

Bringing Science to the People

Street corner conversations with Soapbox Science

Engagement Awards

Supporting the very best engagement

Soapbox Science is an award-winning venture that aims to achieve wider public participation in science. It brings STFC-related science to a new audience: it targets people who do not have the opportunity, funds, time, or inclination to go to a local university event or science museum, but who do enjoy a stroll in the busy shopping streets or a visit to their local arts festival.

Soapbox Science invites female research-active scientists to take a no-frills approach: standing on wooden soapboxes to strike up a dialogue with passing members of the public about their cutting-edge research. Placing women on soapboxes to talk about their science provides young girls with much needed role models who can inspire them to pursue a scientific career.

STFC has supported Soapbox Science to engage across the whole spectrum of society. In particular, the project wants to show people who had not previously engaged with science that it is fun, interesting and relevant to their lives. Soapbox provides opportunities for a diverse community of young people to engage with scientific concepts and appreciate that,

irrespective of background or gender, anyone can enjoy a career in science.

Developing the skills of researchers is a vital component of the programme. Speakers are trained to develop innovative methods to communicate their science, bringing them into contact with professional science communicators, broadcasters, performers, established artists and art students to help challenge them about how scientific concepts should be communicated. These training sessions have demonstrated that unexpected partnerships in science can generate exciting, fresh ways to bring science to the public. Our speakers report that Soapbox has helped promote their careers, made them think



 **55,000**
members of the public
attended Soapbox
Science events in 2016

differently about their interactions with the public, as well boosting their confidence in reaching out to new audiences.

Soapbox Science is about cross-disciplinary relationships that share skills across the UK STEM community. The programme creates lasting relationships between a growing network of local organisers and speakers, building engagement capacity across the UK. The programme encourages previous speakers to set up their own events in their local region, growing the network across the UK and overseas. Matching scientists and non-scientists has allowed the speakers to establish relationships which will have a significant impact on their thinking about making their work accessible to public audiences, which is a vital component in the process of removing barriers to participation in science.



I was delighted and engrossed, and found new ways to engage with the passers-by. It was only when the next speaker lined up that I realised my time was up!

Nikita Hari, Research Student University

KEY LEARNING POINTS

- Don't assume anything! Establishing a successful engagement initiative isn't just about nailing science communication with the public: it's also about appreciating the differences among all the partners involved in the organisation and running of the activities.
- Make things personal! The scientists that get the best reaction from the public are the ones who share their own unique story, and those who invite other people to share theirs.
- Look out for the 'golden moments'! Carefully planned evaluations are essential, but having conversations with people and paying attention to your audience sometimes teases out the really great anecdotal moments you weren't expecting.