

Genomics Showcase 2021



17/11/2021

Introduction

The Genomics Showcase event was developed to highlight advancements in the field of genomics and the potential to improve healthcare to the people of Wales, in line with the Welsh Government's genomics for Precision Medicine Strategy.

The objectives of the event were:

- To increase general awareness of genomics
- To promote the potential of Genomics for the people of Wales
- To raise awareness about the role and activities of Genomics Partnership Wales and its partners

The Showcase was aimed at a wide audience with content for all target groups:

- Patient & Public
- Academics/researchers
- Health Care Professionals (HCP)
- School and College students
- Partners in Industry

Format - Virtual or In-Person?

After cancellation of the 2020 Showcase due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the plan was to deliver an in-person event in 2021. However, winter 2020 saw an increase in Coronavirus cases and reinstated restrictions, which lead to uncertainty about the re-scheduled event. There was doubt about the holding of large in-person events, especially as no vaccine had been developed at that stage. Given that a large portion of our audience would be in the "extremely clinically vulnerable" category, considerations needed to be made about whether an in-person event was feasible, even if restrictions allowed it. In January 2021, with no certainty about the outlook for the Spring, it was decided that the inaugural Showcase would be virtual.

The decision was made not to charge companies for a stand at the event, while it was virtual. Virtual stands seem to have limited appeal and it was thought better to have more people participate while the Showcase was being established. Once the event reverts back to a mainly in-person event commercial organisations could be charged to attend.

Platforms

After a thorough search of the market, potential online platforms were narrowed down to two candidates. Meetings were arranged with both platform providers to discuss the Showcase format and to find out how much of what was planned for the in-person event could be delivered on-line and at what cost.

The decision was made to use VFairs as it better reflected the planned in-person event and offered a superior experience for both hosts and for exhibitors by offering more customisation. Visually, VFairs also provided a novel and more interactive experience for delegates.

Audio-Visual Companies

Due to the scope of the event, it became clear that assistance would be needed with both setting the platform up and running the event on the day. Two companies that provided these services were approached. After initial meetings with both companies, Genero was deemed better able to match the needs of the Showcase team and was engaged.

Programme

As interest in the event spread and people were approached to take part, it became clear that the Showcase was developing into a much larger event than anticipated.

The initial plan was to have two areas – one for the public and another with access restricted to Health Professionals and researchers. Having a restricted area meant that the requirements of health professionals and pharmaceutical companies, whose presentations often contain sensitive information, could be met. Some presenters gave two talks – one aimed at each audience – with content adapted as necessary so that they could reach both audiences.

The Showcase grew as the planning proceeded and eventually two talk areas developed into six. It was clear that attendees would not be able to access all the information available to them in one go, so the content was made available for 30 days after the live event allowing people to listen to talks that they missed on the day, at their own convenience.

Event Day

The day began with an opening address from Catrin Middleton, Head of Programme - Genomics Partnership Wales. After the opening address attendees were invited to explore the event.

Talks

There were 54 talks spread over 6 stages, 3 in the public area and 3 in the HCP area, covering a wide variety of topics. Health Professionals were able to access all 54 talks; the public had access to 21 talks in addition to a Genomics Café which took place in the lunchtime slot of Stage 1 of the Public area.

Exhibition Halls

There were two exhibition halls with 35 stands between them (public – 27 stands, HCP – 8 stands) and an interactive hall with 7 stands.

The decision to have an HCP exhibit hall was made after feedback from industry that they would want to advertise products and services that they have for sale and that they would not be able to do this anywhere that the public had access to.

Interactive Zone

There were 7 stands in the interactive area: Genny the Genetics Robot, Let's talk about DNA – Live DNA Extraction, Educational Resources, Genomics Careers, Genomics Quiz, Explorer Domes, and a Feedback area.

Poster Hall

There were 29 Posters in the poster hall. This area was restricted to health professionals after feedback from those presenting posters that their work would be more suited to this group.

The posters were judged and the best 6 were invited to make oral presentations on the day. Prizes were awarded to the best poster and the best oral presentation on the day.

The full programme is available in the appendix.

VFairs Platform

The VFairs platform was easy to use and offered many options for hosting the event. However, the overall event expanded much more than expected. It seems that most platform users don't exceed 2 presentation stages plus exhibition halls. In this respect, the Genomics Showcase was a first for all concerned, which slowed pre-event set up due to its complexity and size. Although set up was

relatively easy, it took more time than anticipated to customise the event to the desired standard. A comprehensive step-by-step guide, designed by the Showcase team, was sent to every exhibitor to aid set up and the majority of exhibitors found it straight forward to construct their booths pre-event.

Post event, VFairs provided a breakdown of statistics for the event day and also for the following 30-day access period. This provided detailed information, a summary of which can be found in the Appendix.

Genero

Pre-event communication with Genero was good. Their experience of holding online events was invaluable and helped shape the event to get the most out of the VFairs platform. Genero also liaised with VFairs on our behalf to try to ensure that set up and delivery were as straightforward as possible.

Once up and running, feedback about Genero during the event has been positive. There was one representative in charge of each area. The day ran smoothly, and communication was very good. Assistance was provided swiftly to any speakers who had difficulty logging in and the sessions ran to time.

