

Expanded “Town Scientist” Programme Launched **(<https://www.activelink.ie/node/115671>)**

Expanded “Town Scientist” programme launched aiming to positively influence behavioural attitudes to science throughout Ireland

Over 100 community-led STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) activities are taking place in Louth in 2025 as part of this year’s Town Scientist initiative, funded by Research Ireland. Led by science communicator, writer, engineer and performer Dr Niamh Shaw, the events build on the success of last year and involve a six-month science communicator-in-residence pilot study. The aim of the science communicator-in-residence project is to positively influence behavioural attitudes to science long-term and Dr Shaw hopes to see the “Town Scientist” role replicated in communities throughout Ireland in the future.

This year’s Town Scientist programme was officially launched at an event today in Dundalk Credit Union, and is delivered in partnership with Louth Library, Louth ABC programme, Dundalk Credit Union and Louth County Council. The overarching aims of this year’s Town Scientist programme are to create a STEM-engaged community and to make science more accessible, break down barriers that often keep people from engaging with scientific topics, and change attitudes towards science.

Events this year include:

- Family science experiment events;
- STEM career events;
- A climate action speaker series;
- Weekly walk-in Q&A sessions; and much more.

Alongside the activities, a Think Tank advisory group will be established. Led by science communicators Dr Claire O’Connell and Phil Smyth, the group will work with Dr Niamh Shaw to build capacity that will allow the science communicator-in-residence (aka Town Scientist) role to be replicated in communities throughout Ireland in the future.

Speaking at today’s launch, Dr Shaw said: “I am delighted to launch an expanded programme of Town Scientist events this year. This year’s programme builds on the success of last year which had a transformative impact on the people who took part and identified a real need and desire for informal science learning opportunities for adults in Louth and beyond. It has encouraged those who do not typically engage with science to now consider a career in STEM and has given them the skills and knowledge to participate in debate and conversations on topics that directly impact them, whether that is Artificial Intelligence, climate change, or astronomy.

“This year, I want to reach even more people and am doing so through a wide range of events that are open to everyone in the community. By being the town’s science communicator-in-residence I am hoping to change attitudes to science and STEM, and to learn how this programme can be replicated in communities throughout Ireland in the future to create communities who have access to knowledge to make informed decisions about their – and their families’ – futures.”

Welcoming the launch, Interim CEO of Research Ireland, Celine Fitzgerald, commented: “We are pleased to be supporting the Town Scientist project through Research Ireland’s Discover Programme. Impactful STEM initiatives like this help empower individuals, families and communities, equipping them with critical thinking skills, inspiring curiosity and, in turn, laying the groundwork for innovation in many different guises. Society needs – and values – these grassroots-focused projects as part of the collective effort to be appropriately informed and equipped to tackle challenges old and new.”

Bringing the story of the Arctic Fox to life in Louth

Dr Shaw also announced today that she will be participating in The Arctic Circle Summer 2025 Expedition. Artist and scientist led, The Arctic Circle is an annual expeditionary residency programme for international artists of all disciplines, and this July will see Dr Shaw and a number of other participants explore the high-Arctic Svalbard Archipelago and Arctic Ocean aboard a specially outfitted expedition vessel.

During the expedition, Dr Shaw will be researching the area in order to create an interactive walk in Louth commemorating

“The Artic Fox”, Dundalk native Leopold McClintock who was an arctic explorer and discovered the fate of the 1845 expedition to the North American Arctic led by Sir John Franklin. Dr Shaw is working with Louth County Council's Environment Office to bring the story of McClintock to life as part of a climate action initiative, with details yet to be announced.

Dr Shaw will also be honouring Irish women of science whose stories have been forgotten by bringing the Forgotten Women Quilt with her, conducting a number of engineering and human physiology experiments in partnership with Dundalk IT, and carrying a specially commissioned Dundalk flag designed by the media department at DkIT and sponsored by Engineers Ireland NE Region and Dundalk Chamber of Commerce to commemorate the town's engagement with her expedition.

For more information on Dr Niamh Shaw, visit: <https://niamhshaw.ie/> (<https://niamhshaw.ie/>)

Region

Nationwide

Date Entered/Updated

15th May, 2025

Expiry Date

29th May, 2025

Source URL: <https://www.activelink.ie/community-exchange/news/115671-expanded-town-scientist-programme-launched>