

Prof Mike Wood
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08 May 2018

Dear Mike

Re: Public engagement with Chernobyl Exclusion Zone research

I understand that your Chernobyl-related research is being proposed for the 'NERC Impact Awards'. This extremely exciting project has resulted in significant societal impact through public engagement, and I wholeheartedly support the application.

The Museum of Science and Industry (MSI) delivers a vibrant contemporary science programme, highlighting the latest research and developments in bold and innovative ways, providing a place for everyone to join in and be curious. The Manchester Science Festival, of which I am the Director, is the largest, most ambitious and creative science festival in England. Part laboratory, part playground, we encourage visitors of all ages to immerse themselves in surprising and meaningful science. Your Chernobyl research encapsulates the spirit of MSI and the festival, so we are delighted that you have been able to work with us to deliver five public engagement events.



Your first MSI event, on Saturday 11th July 2015, gave people the opportunity to learn about your research from yourself, your collaborator, Professor Nick Beresford, and your enthusiastic students. Visitors had the opportunity to experiment with the camera and acoustic technology that you use in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone. Perhaps the most exciting aspect was the opportunity for visitors to use the prototype of 'Virtual Chernobyl'. Such was the attraction of this that some visitors queued for more than an hour. It was clear from our evaluation that many visitors attended the museum specifically for this event and that there were more than 100 participants per hour, many of whom stayed for more than 30 minutes to discuss your science.

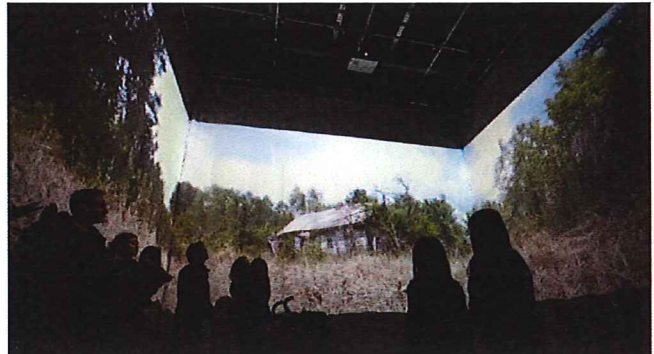
Building on this initial success, you developed a special exhibition epitomising the Manchester Science Festival vision. The exhibition featured a large 360-degree projection chamber that immersed visitors in imagery and sound from Chernobyl. You

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also had a full release of 'Virtual Chernobyl', running on multiple VR headsets, with the opportunity to speak to scientists working on the project. Installed at Media City from 22 - 29 October 2015, visitor numbers exceeded 2,000 over the weekend alone. Approximately the same number of festivalgoers were able to experience Virtual Chernobyl in each of 2016 and 2017. We were pleased to see the enthusiasm and active involvement of students from many of the collaborating universities during the three festivals.



The impact of your three-day MSI event, coinciding with the Chernobyl 30th anniversary, was particularly notable. Again this attracted excellent visitor numbers, and this time introduced a novel deployment of Google Cardboard headsets to share the VR footage with a much younger audience, which proved extremely popular. This event attracted wide media attention, including BBC radio and a feature article on BBC Newsround in which school children were able to explain your research to presenters.

It is clear from the visitor feedback collected across all five events that your work is really capturing the interest of the public. Visitors have been extremely impressed with the science that you are undertaking and your ability to communicate this in ways that people of all ages and backgrounds can engage with. We were interested to hear that questionnaire survey results showed changes in public opinion regarding radiation and its impacts following engagement with you.

It has been fascinating to be involved with this work and we look forward to working with you on new initiatives such as the MakeFest 2018, which will enable the public to learn about your drone-based research at Chernobyl by interacting with your research by being able to fly drones over an interactive map of the Chernobyl area. We also hope that you are able to maintain your research at Chernobyl into the future and continue to work with us to engage the public in this exciting work.

I wish you every success in the application for the 'NERC Impact Awards 2018'.

Yours sincerely



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