



## **Ireland's largest science competition for second level students officially launches for 2016**

**~ SciFest 2016 encouraging students to put their knowledge of science to the test! ~**

**20<sup>th</sup> January, 2016** – All the best young scientific minds in Ireland are invited to enter SciFest 2016 and put their knowledge to the test. As well as pushing the boundaries of science, the national final winner(s) of SciFest 2016 will represent Ireland at the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF) 2017 in Los Angeles, California. Now in its ninth year as a national project, SciFest is an all-inclusive, all-island science competition where second-level students showcase science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) projects at 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. SciFest is funded primarily by Science Foundation Ireland, Intel and Boston Scientific. The winners from each regional science fair go on to compete at a national final in November 2016.

Speaking at the launch of the 2016 competition at the Department of Education and Skills, Marlborough Street, Dublin Sheila Porter, SciFest CEO said: *"2015 was a hugely successful year for SciFest with a record number of students taking part. In total 7,200 students exhibited their projects in local and/or regional science fairs across the country. This year we intend to build on that success and have another record year. SciFest gives students an excellent opportunity to develop their interest in STEM and inquiry-based approaches to learning, while developing their creative and problem-solving skills and learning to work in a team."*

The SciFest 2015 national final winner was 5<sup>th</sup> year student Louis Madden, from Largy College, Clones, Co. Monaghan, for his project that looked at whether genetic testing and DNA research can be carried out simply, cheaply and efficiently. Louis found that important genetic research was often limited by the cost of the necessary equipment. He spent just under €150 on cheap and

recycled material to build several pieces of laboratory equipment including a vortex, centrifuge, PCR, transilluminator, gel box with power supply and gel camera. Using this equipment, he isolated and amplified chloroplast DNA. Comparing his results with those of other tests of the same material he demonstrated that genetic testing could be done in a simpler, cheaper and more effective manner. He will represent Ireland at the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF) 2016 in Phoenix, Arizona. Students wishing to follow in Louis' footsteps can log on to the SciFest website ([www.scifest.ie](http://www.scifest.ie)) and enter online or download a paper entry form. Completed entries must be submitted by Friday 11<sup>th</sup> March.

The aim of SciFest is to create a science fair experience that is inclusive, accessible and inspires excellence. It gives students of all abilities the opportunity to develop research skills and associated skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, presentation skills and teamwork. SciFest provides students with an opportunity to study the STEM subjects in an interesting, innovative and hands-on way.

Jan O'Sullivan TD, Minister for Education and Skills said: *"I am delighted to be here at the launch of SciFest 2016. As Ireland's largest science competition for second level students, SciFest plays a vital role in encouraging and developing an interest in STEM among Irish students. Skills in science, technology, maths and engineering will be crucial in the future if Ireland wants to remain competitive and at the cutting edge of scientific development. I am sure that participants in SciFest 2016 will go on to make impressive contributions to STEM, both in Ireland and abroad."*

Outlining the commitment from Science Foundation Ireland to its continuing support of SciFest, Prof. Mark Ferguson, Director General, Science Foundation Ireland and Chief Scientific Adviser to the Government said: *"Science Foundation Ireland is happy to support initiatives like SciFest as science fairs can be one of the best learning experiences a student can get. Not only do they promote inquiry-based learning, they also help to develop a good base level of science literacy in all who participate. Better understanding and skills in this area make the fruit of a career in STEM more obvious to students which will benefit Ireland in terms of skills in the years to come. Investment in SciFest is a 'win win.'"*

SciFest 2016 will be the second year of the prestigious Boston Scientific Medical Devices Award, which is presented at each of the 16 regional science fairs; the overall winner of this award will receive the Boston Scientific Medical Devices Trophy at the national final in November.

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**Notes to editor**

The closing date for entries from students is Friday 11<sup>th</sup> March; entry forms can be downloaded from the SciFest website, [www.scifest.ie](http://www.scifest.ie), and completed forms should be sent to the students' chosen venue.

SciFest is a series of one day science fairs, funded primarily by Science Foundation Ireland's (SFI) Discover programme, 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>	TBC	<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>	TBC
<b>IT Carlow</b>	28-Apr	<b>Galway-Mayo IT</b>	TBC
<b>LIT Thurles</b>	TBC	<b>Letterkenny IT</b>	TBC
<b>DCU</b>	6-May	<b>SciFest@NorthWest (NI)</b>	TBC

## **About Science Foundation Ireland**

Science Foundation Ireland funds oriented basic and applied research in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) which promotes and assists the development and competitiveness of industry, enterprise and employment in Ireland. The Foundation also promotes and supports the study of, education in and engagement with, STEM and promotes an awareness and understanding of the value of STEM to society and in particular to the growth of the economy. For more information visit [www.sfi.ie](http://www.sfi.ie).