

Questacon – the National Science and Technology Centre, is an interactive science communication facility in Canberra, Australia. It is a museum with more than 200 interactive exhibits relating to science and technology. It has many science programs that are intended to inspire the children of Australia to love science.

Complimenting the main museum, Questacon Science Circus is an outreach program and is the most extensive science outreach program of its kind in the world. Each year, the Science Circus engages with more than 100,000 people, travels 25,000 kilometers, runs professional development courses for 600 teachers and visits about 30 remote aboriginal communities as well as hospitals, nursing homes and special schools.

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History[edit]

Questacon is an interactive science centre that began as a project of the Australian National University (ANU), in spare space at the Ainslie Public School in Canberra.[1] It opened with 15 exhibits and was staffed entirely by volunteers by ANU physics lecturer Professor Mike Gore AM, inspired him to develop Australia's first interactive science centre, based on the Exploratorium in San Francisco. The name 'Questacon' combines two words— 'quest' meaning 'to discover' and 'con' meaning 'to study'. Professor Gore went on to become the founding Director of Questacon and in 2015, he got an Australia Day honour for his service to science.[2]

Questacon's current building was Japan's present to Australia for the 1988 Bicentenary and it was opened on 23 November 1988. Japanese government and business contributed ¥1 billion, half of the capital cost of A\$19.64 million.[3] Questacon was formerly housed at the old Ainslie Primary School.[1]

As of 2021, the director is Professor Graham Durant, who had been in the position since 2003.[4] Questacon's vision is "a better future for all Australians through engagement with science and innovation".[5]

Galleries[edit]

In 2020, there were almost a dozen galleries of exhibitions at the same time. The list was:[6] The Foyer has Robots, the Clockwork Universe, the Cam Wave and the Shop.

Fundamental Exhibition explore Classic Science in different ways.

Awesome Earth Exhibition looks at natural disasters and geology, featuring a Tesla coil and an earthquake simulator.

Q Lab has dynamic experiment space designed to inspire the inner scientist and also includes the Questacon Beehive.

The Shed is an innovative and creative place within Questacon dedicated to experimentation with ideas, tools, science, technologies, and art.

MiniQ is an exhibition designed for children between the ages of 0 and 6. Exhibits include a water play area, a construction zone, and a quiet area.

Excite@Q is spectacular scientific phenomena including Robot Hockey and the Freefall slide Australia in Space looks to future space exploration

Mars Gallery has displays from ancient mythologies to modern interactive media.

Science Garden has some inspiring sculptures designed to be interactive

Even the Ramp has photographic and interactive displays

As of 2019, there are about 500,000 visitors per year.[7] The galleries are staffed by 200 paid staff, as well as team of about 60 volunteers.[4] The volunteers occasionally will make use of Discovery Trolleys, featuring smaller, hands-on exhibits related to the gallery.

Science theatre[edit]

The centre also features a number of performance spaces, used for presentations for general public and student audiences by Questacon's in-house theatre troupe, the "Excited Particles". The Excited Particles also perform puppet shows for young children.

Nkrypt[edit]

Nkrypt is a sculpture installation outside the Questacon building that consists of eight laser-etched stainless steel poles that each carry an encoded message.[8] The outdoor exhibit was installed as a part of the Centenary of Canberra and a prize was offered to the first person to solve the puzzle.[9] This was solved in December 2013.[10]

Questacon Technology Learning Centre[edit]

The Questacon Technology Learning Centre is located at the Royal Australian Mint's former administration building in Deakin and houses more than 80 staff. All of the outreach programs and the exhibition developers, including researchers, designers and electronics, metal and wood shop staff are based there. There are also an exhibition area and spaces for booked technology workshops and holiday programs.[11]

Outreach programs[edit]

In addition to the exhibitions in Canberra, Questacon runs the Questacon Science Circus and Engineering is Elementary nationally and Q2U in the Canberra region. Past outreach programs run by Questacon include the Tenix Questacon Maths Squad, NRMA Roadzone, NRMA Tomorrow's Drivers, Starlab, Questacon Smart Moves, Questacon Science Play, Questacon Science Squad and a range of activities in remote Indigenous communities.

Questacon Science Circus[edit]

The Questacon Science Circus is an outreach program of Questacon and is the most extensive science outreach program of its kind in the world. Each year, the Science Circus engages with more than 100,000 people, travels 25,000 kilometers, runs professional development courses for 600 teachers and visits about 30 remote aboriginal communities as well as hospitals, nursing homes and special schools.

The Questacon Science Circus is a partnership between Questacon and the Australian National University. The Science Circus won the Prime Minister's Award for Community

Business Partnerships in 2006.[12]

Fifteen or sixteen science graduates staff the Science Circus as it travels, bringing lively presentations of science to towns and schools. The Science Circus also supports the teaching of science and technology by running practical and fun professional development workshops for teachers. While working for the Science Circus, each presenter also completes a Masters of Science Communication Outreach through the Centre for the Public Awareness of Science at the Australian National University. Coursework includes studies in print media, program evaluation and exhibition design.

Every year the Science Circus presenters graduate from the course and a new team are selected. The first team graduated in 1988 and there are now over 300 Science Circus graduates. Graduates have contributed to programs on Australian Broadcasting Corporation Radio, the Diffusion Science Radio Show, Cosmos Magazine, and the Mr Science Show podcast.

Photographs[edit]

National Library, Treasury and Questacon

Questacon Building (Photo by Ché Lydia Xyang)

The Astronomer is a sculpture by Tim Wetherell in 2003 made out of fire damaged steel from the Mount Stromlo Observatory which was destroyed by the 2003 Canberra bushfires.

Einstein sculpture in Science Garden at Questacon

Lightning Simulator (Photo by Flagstaffotos)

Clockwork Universe Sculpture by Tim Wetherell

Water responding to different frequencies (Photo by Flagstaffotos)

Shell Questacon Science Circus

See also[edit]

Australia portal

Inspiring Australia