

A new unit brings together the Research Councils' activities to raise public awareness and engagement in science and innovation.

Science in Society

You don't need to be a scientist to find news about a cure for HIV exciting. You don't need a science degree to want to know why glaciers melt in Antarctica.

People of any age, sex or race are involved in science whether they realise it or not. Knowing more about it, and giving your views on the research priorities of the future, is a matter of democracy. It is simply your right.

The Research Councils are key players in science and innovation. As the UK's biggest funders of fundamental research—with a combined annual budget of nearly £3 billion of public money—our work affects everyone. Whether you're interested in bio-medicine or particle physics, engineering, economics or arts, we have something to catch your attention.

As well as funding research and training, the Research Councils engage the public with the research and its implications for society. Activities range from debates to exhibitions and from courses to competitions. Our goal is to promote public interest and involvement in research. The Research Councils have been working together in this area for a long time. But since this is an important part of the mission of all the councils, we

set up a joint unit to help coordinate our activities. And the Research Councils UK Science in Society Unit was born in April 2005.

The new unit is headed by Kerry Leslie. 'We expect a new era of co-ordinated work,' Kerry says. 'The councils have worked well together for a long time, but the new unit will help us to run joint projects more efficiently and share our experiences and views for the future.'

Researchers of all disciplines who want to get closer to the public will find the opportunities they are looking for in the work of the unit. Just like Nicola McLoughlin, a NERC-funded PhD student at the University of Oxford, who won one of our competitions, Perspectives. Nicola was one of 34 young researchers who designed and exhibited a different kind of poster for the BA Festival of Science in Dublin (*Planet Earth*, Autumn 2005, p7). Unlike posters for a scientific conference, which tend to describe methods and results rather dryly, Perspectives posters explored the ethical and social implications of the research. This stimulated lively conversations with

the people who came to see the exhibition. 'The scheme really opened my eyes to the field of science communication!' said Nicola.

Schools can also make science a fun and challenging activity for their students with RCUK Science in Society schemes.

Take the Researchers in Residence scheme. It brings early career researchers to schools to introduce contemporary research and challenging activities into the classrooms. The numbers participating in the scheme are impressive. Since 1995

more than 3500 researchers—mainly PhD students from the Research Councils and the Wellcome Trust—have worked in more than 1000 secondary schools. Baroness Susan Greenfield, director of the Royal Institution, said, 'The scheme shows young people that scientists aren't just male boffins in white coats, but real people working on real problems'.

Want to know more?
To read more about RCUK's new Science in Society strategy and the work of the unit, click on www.rcuk.ac.uk/sis.

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Schoolchildren had fun learning about minibeasts, plants and the environment during national science week in 2005.

Carolyn Jones, a PhD student at King's College London, enjoying her stint as a Researcher in Residence at Stepney Green School.

