Introduction

Science communication and public engagement is a constantly evolving field. It may involve explaining and interpreting to the public the significance of scientific research, or carrying out eyecatching experiments on stage. Your audience may be children, politicians and policy makers, or the general public.

There can be crossover with areas such as science journalism, science policy, education and medical communications.

Besides jobs which are purely scientific communication there are also opportunities for scientists to carry out science communication as part of their academic role. Many PhD programmes include elements of this, sometimes as a condition of their funding. Research students who want to become more involved in public engagement should talk to staff within their school and college to find out about the support available.

What is working in science communication like?

Most people working in this area have a science-related degree, but this isn’t always necessary. A non-scientific background can give you insight into explaining science to people who have little knowledge of it.

The work you do can enthuse people about scientific issues, encouraging them to find out more and engage with public discussion. Working with children may inspire them to study STEM subjects at secondary or higher education.

The work can be challenging, especially if you encounter people with opposing views to your own or who wish to challenge you on scientific areas.

Generally, salaries are not high and there are comparatively few roles at senior level.

Skills development

- Why not start your own blog, uploading science communication videos and tweeting about scientific news? This will demonstrate your enthusiasm and develop your skills.
- Joining relevant groups on LinkedIn (e.g. Science Communication Scotland) can be a good way to find out about what’s going on in the field and hear about any vacancies.
- Experience in performing arts can be good preparation for delivering sessions, and understanding how events are put together.
- Join a EUSA society and help with their communications; social media or marketing.
- EUSci, the Edinburgh University Science Magazine, produces a magazine, online content, podcasts, seminars and workshops providing the opportunity to write, edit and present on science related topics.

“I want to keep alive the spark of curiosity which is innate in all of us. I also want to see a scientifically literate public who question the spin the media put on science stories. Besides that, it’s huge fun and very rewarding!”

Dr Sarah Bearchell, Sarah’s Adventures in Science
Work experience

Edinburgh

- Working or volunteering as a communicator at a science festival is a common way to build experience in this field. For example, the Edinburgh International Science Festival (www.sciencefestival.co.uk) offers great opportunities to get involved both as a communicator and in front-of-house and tech.
- Some individual departments at the University have their own outreach programmes. For example, Chemistry have ‘Spectroscopy in a Suitcase’ and Maths have an active and varied outreach programme. Check their websites for details.
- SCI-FUN (www.scifun.ed.ac.uk) gives the opportunity to join in outreach projects, mostly within schools but also participating in science festivals. FUSION works alongside SCI-FUN and focuses on developing content such as designing exhibits and props.
- The Beltane Public Engagement Network provides support for people who want to make their research available to a wide range of audiences. Its website advertises jobs, as well as funding, details of events and network contacts.
- Bright Club (www.brightclub.org) enables staff and students to perform short sets about aspects of their research or teaching, all compered by a professional comedian.
- Dynamic Earth regularly works with university researchers and also accepts speculative applications from students.

UK

- Search The UK Science Festivals Network directory to find science festivals running throughout the year (http://sciencefestivals.uk).
- The Royal Institution (www.rigb.org) offers short work experience placements based in London in a range of departments, including marketing and communications.
- The Royal Institution also recruits Christmas Lecture Assistants on 4-5 month contracts (usually September/October to January) to help with the annual televised Royal Institution Christmas Lectures.
- Societies for specific areas of science (e.g. Royal Society of Chemistry) often run their own public engagement and outreach programmes. STEMNET Science and Engineering Ambassadors (www.stemnet.org.uk) inspire young people about STEM subjects. Ambassadors come from a range of backgrounds.
- Volunteering for a charity (e.g. nature reserve, national park) and doing educational outreach is a good way to gain experience.
- Winning a prize for your work in this area looks great on your CV. The Royal Society of Chemistry runs an annual science communication prize for students and the British Council holds a competition called Famelab.
- The Wellcome Trust (www.wellcome.ac.uk) has a paid summer internship programme.

Postgraduate study and professional qualifications

A postgraduate qualification in science communication is not always required, although as competition increases it may become necessary for a higher proportion of roles. Many people working in this area have taken this route. Benefits include:

- Training in technical skills and techniques
- Placements
- Taught by industry professionals
- Access to vacancies – sometimes targeted to courses

Inspiring futures
- Meet and learn with like-minded people

Talk to course providers to establish what the course involves and whether it’s right for you.

**Jobhunting**

**Employers:** The wide range of employers includes:

- Science and discovery centres
- Science festivals
- Museums
- Learned societies
- Environmental organisations
- Universities
- Specialist outreach organisations
- Charities

**Entry level roles:** It is common to begin in delivery e.g. explainer or communicator before progressing to the development side. You might then move to co-ordinator and more managerial positions. Example job titles include:

- Education/Outreach Officer
- Community Engagement Officer
- Festivals & Events Officer
- Presenter
- Public Engagement Officer
- Science and Interpretation Assistant
- Science Engagement Specialist
- Science Explainer
- Science Outreach Coordinator
- STEM Learning Officer

**Advertised vacancies**

Scicommjobs ([http://scicommjobs.wordpress.com](http://scicommjobs.wordpress.com)) advertises vacancies and lists organisations who have science communication roles within their organisation. Follow @ScicommJobs on Twitter.

British Interactive Group (BIG) ([www.big.uk.com](http://www.big.uk.com)) advertises public engagement vacancies.

Subscribe to jiscmail lists ([www.jiscmail.ac.uk](http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk)) such as PSCI-COM, STEMPRA and NCCPE to find out about events, meetings, conferences, and vacancies.

The Wellcome Trust’s two-year Graduate Development Programme has six month rotations including engagement and communications.

**Unadvertised vacancies**

The UK Association for Science and Discovery Centres ([www.scientcentres.org.uk](http://www.scientcentres.org.uk)) lists members, who may be potential employers. The British Science Association ([www.britishscienceassociation.org](http://www.britishscienceassociation.org)) also lists organisations involved in public engagement.

For advice on making speculative applications see ([www.ed.ac.uk/careers/spec-apps](http://www.ed.ac.uk/careers/spec-apps))

Networking at conferences and events can be an effective way of finding opportunities. Not sure about networking? See ([www.ed.ac.uk/careers/networking](http://www.ed.ac.uk/careers/networking))

**Find out more**

Search for ‘Science communication’ in the ‘Resources’ section of MyCareerHub.

“Thanks to the internet there are virtually unlimited possibilities to create your own business in science communications. Follow your imagination!”

Nick Oswald, CEO BitesizeBio