



# Pint of Science:

## Quenching your thirst for knowledge around the world

Images courtesy of Nick Rutter.

The Pint of Science festival delivers talks on the latest scientific research in a relaxed atmosphere – in local pubs! Providing a platform which allows people to discuss research with the researchers who carry it out, it is run mainly by volunteers and was established by a community of postgraduate and post-doctoral researchers in 2012. We spoke to founders Dr Michael Motskin and Dr Praveen Paul to discuss more on Pint of Science's background and engaging people with science while having a few pints in the process.



In 2012, Dr Michael Motskin and Dr Praveen Paul, two research scientists at Imperial College London, started and organised an event called 'Meet the Researchers'. It brought people affected by Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, motor neurone disease and multiple sclerosis into their labs to show them the kind of research they do. It was inspirational for both visitors and

researchers. They thought why not bring the scientists out to the people? And so, Pint of Science was launched. In May 2013, they held the first Pint of Science festival in just three cities. It quickly took off around the world and now happens in nearly 300 cities.

Pint of Science is a non-profit organisation that brings some of the most brilliant

scientists to local pubs to discuss their latest research and findings with the public. In an interview with both Michael and Praveen, we discussed more about the Pint of Science festivals as well as the vital importance of science communication and engagement.

*Can you tell us more about Pint of Science, its history and core mission?*

Pint of Science is a three-day annual festival that brings scientists and researchers to their local pub to share their discoveries. It started in the UK in May 2013 as a small project in three cities, and through the infectious enthusiasm of thousands of volunteers has now spread to nearly 300 cities in 21 countries. Our mission is simple: give people an opportunity to hear about and discuss the latest research and give scientists a platform to share and collaborate in different ways.



### What's different about Pint of Science is that we offer the choice of hundreds of events at the same time.

*Can you tell us about your research backgrounds and what inspired you to create Pint of Science?*

As post-doctoral researchers at the division of Brain Sciences at Imperial College London, one of us (Michael) was working on nano-particles to deliver drugs to the brain for Parkinson's and the other (Praveen) was working on genes involved in motor neuron disease. Our focus was on understanding molecular mechanisms underlying these diseases.

As researchers, we found there was a disconnection between scientists and the people affected by the conditions we were working on. Our friends also thought that things we did in the lab was the stuff of science-fiction.

The combination of these factors led us to initially host an event in our lab for people affected by neurodegenerative conditions, showcasing our research and listening to their questions and stories about their own experiences. It was so inspiring for everyone involved that we wanted this dialogue to be available for everyone

and for any subject and spread it further. A few months after our lab event, we mixed together one crazy idea, naivety, enthusiasm and a group of friends which led to the birth of Pint of Science.

*Pint of science really is an ingenious idea to bring science to the masses in a very different way – combining alcohol and science in the same setting. Why do you think this has worked so far?*

Having talks in a bar or pub is not a novel idea – this has been around for nearly three decades. A comfortable and relaxed atmosphere fosters discussion and



The 'Creative Reactions' part of Pint of Science pairs artists with scientists, leading to different interpretations of research.



engagement. It's a good opportunity to hear about discoveries directly from the source, the people who are making them. Sometimes science is misrepresented, or discoveries get lost, leading to mistrust of science and its applications. We want to counter this mistrust by creating an engaging and personal environment.

What's different about Pint of Science is that we offer the choice of hundreds



Each event is unique: dancers, comedians, musicians and magicians can get involved in explaining science.



Relaxed and informal venues in our local communities make events more approachable.



A captive audience at a Pint of Science event in a pub in London.

Dr Emma Byrne explains why swearing can be good for you and can help in pain management.

Punters take part in pub quiz during the break in an event about how microbes in your gut are just as important as food in battling obesity.

of events at the same time – as a guest you are spoilt for choice, whether it's stem cells, volcanoes, how language develops or black holes, we have it all. Having so many events makes them more approachable and accessible to a wider audience, making them part of popular culture and part of a regular night out.

Pint of Science wouldn't be successful without the hard work from our teams and speakers; we're very community-driven and work with thousands of researchers spread across over 40 UK universities who are totally dedicated and committed to making the events the best they can be, all as volunteers in their spare time. Our commitment to them is to provide a platform so that their events can happen.

*Why do you think science communication is so important for*

*the public to engage with the people responsible for the future of science?* As mentioned before, science can be misrepresented or simplified. In this age of fake news, discoveries and impact can get lost, leading to mistrust of science. Events like these provide a great way to make science open and accessible and allow people to question and discuss how and why scientific research is carried out. Similarly, the speakers taking part often comment on how delivering such talks has made them rethink their own research, context and methods, and that questions from the public have been thought-provoking.

Our teams in each city are usually based at universities and always enjoy interacting with other departments in their institution to put on these events. This has led to collaborations across disciplines, and

as a team, they are proud to showcase the research at their institutions.