Post event, the amount of time needed to edit the talks and make them available for access post event had been grossly underestimated. This was partly due to the fact that the event became more complex as it developed. However, it meant that the talks were not initially available post event.

Advertising

Advertisement materials were developed by Nimyrah Caesar, the GPW Communications Officer. Consistent branding was used over all materials. A communications plan was developed and discussed in March, but time pressures meant that every point was not actioned (such as a News Story, Video Advertisement, and paid communications). A target of 1000 pre-event registrations was set and surpassed, so missing action points didn't prevent achievement of goals, however for future events it would be beneficial to create and discuss this plan early, ideally before event organisation begins in earnest.

'Save the date' messages were sent out through WGP networks and newsletters at the end of 2020. This was followed up by an extensive marketing campaign using both internal and external networks to ensure that news of the event was spread as widely as possible.

Speakers

A general call for speakers was sent out in early 2021 and the response was excellent. The plan was for an auditorium each for health professionals and the public, with other breakout rooms for sessions such as the Genomics Café. It quickly became apparent that there was the content to fill many more "stages", so three stages per group were created. The programme for each stage was filled with a variety of topics, informed by GPW Sounding Board group members where possible, with breaks factored in to allow visitors to explore the rest of the Showcase.

Exhibitors

General calls for exhibitors were put out in WGP newsletters and through existing networks. The call was also shared externally in the Genetic Alliance UK and SWAN news bulletins, via the ABPI members' network and the Welsh NHS Confederation Policy Forum.

Once booked in for an exhibition space, participants were sent the link required for them to set up their stand along with a pdf giving step-by-step guidance of the process. The Showcase team also provided guidance if required.

Posters

Health Professionals and Researchers, working in the field of Genomics/Genetics were contacted and encouraged to send in abstracts highlighting their work. A total of 31 posters were displayed at the event. The posters were judged by external judges and the best 6 invited to give a presentation on the day. A prize was awarded to the overall best poster and talk.

Feedback

In order to facilitate feedback, there was a dedicated booth available on the day that guided people to an online or downloadable form. Announcements were put out throughout the day directing people to the booth and session chairs reminded people to leave feedback throughout the day. Two post-event emails were sent out with links directly to the feedback forms. Only 34 responses were received by feedback form - 24 from the public and 14 from HCPs. This is a rate of 5.75%. A new way of gathering feedback is being researched for future events.

General Public

Most of the respondents heard about the Showcase through email marketing (11 of 24). When asked why they were attending most respondents (12 of 24) selected "Learn more about the subject".

Demographics

Nineteen of the respondents were from Wales, 4 were from elsewhere in the UK and 1 did not respond to that question. Most respondents (10) were in the 50-69 age group although this was closely followed by the 70 and over group with (8). There were 3 people in the Under 18 group and 1 in each of the 18-29 group and 30-49.

Reception

All respondents rated the Showcase as either Excellent (13) or Good (10). The most popular aspect of the Showcase was by far the talks with all but 2 respondents marking it as their favourite aspect of the day. The majority of respondents felt that the level of the material was "about right", with only 1 commenting that it was too low. Every respondent felt that they knew more about Genomics as a result of attending the Showcase. Most respondents (13) felt that they would be encouraged to find out more about genomics as a result of attending the Showcase with the rest (9) feeling it might. 18 respondents would recommend the event with the other 5 feeling they might. Most respondents felt that the platform was easy or quite easy to navigate, with only 1 finding it difficult.

In free typing feedback boxes, the platform received praise for its ease of navigation and for how it looked:

"Looked really good when you entered the lobby, like a real conference"

"The virtual platform was excellent it enabled me to attend the event i would have struggled to travel down to Cardiff for the face-to-face event."

"My first experience of a virtual event and it worked really well - almost like attending the real thing, but from the comfort of my own chair!"

"I thought it worked very well. I am not very techy but had no problem in viewing the timetables and deciding which talks I wanted to attend. It was very straightforward logging in and out during the day"

The content of the talks and speakers were also positively received:

"This is a wonderful way to showcase Genomics and inform a wider audience about a complex topic delivered by expert communicators"

"Excellent talks and speakers. Thanks for a very interesting day."

For future events, there was an appetite for a virtual element to be incorporated:

"I hope that future events would be online too alongside actual bodily attending. for those unable to get there in person for whatever reason virtual is great."

"Please allow online participants at future events"

Health Care Professionals

Of the HCPs who responded over half heard about the event via email. There were 9 health professionals, 2 researchers/academics, 1 medical student, 1 research support and 1 admin staff.

Demographics

Eleven of the respondents were from Wales, 2 from elsewhere in the UK and 1 from Saudi Arabia.

Reception

All respondents rated the Showcase as either Excellent (9) or Good (5). The most popular aspect of the Showcase was again the talks, with all marking it as one of their favourite aspects of the day. Every respondent felt that they knew more about Genomics as a result of attending the Showcase. All but 2 of the respondents felt that information from the event would impact on their work with the last 2 being unsure. All but 2 felt that the Showcase would encourage them to find out more about Genomics. All of the respondents would recommend the Showcase. The majority of respondents felt that the platform was easy or quite easy to navigate.

