

1. The Event

I'm a Scientist, Get me out of Here! is a two week long science engagement event that takes place online. It's an X Factor-style competition for scientists, where around 350 school students vote to decide who wins in each zone.

The event gets teenagers talking to real scientists, online, to learn about real science. Students have fun, but also get beyond stereotypes, learn about how science relates to real life, develop their thinking and discussion skills and make connections with real scientists. The event is split into zones, and in each zone there are five scientists and around 350 students. The zones are either general (named after elements) or themed.

Rationale: The primary objective of the event is to change students' attitudes to science, and make them feel it's something they can relate to and discuss. Giving students some real power (i.e. deciding where the money goes) makes the event more real for them.

What's involved?: You interact online with young people (aged 9-18), answering their questions about science, research, and just about everything else. You also read students' opinions on science and get them thinking about how science affects their daily lives. All you need to take part is a computer with an internet connection.

In addition to your profile there are three sections to the site:



Students **ASK** you questions which you answer in your own time; the sooner the better.



You **CHAT** with students online, answering their questions and hearing their opinions.



Students **VOTE** for the scientist in their zone they think should win a prize of €500 to spend on a science communication project. Evictions take place in the second week of the event until the winner is announced on the last Friday.

Contents

1. The Event	1
2. How to use the site	2
a. Log in	2
b. My profile	2
c. Answering questions	4
d. Live chats	4
e. Moderation of questions	5
3. Four key things you need to know	6
4. Advice on engagement	7
5. Useful links on the site	7
6. Rationale behind the event	8

The winning scientist in each zone gets €500 to be spent on a public science communication project. Please think seriously about what you want to do with it as the students will ask you about it. Some suggestions include:-

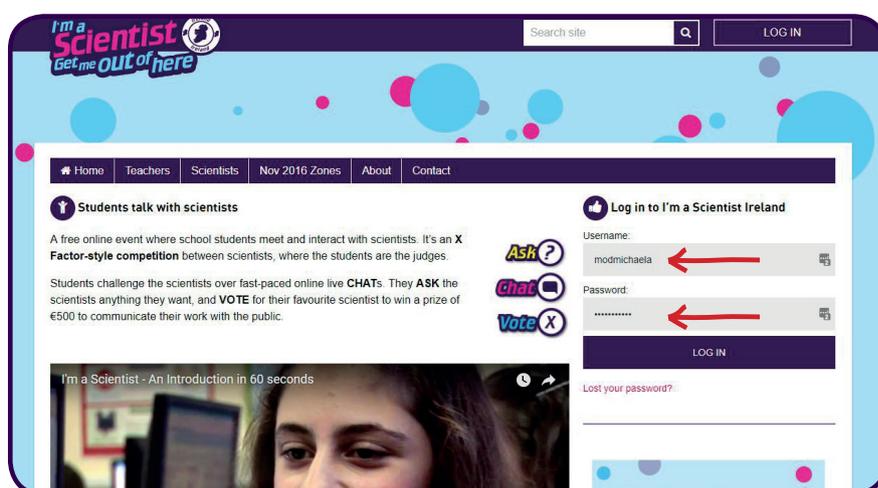
- Buying equipment to allow a research oceanography vessel to communicate with school students during expeditions.
- Funding a community open day for mothers and children involved in a medical research project to find out about the research and get health advice.
- Giving the money to a school in Uganda to pay for science kits and a projector to watch science films on.
- Funding scientist visits to schools, or school visits to labs.
- Buying a touchscreen for a local zoo, to help show visitors more about the primate research they do there.

2. How to use the site

a. Log in

Go to imascientist.ie and enter your username and password as emailed to you - your password will usually be 'firstnamesurname' (e.g. joebloggs).

THERE IS NO NEED TO REGISTER – as a scientist you have already been pre-registered.



b. My profile

You have a profile including a photo of you, information about you and your work, and a set of 'interview' questions. Your profile enables the students to find out more about you and your research, and helps them to think of more questions to ask you. You'll need to fill in your profile around a fortnight before the event, as this is when some classes will start going to the site to do background work.

When filling out your profile remember to save regularly, after filling in each section.

Once you log in you will be taken straight to your edit profile page.

A series of boxes will appear: you need to fill them in.

For the first few you'll be asked for a one sentence summary, and then a longer version. The short versions are all displayed on one page with a 'read more' option underneath. This is because testing showed this makes it much easier for low literacy students, while it's easy for students who want to read more to access it.

Don't feel you need to write loads for the longer versions - people reading online tend to prefer shorter texts.

A. About me and my work

This lets students find out more about you and your interests, and read about what you do in more detail.

