



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Sciencewise



Science Communication Working Lunch Small Talk – Bigger Better Outcomes Tuesday, April 5, Our Dynamic Earth

The *Small Talk* project aims to support the development of good practice in dialogue activities. This Working Lunch considered how getting involved with the project could help scientists and science communicators to work together to create a bigger impact, improve issues-based discussion events and ensure that their outcomes get into the policymaking arena. It also included discussion of some existing mechanisms and networks in Scotland and the benefits they offer to, and any constraints they impose on, partnership working. Before attending, all participants had been invited to browse the Small Talk website (www.smalltalk.org.uk) to familiarise themselves both with the project and the resources available on the site to those wishing to become involved.

Summary

The aim of the Working Lunch was not to promote Small Talk *per se*, rather it was to explore whether it could be regarded as a feasible model for partnership working in Scotland and who might be suitable partners.

Following short presentations on the ethos, background, methodology and involvement in Small Talk, participants considered a number of questions about networks, partnerships and policymaking in Scotland. The small group of participants were from a number of key organisations in Scottish/UK science. While the individuals' participation must be regarded as personal/professional rather than as formally representative of those organisations, there was considerable agreement about the issues which need to be addressed in Scotland when considering partnership working. The key points arising from discussion of the questions posed echo some of the reasons for the original establishment of the Small Talk project – notably, the need for both a 'bottom-up' approach to working together and the development of mutual trust between potential partners.

There was also a strong expression of willingness to try to find ways of using Small Talk as a means of working together, whether on issues around nanotechnologies or on other topics.

It is therefore suggested that, following publication of this report, ways be found to facilitate an early follow-up meeting of those present – together with invitations to others who might be interested – to move things forward.

Small Talk – the project and becoming involved

Gail Cardew, Head of Programmes, Royal Institution, spoke briefly about the Small Talk project, focusing on its origins as a multi-institutional project, which is steered by a group representing those organisations but managed and run independently of them. No one organisation "owns" the project – the aim is for the science communication community to have ownership, through its contributions to the project as this pilot evolves. Gail explained that although the project focuses on dialogue events about nanotechnologies, the principles

which underlie it are related to improving issues-based dialogue processes in general. [See Appendix 1]

Nick Hillier, Science in Society Manager, the BA, then described some of the successes and failures in the early Small Talk events organised by the project partners, mentioning in particular the need to ensure that speakers are very well briefed – for example, about the type of audience to be anticipated; or that the ‘desired’ outcome is one of open and honest discussion, not simply questions after a talk. He discussed the resources available on the website (www.smalltalk.org.uk) and how these are increasing as more people become involved and feed their own information back.

Workshop – Partnership Working

Participants then worked in pre-assigned pairs, each to answer one of a series of questions on aspects of working together. Their thoughts were then shared with and discussed by the rest of the group and are summarised below.

Question 1 : What framework(s) exist already in Scotland that enable us to work together?

- Science Festivals (Edinburgh, Orkney, Tayside, Aberdeen) – if you can afford it
- SETNET – not very Scottish
- ISES/SSERC
- RSE – not a framework
- Small groupings of individual institutions
- Science Centres
- Universities – very localised
- the BA

Question 2 : What do we need in place to enable us to work together more effectively?

- Central hub/info bank of organisations, individuals and activities
- Knowing who is working at these
- Themed networking opportunities – (encourages focused and effective discussion, therefore delivers more successful outcomes)
- Strong liaison network (email, web etc)
- Better understanding of each others’ roles and remits – not reinventing the wheel; political sensitivities
- staff turnover – keeping other organisations aware
- a coordinator – individual you can go to/minutes/info etc. – and who will link into other networks avoiding overlap
- something to recognise constraints of Scotland’s geography

Question 3 : How can we learn from one another and share experiences to increase impact?

- Small Talk website
- Network of contacts (event organisers), both local and national
- Regular ‘update’ events
- Email list could become discussion list
- Speakers list should include info on who organised each event & who briefed the speakers
- Share info on invited/attending policymakers
- Ongoing and/or follow-up activities for participants – feedback any significant outcomes

- Some way of informing participants about other events etc.

Question 4 : How have we engaged with policymakers in Scotland – and how can these processes be improved?

