

PRESS RELEASE

DATE: **Monday 29TH December 2008**



Countdown 439: the countdown begins today

As Norfolk counts down to 2009, scientists at the John Innes Centre have started counting down the days to March 2010, as they launch an ambitious project to get a scientist into every school in Norfolk on the same day. In 2009/10, the world-renowned science institute will celebrate its centenary, and as part of these celebrations scientists will be dispatched to all parts of the county to share their science with local pupils and perhaps find the future scientists who will be making discoveries into the next 100 years.

Norfolk County Council supports 439 schools, so the John Innes scientists are starting the countdown to the project 439 days before its starts. Any schools or colleges in Norfolk are welcome to get involved in the project, as part of the BA's National Science and Engineering Week, an annual nationwide celebration of science and engineering.

The project is being co-ordinated by Dr Phil Smith MBE of the Teacher Scientist Network (TSN), an innovative science education charity hosted by the John Innes Centre that pairs working scientists with teachers, to help bring science classes to life.

“This is TSN’s biggest ever undertaking,” said Phil. “We will have scientists going to school with their own children, or going back to visit their old schools and some travelling across the county visiting more than one school. We’re also keen to hear from any ex-JIC scientists who would like to get involved.” From helping in science classes, to appearing in assemblies, doing practical demonstrations or giving talks, children everywhere will get to meet a real scientist.

“I think this is a really ambitious challenge being undertaken by JIC staff,” said Professor Chris Lamb, Director of the John Innes Centre. “We are celebrating 100 years of the JIC, and what better way to do this than by looking forwards and actively trying to inspire the next generation of scientists. JIC does lots to support local schools, particularly through staff engaging with TSN activity, but this one day project is bigger than anything we’ve tried before and its success will require wide participation from all our scientific and engineering staff supported by expertise and organisation within TSN”.

“This National Science Week 2010 initiative will greatly enhance our goal to provide more positive role models for our pupils. Whilst pupils are able to reel off the pantheon of X Factor winners or Big Brother celebrities; few, if any, are able to name a living scientist. At least we had Stephen Hawking on The Simpsons. The opportunity for all Norfolk children to be able to work with a scientist, even for a short time, is too good a chance to miss. I wholeheartedly recommend that schools and the scientific community get behind this project” said Mike Land, Secondary Strategy Science and School Improvement Adviser, Norfolk County Council.

Contacts:

Phil Smith:

T:01603 450304

E: phil.smith@bbsrc.ac.uk

Notes to editors:

The schools science day will coincide with the BA's National Science and Engineering Week, an annual nationwide celebration of science and engineering.

As part of National Science and Engineering Week in 2009, the Forum in Norwich will host 'Darwin Today', an interactive exhibition exploring the modern impact of Charles Darwin 200 years after his birth.

The Teacher Scientist Network (TSN) is an educational charity striving to enhance science teaching across Norfolk. Further details at www.tsn.org.uk <<http://www.tsn.org.uk>>
TSN is generously hosted by the John Innes Centre and funded by grant support.

The John Innes Centre, www.jic.ac.uk <<http://www.jic.ac.uk/>>, is an independent, world-leading research centre in plant and microbial sciences with over 800 staff. JIC is based on Norwich Research Park and carries out high quality fundamental, strategic and applied research to understand how plants and microbes work at the molecular, cellular and genetic levels. The JIC also trains scientists and students, collaborates with many other research laboratories and communicates its science to end-users and the general public. The JIC is grant-aided by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council.

The Teacher Scientist Network is a company limited by guarantee.
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Registered office: John Innes Centre, Colney Lane, Norwich, NR4 7UH
Tel.: +44(0)1603 450304 Fax: +44(0)1603 450015

Chairman: Prof. Keith Roberts
Coordinator: Dr. Philip H. Smith

email: phil.smith@bbsrc.ac.uk
Internet: www.tsn.org.uk