B. My typical day

Writing about your typical day gives students a tangible sense of what working as a scientist is like.

C. What I'd do with the money

Students vote for the scientist they want to win, so they want to hear what you would do with the prize money.

D. CV

This shows students how you've got to where you are now.

E. The interview

These questions are here to show your personal side to students, who often feel that scientists are not like real people they can relate to.

2. When you have finished, click the 'Update Profile' button at the bottom. You can come back and edit your profile at any time

3. Adding images and other media

You can put photos or other images (for example, graphs or images that illustrate your research) into the long answers only of sections A-C; 'About me and my work', 'My typical day' 'What I'd do with the money', and also into the 'Work photos' section.

To do this, upload as many images as you wish and drag and drop them to where you want them to appear.

You can even embed videos from YouTube or similar. However, do be aware that some school systems will block YouTube and many other video sites. This isn't necessarily a reason not to use video, as it can be very effective, but don't make understanding your profile dependent on viewing the video as it will leave out some students.

4. Changing your main photo

You can change your main photo if you wish in this section of your profile. Your profile image will always be circular on the site.

c. Answering questions

You will be notified by email of all new questions. You can answer them in your own time, but the sooner the better.

- i. Log in
- ii. On your profile page you will see a 'My Unanswered Questions' box on the right hand side. Up to 100 recent unanswered questions will appear in this box as a clickable link.
- iii. To answer a question, click the link and type your answer. You will also be able to view other scientists' answers to the question.

To make it easier to find questions moderators will tag keywords in questions. The keywords are then used to list any similar questions in the 'Related Questions' box on the right hand side.

It is up to you what answers to give and how much detail to go into. Don't be afraid to write a really long answer, but at the same time you don't need to write long answers. Our advice is simple – be honest, straightforward and to the point in your answers.

d. Live chats

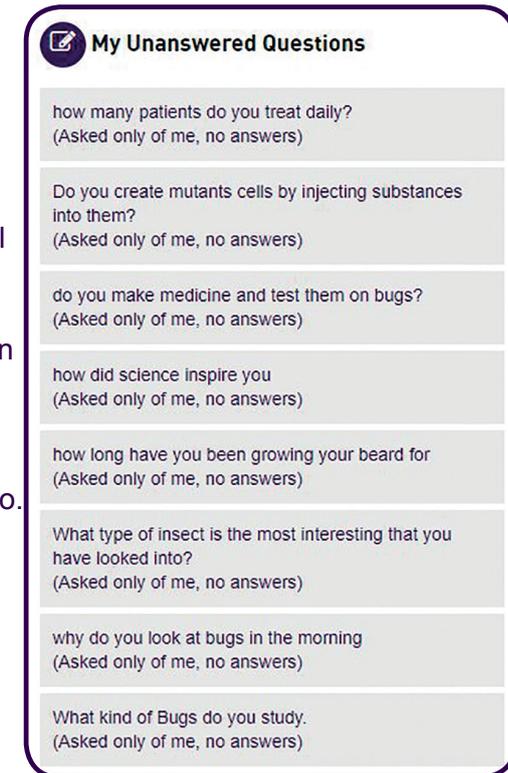
Live chats are consistently the most popular part of the event for students, teachers and scientists. They are like WhatsApp group chats or Facebook Chat, where students ask you questions and express their opinions on your work. Live chats are fun and give immediate contact between scientists and students, allowing students to relate to you. Many teachers tell us that the quieter students are more active in these text-based live chats than face to face, providing an interesting change to class dynamics.

i. You will be notified by email of when live chats will occur in your zone.

Please confirm whether you will take part in the live chat, by following the instructions in the email. This is really important for us to know if there are scientists taking part in every live chat.

ii. Log in and click on the chat icon in the top right corner

- iii. About 5 minutes before each chat booking, two chat boxes will appear on this page. The left hand one is for students, the right hand one is for scientists. Simply type in the entry box above the chat box and press return.

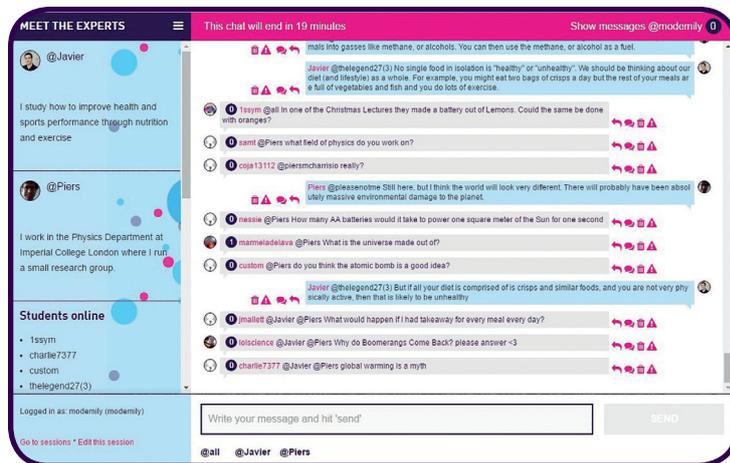


Top Tip:

To see the live chats booked in your zone, go to imascientist.ie/live-chat
You can filter all the booked chats by zone and date.

