

Introduction

The Science & Technology Facilities Council is recognised as a leader in STEM engagement in the UK, reaching hundreds of thousands of members of the UK public every year with our engagement activities. Add in the activities of our wider community, whom we support with grant funding, networking, and the sharing of best practice, and our reach extends into the millions.

In 2016, we have published our new strategy for public engagement, which outlines the five key aims of our engagement over the next five years. To indicate what we are doing to address the aims of our strategy, we intend to publish an annual delivery plan for public engagement. This short document is the first of those plans, and outlines the key activities we plan to undertake over the coming twelve months that will help to realise our vision of a UK society that values and participates in scientific endeavour.

Public Engagement in STFC

Our public engagement programme uses the work of STFC's staff, facilities, and wider community to involve people with science and technology. We want people all across the UK be inspired by science and engineering, to understand its value to society, and to appreciate that science and engineering open doors to hundreds of rewarding careers.

Our public engagement team is based over four STFC sites – our three National Laboratory sites at Daresbury Laboratories in Cheshire, Rutherford Appleton Laboratories in Oxfordshire, the UK Astronomy Technology Centre in Edinburgh, and our Headquarters in Swindon. The team carries out a wide range of activities that deliver our strategy, including bringing the public onto our science and innovation campuses, providing grant funding schemes for public engagement, working with teachers and educators to incorporate STFC science as a context for their teaching, creating partnerships with national and international organisations that increase awareness and understanding of STFC's science and engineering, and networking together the STFC community to share ideas and best practice.

As one of seven UK Research Councils, STFC is committed to identifying appropriate opportunities for cross-Council partnership working that delivers more effective engagement outcomes, or allows us to undertake our work more efficiently.

Supporting the strategic development of STFC Public Engagement

All our activities are conceived and delivered in line with our public engagement strategy. This delivery plan provides a short outline of the major areas of work we will be focusing on during 2016-17. Each of these projects addresses, to some extent, all five of the strategic aims for public engagement that are listed in our strategy.

A number of our objectives are designed to support the strategic development of STFC's public engagement programme over the coming year and beyond:

1. A public engagement and communications campaign for the James Webb Space Telescope

The James Webb Space Telescope is a flagship project for STFC and the UK research community. We will work with partners across the UK to plan a strategy for a nationwide campaign that fully exploits the inspirational value of the Telescope and highlights the important role that the UK has played in the engineering, design, and scientific content of the mission.

2. STFC science & technology supporting formal STEM learning

Educators are key STEM influencers, and an audience with which we want to work closely to understand how stories of STFC science & technology can be best used to enhance learning in schools. We will work to improve and prioritise our communication with teachers, and map our science & technology to national curricula.

3. Raising STEM capital by improving our engagement with diverse audiences

There are many ways to look at diversity of audience. During 2016/17, we will be particularly focusing on one of the most commonly-cited challenges – gender diversity. We will examine our programme carefully, identifying and acting to eliminate any practices that prevent our programmes being as fully gender inclusive as possible.

4. A framework for future public engagement partnership working

Given the importance of partnership working in allowing us to deliver our public engagement strategy, we will develop a new framework for partnership working that allows us to clearly articulate the shared principles, objectives, and evaluation requirements for each of our existing and future partnerships.

5. Raising the standards of public engagement in STFC's community

Having gathered substantial evidence of the prevailing culture of public engagement in STFC's university community, we will publish an action plan in response to our 2016 'Attitudes, Culture & Ethos' report, and begin a series of university visits and workshops during which we will discuss the report's findings, and STFC's response to them, with the community.

6. Reviewing and refreshing STFC's public engagement grant schemes

Our long-standing grant schemes provide funding for STFC's community to undertake their own engagement activities, but the scope of the schemes has not been reviewed in many years. In the context of our new strategy, we will review our funding mechanisms and implement any changes necessary to increase alignment with our strategic aims.

7. Implementing STFC's evaluation framework for public engagement

We will begin use of our new Evaluation Framework at all STFC national laboratories, beginning with trials of quantitative data collection and analysis for selected activities, gradually expanding across our whole laboratory programme. We will also develop our approaches for gathering and utilising qualitative feedback to complement our quantitative measures.

8. Refreshing the content and operation of our meteorite and lunar rock loan scheme

STFC's phenomenally popular 'Borrow the Moon' scheme allows people across the UK to see lunar rocks and meteorites first hand. We will work with partners to review the content and operation of the scheme, ensuring that we deliver high-quality material that supports STEM learning, using a resource-efficient operating model.

9. Improving the relevance and utility of our online public engagement content

We recognise that STFC can make even better use of our online platforms for public engagement. We will work to improve and increase the use of social media by our public engagement team, increase interactive content on our web pages, and create new, high quality digital resources.

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