

Edinburgh Beltane Beacon Public Engagement Fellowship

Final report

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Summary

This report gives an overview of my activities relating to public engagement since the beginning of my Public Engagement Fellowship in March 2011. The original fellowship plan was to organise photography events around International Year of Forests. Some activity was done within this original scope, but other, better, opportunities arose that were not known about at the time of the application. So, while continuing to work with the Edinburgh Beltane Beacon, my work during the fellowship as evolved. This has resulted in a much greater impact, over more of the aims of the fellowship scheme, than were originally proposed.

Impact has been achieved in:

- 1) Delivering public engagement
- 2) Training people for public engagement
- 3) Culture change within the universities
- 4) Cross-discipline and cross institution activities
- 5) Potential for sustained activity
- 6) Publicity of public engagement activity

The main additions to the fellowship are (in chronological order):

“Fantastic Forests”

An event as part of The Edinburgh International Science Festival at the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh, in collaboration with Forest Research. This was a well attended event linked to International Year of Forests and International Year of Chemistry and involved researchers from Edinburgh Napier University who had no previous experience of Public Engagement. My involvement was supported with funding for equipment and consumables from the Faculty of Engineering, Computing and Creative Industries at Edinburgh Napier University. The public engagement component of this event was within the scope of the original fellowship application.

“The Chemistry of Autumn”

An event supported by a Public Engagement Challenge grant from the Edinburgh Beltane Beacon in collaboration with Jenny Bos (another Public Engagement Fellow). This event was also linked to International Year of Forests and International Year of Chemistry and took place at the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh. It was well attended by the public but was also particularly successful in involving young researchers in delivering public engagement and in generating public engagement materials that were subsequently used by others.

“Bright Club”

Thanks to the original effort by the Edinburgh Beltane Beacon to bring Bright Club to Edinburgh, the concept (researchers performing stand-up comedy) has proved very successful in Edinburgh. My involvement has been considerable in taking responsibility for coordinating Bright Club Edinburgh, with the help of other volunteers. My own performances (linked to the public

engagement objectives of the original fellowship application) have reached a large audience, but the greatest impact has been in building an ongoing multi-discipline, cross institutional public engagement activity that has huge benefits for personal development of researchers, and in raising awareness and appreciation of public engagement.

My work has involved collaboration with the following organisations (to varying degrees):

The Edinburgh Beltane Beacon for Public Engagement
The Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh

Edinburgh College of Art
Heriot-Watt University
Queen Margaret University
The University of Edinburgh
The University of Glasgow
The University of Stirling
University College London

BBC
Civil Engineering Central Services (Forestry Commission)
Forest Education Initiative
Forest Research
Forestry Commission Scotland
Penicuik Historical Society
The National Museums of Scotland
The Physiological Society
The Royal Society of Chemistry
The Scottish Resource Centre for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology
The Stand Comedy Club

Additionally, though industry related events, meetings and workshops I have spoken about public engagement best practice and assisted people with the development of their ideas. These have included the Forestry Commission, Confederation of Forest Industries, the Scottish Forest Industries Cluster, Forest Education Initiative, and numerous companies.

Background and objectives of the original fellowship proposal

Background

My research work covers a variety of subjects related to timber production from silviculture to construction. This encompasses structural engineering, materials science, wood technology, biomechanics, and wood quality assessment. I am one of the UK's experts on machine strength grading of timber.

The majority of my research relates to improving domestic timber production and usage. Forestry and wood production are vital to the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the UK. Wood is one of the few truly renewable materials and forests are crucial, for example, to the drive towards low carbon and affordable housing, biodiversity, tourism, and the country's renewable energy strategy.

Our forests are a precious resource and we must work to ensure that their stewardship continues. My research, and that of my colleagues, will help to get the most benefit from them as demand for wood for products and bio-energy rises.

Through previous projects I have found that the general public is quite poorly informed about sustainable forestry and has some persistent misconceptions (e.g. the UK's forests are shrinking, cutting down trees is always bad for the environment, buying wood products leads to deforestation, forestry is old fashioned and low tech, and working in timber production is a man's job).

The primary aim of my fellowship was to help tackle these, while also conveying some basic science knowledge. In doing this, there was also an aim to assist the project partners in their objectives to educate the public in an entertaining way, and to bring in visitors.

