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## Female scientists get set to take to the soapbox

**Did you know that fruit flies are being used to help to find a cure for Parkinson's Disease? This is one of the topics currently being researched at Northumbria University which will be under discussion at a special event celebrating women working in science this weekend.**

The Soapbox Science event, being held at Grey's Monument on Saturday 18 June, is specially designed to bring fascinating scientific work from female academics to the public in new and accessible ways.

Northumbria academics, [Dr Tora Smulders-Srinivasan](#) and [Dr Amanda Jones](#) from the University's [Department of Applied Sciences](#), will join academics from Newcastle, Durham and Bradford Universities at the event. They will take to the soapbox to share their research into how racing fruit flies against each other can help with studies of brain disease, and how your garden soil is filled with antibacterial properties.

Other talks at the event will include looking at the batteries of the future, how human-made noise can affect marine animals and how your teeth can give clues about your health.

Research Fellow, Dr Smulders-Srinivasan, explained: "Soapbox Science is an excellent event designed to promote science as a career for women, as well as educating the public into some of the innovative research happening in their local universities.

"My particular talk will look at my research into Parkinson's Disease. People may not be aware, but there are many similarities between human genes and fruit fly genes – the typical flies that buzz around your bins – so we can learn a lot from flies about how their motor skills can be impaired by genetic disorders.

"As gene defects can impact on movement, which is one of the primary symptoms of Parkinson's, my research specialises in looking at how flies with different levels of genetic impairment perform in time trials. By placing them in test tubes and racing them against each other, we can see how certain levels of genetic impairment can impact on mitochondria and neurons. This will help to inform how future drugs can be used to treat Parkinson's Disease."

The Newcastle Soapbox Science event is one of 16 events being held across the UK between May and September. The events bring cutting edge research out of universities and onto the streets, with inspirational female speakers engaging in conversations with the public about their work to encourage people to engage with, and think about careers in, science.

Northumbria University is currently running a major three-year £1.2 million project, Think Physics, to help to engage more young people – especially girls and those from under-represented groups – into studying science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine (STEMM) subjects. The project

was partly inspired by a report from the Institute of Physics which revealed that only 21% of physics students at UK universities are female.

The University also recently received the prestigious national Athena SWAN bronze award in recognition of its commitment to supporting women's academic careers in STEMM disciplines.

Professor Dianne Ford, Executive Dean of Northumbria's Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, is one of the organisers of the Newcastle Soapbox Science event. She said: "It's hugely important for women working in science to showcase their work to the public. Science opens the doors to the most incredible careers for young women and this is an excellent opportunity for female academics to take to the public stage and help to inspire the next generation of female scientists and engineers. It was a competitive process to be selected to speak at this event, so I'm delighted that Northumbria academics have been chosen to take part."

The Newcastle Soapbox Science event will be held at Grey's Monument on Saturday 18 June between 12 noon and 3pm. The event is free of charge and all are welcome to come along and participate.

Soapbox Science is a nationwide initiative which aims to bring science to the people and challenge gender stereotypes in science careers, promoting the visibility of women in science. Soapbox Science events are part-funded by the Science and Technology Facilities Council. For more information, visit [www.soapboxscience.org](http://www.soapboxscience.org)

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