



ESOF is a biannual event. And this year, it will be held in July in Manchester. Known for its manufacturing past, its footballing present and its graphene future, this vibrant city in the Northwest of England offers more than meets the eye. It is also the perfect location for an international forum such as ESOF2016. Find out more about what you can expect at this year's event from its champion: Nancy Rothwell.

Nancy Rothwell: ESOF2016 Champion



High expectations set by the president of the University of Manchester

Manchester seems to fill a special city niche. Certainly it is a large and bustling metropolis, but the crowds are not too big, the pace not too frenetic. You quickly feel like this place has purpose, but gives people space to find their own pace.

For Nancy Rothwell, president of the University of Manchester, this makes her city an ideal venue for the European Science Open Forum 2016 ([ESOF2016](#)). She has taken on the role of champion for this exciting event, due to take place between 23rd and 27th July 2016. Her calm--befitting her honorary

title of 'Dame' bestowed in 2005 for services to science--gives away nothing of the packed schedule awaiting her in the next six months. "There are some days when all I seem to do is related to [ESOF2016](#)," she admits, acknowledging that she still has one of the UK's top universities to run as well.

But the success of the event hinges on attendance of as many students, scientists, entrepreneurs and policy makers, as possible so they can take part in debates surrounding science. Rothwell is determined to make this a forum to remember.

Manchester magnet

To attract participants, the traditional image of the city may need to be challenged. "I'm here to show that Manchester is not just about [British TV series] [Coronation Street](#) and football," she continues. "I want us to be known and remembered for our culture, our science and our facilities. This is a great European city and a great place for science. That's what I want people to hear and remember." She adds: "So many people never come here; they think it's a bit grim up North. I want them to come.... and go 'Wow!'"

But Manchester's attractiveness has already been proven in private sector circles. "Businesses are starting to look at this city and realise they need to be here. They look around and see a vibrant city with fantastic facilities, an international airport, an active cultural sector and a world-class research base with strong partnerships like [Graphene City](#) and the UK's [Internet of Things City](#). Why shouldn't this be right for a European headquarters?"

Top scientists and tech art

It's this zeal for science and city that make Rothwell the perfect evangelist to prepare for what is lying ahead. "As a scientist, I wanted to create a programme that I would want to attend; a conference that would excite me," she explains.

The programme will include something for everyone. Presentations and discussions will cover issues ranging from healthy populations to women in science. Graphene of course will feature, for example in a session on the application of graphene in healthcare technologies. The University will certainly parade its stars including Nobel laureates and discoverers of graphene, Andre Geim and Kostya Novoselov. Particle physicist-cum-TV presenter Brian Cox is also getting involved. There will even be a performance by a [robot orchestra](#).

Besides, Rothwell is secretly looking forward to the parody of Nobel prizes, the [IgNobels](#). They represent some light relief from serious science, but still with a serious message. Interestingly, Geim is the only recipient of an IgNobel and Nobel Prize; he says he is equally proud of both!

There are other attractive aspects to such a forum, not strictly connected to the practice of science. "I'm also passionate about science communication. Scientists need to get out and talk about their work, share their love of knowledge and discovery and discuss how their work may affect everyday life or help solve the many challenges we face in society," Rothwell says.

She has high expectations regarding the role of the forthcoming July forum as "a place for scientists to meet each other, to partner with businesses and policy-makers and engage with the public."

Policy in action

As part of her role in the event, Rothwell has met many politicians and government officials to secure funding and garner support. She has also persuaded some top names in government and policy to make the trip in July, including Carlos Moedas, European Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation, Naledi Pandor, South African Minister of Science and Technology and Sally Davies, the UK's Chief Medical Officer, who is the professional head of all directors of public health in local government and a leading campaigner on anti-microbial resistance. Certainly the [Science for Policy and Policy for Science](#) sessions promise up-to-date insights and heated debate.

Policy is anything but boring, Rothwell asserts, as she recalls the discussion between government scientific advisers at [ESOF2014](#) in Copenhagen, Denmark. It was one of the most packed sessions of that week. "Science policy affects everyone," she says. "It affects who gets funding, how much, for how long. It defines what research gets done. Every scientist wants to know what governments are thinking and understand how it will affect them."

During these debates, scientists will also discover how their work can shape policy in other areas, with talks and presentations on how political savvy can help researchers advise government and support evidence-based policy-making.

Multidisciplinarity at heart

With her busy weeks ahead, Rothwell promises the July Forum will be a catalyst for so much more. "ESOF is unusual because it brings so many different fields of science together alongside business, policy and culture," she notes.

In a way, by not focusing on a single discipline, the event could foster great cross-fertilisation among scientists from various disciplines who will attend. "I hope that a physicist will take time out to find out what is so controversial about gene editing or a life scientist might pop along to some talks on climate change," she says.

She concludes: "You never know what is relevant and how the interactions between delegates will develop. But we do know that networking and cross-over does lead to new things. I wonder what new ventures for science, for Manchester, for Europe ESOF2016 might create?"

Edwin Colyer

Photo Credit: University of Manchester