Objectives

The specific objectives were:

[Obj1] To raise public awareness of forests and their role in the environmental, economic and social sustainability of the UK.

[Obj2] To improve the public understanding of sustainable forestry and have better informed consumers in the future.

[Obj3] To stimulate discussion around issues such as climate change, carbon sequestration, renewable materials, bioenergy, ecology and the role of the public and private sector in forest management.

[Obj4] To help publicise good existing sources of information (e.g. forest education initiative, forestry commission, woodland trust)

[Obj5] To encourage people to visit forests.

[Obj6] To widen the public awareness of the science-based jobs in forestry and timber production.

[Obj7] To challenge stereotypes related to forestry and timber production (particularly gender)

[Obj8] To strengthen the links between those people communicating with the public and those working in research and industry.

[Obj9] To improve my science communication skills and pass on what I have learnt to my colleagues.

In addition to these, there was also an objective to assist with the Beacon's objective for culture change at Edinburgh Napier University.

During the fellowship, a number of additional objectives were achieved:

[Obj10] Assisting culture change within the universities

[Obj11] Cross-discipline and cross institution activities

[Obj12] Creating sustained public engagement activity

[Obj13] Creating publicity for public engagement activity

Photography

Description

The original fellowship proposal was based around photography events, a competition, and an exhibition. Some work was undertaken toward this, but not everything was achieved as planned.

The UN declared 2011 as the “International Year of Forests” to raise awareness of sustainable management and conservation of all types of forest. To coincide with this, and to help raise public awareness of these issues in the UK I proposed to hold two related photography competitions. One of these, for the general public, was to be about “what the forest means to me” and grouped into a number of themes related to science (e.g. biodiversity, resources, energy, biology). The other, ostensibly for people who work in the forest industries, was to be for portraits of the people who work with trees and wood in jobs that use science and engineering.

At the time of writing the application, I said that the subject of public vs private ownership of forests was about to become a media issue, due to the proposal to sell off Forestry Commission land in England. I had, in fact, underestimated how much of a public debate there would be and how quickly Government policy would be overturned by public protest. By the time the fellowship started, many of the topics I had planned to engage the public with had been covered by the national media (although not necessarily accurately).

Also, by the time the fellowship began, The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) had launched their own year-long national photography competition (one part for each season) and so I decided that I should adapt my work to reinforce this, rather than create something that would work against it. In fact, I noted that the competition was struggling to attract entries. This was despite FSC having a strong identity and also using the photo sharing social media website, Flickr, as I had intended to do.

FSC competition details: www.fsc-uk.org/?page_id=1495

I decided that a good strategy would be to organise photography meets so that photography could be combined with direct public engagement. This would also help promote the FSC competition.

Two photography walks over the weekend of the 7th and 8th May 2011 were run within the arboretum of the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh (RBGE). Volunteers acted as guides to show people around the interesting trees in the arboretum, and talk to people about forestry and arboriculture. Other guides were there to help people with their photography.

The event was promoted by their RBGE in their events diary and on their Facebook page, on the Facebook page of the Forest Education Initiative, on the Flickr group “Edinburgh Meetups” and the meetup.com group “Edinburgh

Digital Photographers”. The turnout for the walks was lower than hoped due partly, it is assumed, to the poor weather during this period. However, these smaller groups did allow for longer and more in-depth engagement with the people taking part. Approximately 20 members of the public took part in the walks across both days (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Some of the participants on the tree photography walks

Some of the images taken were posted on the Internet by the photographers, and can be viewed in these galleries:

<http://www.flickr.com/search/?q=em20110507+OR+em20110508>



<http://www.meetup.com/The-Edinburgh-Digital-Photography-Meetup-Group/photos/1377953/>



I also created a Flickr group in order to engage more widely, although I was not able to spend much time maintaining it.

<http://www.flickr.com/groups/forestsforpeople/>

I had also intended to collect portrait photographs of people working in the forest and timber industry and exhibit the best in a touring portrait exhibition. No real progress was made toward this due to lack of time, although I still intend to do this at some point in the future. During the fellowship period I did, however, talk to several industry organisations about the importance of using photographs that do not reinforce misconceptions about the forest and timber industry.

Objectives met

[Obj1] [Obj2] [Obj3] The walks started with a presentation from me about International Year of Forests and the role of forests and trees in our everyday lives. I also provided information sheets for people to take away.

