

should we continue to pursue  
*dialogue?*

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# what is the BA?

- established 1831
- British Association for the Advancement of Science
- nationwide organisation with a regional & branch network
- communicating science in an open society
- open & inclusive membership



# what does the BA do?

## broad programme of events

- the BA *Festival of Science*
- UK *National Science Week*
- media fellowships
- *sciBArs*
- science & society forums
- public consultations
- mass participation expts
- events for professional science communicators
- *Science & Public Affairs* magazine
- Alpha Galileo press service
- young science writers awards
- young people award schemes
- major hands on science events for
- *Visions w*

# didactic to dialogue

- what is dialogue?
- reasons behind recent push for dialogue?
- is dialogue working?
  - sciBArs
  - the x-change
  - media fellowships
- should we continue to pursue it?

# what is dialogue?

- two way communication
- open and inclusive discussion
- exchange of mutual understanding, not just information
- interaction with key social actors

# recent push for dialogue

- UK House of Lords report, 2000
- is it 'deficit model' in new clothes?
- stated reasons include:
  - to win public support
  - to reduce conflict
  - increase level of trust in regulators
  - increase inclusion of public knowledge
    - in setting research agenda
    - in policy making decisions

# potential for dialogue?

- yes – massive potential
- much talk about the process, as opposed to the outcomes, of dialogue
- what is our approach so far?
  - present the topic as an issue that involves science, rather than framing it as scientific

# sciBArs

## objective

- to provide informal opportunities for publics and scientists to discuss issues that involve science, as well as quirky science

## audience

- an already present one, though we tend to attract our own

# sciBArs examples

- *Soft drugs – hard facts*
- *Fancy a flutter? – probability and betting*
- *Spit or swab – DNA data bases on trial*
- *Farm to fork – lessons learnt from foot & mouth*
- *Killer asteroids and rogue comets*
- regional sciBArs

# sciBAr outcomes

- quick turn around and inexpensive
- often Q&A sessions
- reaching new audiences? either interested in science or are already interested in the topic
- opportunity for scientists

# the x-change

## objectives

- informal discussion of the 'best of the fest'
- to encourage scientists to discuss a broad range of issues in a public space

## audience

- festival goers – science aware public and scientists

# x-change outcomes

- informal, end of the day gathering in room with a bar
- panel of 5-6 scientists who are invited to comment on issues outside of their speciality
  - e.g. the UK chief scientists and Nobel prize winners, most interesting speakers that day
- looking for ways to increase its impact

# media fellowships

## objectives

- create greater awareness of the workings of the media to scientists
- promote better links between scientific community and media

## audience/partners

- working scientists and science journalists

# media fellowship outcomes

- 10 scientists each year hosted with science journalists for 4-8 weeks
- provides a chance for scientists to learn from journalists – reverse of typical ‘dialogue’
- reflections change from stated motivations
- *“I have come away with far more than I ever expected – including a very real view of how ruthless the media industry can be.”*
- *“The scheme is excellent and has given me a unique opportunity to gain insight into how scientists and the media interact.”*

# impact of dialogue?

- more appealing than didactic approach
- more opportunities for public to comment and state their experience and opinions
- yet is there evidence that greater listening is occurring?
- do we achieve mutual understanding?

# continue with dialogue?

- to answer this we need improved evaluation
  - to determine if dialogue is occurring
  - impacts of dialogue
    - with members of the general public
    - within scientific community
    - other key social actors e.g. policy makers
- we will continue to promote opportunities for different knowledges to be voiced and heard

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