

Public education about science

how Irish scientific institutions use the web

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Main points of analysis

- what kinds of information were given most prominence
- what audiences were targeted
- how sources of information were indicated
- how frequently new information was provided
- how feedback was facilitated
- what external links were made, and how

Criteria for higher ranking

- greater prominence for research information
- intended audiences identified
- indications where information comes from
- greater frequency of updates
- site users allowed to interact with site publishers and content contributors
- site users guided to other sources of information

Main survey findings 1

- Nearly all sites included an About Us or similar statement (108), and identified themselves (110), their purpose (107) and their expertise (108)
- Just over 10% (12) of the sites identified target audiences - 3 sites specified school students
- Nearly all the sites (106) included some facility to contact the publisher

Main survey findings 2

- One quarter (27) named a specific person for contact purposes
- Half (56) of the sites somewhere gave contact details for scientists – phone number and email in 45 cases
- Three (3) sites had authors' names on specific pieces of content
- Less than one third of sites (33) gave date of posting
- Three-quarters (78) of sites had a News section - nearly half updated in the month before viewing

Main survey findings 3

- Nearly half (51) of sites presented research information prominently on home page
- About one quarter (27) gave greatest prominence to information on personnel, institution or facilities
- Three quarters (79) of the sites had Links sections – most commonly to state agencies (52), higher education institutions (51), professional societies (37) and research institute (30)

Main survey findings 4

- One quarter (27) of sites provided explanations of scientific terms, 18 within the texts
- Half of the sites (53) had one or more of three identified usability features, e.g. sitemap, drop-down navigation menu or search facility
- Two-fifths (48) of the sites had internal search mechanisms
- Half the sites (57) had one or more of five multimedia features, e.g. graphics, photos or animation; half had none

Main survey findings 5

- Few sites had any of five identified interactivity features, e.g. subscription newsletters (8), subscriptions to alerts (5), discussion boards (4)
 - Internet searching on three search engines for information on "research topic + Ireland" found 20 sites in the top ten results for all three engines
 - Searches found 48 of the sites in none of the top ten results for any of the search engines

Interviews

- 15 per cent response to inquiries
- Sites seen as means of promotion and dissemination to peers and partners
- No policies on naming authors, dating content, etc
- Very low user participation in discussions
- Recurring complaint about resources