

## Public Engagement Practitioners Meeting 29/04/2014

The focus of this meeting was feedback from the Big Bang in which a number of us had been involved March 13-16 2014. The objective was to identify the best parts of what we did (both the planning / selection of activities and the delivery over the 4 days) and to reflect on what was not quite as we had hoped.

The meeting was held in Wolfson3 at lunchtime, and a sandwich lunch and beverages was provided.

A number of people presented their thoughts and there followed a general discussion.

Ally Caldecote co-ordinated the Warwick science faculty presence at the Big Bang Fair (BBF) and began with a history of how the event came about: There was some haste as the BBF closing date was already drawing near when Ally returned from maternity leave. Having persuaded Pam Thomas to fund a stand (she insisted it was the whole science faculty not just Physics) Ally's main point of contact was via the HoDs of the science departments, which, regrettably meant that the message did not filter through to some key public engagement practitioners (one of the motivations for having this group is to form an independent network for fast dissemination of opportunities to interested, skilled individuals). A theme of 'sensing' was decided.

The stand cost £15,000+VAT and the remainder of the £25,000 spend was on pens and stickers to give away, tablecloths, table hire and banner stands plus tee-shirts.

The Warwick stand comprised 4 tables covered in table cloths surrounding 4 science faculty banners in the middle of the stand. Storage was provided by drawers under the table and boxes behind the banners. The 4 tables had maths puzzles, Kinect robots, 'bat detector' helmets and a pregnant jelly baby ultrasound. Over the 4 days we engaged with about 7,000 individuals, mostly 7-19 years old, their parents and teachers. Most of these would not have come to an open day. A few asked about courses and there seemed to be a lack of understanding that it is not necessary to be in the UCAS application stage to attend an open day. The stand was continually busy and well-placed on the corner of a thoroughfare to attract passers-by. We were able to spread beyond the 4 tables and some volunteers went out into the crowds and brought people to the stall.

Ally will distribute the photographs and all are encouraged to use them to inform and to enthuse their departments, write contributions for newsletters, etc.

**ACTION: ALLY**

There is a video on YouTube which captures something of the excitement of the BBF, and can be used to convey to departments what it is and generate enthusiasm for next year.

<http://www.youtube.com/user/thebigbangfair>

**ACTION: ALL**

STEM ambassadors were volunteers at the BBF, and Liz gave a talk about her experience. She was one of those who didn't know about the Warwick stand. As a STEM ambassador Liz helped at two different stands on her two days there – one was robots and the other had a bicycle – based large Spirograph which made different patterns out of sand, depending on the gears selected. STEM ambassadors also go into schools for careers fairs, etc.

## **Public Engagement Practitioners Meeting 29/04/2014**

Maths' contribution was led by David Mond and with personnel also from Complexity and Statistics departments. The mathematicians tried very hard to fit in with the theme, but eventually drew a blank and were faced with the prospect of withdrawing or using other activities. One activity was a competition and the top entry each day was rewarded with a book and a certificate sent to their school. Although the youngsters enjoyed the mainly paper-and-pencil activities, David & Owen were really concerned that this was not how they wanted to represent maths – it was not these types of things that inspired them to become mathematicians. Nick agreed; for him it was exposure to the Mandelbrot set. Activities which could be re-used at other festivals, open days or masterclass would be good value for money. A computer, screen and printer would allow participants to take away the patterns they create changing parameters on the Mandelbrot set. Something with Fibonacci sequences would be good, and fractals – especially random fern fractals.

MathsJam (Colin Wright & matt Parker), held in the Autumn, may be a good source of appropriate activities.

**ACTION: NICHOLAS**

Martine passed on the David details of where a Galton board could be obtained and that the IMA outreach materials, including a chaotic pendulum, were available for loan from Coventry University – contact Jim Tabor.

**ACTION: DAVID**

Kevin was delighted by the way in which the Life Sciences undergraduate engaged with the BBF, although engagement by PhD students was disappointing. There are plans afoot to make at least a little public engagement mandatory for them. The LS part of the stand engaged about 2000 people and the activities were suitable for different levels of engagement by those of different ages. The ultrasound machine they bought was similar to the type used on battlefields but it worked well. Making the jelly baby of the right consistency was a challenge, and on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day participants broke it by plunging the probe into the jelly. However, they were fascinated by scans of the LS staff hearts, wrists, etc. New models were made and worked better in the last 2 days. To fit in with the theme, LS ended up with an activity on which they do no research, and would prefer to present a research area in future.

**ACTION: KEVIN**

Martine's pet peeve was the tee-shirts; they were all men's tee-shirts. When maths, physics and other sciences have a hard time recruiting representative numbers of women, and our visitors clearly care about their own appearance, having women looking 'like the back end of a bus' wearing men's tee-shirts is unlikely to help, especially in competition with Pharmaceutical stands whose corporate image is skirt suit and heels. Thought experiment: what would happen if the University bought a job lot of women's tee-shirts and expected the men to wear them?

Big Bang Fair 2015 will be at the NEC again and Ally will work on sourcing funding.

**ACTION: ALLY**

## **Public Engagement Practitioners Meeting 29/04/2014**

A proposal needs to be in place by August, and it was agreed to use the PEP meetings to meet up and plan.

**ACTION: ALL**

Next meeting in about 3 weeks (to piggy-back on a PEP meeting)

**ACTION: MARTINE**

Wish-list for next time:

- A smarter-looking stand
- More storage
- Better dissemination through departments
- More volunteers
- Better forward planning
- Stand staffed by representative demographic.

About 70,000 people came to BBF 2014 and capacity is thought to be 100,000. When this is reached, it is likely that 'Big Bang Near me' (ours at the Ricoh) will be promoted more strongly.