



British Science Week - How to contact a school or college to offer help.

This piece has been written particularly for RSGB members who would like to offer help to a UK school or college during British Science Week (BSW) but aren't sure how to do it. It applies more generally too and could easily be adapted for scout troops, youth clubs and so on. It is advice based on personal experience. It is not cast in stone and feel free to adapt it how you like.

Use email to make your contact. Don't write a letter and don't just telephone. Emails work and teachers are used to receiving and responding to them. They can easily be forwarded to the most appropriate person. For the first contact, always write to the head teacher but if you want to approach the head of science in a secondary school, for example, copy that person in on your message. Etiquette is important here and some heads don't like it, quite reasonably, if outsiders write directly to their staff without the courtesy of approaching them too.

1. Find out the name of who best you should write to

If you have a contact in the school – you are a friend of one of the teachers perhaps - then approach them directly to sound them out but confirm what you're doing with the head teacher. If you are a parent of a student at the school, go through the “proper channels” as below – you will, of course, know who the right people are.

For a primary school, the best person to start with will probably be the head teacher. Finding their name is easy – it'll be on the website but finding their email address is more difficult. It might be on the school website, if not give the school a ring and ask for the email address of the head.

For a secondary school or college, the best person is more likely to be the head of science or technology. That might or might not be on the website – some schools are happy to publish names and even email addresses for key staff, others aren't. Do a bit of detective work, or phone the school. At best you'll get their name and email address, at worst you get a general contact point in which case write to the head but make sure you add “FAO: head of science” in the subject line.

For a university, you're better off approaching their students' union than academic staff. The union should have a website with details of their Radio Club or Society and if they don't – they might like one. Write to the President of the Students' Union.

In all cases don't just do an email to a general account with “British Science Week” or “Offer of Help” in the subject line – whoever monitors the account won't know where to forward it, so might get it wrong. Find a name or title and say “FAO Jim Smith” or “FAO: Head of Science”.

2. Outline what you're offering

Most head teachers, heads of science or technology won't know very much about amateur radio. If they did, they'll be ahead of you and will have something already in place. Our hobby is highly technical and specialist. Unless you are specific and can convince them that *they* don't need any specialist knowledge because *you* have it, you'll be met with a blank. Think through what you can offer: this could be some construction work, some experiments, setting up a station or doing a talk to interested students. Think about how long it would take (and how long you are prepared to spend) and do a firm proposal to them. Some ideas are on [rsgb.org/bsw](https://www.rsgb.org/bsw) and a suggested letter outline is below.

Be careful of offering to do some activities with small groups – Safeguarding will probably prevent this. See Safeguarding below.

If you are prepared to help and don't have any specific ideas, think through what *you* enjoy and could talk about with students.

3. Be prepared to go and visit them to talk it through.

The school will need to be assured that you can handle this with their help. They will also need to know that you will be doing something that won't waste their students' time. A meeting will help convince them of this. During the meeting, be flexible. For example, you've suggested a two-hour session but they can only fit you in to a one hour lesson, so flex! Ask them what their science or technology curriculum covers and see if there's something you can help with there. For example, A-level physics covers a lot of what we do, and that could be your way in because you can offer real-life examples.

4. Safeguarding

Unless you already hold a DBS, Disclosure Scotland or NI Access certificate, you can never be allowed to be on your own with anyone under 18 in school. Even if you are certificated and you only want to work supervised, they will probably want to do their own check – don't be alarmed at this. Remember that in Scotland, university undergraduates start at 17. All this means that someone will probably always have to be with you, even if you have had the necessary checks. This in turn means a resource drain for the school, so don't offer to take a small group of interested students to one side – they simply won't have the staff to accompany you. If they do and they want that, they'll suggest it.

So, you have a local school in mind and you have thought about an activity you'd like to do. Now make your proposal, here is an outline of a letter:

- a. say who you are and that you are an amateur radio enthusiast willing to help. If you are a parent of a student at the school, this is where to say so. This is also a good place to say if you've had any experience of working with young people;
- b. remind the recipient about BSW and say that you realise they will be planning to do some something and that you would be willing to offer your skills in radio in any way you can but that you also have a proposal for them;



- c. outline your proposal in brief including any financial or resource commitment. Point out that you won't want to be paid, but there might be other costs (components, perhaps). If there are none, say so;
- d. point out that this is a suggestion and that you would be happy to offer help in any radio related activity they are planning now or in the future. Yes, I know that's a repeat of b, but it doesn't hurt and it might be that they can't do anything now, but you could support something like a science-themed week in the future;
- e. point out that there might be spinoff activities such as working towards an Ofcom Foundation Licence, which has significant currency for UCAS and apprenticeship applications. That's so even for primary-age students;
- f. say that you'll be happy to continue the discussion in person or by email if they like.

And there you go. Don't be upset if they refuse – you've tried! A refusal probably means that they aren't doing anything for BSW because they hadn't thought of it until you wrote. But they might be interested in doing something in the future.

I'm happy to offer advice to you in any way that I can, just drop me an email at the address below.

A sample risk assessment and the lesson plans for my day in school are in the resources area: [rsgb.org/bsw](https://www.rsgb.org/bsw). We're happy for you to use them in any way you wish.

Good luck!

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