[Obj4] [Obj5] I provided information to the participants about good sources of further information from FSC, Forest Education Initiative and the Woodland Trust. I also told people about the FSC photography competition.

[Obj6] [Obj7] [Obj8] [Obj9] Volunteers acted as guides for the walk; talking to people about trees, forestry and arboriculture. These included researchers from the Forest Products Research Institute at Edinburgh Napier University, Shireen Chambers (Executive and Technical Director of the Chartered Institute of Foresters), and Keith Logie (Park Strategy Manager for Edinburgh City Council).

Thoughts on good practice

I had intended to create a good practice guide for running photography competitions linked to public engagement. Since I did not actually run a competition, it is not possible to produce such a guide, but from my observations I can offer the following advice.

There are a lot of photography competitions and so it is hard to get noticed without a publicity budget or the backing of an organisation that can help with promotion. Also, many of the people who take photography seriously are cynical about the motives of competitions. Certainly, many organisations use competitions as a way to acquire rights to photographs cheaply, exploiting the entrants. It is therefore important that copyright matters are carefully and clearly explained in the competition rules, and that no more rights are transferred by entry into the competition than necessary. Often, badly written legal statements will attract negative publicity from professional photographers and more serious enthusiasts.

Social networking websites that facilitate photo sharing are one way that a gallery of photographs can be collated for a competition without complicated copyright permissions. However, for these to work the competition cannot be passive. The website must have regular activity in order to work, both from the organisers and from the participants.

Photography meets are a way to bring people together in order to achieve public engagement aims, although the nature of the activity means that people tend to want to go off on their own rather than stay in a group and listen to someone speaking. If the subject lends itself to photography it can work very well since people like to share their photographs with others. Meets that give special access to places also work well (The UK Astronomy and Technology Centre held such a meet in November 2011). Another possibility is to produce photowalk guides for people to use on their own, perhaps linked to online content people can access through their mobile phones while on the walk.

Fantastic Forests

Description

The opportunity arose to be part of an event that was part of the Edinburgh International Science Festival. The event organised by Forest Research and took place in the Real Life Science Studio at the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh. Also involved were Forestry Commission Scotland, and Civil Engineering Central Services (FC).

This drop-in event ran over two weekdays (14th to 15th April 2011) between 10am and 5pm. It was listed in the events calendars of International Year of Forests, International Year of Chemistry, the Edinburgh International Science Festival and of the RGBE. It was also promoted on the Edinburgh Napier University staff Intranet.

I provided a paper making activity, a 3D slideshow, a display of wood samples and a tower building challenge (Figure 2). I also coordinated the volunteers from Edinburgh Napier University, which included Professor Callum Hill who advised on the paper making activity. The Faculty of Engineering, Computing and Creative Industries at Edinburgh University supported our involvement in the event with a budget of £500 for equipment and consumables.

I also provided an instruction sheet for paper making that people could take away with them. This sheet, which also included some explanation of the science behind paper-making and recycling, has been passed on the Forest Education Initiative and the RGBE.

The event attracted 1260 members of the public (estimated by clicker counter) over the two days. This represented 27% of visitors who came into the garden via the John Hope Gateway Building. It was noticed that many people stayed in the lab for up to an hour (a few longer), taking time to go round each activity and spend time taking part and chatting to staff. At times there were up to 60 visitors in the room.

Feedback was collected using comment 'leaves' and RGBE feedback forms. On the latter, 73% of completed forms scored 5 while the remainder scored 4 (rating 1=very dissatisfied, 5=very satisfied). The paper making activity was very popular, second only to the squirrel making activity provided by Forest Research. The whole event was within the engagement theme of my Public Engagement Fellowship.

A more detailed report of the event was produced by Forest Research and forwarded to the Faculty of Engineering, Computing and Creative Industries. This report was also passed to another Edinburgh Beltane Public Engagement Fellow, Jenny Bos, when planning the Chemistry of Autumn event.



Figure 2: Tower building and paper making at Fantastic Forests

Objectives met

[Obj1] [Obj2] [Obj3] The theme of the event was linked to International Year of Forests and explicitly covered the engagement themes of my fellowship: climate change, carbon sequestration, renewable materials, bioenergy, ecology and the role of the public and private sector in forest management.