- Science is split – some devolved, some reserved – this is a problem, e.g. how to identify influencing points?
- Royal Observatory is PPARC funded, so no engagement, but... some work is done to support teachers (CPD and advice on CPD provision in science)
- NESTA working with Scottish Executive Depts – SEED & SEELLD
 - SEED – on Science Small Grants and FLAT team
 - SEELLD – policy for business start-ups and into HE
- Through development of relationships with civil servants
- NESTA responds to Scottish Parliament Educ. Comm Inquiries, eg
 - Early years/technology education
 - Pupil motivation
- Attend Science & Parliament event + exhibit
- Invite MSPs to events generally and in role of honour (eg presentation, opening speech etc.)
- Develop relationship with Scottish Science Advisory Committee

Question 5 : How do we feed back to people who come to events?

- Data Protection issues – RI has Opt-In, BA uses Opt-Out policy
- Awareness of the Chatham House Rule – unattributable quotes possible and in summaries
- Show how opinions have an impact on/inform policy (there is a need for policymakers to acknowledge/explain what they have done)
- Develop effective strategies for following up (whether opt-in or opt-out, offer option to receive outcome and invite to provide postal – not just email – address)
- Accessibility issues
 - (a) don't exclude those not web-accessible;
 - (b) ensure websites are accessible under Discrimination legislation
- Delivery of feedback/follow-up should be in the event plan from the outset of planning.

DISCUSSION

The 'natural progression' in the order of the foregoing questions, resulted in answers and subsequent discussion that led to an almost inevitable logical conclusion. However, specific points raised in the discussion were:

- Scotland operates as a neural network
- In addition to the 'non-Scottishness' of SETNET, there are issues with regard to the four parts of SETPOINT Scotland
- Additional networks in environment fields include REEF (Regional Environmental Education Forums) and SNH – Scottish Natural Heritage
- "Explore Edinburgh" – all science-based visitor attractions in Edinburgh & Lothians joint marketing etc.
- Need for people to know what everyone else is doing
- Need for equality – no one organisation should start of or end up taking the lead (i.e. taking over)
- Issues of proliferation of websites/newsletters etc. – need to be user-focused
- Need to address Data Protection Act issues to ensure feedback to participants on outcomes and to inform of similar events

- Engaging policymakers - just how devolved is science in Scotland – role of Scottish civil servants and SSAC?
- Need for a hub
- Need to engender trust between organisations/individuals before true partnership working

IN CONCLUSION

To draw the workshop to a close, participants were posed two further questions on which there was discussion over lunch. Participants were invited to respond formally to these questions on paper – and also to add any further comments they wished to the previous questions and answers.

1. **Can the Small Talk approach be applied to topics other than nanotechnologies?** – to which there was general agreement
2. **Will you use Small Talk to try out ways of working together?** – several responded favourably:
 - Maybe as a model
 - really like the model – would love to apply it with the right collaborative topic-driven project
 - very interested – sci comm. strategy will have partnership as a main point, so programming for 06/07 based on that.

Participants & Speakers

Dr Teresa Anderson, NESTA teresa.anderson@nesta.org.uk

Mr Peter Ball, Institute of Physics, Scotland peter.ball@iop.org

Dr Gail Cardew, Head of Programmes, Royal Institution of Great Britain gail@ri.ac.uk [SPEAKER]

Miss Lyndsey Clark, Science Communication Manager, National Museums of Scotland
l.clark@nms.ac.uk

Ms Dee Davison, Education Manager, Our Dynamic Earth dee.davison@dynamicearth.co.uk

Miss Emma Faragher, Education Assistant, Royal Society of Edinburgh efaragher@royalsoced.org.uk

Ms Eleanor Gilchrist, Public Relations Officer, UK Astronomy Technology Centre, Royal Observatory Edinburgh efg@roe.ac.uk

Mr Nick Hillier, Science in Society Manager, the BA nick.hillier@the-ba.net [SPEAKER]

Dr Wendy Inglis-Humphrey, NESTA wendy.inglis@nesta.org.uk

Ms Fiona Selkirk, PR Consultant, the BA Scotland fiona.selkirk@the-ba.net

Ms Susan Walker, Events Officer, Royal Society of Edinburgh swalker@royalsoced.org.uk

FEEDBACK/EVALUATION SUMMARY

1. Reason to attend and what were expectations

- understanding more about how to influence policy
- networking opportunity and keep up to speed with new developments and initiatives; learn about Small Talk
- seeking advice on how to run a nanotechnology event
- discover potential to work together
- networking opportunity, to meet other science communicators in Scotland/Edinburgh
- gather ideas about dialogue events