*Pint of Science has great support from some very well-known major partners – why is this support and collaboration so important?*

We are collaborative from our core; Pint of Science is just one large collaboration and we all rely on one another for support and to deliver the events. We rely on sponsors and selling tickets to sustain us – we have never had large grants or donations to support us. Having a range of partners also helps us reach wider audiences and deliver a host of different events – either with astronauts, theatre groups or artists.

*Creative Reactions is a collaboration between artists and Pint of Science scientists to produce artworks related to the science presented during these events – why did this prove to be a major success and benefit for Pint of Science?*

Art and science have a long-standing relationship. Artists have always communicated ideas through a wide range of media and using their expertise in communicating what may appear to be complex topics through their artwork seems natural. The involvement of artists in science communication generates fantastic ambassadors for science.

*What does the future hold for Pint of Science?*

Pint of Science has been growing nationally and internationally for five years now. It's been an incredible journey so far, and we have been trying to evolve to meet the

demand. We are now at a crossroad and our next step is to evolve Pint of Science into a science events platform throughout the year. A central hub where people can find science events near them.

*How did the most recent festivals go? What are people's reactions to Pint of Science?*

Pint of Science is always greatly received by everyone involved – from the

65% of our population is between 0 and 24 years old and is in great need to be exposed to activities such as this. Thanks for your time and collaboration"

"Until about 15 minutes ago, I had never heard of you, but thanks to the U3A, now I have. The talks look interesting, but at present it seems that we (my husband and I) will be rather occupied with his health. Both of us being 83, we go rather

experience. Any suggestions would be very appreciated."

The amount of work that goes into putting together over 500 UK events (not to mention the 100s of events in 20 other countries!) is vast and takes nearly a year. This year there were 120k attendees and 5000 scientists that spoke in over 2000 events. Pint of Science is a rollercoaster, but we know that everyone involved learns and takes something positive

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organisers to the speakers to attendees and beyond. We get a range of feedback – from people who've left science at school being inspired by a talk about their favourite subject to those who try to find a cure to their or their relative's condition by engaging directly with researchers participating in Pint of Science.

We have numerous emails that show how our work impacts far beyond our initial intention, here are some examples: Email from Angola: "Dear Sirs, salut! I would like to know what are the necessary prerequisites to bring the festival into a new country. I am writing to you from Angola. We have just solidified our peace after 40 years of war. It is now important to bring science into the lives of our youth:

slowly these days but the brain seems to be functioning still. Please would you send me any news as appropriate (we live near Coventry), and include me next year".

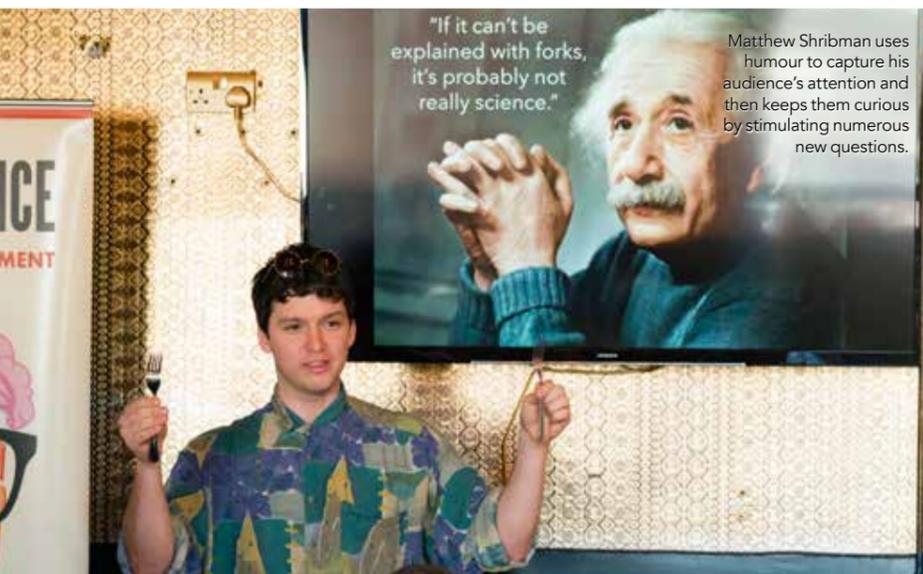
"Hi Guys, Just saw an advert for one of your events in Cardiff and wondered if any of you know of anyone who could get my son some work experience in science research. He is fifteen years old and keen to see if this is the career route he wants to go down. I am told by his teachers that he is a talented science student, but this is not my field at all and don't know where to start – although I have already tried the hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, Cardiff University. Work experience is mainly offered by these institutions at year 12 but he needs to get a week's work

from the experience. We all certainly need a drink after it!

**If you have a passion for science and want to find out more, please visit [www.pintofscience.com](http://www.pintofscience.com).**



**E:** [Contact@pintofscience.com](mailto:Contact@pintofscience.com)  
**W:** [www.pintofscience.com](http://www.pintofscience.com).



Matthew Shribman uses humour to capture his audience's attention and then keeps them curious by stimulating numerous new questions.