[Obj4] I used several activity sheets from the Forest Education Initiative and the Woodland Trust. I also pointed people to the website of Penicuik Historical Society, which has a wealth of information about the history of papermaking in the local area.

[Obj5] This event raised awareness of the role of Forestry Commission, and the facilities they provide for visitors to forests.

[Obj6] [Obj7] [Obj8] Many of the volunteers for the event were people working in forestry, albeit the public sector part.

[Obj9] I coordinated a number of helpers from Edinburgh Napier University and assisted them in developing their public engagement skills.

[Obj10] The Faculty of Engineering, Computing and Creative Industries was informed of the event and supported it financially.

[Obj11] [Obj12] The event involved people from forestry and engineering backgrounds across a number of organisations. The invitation to be part of the event was a result of similar collaboration on earlier events.

Thoughts on good practice

The Real Life Science Studio at RBGE is an excellent place to do drop-in type public engagement events. This is particularly true for events linked to trees and timber construction, because the Gateway building and the arboretum are both wonderful educational resources in themselves.

While being listed in the events diary no doubt helps, the majority of people who visit have come to visit the garden. The studio is well placed to be seen by people passing through, but it helps to stage some activities and helpers outside the doors of the room to help bring people in. Big, simple signs help people navigate a room full of activities, see what is going on, and understand how they can engage. People who are helpers should be clearly differentiated from visitors by clothing or name badges.

Activities where children can take things away to show their friends are also effective in bringing more visitors to an event, as are activities that create noise (e.g. xylophones) or spectacle (e.g. tower building challenge).

Activities that children can take into the garden are also good (e.g. leaf hunt sheets) because parents frequently want to get their walk, rather than spend a long time in the studio. This can also bring people back to the event before they leave.

On a normal weekend the audience tends to be a mixture of young families and older people. During the science festival it is similar, although there are more teenagers. It is important to provide activities for very young children too.

Activities where children spend some time engrossed in something are also helpful in allowing parents to participate in other engagement activities. However, it is important to make sure that children are never left in the care of the event. Activities where parents can help educate children are popular.

Paper making is very popular with children and adults alike, but labour intensive. It required a large quantity of materials and equipment, some of which required special measures for reasons of health and safety. Papermaking equipment can be made, but is perhaps more cost effective to buy. Suppliers may provide a good educational discount on request. There

are plenty of 'how to' guides on the Internet but practice before the event is essential to ensure the activity works.

The squirrel making activity created by Forest Research was incredibly popular and was accompanied by an excellent booklet linking the activity to sustainable forestry. Materials for this were relatively expensive, but very effective. Indeed some people came to the event specifically to do this activity following word of mouth.

The methods for evaluation worked well. It is worth noting that estimates of the number of participants tend to be lower than the number obtained from counting. For this event, no information was collected about how people heard about the event. It is presumed, from talking to the visitors, that most people were generally passing by on visit to the garden, but it would have been useful to collect this information on the feedback forms.

Public Engagement Challenge – “Chemistry of Autumn”

Description

This event was the direct result of a networking breakfast meeting of the Edinburgh Beltane Beacon Public Engagement Fellows. I collaborated with Jenny Bos (nee Rodgers) to apply for a Beltane Public Engagement Challenge Grant that was linked to the objectives of both our fellowships.

This drop-in event took place in the Real Life Science Studio at the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh over a weekend (22nd to 23rd October 2011) between 1pm and 4pm. It was listed in the events calendars of the RBGE and the Royal Society of Chemistry. It was also promoted on the Forest Education Initiative Facebook page and through a network for home schooling.

I provided a display of household items containing forest products, wood samples, 3D images and activity sheets (including some from the Forest Education Initiative and the Woodland Trust, Figure 2). Steve Penny (Research Liaison Officer for Forest Research in Scotland), who organised ‘Fantastic Forests’, also helped at the event and brought along displays about carbon sequestration. Jenny worked with Robin Andrews (who brought a school teaching perspective) to develop chemistry related activities. This included self-inflating balloons (an uninflated balloon containing a piece of dry ice) which was used as an illustration and discussion point for carbon sequestration (the volume of CO₂ was related to everyday activities and the atmospheric carbon sequestered within wooden blocks).