How it works:

- Test it out by coming to the drop-in chat session (details on the separate key dates sheet) so you've got your head round how it works.
- Your lines will be right-aligned, students on the left, and mod lines will be in yellow. Remember that anyone with a mortarboard symbol next to their name is a teacher.
- Click on a student's question to reply to it, otherwise they may not realise you've answered their question and keep asking it.
- If a chat is very busy, use the 'show messages @me' in the top right, which allows you to see messages directly for you.
- The number in the circle next to a student's display name in the chat shows the number of times they have been answered.



Some handy hints:

- Chats can be very hectic, but also exhilarating. Enjoy the hurly-burly and don't worry too much about your spelling!
- Be patient. Some young people's turn of phrase and use of language may be different from academic discourse. It may take you a little while to understand what they are trying to ask. This is especially true when Special Schools are involved.
- Be tolerant. Sometimes young people can be over-exuberant online. Chat with them and they will calm down and engage with you.
- Don't take offence. Sometimes you will receive questions which seem quite blunt, but usually students don't mean to be offensive. The benefit of an online event is that they feel empowered to ask.
- Keep an eye out for students who stand out in the chats and/or by their questions in ASK. We'll ask you to nominate students who have engaged well, and one student from your zone will be selected to receive a €20 voucher.

e. Moderation of questions – our policy

All questions are moderated before they are sent to you. The moderators work very hard to strike a balance between making your lives easier as scientist participants, and giving the young people the chance to ask real questions. Remember most students are 13 or 14 years old, although there are some Senior Cycle classes taking part too. Some classes are from Special Schools or young offender institutions. Most students will never have had the chance to talk to a scientist before.

Duplicates: We know you will get sent some very similar questions (believe us, the moderators wade through and weed out a lot more of them!). Moderators will take out duplicate questions, but allow through questions which may be similar, but make additional or slightly different points.

Offensive questions: Moderators will remove rude or offensive questions (there are generally very few) and anything which breaks the house rules. They will allow challenging questions. They will allow irreverent, but friendly, questions. There will always be a moderator in the chatroom to help things along. However, they are not miracle-workers, and from time to time there will be the odd chat that we cannot get on track. Bear with us, we're doing our best!

3. Four key things you need to know

1. This may take about 2-3 hours per day. Last year 27% of scientists spent 1-2 hours a day, 48% spent 2-3 hours a day, some spent less than 1 hour a day but about 23% spent more than 3 hours a day. Mainly because they really got into it! Many scientists spend time in the evening answering questions.

The time involved depends, to an extent, on how busy your zone is, but also how long you spend on your answers. Classes vary on how much time the teacher spends on it and how much the kids get into it and we can't predict that beforehand. We try to even it out!

2. This is not a seminar for the super-smart scientists of the future. There will be a wide variation in the students taking part. Most will be 13 or 14 years old, but some will be older, up to 18. There will be a big variation in ability. Some will be 'gifted and talented' students, some will be lower ability classes, or have special educational needs. The point of I'm a Scientist is to try to engage all students, not just the ones who might go on to study science at university.

Most teenagers won't grow up to be scientists, but they will all grow up to be people. As adults they'll have to make decisions about science – as voters, as patients, as consumers – and we are trying to help them develop the skills and confidence to do that. For some, 'Where do bogies come from?' or, 'Do you like your job?' may be the most pressing question they can think of. Part of the point is that this event humanises science for young people – they realise that you are 'like normal people' who they can relate to.

3. Don't be afraid to say 'I don't know'. You will be asked many questions which are not in your area. Answer what you feel you can, but don't feel you have to Google all evening to answer these questions. Part of the point of the event is that students get a more realistic idea of scientists. They can learn that, for example, there's no reason why a psychologist should know about how much the moon weighs. This makes science seem a lot less intimidating. You can be a scientist without being a genius who knows everything! That can be a liberating realisation for students.

Also, of course, many things in science aren't known. Otherwise there'd be nothing for scientists to do. And even as adults, we can learn new things all the time. This is part of the fun of science! Don't be afraid to let students in on that secret.

