

Reaching out to the hard to reach: using a science centre model to deliver public engagement with research.

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While there is both academic and public appetite for Engagement with Research (PER), there are barriers to reaching a wide range of publics. Attempts to connect the public with research often end up targeting the 'already engaged'; the hard-to-reach remain just that. Promoting science engagement in a wider demographic is crucial and requires the creation of opportunities for the public to engage with research in places in which they feel they 'belong'.

We report here on an 8-month pilot of a science centre model for PER. Oriel Science (www.orielscience.co.uk) ran a research-led science exhibition in Swansea city centre. Our exhibition covered the topic of 'Time' with geoscience relevant themes including climate change, tree ring research and glaciology. The exhibition was run by academics and student ambassadors. Oriel Science received 16,000 visitors in 8 months, 40% of whom had no previous interaction with the university or its research and >40% of whom came from socio-economically deprived areas. By locating research outreach in a city-centre leisure space we were able to engage with a wider range of publics than either a university or museum and our visitor demographic matched that of the surrounding region. We report on the public engagement leadership we enabled, working with 18 research groups over 8 months, and our achievements in giving a broad range of publics the most direct access to participate in contemporary geoscience research.