The event attracted 600 members of the public (estimated by counting the number of balloons taken) over the two days. It was noticed that several people stayed in the lab for over an hour, taking time to go round each activity and spend time taking part and chatting to staff. Feedback was collected using feedback forms and was very positive; particularly regarding the friendliness and enthusiasm of helpers. The self-inflating balloons was a clear highlight. More details are given in Jenny’s report on the event.

The event was reported in an article by Jenny in The Royal Society of Chemistry, Education in Chemistry, a magazine which goes out to every secondary school in the UK.

<http://www.rsc.org/Education/EiC/issues/2011November/15111101.asp>



My household items from forest products activity was subsequently used in an open day at Woodhouse College, North London, by one of the visitors to the ‘Chemistry of Autumn’ event. Instructions and information was also requested by, and passed onto, Forest Education Initiative, RBGE and Forest Research.



Figure 3: Microscope activity and leaf hunt

Objectives met

[Obj1] [Obj2] [Obj3] The theme of the event explicitly covered some of the engagement themes of my fellowship: climate change, carbon sequestration, and renewable materials.

[Obj4] I used several activity sheets from the Forest Education Initiative and the Woodland Trust. I also pointed people to the website of Penicuik Historical Society, which has a wealth of information about the history of papermaking in the local area. I used QR codes on some of the displays to link to resources in the Internet.

[Obj6] One of the explicit messages of the event was that there are scientific careers linked to forest products.

[Obj8] William McKenzie, from Penicuik Historical Society helped with the event on Sunday, talking to visitors about his 25 years in the papermaking industry in Scotland, South Africa and Australia.

[Obj9] In event involved a large number of helpers from Edinburgh University and Edinburgh Napier University. Coaching was provided for those who had no prior experience of public engagement.

Thoughts on good practice

Much of what applies to this event echoes that from 'Fantastic Forests' and experience from that event informed the planning of this one.

The self-inflating balloons were very popular and good way illustrating carbon sequestration. Ideally this would have accompanied the hugely popular squirrel making activity from 'Fantastic Forests', but unfortunately sufficient funding to support this could not be found.

Involving people who had experience with school teaching in the design and promotion of the event was very useful. Furthermore, being listed on a home schooling network brought along people who had come to the Gardens specifically for the event and who spent a long time doing engaging with activities.

Bright Club

Description

The vast majority of my work in public engagement during the time of the fellowship is related to Bright Club Edinburgh. This was not known about at the time I wrote the application, but it quickly became apparent that this was the best focus for my effort because it had the potential for the greatest impact across many priority areas:

- 1) Delivering public engagement
- 2) Training people for public engagement
- 3) Culture change within the universities
- 4) Cross-discipline and cross institution activities
- 5) Potential for sustained activity
- 6) Publicity of public engagement activity

Bright Club is an idea that began at UCL in May 2009. The concept is that university researchers perform short stand-up comedy routines about their work in a typical comedy night environment. This is not aimed at researchers who want to be stand-up comedians, rather the idea is to provide an opportunity to deliver public engagement to an audience that would not normally attend an event associated with universities, while also providing a personal development opportunity for researchers. The latter is of great value (see below).

Several Bright Clubs have been set up in cities across the UK. The Bright Club in Edinburgh is one of the most active.

My involvement began as volunteering to perform in the first shows (Figure 4). This was thanks to initial involvement of the Edinburgh Beltane Beacon and support from the BBC, comedian Susan Morrison and Steve Cross from UCL. Since then I have taken on the responsibility as central coordinator for Bright Club Edinburgh (with assistance from other volunteers). This includes arranging the shows, finding the performers, training the performers, maintaining the Facebook page and blog, media relations, financial management, promotion of the shows, logistics, show photography, audio and video editing.

Numerous shows have been delivered (Table 1) and more are planned (Table 2). I have made videos of my own performance publicly available on the Internet (Table 3) so that they continue to reach new audience for public engagement, and also serve to help people who are considering performing in future shows. Bright Club Edinburgh now works in collaboration with The Stand Comedy Club.




