

Science Uncovered 2010–2014

Key findings from visitor evaluation

Introduction

Science Uncovered is a one night, annual event at the Natural History Museum in which visitors meet researchers, scientists and curators. They can talk with them about their research and careers, get privileged access to amazing specimens from our collections, learn about science and the natural world and ask their own questions. Last year (2014) more than 350 researchers presented their work in a multitude of ways to over 8,500 visitors.

This document is a summary of key findings from visitor evaluation since 2010.

What do visitors get from *Science Uncovered*?

Outcomes	Evidence	Quotes from visitors
A positive, motivating experience of science	In 2013, 96%, and in 2014 95%, of visitors reported that the event was good or excellent. Visitors were inspired to interact with numerous scientists and participate in numerous activities. Visitor counts showed that the 10,000 visitors in 2013 each had seven interactions on average with scientists.	Re-connecting with the fun of asking questions about stuff without the pressure of thinking you had to be tested on it.
The realisation that real scientists don't match common stereotypes	In 2010, a baseline survey recorded that most visitors thought of scientists as 'boffins' and 'lab workers'. A similar study at <i>Science Uncovered</i> 2011 revealed that 25% of visitors regarded scientists as 'people like us' as a result of the event. This category did not appear at all in the baseline survey. Results from subsequent years confirm a trend of visitors reporting that scientists are likely to be female, young or 'people like us' after attending <i>Science Uncovered</i> . In 2014, 60% of respondents were surprised by the diversity of the scientists they met.	They are just like normal people! Not all beards. All lovely. It has changed some of the students' perceptions about who or what a scientist is. I think it was really important for some of our children to see that scientists are not all old, white, middle-class men.
An understanding that science is important and relevant to wider society	Visitors describe a multitude of direct benefits that science brings to society, many of which are discussed at the event. In 2013, 85% of visitors left the event strongly agreeing that the work of scientists benefits society. In 2014 75% of poll respondents reported they had significantly increased their knowledge of the benefits science brings to society. Another 86% of respondents stated that the event had made them think more about the importance of scientists to society.	Scientists help to discover the cause and effect of global change. Solve crime. Help us learn about our surroundings. Scientists reveal our proper place in evolution and teach us to respect and care about all forms of life on our planet.
Encouragement to pursue science as a career or a qualification	At the 2012 young person's reception, students reported an increased understanding of what is involved in a science career as a result of the event. Both students and adults demonstrated an awareness of the diversity of jobs available in science. In 2014 we revisited this outcome specifically with regard to children and young people. The teachers we surveyed all agreed their students found inspiration at the event and that more, more strongly, desire a career in science as a result.	We had a fascinating evening. My daughter is now keen to become a scientist. Coming last year basically gave me the last little nudge. That even though I'm quite old for it, I did sign up for a science degree. Realising how specific jobs in science can be and that you can pursue a career in exactly what you're interested in more children want to be scientists now.

Knowledge about the natural world

Understanding the natural world and our place within it is central to what many visitors want from the event.

In 2013 the majority of respondents identified the specimens on display, and hearing from scientists about them, as their single greatest highlight of the evening.

Tonight I have learnt about survival/mating strategies of squids, genetic traits, barnacles, brain trauma, bi-valve molluscs and butterflies.

I learnt that meteorites from outer space contain SO₂ and SO₃ which can tell us how the star was born.

Inspiration to become more involved with science in the future

In 2012 22% of respondents requested further contact and information from the Museum. In 2013 this figure increased to 29.2%. This percentage increased again in 2014, with 50.6% of respondents indicating they wanted further contact with the Museum and its science as a result of attending *Science Uncovered*.

This was superb. I want more of this!

What a wonderful evening. Sure to come next year.

What makes the difference?

Much of our evaluation work is directed towards identifying the features of activities that are successful in encouraging visitors to adopt and take away the outcomes around which the event is organised.

What promotes positive impact?	Explanation	Quotes from visitors
Passion and enthusiasm of scientists	The feedback we've had over the past five years shows this is one of the key drivers for the success of the event. The experience of meeting researchers and scientists face to face is unusual enough to be memorable, but relaxed enough to be accessible. This was also evident in a slightly different format in 2014 when we sent scientists into schools in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.	Talking to scientists who are so passionate about their field. Very inspiring + interesting! The atmosphere is uniting and enthusiasm contagious!
Unique access to spectacular specimens from our collections	Many of the specimens at <i>Science Uncovered</i> are inaccessible to the public for the rest of the year because of their use in on-going scientific research.	I found a pickled Gaboon viper therefore I am happy!
A huge variety of fields, disciplines activities and activity formats	From straightforward show-and-tell sessions to discussions and debates, and from specially created interactive games to unique behind-the-scenes tours.	There was a great range of scientists of all disciplines and even countries who specialised in different subjects, giving us a taste of everything.
Cutting-edge research technology	<i>Science Uncovered</i> features some of the latest research technology (from CT and MRI scanners to electron microscopy), but it is the opportunity to try out some of this technology yourself that is so inspiring.	Immense variety of new discoveries and 'evolutionized' technology to detect and further research global health and environmental problems.
Asking your own questions	The direct, personal contact with scientists and researchers means visitors can pursue their own interests, often with unexpected results.	It's so wonderful to be able to ask questions directly and have my preconceptions shattered!

For the full reports on past *Science Uncovered* events please go to:

www.nhm.ac.uk/about-us/visitor-research/evaluations-and-research/index.html