

Public Engagement Case Study

Rising Stars (University of Cambridge)

Rising Stars - organised by the Office of Community Affairs at the University – gives the opportunity for undergraduate students through to early-career academics to develop the communication skills required to become ambassadors for their subjects. Participants attend training and networking sessions within the University in order to learn how to put across specialist topics in an engaging and inspiring way. The programme (funded by HEFCE) includes the delivery of a talk or demonstration to the public, followed by feedback from peers and participants. Penny Wilson, Head of Community Affairs, says: "Underlying the scheme is the real need to create dialogue between the University and the wider community, and communicate what goes on at the University and its contribution to society."

How were the students involved trained?

'Participants attend five half-day sessions and are then responsible for planning, organising and delivering a real outreach activity to the public. Training covers a wide range of topics including communicating research to non-specialists, working in the media and event management. Staff and students already involved in outreach at the University form a panel during the course, with which participants can discuss their public engagement plans.'

The Community Affairs team actively helps participants with planning and implementing their chosen outreach activity with, for example, school pupils, older people's groups, youth clubs, and the general public (but not other academics). Activities include talks, discussions, and hands-on demonstrations, which can be stand-alone or integrated with the University's huge range of existing outreach events.'

What did the students get out of the programme?

'As well as excellent training in public engagement and communication skills, participants also gain experience in working with 'hard to reach' communities, methods of engagement, identifying and creating opportunities to communicate, publicity, evaluation, clear communication of technical subjects, and print and broadcast media.'

What advice would you give to a similar programme?

'Making the course interdisciplinary (all subjects from science to the humanities are included in Rising Stars) works very well. The culmination in a 'live' activity brings the course to life and will be useful for the participants' public engagement skills, as well as for general communication skills. Equally as important is ensuring practical support for event management and marketing etc.'

For further information please visit:

PDF brochure for Rising Stars programme:

http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/communications/community/star/final_rs_publication.pdf

Contacts:

Penny Wilson, Head of Community Affairs: penny.wilson@admin.cam.ac.uk