Table 1: Past shows

Date	Show	Audience	Role
26/06/11	Bright Club Edinburgh #1.0 "Beginnings" City Cafe	100	Performer
24/08/11	Bright Club Edinburgh #1.1 "Beginnings" BBC@Potterrow	230	Performer
27/08/11	Bright Club Edinburgh #1.2 "Beginnings" Turing Festival	75	Performer
20/09/11	Bright Club Edinburgh #2.0 "Revolution" City Cafe	100	Organiser, trainer, performer
01/11/11	Bright Club Edinburgh #3.0 "Luck" City Cafe	109	Organiser, trainer
13/12/11	Bright Club Edinburgh #3.14 "Minced" Voodoo Rooms	95	Assist' organiser, trainer, performer
04/01/12	Bright Club Edinburgh #4.0 "Resolution" The Stand	95	Organiser, trainer
01/02/12	Bright Club Glasgow #2.0 The Stand	115	Performer
24/02/12	Bright Club Edinburgh #4.1 "Museum Lates" NMS	220	Organiser, trainer
Total		1139	

Table 2: Future shows

Date	Show	Audience	Role
02/04/12	Bright Club Edinburgh "First Degree" Banshee Labyrinth	60	Assist' organiser
05/04/12	Bright Club Edinburgh #5.0 EISF "Bodies" Ghillie Dhu	200	Organiser, trainer
14/04/12	Bright Club Edinburgh #5.1 "Z-Axis" The Stand	70	Assist' organiser, performer
09/05/12	Bright Club Edinburgh #6.0 "TBA" The Stand	90	Assist' organiser, trainer
18/05/12	Bright Club Edinburgh #6.1 "Museum Lates" NMS	200	Assist' organiser, trainer
18/05/12	Bright Club London Bloomsbury Theatre	550	Performer
12/07/12	Bright Club Edinburgh #7.0 "TBA" The Stand	90	Assist' organiser, trainer
Total		1260	

Table 3: Videos of performances with engagement component

Date	Show	Views ¹	
26/06/11	Bright Club Edinburgh #1.0 "Beginnings" City Cafe http://youtu.be/zhMTB5VS2tE	363	
24/08/11	Bright Club Edinburgh #1.1 "Beginnings" BBC@Pottterrow http://youtu.be/JMmM_LhGjyc	175	
01/02/12	Bright Club Glasgow #2.0 The Stand http://youtu.be/DbKbW1gqbh8	102	
Total		640	

¹ at 22/03/12

**Figure 4: My performance on the BBC@Pottterrow stage**

Publicity

With the help of other volunteers I maintain the Bright Club Edinburgh blog and Facebook page. (Andy MacLeod maintains the email address and Twitter account). I also design most of the show posters and badges.

Blog: <http://brightclubedinburgh.blogspot.co.uk>

Facebook: www.facebook.com/brightclubedinburgh

The activity of Bright Club Edinburgh has attracted good media attention including an article and interview on the New Scientist blog, in the New Statesman magazine (Figure 5) and on Radio Scotland's Comedy Café (29 July 2011) and Comedy Zone programmes (13 August 2011). I also mentioned it in an editorial for the Chartered Institute of Foresters magazine (Spring 2012). I am currently in discussion with STV's Community Editor for Edinburgh to produce something for their website in the run up to the Science Festival.

enda | This week's best talks and lectures

The former NS editor Peter Wilby joins George Brock and Paddy O'Connell (Radio 4) to consider the latest revelations from the press standards hearings. Frontline Club, 13 Norfolk Place, London W2. 7pm. £12.50/£10. 020 7479 8940. frontlineclub.com

● **Bright Club, Edinburgh**
Join students from the city's universities as they gather to share strange and wonderful stories about people and events from their research degrees. The Stand, 5 York Place, Edinburgh. 7.30pm. £5. 0131 558 7272. brightclubedinburgh.blogspot.com

HOT TICKET
Bright Club, Edinburgh
4 January, with Dan Ridley-Ellis

What's the event?
Bright Club started at University College London and now we have one in Edinburgh, too. People who do research get up on stage and do eight minutes of engaging stand-up comedy about their work.

Why are you involved?
I'm one of the organisers and was a performer from our first show. It's very rewarding.

Why should we come?
If you like laughing at interesting things, then come along. This is stand-up of a kind that you won't get elsewhere: surprising and original.

What questions should we ask?
If you want to know more – and you probably will – the performers are always happy to talk about what they do.

