






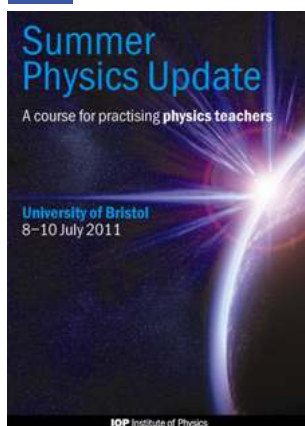
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Physics Update courses: inspirational weekends-away for science teachers

[Education](#) — By [Lena](#) on August 10, 2011 at 10:03 am

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[Physics Update residential courses](#) occur three times a year in various university physics departments around the UK and are aimed at specialist physics teachers. New teacher, **Richard Wood**, shares his experiences of the most recent course.

“Having just finished my PGCE and found my first job, I attended my first Summer Physics Update course at the University of Bristol from 8 to 10 July. Unsure of what to expect, what I actually found was a fantastic opportunity to gain ideas and share experiences on physics teaching.

The structure of the weekend centred on a number of lectures interspersed with workshops, with pre-dinner talks on the Friday and Saturday evenings. The lectures were on a variety of topics including: sudden phase changes, the science of volcanoes, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, and the science of taste and flavour. My personal favourite was the talk by Dr Diane Aston, from the Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining, giving vivid demonstrations of innovative materials such as shape memory alloy and jet engine turbine blades (I'm a sucker for jet engines!).

The hands-on workshops also provided excellent opportunities for encountering new resources or teaching ideas. Dr Matthew French, from Clifton College, led a session on the uses of liquid nitrogen. This workshop included superconductors and provided a demonstration of levitation that I had wanted to see again ever since I first saw it on Tomorrow's World in the 1980s.

Dr Neil Downie provided demos of several experiments, several of which would be ideal for a science club project, for example, making bazookas from vacuum cleaners and plumbing pipes. The workshop on the Science Enhancement Programme's resources demonstrated the use of some of their specialist equipment. The fourth workshop showed us the possibilities of putting cosmic ray detectors on the roof of our schools.

Which was the part I enjoyed most? The TeachMeet session: where many teachers shared their own classroom ideas with the rest of the group. I'll be sharing some of mine next time! I enjoyed myself thoroughly and took away a great number of resources, new ideas and new contacts and will certainly be attending the next one.”

To receive notification of upcoming [Physics Update courses](#), send your contact details to Manchi Chung (e-mail manchi.chung@iop.org).

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