

Armagh Observatory/The Centre for Cross Border Studies

PRESS RELEASE

for immediate release

DISCOVER THE STARS AT ARMAGH: SECOND CROSS-BORDER SCHOOLS SCIENCE CONFERENCE

'Discover the Stars at Armagh', the second Cross-Border Schools Science conference, takes place at the Royal School Armagh, Armagh Observatory and the Armagh Planetarium on Wednesday 29th and Thursday 30th April 2009. The Centre for Cross Border Studies is also a partner in this event.

250 pupils aged 13-14 from schools in Belfast, Dublin, Armagh, Monaghan, Keady, Banbridge, Portadown, Carrickmacross, Dundalk and Westmeath are attending the conference. The conference begins runs from 10 am to 3 pm on both days.

Opening the conference, the Director of the Armagh Observatory, Professor Mark Bailey, said the conference series owes its genesis to a 2007 Northern Ireland government initiative called "Skills and Science" and to funding from the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure in Northern Ireland and the Department of Education and Science and the acclaimed "Discover Science and Engineering" programme in the Republic of Ireland. The first conference was held in Armagh in March 2007.

Professor Bailey said: "These science initiatives, North and South, are designed to promote innovative projects aimed at stimulating a greater interest in science, technology, engineering and mathematics among young people. Of course, we think that subjects like astronomy and mathematics are interesting in their own right. But governments on both sides of the border have bigger fish to fry, and they recognise that science and technology, and the fundamental physics and mathematics on which so much of our modern technological lifestyle depends, are essential elements of a healthy economy."

The keynote conference speaker is Jay Tate, Director of the Spaceguard Centre in Knighton, Wales, who is one of the world's leading experts on the risk to civilisation posed by collisions of comets and asteroids with the Earth. His address is entitled "The Science of Armageddon".

The conference is held under the auspices of UN International Year of Astronomy 2009, which celebrates the 400th anniversary of the first use, by Galileo Galilei, of a telescope for astronomical observations. Conference material and prizes have been supplied by the Royal Astronomical Society, the European Space Agency (ESA), the European Southern Observatory (ESO), NASA, the UK Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC), the Faulkes Telescope Project, and the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium.

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