

Sharing Sky & Earth



RAS 200: Sky & Earth is an outreach programme that is considerably more than the sum of its parts. And the next step, reports **Sue Bowler**, is for more RAS Fellows to get involved.

The RAS commitment to new astronomy and geophysics outreach to mark its forthcoming bicentenary (RAS200: Sky & Earth) has resulted in the Society funding 12 innovative projects. In September, representatives of most of the partner organizations being funded came to Burlington House to meet each other and members of the RAS200 committee and staff. Steve Miller, RAS200 chair, congratulated the new partner organizations from the second tranche of funding: Bounce Back; National University of Ireland, Galway; Girlguiding; and Truro High School. "It was a very competitive process," he said "and the winners are all fantastic projects."

And they are already making a difference. "I've been lucky enough to work with groups from the Prince's Trust," said RAS Education and Outreach Officer Sheila Kanani. "The effect that the RAS200 projects are having on their lives is profound. I know we're not changing the world on a grand scale, but I do think we're changing lives."

One aim of this meeting was to reinforce the RAS200 community, and build links between projects and with RAS Fellows. "I'm keeping a wish-list of Fellows and skills wanted, so do

let me know what you need," said Kanani to the RAS200 group representatives. "But do also be proactive and think about what your local universities could do for you. Bounce Back is already approaching London universities and we have Fellows all over the country who could help."

One of the reasons the RAS is funding these projects is to build up interest in astronomy and geophysics at and after the RAS bicentenary in 2020. "Our goal is to embed astronomy and geophysics more widely in society," said Miller. "But we also want the projects to be sustainable, to give us a legacy lasting longer."

Engaging evaluation

The RAS has engaged Jenesy Associates to evaluate the projects. Sarah Jenkins and Liz Jeavons of Jenesy described their approach as that of a "critical friend", using evaluation as a tool for learning and reflection, not just for judgement. The aims of their evaluation are to monitor the demographics of the projects and their impact on new audiences and to evaluate how and how far the aims of the project have been met and how the outcomes contribute to RAS outreach.

The RAS200 groups funded since 2015 gave some highlights of their experiences. RAS science is now part of the Welsh cultural mix at the Urth Eisteddfod and National Eisteddfod, for example; the WEA has introduced astronomy to 6000 of its students in the northwest of England; and Care for Carers has organized short breaks with astronomy for 170 carers in Scotland. The Prince's Trust has trained its staff to deliver astronomy on residential

Three new projects for 2017

"Touch the Sky: Tactile Stargazing for Blind People" was a winning RAS200 project this year for the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) who, unfortunately, declined the funding because of personnel difficulties at its partner, the Glasgow Science Centre. Instead, the RAS is using some of that funding to enhance the award made to "Cornwall – Sea to Stars" and to fund three smaller runners-up: "Electric Skies", with the Ouseburn Learning Trust; "Astronomical Data: from Small and Beautiful to Big and Overwhelming" by the South African Astronomical Observatory; and "Geophysics in a Box" from the National Youth Agency.

programmes and as part of its "Get Started" scheme; a "Get Started in Film" course has already taken

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place at Burlington House. The National Space Centre Creative's planetarium show, *The Planets 360*, is taking shape, ready for the premiere in February 2018. The National Autistic Society is working with other RAS200

organizations to ensure that their work is available in forms accessible to people with autism.

More Fellows, please!

A theme that emerged through the day was the benefit of combining our sciences with our partners' outreach expertise – and the potential to do more, with the help of more RAS Fellows. "RAS200 funding can widen the appeal of astronomy and geophysics," said Miller, "while generating a 'multiplier effect' with our partners' own efforts. We need Fellows interested in the groups of people RAS200 projects are working with, and who are ready to take a lead from our partner organizations in explaining our sciences in ways appropriate to these groups." It can be very different from working with keen young stargazers, agreed Kanani: "One person said they would keep reading their star signs, but at least now they knew the difference between astronomy and astrology!"

If you are interested in getting involved, keep an eye on the RAS200 website (<http://ras200.org>). You can also expect to discover much more about the progress of RAS200 projects on the Fellows' website A&G Forum (<http://aandg.org>) and in the pages of A&G, from members of the RAS200 committee, from our partner organizations and from Fellows.

One thing is certain: RAS200 is already making a difference. "On a personal note," said Miller, "I have found many of the examples of feedback, experiences and achievements given by the projects funded in 2015 extremely moving, and a clear indication of why RAS200 is an important part of the Society's preparations for its 200th anniversary and beyond."

AUTHOR

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MORE INFORMATION

RAS200 website <http://ras200.org>