

ASTEN Professional Development Report  
**Questacon, Canberra**  
**Australia's National Science and Technology Centre**  
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Questacon is inarguably Australia's most well known and highly regarded organization dedicated to communicating science. Therefore, I was excited and fortunate to visit the Centre thanks to the ASTEN Professional Development Fellowship.

Monash Science Centre's main focus in education is outreach in local primary schools and is largely self funded. Each year we commit to enhance our current education programs, develop new programs and increase awareness of these through effective, low cost marketing and promotion. My two initial aims in visiting Questacon were to observe the tactics used by the marketing team for their outreach and centre based education programs, and begin to research the development and integration of Indigenous knowledge and learning into existing programs. My week spent at Questacon offered this and much more by including time spent with staff at various levels of management throughout almost all departments.

My time spent with Melissa Morley, Indigenous Officer at Questacon Outreach was incredibly beneficial in her provision of advice, support and encouragement regarding Monash Science Centre's (MSC's) own endeavour to develop a new program centred around Indigenous knowledge. Melissa's research allowed her to direct me to existing resources and identify Australian's currently practicing two way learning. We were also able to discuss issues relating to the challenge in finding resources, working with the new national science curriculum and building relationships with indigenous communities. The Shell Questacon Science Circus itinerary includes a tour through a remote indigenous community each year, and an overview of the specific and specialised training required for this program was also of interest.

I also caught up with coordinators and presenters from 'The Excited Particles', the centre based theatre troupe who perform science shows and interactive programs daily. I viewed various stage shows and the very successful Science Time for preschool children. Discovering different ideas and presentation styles was incredibly beneficial, as was the exposure to the hiring and training process of performers. Of particular interest were the topics of focus and program structure of Science Time. Monash Science Centre has long looked at the possibility of implementing a weekly program for preschool children. Early Childhood Coordinator BJ Anyos offered much assistance in explaining the origin of the program and its progression toward a high level of success, along with sharing ideas and lesson plans. Belonging to a small science centre such as the MSC offers a wide range of experiences, however the small staff size can reduce the capacity for teamwork. The interaction I had with members of The Excited Particles coupled with their willingness to share ideas, will surely enhance my efforts in keeping MSC presentations fresh and dynamic.

Members of the Questacon Marketing team provided an overview of the strategies in marketing and promoting specific outreach programs and most generously offered their expertise in ideas for



possible promotions for MSC-run programs. Strategies including cold calling and follow up, organization and program branding, cross promotion with other organizations or across different programs, use of local media and hosting a familiar event for targeted clientele were all discussed in relation to current Questacon programs and Monash Science Centre programs. Aside from new ideas that may be implemented to benefit the MSC, this particular meeting also validated many of the choices MSC staff have made in our own efforts of promotion.

I was also able to meet with managers, coordinators and staff belonging to the following departments or programs:-

- Education and Visitor Experience; discussing the broader plan in enhancing the visitor experience.
- Visitor Services and Bookings; to examine the operations of hosting visitors and special groups, and interaction with floor staff working at different posts within galleries.
- Digital Programs; discussions on website maintenance and special event video conferences.
- Inspiring Australia Team; overview of the purpose of the new national strategy for science engagement.
- Volunteer Program; managing and training volunteers.
- Questacon shop; popular stock and suppliers.
- Discover SKA; program aims and how to be involved.
- Outreach which included the following:
  - Overall strategic plan
  - Smart Moves; excellent example of a successful program for secondary school students of all ages. This meeting lead to myself and another MSC staff later attending a Smart Moves show in regional Victoria to experience the program as a client/viewer.
  - Invention Convention
  - Tenix Maths Squad; consideration of the current philosophies behind teaching mathematics and how to engage youth within an area of study that is perceived as “dry”.
  - Shell Questacon Circus; overview of itinerary, staffing and sponsors.
  - Digital Outreach
- Exhibitions which included the following:
  - Concepts and Education
  - Design
  - Travelling Exhibitions
  - Workshop

I was fortunate enough to visit institutions working alongside Questacon. At the CSIRO Discovery Centre I toured their extensive exhibitions aimed at secondary school students with the Centre Director and Exhibitions Manager, Christine Cansfield-Smith, leading to an appreciation of the broader goals of the Centre and the processes involved in creating their exhibitions. Public Programs Manager Guy Micklethwait provided invaluable insight to their events program aimed at adults, primarily lectures, open discussions and gallery style exhibits. The Centre for Public Awareness of Science (CPAS) at ANU also afforded the opportunity to participate in a CPAS ‘on the couch’ event and learn about the various avenues for undergraduate and postgraduate studies in Science Communication.



The ASTEN Professional Development Fellowship allowed me to meet with science communicators who ranged in professional experiences and knowledge, and gain insight into a vast range of programs for a variety of audiences. The diverse range of educational programs offered fresh ideas in approach, delivery and implementation for MSC education and community events. Additionally my week long visit provided the opportunity to network in consideration of ways in which we could work together. I thoroughly enjoyed meeting people with similar work experience, qualifications, interests or backgrounds of working at small science centres like MSC. I appreciate the opportunities presented to me through the ASTEN Professional Development Fellowship and thank the ASTEN Committee.

