

## **Irish science fair SciFest identified as a global exemplar**

*Lord Mayor of Dublin hosts meeting in the Mansion House with American researchers visiting Ireland to learn about SciFest.*

**Monday April 18<sup>th</sup>** – 18 American researchers from the University of Southern California and the organisers of SciFest today discussed the importance of student science fairs in Ireland, at a meeting in the Mansion House hosted by the Lord Mayor of Dublin Councillor Críona Ní Dhálaigh. Recognised as an international exemplar of how science fairs should be organised, SciFest is an all-inclusive, all-island science programme where second-level students showcase their Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) projects. It consists of a series of one day science fairs held locally in schools and regionally in the 14 Institutes of Technology, DCU and St. Mary's College, Derry. The SciFest programme is funded primarily by Science Foundation Ireland, Intel and Boston Scientific.

At the meeting, the researchers and the SciFest Executive discussed the important national leadership provided by SciFest in promoting STEM among second-level students across the island of Ireland and the importance of science fairs for students. The researchers are currently on a ten day research trip to Ireland, studying the programme's inclusive, empowering and extremely positive contribution to science education in Ireland. They are also looking at the effect of globalisation on STEM education. In the course of their study the researchers will visit some 18 schools and meet with a wide range of stakeholders in the STEM education space. The lead researcher, Dr Michael Escalante, had met SciFest CEO Sheila Porter when she gave a talk at Intel ISEF in Los Angeles and suggested that SciFest would make an excellent case study for his students.

Speaking after this morning's visit, Sheila Porter, CEO, SciFest said, *"It was a great honour to meet the Lord Mayor. Along with our US visitors, we were very happy to have the opportunity to discuss the work of SciFest in encouraging STEM in schools, the importance of STEM education in Ireland and the research being undertaken by our American visitors into the impact of SciFest and globalization on STEM education in Ireland. SciFest has grown extensively since it launched in 2008. From having 1,612 participants in its first year, it had over 7,200 in 2015. By the end of the current year the total number of participants since 2008 is set to exceed 40,000. We are very proud of this success and we want to see it continue in*

*the coming years. Our primary aim is to foster an interest in, and a passion for science among second level students."*

Lord Mayor of Dublin Críona Ní Dhálaigh, said, "*SciFest is a very inclusive, all-island programme that does important work in promoting STEM education on all parts of the island of Ireland. It is important that our young people be given the best start in life through an education system that allows them to fulfil their potential and develop their interests. As part of this, it is so important to encourage participation in science. I was very happy to meet with SciFest today and with the team of US researchers to discuss the importance of science fairs to the Irish education system."*

Dr Michael Escalante, Lead Researcher with the research group from the University of Southern California, said, "*We are in Ireland to study the effect of participating in science fairs, specifically SciFest, and globalisation, on STEM education. It has been really interesting to learn more about SciFest and the work that it does. It was also a privilege to meet with Lord Mayor Críona Ní Dhálaigh and to discuss these issues with her. Policy makers and public leaders have an important role in promoting science, and Lord Mayor Ní Dhálaigh demonstrated her great interest in this area."*

Applications to SciFest@College 2016 are now closed except in the case of SciFest@NorthWest in St Mary's College, Derry, where the entry date is Friday 29 April. The first of the regional SciFest science fairs will take place later this week. The SciFest National Final will take place in November in Dublin.

~Ends~

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**Notes to editor**

The closing date for entries from students was Friday 11<sup>th</sup> March.

SciFest is a series of one-day science fairs, funded primarily by Science Foundation Ireland, Intel and Boston Scientific. It is also supported by a number of other companies and organisations.

**Dates and venues for SciFest@College 2016**

<b>SciFest@College 2016</b>			
<b>DIT</b>	21-Apr	<b>Dundalk IT</b>	04-May
<b>Cork IT</b>	22-Apr	<b>IT Blanchardstown</b>	04-May
<b>Limerick IT</b>	27-Apr	<b>IT Tralee</b>	05-May
<b>Waterford IT</b>	27-Apr	<b>IT Tallaght</b>	10-May
<b>Athlone IT</b>	27-Apr	<b>IT Sligo</b>	11-May
<b>IT Carlow</b>	28-Apr	<b>Galway-Mayo IT</b>	12-May
<b>LIT Thurles</b>	04-May	<b>Letterkenny IT</b>	13-May
<b>DCU</b>	6-May	<b>SciFest@NorthWest (NI)</b>	27-May