

# SciFest 2015



The last of the fifteen regional SciFest@College science fairs took place in St Mary's College in Derry on 12 June. This provided an opportunity to celebrate what has been the most successful year for SciFest yet. Since the second level schools opened their doors in September more than 7,200 students have entered over 3060 projects. Since SciFest was launched nationwide in 2008 more than 32,200 second-level students have participated in the programme. The overwhelming popularity of SciFest reflects the fact that it is accessible, inclusive and free to enter, while recognising diversity and the uniqueness of the individual.

SciFest operates at local, regional, national and international level. Between September 2014 and May 2015 forty schools hosted in-house science fairs (SciFest@School). Dublin Institute of Technology hosted the first of the regional SciFest@College science fairs at the end of March followed by the thirteen other Institutes of Technology and St Mary's College in Derry. The SciFest National Final (SciFest@SFI Discover) took place in Dublin in November, bringing the total number of SciFest science fairs which took place during the school year to fifty-six.

SciFest 2015 has also had a very successful year on the international stage. The overall winner from the SciFest 2014 national final went on to represent Ireland at the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF) 2015 in Pittsburgh in May. He was awarded second place in the Computational Biology and Bioinformatics Category and also had an asteroid named after him. The overall winners of the SciFest 2014 SEAI award section represented Ireland at the International Environment and Sustainability Project Olympiad (INESPO) 2015 in Amsterdam in May and achieved a first place and were awarded a gold medal.

The SciFest programme offers an innovative way for teachers to expose students to, and enhance their understanding of, STEM subjects. Own choice of topic, collaboration, hands-on activities, presentation skills and recognition of work done are all attractive aspects of SciFest. The emphasis on real-world problems helps make STEM relevant to all students. SciFest also provides an excellent opportunity to make students more aware of the wide variety of careers available with a STEM qualification. At eleven of the regional venues this year STEM career talks were provided by SFI's Smart Futures programme. For a company sponsorship provides an insight into educational structures and standards, facilitates collaboration with local schools, and strengthens links with third-level colleges. There are also opportunities for CSR activities such as mentoring, judging at the science fairs and attending award ceremonies and presenting trophies.



SciFest is funded primarily by Science Foundation Ireland's (SFI) Discover programme, Intel and Boston Scientific. It is also supported by a number of other companies and organisations including: Abbott, PharmaChemical Ireland, Newstalk, SEAI, EPI-STEM, the Royal Society of Chemistry, ESERO Ireland, the Irish Science Teachers' Association and the Institute of Physics.

See [www.scifest.ie](http://www.scifest.ie) for more details.