4. Get your boss onside. We'd strongly advise you to tell your boss you are taking part in the event, and get their support, if you can. Several scientists said that this made a big difference. Questions on the website can be answered during the evening, but live chats have to be during the school day so during working hours.

Also, many scientists found themselves discussing some of the more intriguing questions with colleagues. This can be one of the most stimulating things about the event. Get your lab involved in the fun! If you need ammunition to persuade your boss of the benefits, we suggest the following points:-

- Taking part in I'm a Scientist develops your communication skills. This is the most mentioned benefit from taking part.
- It can re-energise you about your own science, and get you thinking differently. Teenagers can ask great questions.
- It can broaden your science and your relationships with other scientists. It's easy sometimes to get stuck in your specialism. Scientists in previous events have learnt, or been reminded of many other areas of science, and even formed collaborations (or friendships) with scientists in other areas they 'met' during I'm a Scientist.
- You're 'giving something back' and contributing to science education and the future of science.

4. Advice on engagement

1. Be yourself

Our best advice is to be yourself in your answers. You don't need to pretend to like Justin Bieber for young people to relate to you, being genuine is what's important.

2. Be friendly

When we asked scientists what they would do differently if they did it again, one answer that summed up many was, *'I would be less formal and more personal from the start'*.

3. Simplify your language

Even if you think you are using simple language, scientists work in an environment where there is a lot of jargon, and technical words are often used when simpler ones are available. It's easy not to realise when your language may be going over the heads of most 13 year olds.

Don't 'identify', 'find'. Don't 'utilize', 'use'. Don't 'investigate', 'look at'.

4. Talk to us!

Please communicate with other scientists and the moderation team, as well as the students. We've occasionally had scientists finish the event and say in feedback that they were having technical problems, or were worried about particular questions, or similar. We'd much rather hear at the time so we can do something about it. Let us know if you're having problems using the feedback form on the right hand side of the browser when you're logged in.

We use Twitter as a way to interact with scientists taking part in I'm a Scientist, amongst other things. It's a great way to communicate how the event's going, learn more about you, the scientists taking part, and ultimately keep in touch with scientists after the event. So get on board and follow us at [@imascientist](https://twitter.com/imascientist) (twitter.com/imascientist) and keep an eye on tweets marked #IASIE at twitter.com/search/iasie



Got any questions or feedback?

Get a quick answer to **frequently asked questions** or contact us below:

If you'd like a response, add your name and email

SEND FEEDBACK

5. Useful links on the site

1. See all the live chats booked in your zone at imascientist.ie/live-chat. You can filter the chats by zone and date.
2. Visit the staffroom at imascientist.ie/live-chat during the event to say hi, or if you've got a question for the moderators.



6. Rationale behind the event:

Since the Bodmer report in 1985 there has been a growing enthusiasm for “the public understanding of science”. This was originally conceived as ‘teaching the public more science’. More recently a consensus has emerged that communication is a two-way process and scientists need to engage in a dialogue with wider society.

It is also thought that in order for citizens to meaningfully participate in this dialogue and in making decisions in their lives, an understanding of the scientific process is in many ways more crucial than an understanding of specific science facts. For example understanding how peer review works, how hypotheses are tested and how scientific consensus emerges.

Analysis suggests that, for example, the MMR debacle had much more to do with lack of understanding of the scientific process than to do with lack of understanding of specific scientific facts per se. Similar arguments have been made re public attitudes to anthropogenic climate change.

This understanding has been reflected in the new (2006) British GCSE syllabus with its emphasis on ‘How Science Works’, in changes to the KS3 and A Level syllabi and the addition of a ‘Science for Public Understanding’ AS Level. The curricula now consider issues like dealing with scientific uncertainty and the wider implications of scientific activity.

Large scale evaluations of the new curriculum are broadly positive about these changes, but found that resources to support teachers in these new areas are lacking. Specifically in helping students develop the skills to discuss science and society issues and put things into a wider context. Our own research with teachers supports this view.

These sometimes abstract or esoteric questions can be difficult for teachers to teach, especially when they may not have had any training in the area themselves. There is also a new recognition that real world experience or ‘experiential learning’ is far more memorable for young people and helps them to develop life skills.

This is precisely why we have developed the event, which transfers smoothly to the Irish Leaving Certificate science syllabuses. I’m a Scientist helps to improve critical thinking and problem solving skills and independent thinking, which is one of the main aims of the Leaving Certificates.

The team involved have, between them, decades of experience in science education, science communication and other forms of youth engagement work. We consulted extensively with teachers throughout the development process to make sure we were producing an event that would meet their needs and actually work in the classroom.

Contact

If you need any help please email admin@imascientist.ie
or call +441225 326892.

For further information please visit: imascientist.ie/scientists