What homework should we do?
No preparation is required – just come prepared for a good evening out. ●
For more details of the event see our listings

Figure 5: Mini interview and event listing in the New Statesman

New Scientist:

www.newscientist.com/blogs/culturelab/2011/09/the-funny-side-of-serious-science.html



BBC Radio Scotland, Comedy Café:

http://soundcloud.com/danridley-ellis/brightclubedinburgh_radio



Other coverage includes:

Times Higher Education

www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=417805



Edinburgh University Science Magazine

www.eusci.org.uk/news/university-researchers-doing-stand-comedy-good-idea



The Reduced Section Podcast

www.mixcloud.com/TheReducedSection/the-reduced-section-podcast-no4-20022012-bright-club-edinburgh-world-fun-mesp-2012/



Edinburgh University School of Biological Sciences Podcast

www.biology.ed.ac.uk/polopoly/podcasts/BioPOD%20episode%203.mp3



Buzzmag

www.buzzmag.org/2012/03/comedy-review-bright-club/



Benefits for personal development

The benefits of Bright Club for personal development are numerous, even for researchers who are experienced with lecturing and public speaking. The training element of Bright Club is therefore very important in terms of getting the most benefit from those involved and in ensuring a high quality show for the audience. These benefits include:

- Use of humour to help communication and learning
- Use of rhythm, tone and pauses
- Confidence
- Stage presence
- Creative thinking
- Speaking without Powerpoint. Learning a script
- Improvisation and quick thinking. Speaking 'off the book' (without preparation)
- Dealing with nerves
- Being able to communicate clearly in a short time to a non-specialist audience

I have played a key role in the training workshops for Bright Club Edinburgh shows to pass on what I have learnt. This includes a 'taster session' for postgraduate students at Heriot Watt University (17/10/11).

Objectives met

[Obj1] [Obj2] [Obj3] My stand-up script covered the headline engagement message of my fellowship: sustainable forestry is good for the environment and the economy, and that there is science involved.

[Obj8] Bright Club helped raise awareness of my public engagement work within the industry and provided an opportunity to talk to people about its value.

[Obj9] I learnt a lot from doing Bright Club and am actively passing this on to new performers. I consider the training to be a vital part.

[Obj10] Bright Club helped raise awareness of my public engagement work within the Edinburgh Napier University and provided an opportunity to talk to people about its value.

[Obj11] Bright Club is cross-discipline and cross institution. There are few networking opportunities for researchers that are so broad.

[Obj12] Bright Club Edinburgh is a continuing, indeed growing, activity.

[Obj13] Publicity for Bright Club Edinburgh has been very good, both in terms of teach and in terms of correctly communicating its aims.

Thoughts on good practice

Bright Club Edinburgh is, in some respects, still finding its feet. The training aspect is important and this would benefit from being formalised and linked into the personal development programmes of the universities in the city. Having input from professional comedians is extremely valuable. Formalising the training would also help with the main challenge for sustainability of Bright Club Edinburgh: attracting new performers.

Operating Bright Club Edinburgh is time consuming, but something that many people are willing to volunteer toward some element of. Finding a way to manage this, alongside the short-term nature of contract research positions, will be a challenge.

One thing that needs attention is getting better recognition of institutions that people work for, and also providing a mechanism for people to contact performers.

Facebook is very effective for both promoting and organising Bright Club.

Recording of performances is very important because people often do not remember how their performances went. Providing both audio and video seems to be beneficial because they encourage examination of different aspects of the performance. Many performers post their videos on the Internet, which helps reach a wider audience.

Evaluation of Bright Club Edinburgh was carried out by Sarah Jenkins (Jenesys Associates Ltd) in November 2011 as part of the evaluation of Bright Clubs attached to the Beacons for Public Engagement. This was valuable, and feedback used to adjust our operation. The main form of audience feedback is laughter, but feedback is also obtained by talking to people at the shows, and through Facebook and Twitter; this seems to be sufficient.

Performances that contain public engagement rather than pure stand-up are best. For greater reach and sustainability it has been decided to widen the scope of Bright Club Edinburgh to include researchers from industry. It was also decided to allow the occasional undergraduate and taught postgraduate students to perform.

Using one or two repeat performers per show helps with cascading of good practice, and also to allow people the opportunity to improve their sets (a useful exercise for personal development).

Other events

Forest Education Initiative National Networking Event

26/05/11 [Obj4] [Obj8] [Obj9] [Obj11]

I attended this event to share experiences and advice in engaging with children on the subject of forests and timber.

