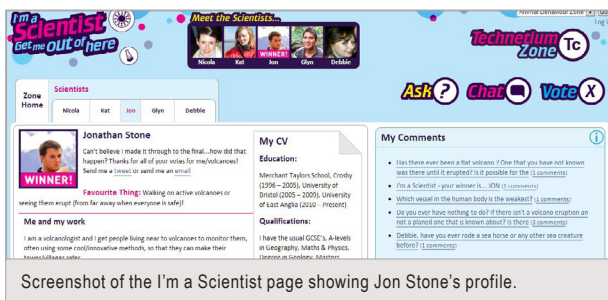




## I'm a Scientist, Get me out of Here!

Jon Stone, a volcanology PhD student at the University of East Anglia in the UK, was keen to talk about his work, to be asked questions on a topic he understood well – to really engage with young people. So when he heard about I'm a Scientist, Get me out of here!, he just had to apply.

The two-week event involves taking part in fast-paced live online chats with classes of school students. Stone explains: "I wanted to have a go at the challenge of talking to young people in that situation. School kids asking questions about what you do – where else do you get that forum? The chance to answer interesting and exciting questions motivated me: they don't ask the usual questions, but unique and wonderful things." He continues: "The format is awesome, especially for this day and age – that's how people are used to interacting with each other. Another thing is the excitement: because it had the competitive element, you want your work to be cooler than the others."



Screenshot of the I'm a Scientist page showing Jon Stone's profile.

Competing against four other scientists for student votes and the chance to win £500 to spend on further science communication, Stone was challenged to answer a huge range of questions (many, of course, related to volcanoes) and other scientists in the competition also faced some interesting geoscience questions:

- [Has there ever been a flat volcano? One that you have not known was there until it erupted?](#)
- [Do any animals live on or in volcanoes?](#)
- [What are the relationships between geysers and volcanoes?](#)
- [Would we be able to make the Earth earthquake-proof?](#)
- [What advice would you give to someone to pursue a career as an Earth scientist?](#)

Stone was enthused by the experience: "It was genuinely the most exciting two weeks of my life. I think I learnt a lot about the necessity: what's sufficient to answer this question which isn't misleading and will make them ask more questions."

He also shared his own discoveries and experiences with students:

- Student: "What's the most interesting thing you've ever discovered?" Stone: "That just because people might not want to evacuate from their home near a volcano, doesn't mean that they are stupid and don't understand science or the dangers they face."
- Student: "What is the most dangerous volcano that you have ever been to?" Stone: "Most dangerous volcano at the moment? Prob-

ably Volcan de Colima in Mexico. Most dangerous volcano for the future? Vesuvius, easily."

And it wasn't all science talk. "[Do you like Justin Bieber?](#)" turned out not to be such a trivial question: "People realising scientists can be normal is really cool and really important. I enjoyed those personal questions as much as I did the questions about science, and I didn't expect to," said Stone.

Both the scientists and the students shared a sense of humour. When asked if he felt qualified to destroy the 'one ring' in the fires of [Mount Doom](#) he answered: "If given the opportunity... yes! And I would do it a lot quicker than Frodo did..."

During the second week of the event a scientist is evicted each day until just one is left to claim the £500 cash prize. Stone couldn't have been happier to win the money, which he wasted no time in spending on a quadcopter with a camera: "Even if I had that kind of money myself, my wife wouldn't let me buy it, it would seem like a frivolous expense. If I was to give advice to other winners I'd say do something with the money that's a bit of a risk. You never have that opportunity to have a new idea and go with it."

The win gave him the chance to take photos of day-old pyroclastic flows following a volcano eruption in Ecuador. The pictures were used by the local authority to make maps and provide information about evacuations, not to mention enabling Stone to talk about his work with local children who crowded around to see the quadcopter. None of this would have been possible without the competition prize money.

Talking about his research in Ecuador was just an extension of geoscience conversations during the event: "I think the kids know a lot more than they think they do – it's about joining the dots and making connections. But they know less about Earth science than they do about classical sciences. That made it all the more fun for me.

"We're so lucky in academia because we have a flexible work schedule. The only reason I think someone wouldn't take part is if they hadn't heard about it, there isn't a comparable experience, it's a genius idea."

*Hannah Sweet*

*Assistant Project Manager of I'm a Scientist, Get me out of here!*

### More information

Scientists can apply to take part in I'm a Scientist, Get me out of here! [online](#). Events run over two weeks in March, June and November, with scientists competing in either general or themed zones. Jon took part in the [Technetium Zone](#) in March 2013. The project is part-funded by the Wellcome Trust, a global charitable foundation dedicated to achieving extraordinary improvements in human and animal health. The event is currently free for schools in the UK who can sign up at <http://imascientist.org.uk/teachers>.