

Background

Scientists in Schools is an initiative of the Chief Scientist, Dr Jim Peacock. Funding for a pilot project was provided by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations; this has been supplemented by funding from CSIRO. *Scientists in Schools* is managed by CSIRO Education.

The aim of *Scientists in Schools* is to create and support long-term professional partnerships between scientists and teachers. Partnerships are completely flexible; the scientist and teacher are encouraged to work together to develop a program that suits their respective expertise, interests and availability.

The definition of a scientist for this program includes any professional who is actively engaged in the fields of science and/or technology. It includes engineers, mathematicians, IT professionals, applied scientists and medical practitioners amongst others.

In addition, *Scientists in Schools* runs national and regional symposia for participants. The symposia are invitation-only events open to partnered teachers and scientists, and feature sessions on a topic of current scientific relevance as well as education-related sessions. The symposia have as their aims:

1. To inform and inspire teachers about contemporary scientific research.
2. To inform and inspire scientists about contemporary school science education.
3. To better integrate contemporary scientific research into our classrooms.

Participation

Scientists in Schools began in July 2007 with a target of 100 teacher-scientist pairs by National Science Week (August) in 2007 and 500 pairs by the end of 2007. These targets were achieved, and there are currently over 700 partnerships across Australia.

Participation by schools is spread across government, Catholic and independent sectors and includes a fairly even split of primary and secondary schools. Almost half the schools involved are from outside major cities, including some remote schools and at least four identified indigenous schools. Scientists come from federal, state and local government organisations, universities and the private sector in all States and Territories.

Symposia

The first *Scientists in Schools* national symposium was held at the CSIRO Energy Centre in Newcastle in October 2007. The theme for the symposium was energy and climate change, and it featured scientific presentations from leading researchers in these fields.

Attending the symposium were 50 teacher-scientist pairs from around Australia, who were selected by the *Scientists in Schools* team. Participation for the pairs was fully funded, including travel and accommodation for all and teacher release for the teachers. Representatives of interested organisations, such as government education departments, also attended.

A regional *Scientists in Schools* symposium is planned for 22-23 May in Hobart. The symposium will have a biotechnology theme and all Tasmanian-based partnerships have been invited. This symposium is an initiative of the Tasmanian Science and Technology Council and is supported by Biotechnology Australia.

Evaluation

Evaluation of Scientists in Schools has been both formal and informal. An independent evaluation of both the partnerships and the national symposium was undertaken by Curtin University of Technology at the end of 2007. The evaluation results were overwhelmingly positive, showing significant benefits of participation for scientists, teachers and students. The authors recommended that the program continue.

Informal feedback has also been very positive. Partnerships have taken many different forms, with several outstanding successes and significant impacts beyond the direct participants.

Examples of successful partnerships

- An Antarctic scientist in Hobart has formed a long-distance partnership with a primary school in Townsville, sending regular emails to the students about his research
- A primary school in Esperance, working with a climate change scientist in Canberra, has extended their program to develop links with scientists from throughout their local community
- A Canberra scientist runs a lunch-time science club and community meetings about environmental sustainability at her daughter's school
- A South Australian scientist is coordinating a science fair at a local primary school, including providing training to students, teachers and parents
- All 10 Year 6/7 students at a school on Hamilton Island spent two days in Townsville visiting 'their' scientist and his colleagues
- A Sydney scientist is helping establish an extra-curricular science club at a local primary school
- A scientist in Canberra is mentoring students at a local high school who are completing high-level science projects
- A Western Australian defence scientist is spending half a day each week running an extension science class at his local primary school

Collaboration

A focus for Scientists in Schools is collaborating with complementary programs. Collaborations include:

- Cross-promotion and referrals to other programs where appropriate to ensure scientists and teachers join the program that best suits their requirements
- Providing organisations with data on the participation of their staff to assist with reporting on community engagement goals
- Matching scientists with their organisation's priority schools to help develop links between clusters of schools and science organisations
- Collaborating on events, such as regional symposia, gatherings and workshops

Further information

More information about the program, including online registration forms, showcases of successful partnerships and contact details, is available at:

www.scientistsinschools.edu.au