Celebration of Leaning, Edinburgh Napier University

17/07/11 [Obj1] [Obj2] [Obj3] [Obj5]

I gave a presentation on wood biomechanics (based on what I had developed for my Beltane Challenge Grant the previous year). The audience was adults involved in community learning in the west of Edinburgh; mainly from WHEC, WHALE arts, Platform Adult Learning Centre, Community Learning and Development, Volunteer Centre SWI. I estimate the audience size to be approximately 60.

Women in SET, Dalkeith Arts Centre

30/08/11 [Obj1] [Obj2] [Obj3] [Obj6] [Obj7]

I gave a talk at this event which was part of the Edinburgh Beltane Public Engagement Challenge grant with the Scottish Resource Centre for Women in Science Engineering and Technology. Unfortunately the audience was very small, but this did mean I could talk for longer with those there on the topic of sustainable forestry and gender balance in the industry.

Edinburgh Doors Open Day, Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh

24-25/11/11 [Obj1] [Obj2] [Obj3] [Obj6] [Obj11]

I gave five one-hour tours of the John Hope Gateway visitors' Centre building over the period of the weekend. As well as explaining the construction of the Gateway (an award winning timber building) I talked with the visitors about the sustainability of timber, wood technology and the importance of forests to the UK. I provided a flier with a summary of the building and the types of timber construction involved, and several visitors were sufficiently interested to take away copies of a technical paper, written by the engineers, for a timber engineering conference I hosted the previous year. Over the two days, 81 people attended my tours.

Construction and Built Environment Challenge

27/10/11 and 24/11/11 [Obj9] [Obj11]

For a number of years I have been providing activities for the Construction and Built Environment Challenge; a construction related competition for S2 pupils. This year I participated in two of the heats and engaged with a total of approximately 100 children. I also helped a member of academic staff at Edinburgh Napier University deliver activities for the first time.

Beltane Celebration Event

27/10/11 [Obj10] [Obj11]

I attended this event to share experiences and advice on public engagement.

The University of Edinburgh, Physics General Interest Seminar

17/11/11 [Obj1] [Obj2] [Obj6] [Obj11]

I was invited to give a presentation to students. This was not public engagement by strict definition, but I was talking about wood technology, timber engineering, and the importance of forests to a group of people who do not know any more about this than the public do. My presentation was a mixture of elements from my public engagement work and from my normal work presenting to people from the forest and timber industries. I estimate that the audience size was approximately 100. The presentation was recorded and put online by Edinburgh University.

<http://www2.ph.ed.ac.uk/podcasts/Physics/PhysicsGenInt/podcasts.html>



Forest Education Initiative Networking and Development Event

01/12/12 [Obj4] [Obj8] [Obj9] [Obj11]

I attended this event to share experiences and advice in engaging with children on the subject of forests and timber and, particularly, to help with encouraging industry to play a role in public engagement.

Edinburgh Napier University, Celebration of Public Engagement

20/02/12 [Obj10] [Obj11]

I participated in this event to share experiences and advice on public engagement and to act as facilitator for discussion aimed at effecting culture change.

End of Beacons Event

22/02/12 [Obj10] [Obj11]

I participated in this event to share experiences and advice on public engagement and act as one of the “story tellers”.

Summary

Although I did not complete the project plan I had intended to do for my Beltane Fellowship I did complete all the objectives. By taking opportunities and adapting my strategy I was able to achieve greater impact; not just in terms of the size of the audience reached (Table 4), but also in terms of helping others develop their public engagement skills (Table 5).

Table 4: Estimate of public audience reached (not all unique)

Event	Audience	Size
Photography walks	Adults	20
Fantastic Forests	Families	1260
Chemistry of Autumn	Young families	600
Bright Clubs to date	Adults mainly ages 20-40	1139
Online videos of Bright Club performances	Unknown	640
Celebration of learning	Community learners	60
Edinburgh Doors Open	Mainly adults	81
CABEC	S2 pupils	100
	Total	3900

Table 5: Estimate of people directly assisted with developing public engagement skills (not all unique)

Event	Category	Number
Photography walks	ENU Researchers and 'industry'	4
Fantastic Forests	ENU Researchers	6
Chemistry of Autumn	Researchers (mixed)	10
Bright Clubs to date	Researchers (mixed)	27
CABEC	ENU Researcher	1
	Total	48