



**Consultation by the Higher Education Funding Council for England
(HEFCE) on its draft Strategic Plan 2006-11**

Deadline for responses to pre-consultation: 2 September 2005

NESTA
Fishmongers' Chambers
110 Upper Thames Street
London EC4R 3TW

The National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA) welcomes the theme of engagement between higher education and the public which underpins one of HEFCE's roles as set out in the draft strategic plan 2006-11. There may be opportunities for HEFCE and NESTA to work in partnership on the delivery of this theme, informed by our work in support of science communication. NESTA is already exploring issues of public engagement with science and science communication with the Wellcome Trust, Research Councils and the Royal Society.

NESTA exists to help maximise the UK's creative and innovative potential. We are funded by an endowment from the National Lottery and use the interest to back people of exceptional talent and imagination. Through a range of pioneering programmes we offer the support they need to explore new ideas, develop new products and services, or experiment with new ways of nurturing creativity in science, technology and the arts. We also work with others to remove obstacles that have prevented this country's innovative potential from being fulfilled.

NESTA is statutorily required to contribute to the public knowledge and appreciation of science, technology and the arts. In particular, we have a varied programme of activities around science communication and science education. To date, NESTA has invested £3.5 million in projects supporting the public appreciation of science and £1.6 million in projects promoting science in schools.

NESTA supports projects which aim to broaden the horizons of scientists (Crucible); create role models for younger people interested in science (Planet Science and Planet Jemma) and identify and reward scientists who are talented communicators (FameLab). These projects, and other investments we have made in science communication, are discussed further below.

The development of skilled science communicators who are able to contribute to greater public engagement with science requires that science communication becomes a valued and recognised professional activity for science academics. The ability to communicate scientific concepts to public audiences should be fostered in scientists at all stages of their career, from first degree onwards. We have supported projects which address both of these issues and would be interested in working with HEFCE on further initiatives to remove the barriers to scientists' engagement with the public

Examples of NESTA's work on science communication

The Fellowship programme helps exceptionally talented and original individuals fulfil their potential. It also offers awards designed for particular audiences, such as CRUCIBLE, a year-long programme, with 30 scientists and engineers selected to take part each year a series of three career and personal development, residential weekends designed to expand their thinking about science in relation to ethics, politics and creativity. CRUCIBLE offers participants the chance to attend seminars, based around themes such as science in society and globalisation, led by internationally-respected speakers and. Those attending are also encouraged to develop their networking, management, personal development and communication skills.

The Invention and Innovation programme turns ground-breaking ideas into innovative products and services with commercial potential – approximately a third of the investments in this programme are to projects from higher education institutions.

The Learning programme funds projects that bring learning alive for people of all ages and backgrounds and supports initiatives that enhance the public appreciation of science, technology and the arts. An award that spanned our Learning and Invention and Innovation programmes was Cape Farewell, a sailing expedition that aimed to engage the public and schools in the debate about climate change.

In 2001 NESTA won the tender to manage Science Year, funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), which later became Planet Science - an educational campaign aimed at inspiring young people and enhancing their perception of science. Planet Science aimed to inspire and support kids, teachers and parents in learning about science. There are a wealth of activities and resources hosted by the Planet Science website, particularly for teachers.

Planet Science includes initiatives to encourage an interest in science, such as Planet Jemma, a website where visitors log in and follow Jemma through her life as a first year physics student. The target audience for Planet Jemma is teenage girls.

Another project within the Planet Science website is 'Meet Your Match', which profiles modern scientists as a way of showing pupils examples of the range of career paths available to them. Profiles include: Dr Dwain Neil, a management consultant with a PhD in Nuclear Chemistry; Stephanie Ankrah, a sports materials engineer doing a PhD in Football Shin Guards; and Tony Waithe, an inventor of a folding fire-escape ladder and a revolutionary bicycle saddle.

The science world's equivalent of Pop Idol, FameLab™, launched a national competition to discover the new faces of UK science communication. The initiative was the brainchild of the Cheltenham Science Festival in partnership with NESTA. Dr Mark Lewney, a physicist from Cardiff won the inaugural FameLab competition and he will now enter discussions with Channel 4 on his potential career as a television science presenter and will perform at a series of live science events. Over 300 practising scientists from all over the UK entered the competition at regional auditions held throughout the spring.