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Hard to Move Science: Using travelling exhibitions to reach national audiences (12' + 3')

Friday 5 August 2016 11:45 (15 minutes)

This session will focus on the UK's approach to engaging national and harder-to-reach audiences with "hard to move" Big Science facilities including the Large Hadron Collider. Speakers include a particle physicist who worked on the LHC national roadshow as a PhD student, the UK's national particle and nuclear physics outreach coordinator, and an overview from the strategic communications and public engagement perspective. We know from personal experience and evaluation that few experiences can rival a visit to a large scale science facility or laboratory to generate lasting interest in science, especially among young people who are our future researchers, technicians and skilled staff. But our laboratories are not theme parks, and we must of necessity therefore limit the number of visitors for capacity, safety and operational reasons. But in practical terms this restricts access only to those able to easily travel to our locations, which in turn raises equity and diversity concerns.

Our solution was to bring the facilities to the public. From our start in 2011 we are now approaching one million visitors to our series of major national roadshows: firstly in particle physics, then astronomy, crystallography and most recently lasers. Each was based on a travelling large scale exhibit: a life size replica of the Large Hadron Collider tunnel; a 1/4 scale Very Large Telescope facility, and most recently a life-size model of the Vulcan very high powered laser facility. In this session we will explain how we developed the roadshows to fit the wider UK public engagement strategy, how we engaged our researcher communities, the lessons learnt including what didn't work as well as we'd planned, and give thoughts on how other labs may be able to adapt the model for their purposes.

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