In free typing feedback boxes, there was again praise for the platform:

"Overall, it was fairly straightforward and a very nice platform."

"Virtual platform worked well and was easy to navigate."

There was praise for the talks, although several people felt there was too much choice:

"I enjoyed the event, which was full of great talks"

"It was quite overwhelming initially, with a lot going on and things to do"

"Great choice of talks, but maybe a little too much choice."

"A great event as usual, just a lot to take in"

Exhibitors

As this was the first Genomic Showcase it was not known how much delegates might engage with the chat functions on the exhibitor stands. This was discussed with all exhibitors, and they were given different options for manning the booths. Most exhibitors manned their booth all day. The feedback has been that their exhibits were very quiet, and some exhibitors fed back that they had very few or no conversations with delegates.

"It has been very, very slow for us"

In future events, the chat function should be advertised as an option, with advice that delegates can be reluctant to engage in this way. Exhibitors can be advised to use their booth as a signpost to advertising materials and existing resources. With more time exhibitors can generate materials specific to the event. Interactive elements on the stand greatly help engagement.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Genomics Showcase 2021 was undoubtedly a success. However, the final event was complex and included so many contributors that it would be difficult to repeat on an annual basis. The recommendation is that the event be held bi-annually to maintain the standard and also the interest.

When the pandemic hit, engagement moved online, and Zoom/Teams became a novel way of communicating. However, as time has gone on, anecdotal feedback suggests that people are becoming somewhat fatigued with using online platforms. It would be a shame for the Showcase to become just another online event. To keep the profile and the interest high the following recommendations have been made:

- Hold the event on a bi-annual basis.
- Set the date for the next Showcase as soon as possible.
- Use the non-event year to build content and to advertise the next event. Now that a Showcase has been held, participants know what to expect so marketing for contributors should be easier.
- The initial Showcase was a learning experience for all concerned. Do not expand the event any further, rather concentrate on perfecting the existing format. If the format is repeated – 6 stages with a large variety of presentations – participants will be more at ease with the familiar layout. There are many areas that can be improved upon to make participation better for all, particularly more interaction.
- Keep the same suppliers for the platform and delivery assistance to benefit from the experience gained delivering the event in 2021.
- Keep the impetus for the next Showcase up by holding small events around Wales in the non-event year, in the form of a Roadshow. This will keep up engagement with existing participants and advertise the next Showcase to others. It is anticipated that the Showcase, with the Roadshow on alternating years, will then become embedded as the regular pattern of events.
- Monitor other events and canvas previous participants and others to see what improvements can be made to the next Showcase.

Closing summary

The Genomics Showcase was undoubtedly a success, meeting all the set objectives.

Registration targets were exceeded, and feedback of the event has been overwhelmingly positive. Since the Showcase, the organising team has been asked to meet with other groups who are using the Showcase as a model for their own virtual events. These organisations attended as exhibitors, speakers and delegates. This evidences the quality and success of the event on all fronts. The Showcase matched the ambitious scale and variety that was outlined and was a very successful event.

Appendix

Statistics from the day and post-event

	Total	HCP	Public
No. registered	1213 (inc. 118 exhibitor admins)	419	676
No. visiting on day	429	115	314
No. in post event period	144	69	75

The percentages below do not include exhibitor admins in their calculation.

39% of registrants attended on the day. 13% of people logged in at some point after the event.

46% logged in at some point during or after the event.

54% did not log in to the platform at any stage.

Advertisement of the event was clearly very successful. In future an increased focus could be made on converting registrations to attendance, however, experience has shown that for a free event it is likely that there will always be a large portion of people who register and do not attend.

Talks:

On the Day:

	Unique visits for each stage	Total visits for each stage
	Public	
Stage 1	239	580
Stage 2	146	276
Stage 3	142	247
	HCP	
Stage 1	78	159
Stage 2	78	175
Spotlight	57	89

Post Event:

	Unique visits for each stage	Total visits for each stage
	Public	
Stage 1	59	220
Stage 2	41	133
Stage 3	33	94
	HCP	
Stage 1	23	113
Stage 2	17	80
Spotlight	15	65

- The most watched video post event was Professor Julian Sampson's '*Drugs for busted genes? – The remarkable case of tuberous sclerosis*', which was watched **36 times**.
- This was followed by Dr. Alex Murray's '*Genomics: What it is & How it will affect me?*', which was watched **34 times**.

Exhibit Halls:

Stand Visits:

Public		
	On the day	Post Event
Range (Unique Visitors)	13 - 83	1 - 18
Average	40	7
HCP		
	On the day	Post Event
Range (Unique Visitors)	10 - 48	4 - 12
Average	26	7
Interactive		
	On the day	Post Event
Range (Unique Visitors)	54 – 128	11 – 29
Average	91	17

The most visited stands on the day and in the post event period were:

Hall	Stand	Unique Visits
Public	Wales Gene Park	18
HCP	Wales Gene Park	12
Interactive Room	Let's look at DNA! Live DNA Extraction	17