

Working in science communication

Six people whose work can be described as ‘communicating science’ reveal the great variety of career paths in this area.



Alex Tate, Producer/Director, Windfall Films

I produce and direct science and natural history documentaries. For me it strikes the perfect balance between my interests in science, natural history, photography and storytelling. Plus I get paid to travel the world!

I studied zoology at university and then took a master's in Science Communication, with a focus on science media production. The course was invaluable for me. It opened my eyes to the filmmaking process, taught me to write about science in an engaging way and helped me get a foot in the door with a production company. I'm at the same company 6 years later.

My job varies a lot. Making a documentary usually starts with a lot of research - so I'll be reading journals, speaking to scientists and trawling the internet for information to help me write a script and work out the details. If you're lucky, a few weeks later you could be filming in a far flung corner of the world. After filming I spend about 2 months with an editor, putting the film together. This involves more script writing, working with graphics, animation companies and music composers. Managing all the different parts of the process is hard, but worth it!

It is great when your film is recognised by others. A lot of TV gets made and not all of it is good! So I'm very pleased to have a BAFTA on my shelf at home as recognition of my work on 'Inside Nature's Giants' for Channel 4.

A *master's* is a higher university degree, often studied after completing a first or bachelor's degree.

Dr Sai Pathmanathan, Science education consultant



I am a science education consultant with a focus on entertainment media. I do all kinds of things, from running workshops at the BBC's 'Bang Goes the Theory' roadshow, to researching and creating new educational games and media.

While at university studying neuroscience I started doing science communication activities, which got me interested in working in this field so I did a master's in Science Education. I focused on studying how young people learnt about marine biology from films such as Finding Nemo.

Because of my research on children's media, I was invited to work at the National Science Foundation in Washington, D.C. in the United States. It was a truly memorable experience. I juggle a lot of different projects, but I'm never bored. I travel to fantastic places (Hawaii!) and meet amazing people, and all for work!

Alexis Mannion, Education and Outreach Manager, The Francis Crick Institute



I manage the Francis Crick Institute's education and outreach programme. Due to open in 2015, the Crick will be one of the largest biomedical research institutes in the world! My work involves creating science education opportunities for diverse audiences – from local schools and community groups, to internationally acclaimed scientists.

I studied Geology at University and found my first job as an Explainer at the Science Museum in London. The experience opened my eyes to the world of science communication and confirmed

that I didn't want to work in a lab (or the field!) all day. While working, I studied for a Master's in Science Communication to understand the practice and theory of science communication in more depth. The course really helped me to develop the experiences I had gained while working and move forwards with my career.

At the moment I'm working on an exciting project with local community groups to create three graphic novels all about Francis Crick and the new institute – we've worked with an award winning children's writer and amazing illustrators to create the books – it's been a fantastic project!

Toby Shannon, British Science Association, Science in Society Officer



I am a Science in Society Officer at the British Science Association – I work on many different, exciting projects with scientists and engineers to get them engaged with the public. The Association aims to bring people and science together through our nation-wide programme of events and activities – we've been going since 1831!

I've always loved science and started off studying for a degree in Physics with Nuclear Astrophysics. I had the opportunity to go on a placement year to work in communications at the Rutherford Appleton Laboratory in Oxfordshire. I learnt so much about science communication that I was inspired to pursue it as a career. I went on to do a Science Communication master's course which gave me a really solid theoretical base and loads of new practical skills.

One of the things I love about my job is that it's so varied. You might find me preparing for conferences, running the x-change events at the British Science Festival or training scientists to better communicate their research to the public. It's tricky balancing lots of different projects at once but I love the challenge! It's great working on something that you believe in and that you're proud of!

**Kamini Plaha,
Natural History Museum,
Science Educator**

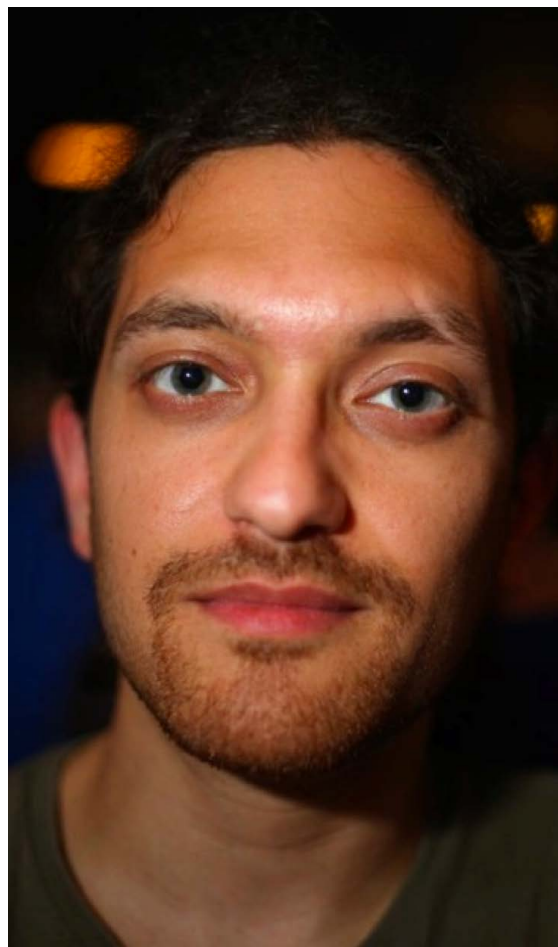


My job is to engage, enthuse and inspire visitors of the Natural History Museum (NHM) through the use of the museum's collections. I deliver workshops and shows around the museum for families and schools. My favourite is a show called Animal Vision as we get to work with a professional animal handler and their amazing living animals.

After my degree in Biological Sciences, I wanted to experiment with different careers in Science Communication as I was unsure as to what it was and whether I would enjoy it. I became a Learning Volunteer at the NHM and was an intern at the Royal Society. I really enjoyed engaging with the visitors at the NHM and communicating the behind-the-scenes science to visitors and was delighted to get a full time job at the museum. Science communication has become a big part of my life and studying it has helped me to communicate science in an effective way and to understand how science actually works. I've never looked at a documentary, exhibition or magazine article in the same way again!

It can be hard to keep a high level of energy, enthusiasm and attention for each workshop and show, but I love the reaction from the visitors when they engage with me and an animal. We are the ones that bring the specimens and science at the museum to life!

**Rohan Mehra, Exhibition Content
Developer, Science Museum
(Contemporary Science)**



I produce exhibitions, displays and lots of events for the Science Museum. I'm always on the lookout for the most amazing things I can find, that affect people and get them talking!

Before working at the Science Museum I was a documentary film maker, which is a lot like being a journalist, which really helped me communicate contemporary science. But my road to this job started when I did a master's course in Science Communication. I learned all about turning complex ideas in science into something fun and engaging, that everyone can explore.

I spend a lot of time researching science news and issues, which is important because without research it is impossible to delve deeply into a science story. I interview scientists and read all about strange and wonderful things. If I'm working on an exhibition then everyone I talk to will be researching a different part of a large story, such as the environment, physics, robotics, or anything!

I really get a buzz from the creative parts of this job. We've run spy-games to talk about online-security, used ice-cocktails to discuss climate change and even had some live spiders in for an event on pain relief. My absolute highlight was when I wrote a short piece with Professor Stephen Hawking!

These six case studies were collected by Emily Dawson.