Rising Stars gives outstanding Cambridge undergraduates, post-graduates, post-docs and early-career academics the chance to develop the communication skills required to become ambassadors for their subjects. Fifty participants have taken part in the HEFCE funded programme so far.

Rising Stars was set up in early 2007 and is intended for those wishing to pursue an academic career, and wanting to hone their communication skills in order to integrate public engagement with their academic discipline.

The programme is the first of its kind in the country and has three groundbreaking aspects:

- The scheme is wide ranging, covering working with ‘hard-to-reach’ communities, methods of engagement, identifying and creating opportunities to communicate, publicity, evaluation, clear communication of technical subjects and print and broadcast media.

- The course is truly multidisciplinary, integrating the sciences with the arts, humanities and social sciences.

- The participants put their new skills into practice by organising a real-life public activity. Activities have included a radio show on ground breaking science and a schools masterclass on the science of love.

Are you passionate about communicating your subject to the general public?

Could your enthusiasm for your field – whether science or humanities – hold a non-academic audience spellbound in a community centre or classroom, or even on television or radio?
Doing this has encouraged my belief that any subject no matter how simple or complicated, can be translated to both lay people and academics and the media, if enough consideration is given to who the audience is, how best to present the topic and what to include in a presentation to these varying audiences.

Thank you for all the opportunities given to me via the Rising Stars programme. I’m really excited about auditioning as a science presenter for the BBC … I thoroughly enjoyed being involved in the Science Festival and have been able to develop my ability to talk about my subject area to a wider audience which is really rewarding.

Djuke Veldhuis, PhD Student, Biological Anthropology.

Underlying the scheme is the real need to create dialogue between the University and the wider community, and communicate what goes on at the University and its contribution to society.

We see Rising Stars building on the success of initiatives such as the Science Festival, and fostering talent within the University by tapping into the huge energy and enthusiasm that exists among staff and students for sharing their subject interest.

It is early career academics who make the best ambassadors for the University for many audiences, and it’s they who will become the more established names of the future – and, in their turn, role models for the next generation.

Nicola Buckley, Festivals and Outreach Co-ordinator
What else does Cambridge do with the public?

Our public activities include:

- the Cambridge Science Festival - the largest free Science Festival in the UK
- the UK’s first arts, humanities and social sciences festival – the Festival of Ideas – which will take place in October 2008
- subject based outreach programmes, including student-run activities like CHAOS (Cambridge Hands on Science)
- our museums, art gallery and botanic garden
- a whole variety of other programmes, such as the Naked Scientists radio show, listed at webservices.admin.cam.ac.uk/outreach

In all of these activities, we are particularly keen to work with hard-to-reach communities with little history of interaction with academic research bodies.

- Each year, 3,000 members of University of Cambridge staff are involved in outreach of some kind.
- More than 1 million members of the public participate in Cambridge activities each year.

A flavour of the activities organised by Rising Stars

**Kate Bethune** (History) organised a family fun day at the Benjamin Franklin House which included the activity ‘Dress the 18th Century Lady’.

**Phil Corlett** (Psychiatry, Brain Mapping Unit), **Cecily Morrison** (Computer Science) and **Helen Van Noorden** (Classics) delivered an inter-disciplinary session to forty 14 year olds on how language structures thought at St Neots Community College. It addressed scientific language in the media, whether computers can think and how we communicate love and hate.

**Geraldine Parsons** (Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic) created a website on medieval Irish literature for specialists and non-specialists.

**Alexander Orlov** (Chemistry) sat on the Conservative Party science task force, producing documents on science in society.

**Ben Collie** (Applied Mathematics and Theoretical Physics) and **Kelly Neaves** (Pharmacology) produced a video podcast about the Large Hadron Collider at CERN which will simulate the time after the Big Bang and help us to better understand particle physics and dark matter.

A group of Rising Stars including **Hannah Critchlow** (Physiology, Development and Neuroscience) and **Ben Collie** (Applied Mathematics and Theoretical Physics) planned and featured in a new Rising Stars feature on the Naked Scientists Radio Show talking about their research.

**Lucy Rhymer, Sally Lamb, Sarah Lamm and Alexandra Sapoznik** (all History) are organising a ‘Medieval Cambridge’ walk with retired people, followed by a discussion and tea.

**Caroline Dingle** (Zoology) and **Andrew Caines** (English and Applied Linguistics) are planning a schools session comparing human language with bird song, and hope to write an academic paper on the topic.
What does the programme cover?

The programme lasts four half days over a period of four months, with an outreach activity organised between day three and four. It is delivered by Sarah Cottam (a communications specialist at eloquential), staff from the University’s Community Affairs office and invited experts.

1: Introduction to public communication
- Developing creative and engaging ways to communicate
- Methods of delivery: including media, reports, web, lectures, presentations, activities
- Working with different audiences: including school pupils, families and adults
- Expert panel discussion
- Communicating technical content to non-specialists

2: Spoken communication skills
- Non-verbal communication
- Emotional involvement

3: Communicating your subject
- Presentation and group critique: each individual presents a 5 minute excerpt of their planned outreach activity and their performance is reviewed by the rest of the group
- Preparing for the event and all eventualities

4: Outreach activities carried out

5: Evaluating your communication skills
- Individual evaluation of outreach activities delivered: positive and negatives and lessons learned
- Media taster: advice and practice interviews with an ITV journalist
- What now: highlighting what opportunities are available for ongoing outreach work
- Networking event: open to all Rising Stars and University staff involved in outreach

92% of participants say that they found Rising Stars useful for their professional development. 100% of Rising Stars participants say that they will continue to engage with the public in their academic research and we’ve certainly seen evidence of that.

For more information about Rising Stars, contact Penny Wilson, Head of Community Affairs, University of Cambridge, 01223 765490 or penny.wilson@admin.cam.ac.uk