2. Content

- great/excellent/very interesting and thought-provoking
- inspiring as a potential model;
- appreciated honesty about things that hadn't worked
- content about right, nice balance of discussion and information, full participation from attendees
- good speakers
- too much of the usual "oh wouldn't it be great if there was a central resource", but as usual without an audience

3. Issues/developments for future Working Lunches

- science curriculum
- how to develop and utilise evaluation (feedback forms etc)

4. Ranking the experience

	strongly disagree	disagree	agree	agree strongly
There was enough time for discussion	0	0	7	1
There was enough time for networking	0	0	7	1
The workshop was well structured	0	0	7	1
The workshop has contributed to my professional development*	0	1.5*	5.5*	1
I felt welcome and able to comment and ask questions	0	0	3	5
I enjoyed taking part	0	0	4	4

*One person ticked between the agree/disagree boxes

5. Overall satisfaction (meeting expectations)

All the attendees were satisfied or very satisfied. (5 of the 8 participants described themselves as "Satisfied"; the remaining 3 participants were "Very Satisfied").

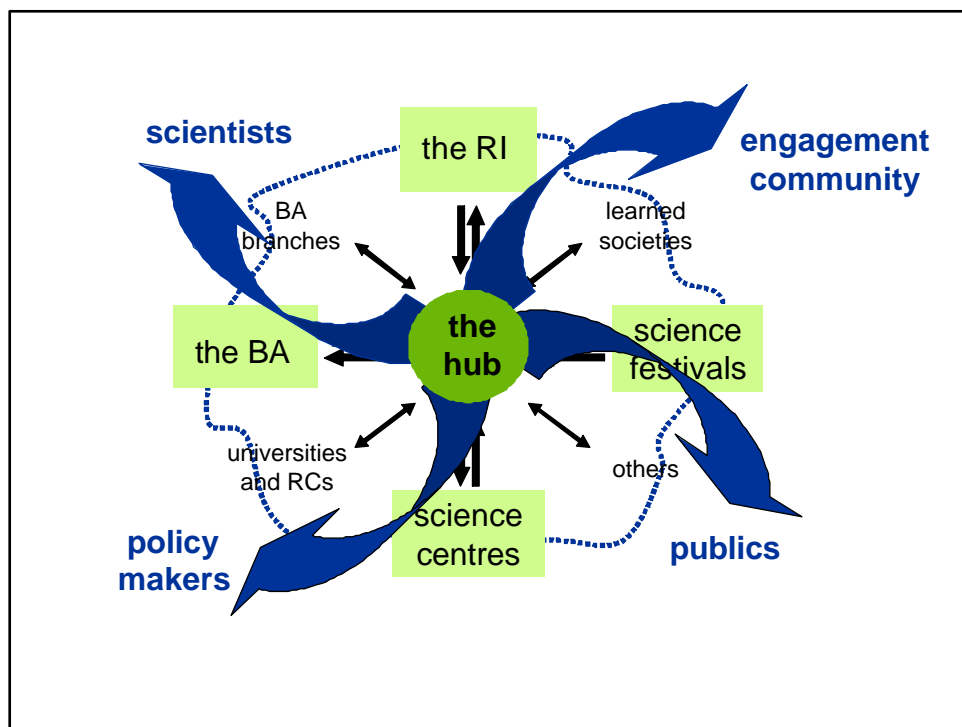
APPENDIX 1: Presentation by Gail Cardew

the history of *small talk*

- it did not start with nanotechnologies
- it started with four people wanting
 - an opportunity to work together to increase impact
 - better inclusion of social and public issues
 - to frame issues as other than scientific
 - to capture views of our audiences (publics and scientists)
 - greater coherence to engagement activities and sharing of good practice
- nanotechnologies? we knew it would be difficult

what is *small talk*?

- a collaborative pilot project on nanotechnologies
- not just the 4 partners, but any person or organisation interested
- a way of preserving the diversity of events
- September 2004 – February 2006
- target audiences: teenagers, adults, families, interested publics, young scientists and industry



desired outcomes

- run a variety of activities linked by common threads
- provide a central resource for community
- learn about public views
- learn about and improve engagement methods
- can we link to policy making?
- share our findings with scientists, engagement community, policy makers and publics