Summary of key issues and advice relating to careers in Science Communications

A presentation was given by a representative from the Public Engagement Unit of a UK University about her career in Science communications and some advice about the nature of the work / sector and how to get in and progress.

This report contains the following:

1. Speaker’s Career History
2. The nature of work
3. Example roles and sector issues
4. Further resources

Please Note: The information provided below is transcribed from notes taken during the event. Where possible, links have been provided to relevant online information so that readers can verify the information in this document. Dr Calum Leckie, UCL Careers Consultant

1. The Speaker’s Career history

The speaker had spent 15 years in the communication of science in various roles and was currently the Head of Public Engagement for a UK university. The speaker noted that you will not find jobs advertised as ‘Science Communicator’ but that you will find a diversity of titles in this area of work. One role that she held was as a ‘Content Researcher’ for a science centre.

The speaker had completed a masters in science communication (note, the speaker had left academia with a PhD) but stated that this was not necessary for entry level work. However, she noted that many of those people she had met that had been in this industry for some time did have a masters degree in science communication. It was mentioned that some in the industry had completed a postgraduate certificate in science communication.

The speaker obtained relevant work experience by working as a volunteer for The British Science Association (https://www.britishscienceassociation.org/) and was also involved with the British Interactive Group that runs annual and regional events (http://www.big.uk.com/).
‘Science Wise’ which organises national debates, was also mentioned as a way to get relevant experience (http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/)

The speaker mentioned that if you are targeting ‘Science Journalism’ you were better off doing a general journalism qualification.

2. The nature of the work

The speaker stated that the work was a ‘skills-based creative job’. A lot of her time is spent developing relationships with researchers, and she is involved in creating science exhibits. Her role also involves grant writing, evaluation and reporting, marketing and training.

3. Example roles and sector issues

As mentioned above, you are unlikely to simply come across a job title ‘Science Communicator’

The speaker gave some examples of job roles in this area that she had seen advertised;

- Physics Educator (Interactive Exhibits)
- Content Researcher (Interactive Exhibits)
- Education Manager
- Project Manager, Public Engagement

It was mentioned that there isn’t an obvious career path within science communications, and that to progress you need to build up a ‘portfolio’ of successful work. This can result in a CV that lacks an obvious ‘story’. The speaker noted that the work wasn’t particularly well paid, there was a lot of short term contract work and a lot of time spent hunting for money for projects.

The ability to network with other science communicators was mentioned as a key skill as often other science communicators may have had the same creative ideas as you and delivered them in the past but as the profession is ‘not well documented’ there may not be accessible records of it.

For those looking for advertised jobs and further information, a key resource mentioned was the Psci-com mailing list (https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A0=psci-com) as well as The Association of Science and Discovery Centres (http://sciencecentres.org.uk/) and the Association of British Science Writers (http://www.absw.org.uk/)

4. Further Resources (as suggested by Calum Leckie)

Interviews with two doctoral graduates who are in science communication roles can be found on our Researcher Careers website at: www.ucl.ac.uk/careers/researchers - scroll down and open the ‘Career Stories of Doctoral Graduates’ section for;

- Dr Marek Kukula. Public Astronomer, Royal Observatory Greenwich
- Dr Vicki Symington. Regional Coordinator (South East) Royal Society of Chemistry
http://scicommjobs.wordpress.com  - Science Communication Jobs

www.indeed.co.uk/Science-Media-jobs

www.wellcome.ac.uk/Funding/Public-engagement/Funding-schemes/Broadcast-games-and-film-awards/Science-Media-Studentships/  - Wellcome Trust Science Media Studentships
  o  http://www.ucl.ac.uk/public-engagement  - Opportunities and training in public engagement

http://www.jobs.ac.uk  - site for jobs within Universities and Institutes. Select the ‘PR, Marketing, Sales and Communication’ section