



Evaluation 2007

"I'm still catching my breath one week on from my Fellowship. I've had a fantastic four weeks [on my placement]. The hosts on the science desk couldn't have been better. I was involved in pretty much all aspects of the show: writing news stories, interviewing, podcasting, field reporting, web development (writing information boxes about space probes), blogging, going to press conferences, as well as trawling through old copies of New Scientist and the Engineer. An all round experience really, and I couldn't have hoped for better."

www.the-ba.net/mediafellows

BA Media Fellowships evaluation

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1 Executive summary

1.1 Aims of the scheme

The BA Media Fellowships are intended to create a greater awareness and understanding of the workings of the media among practising scientists, social scientists, clinicians and engineers. Specifically the scheme aims:

- to provide opportunities to learn how the media operates
- to improve communication skills, in particular writing skills
- to increase confidence, and willingness to engage with the media
- to encourage participation in wider public debate on issues involving science

1.2 BA Media Fellowships in 2007

In 2007 **100 scientists applied for a BA Media Fellowship**. This constitutes a **64% increase in applications** compared to 2006. A shortlist of about 20 applicants was compiled and in consultation with the media hosts, the final **10 BA Media Fellows were selected** (see Appendix A). Fellows attended an intensive one-day briefing on 14 June at the Dana Centre in London. All of the Fellows spent between 3 to 7 weeks on placement with their host organisation before attending the BA Festival of Science in York. The Fellowships were as follows:

The Fellows came from a wide range of scientific disciplines and included one professor. The Fellows' reports are available on the BA website: www.the-ba.net/mediafellows

1.3 Key outcomes

The Fellows provided feedback on the scheme at the Debriefing Day and some key outcomes emerged:

It was widely agreed that **the Media Fellowships website provides excellent information** and that the application form, although detailed, encourages applicants to think carefully before applying. Some useful modifications to the application form were suggested. A number of Fellows were greatly encouraged when their host made a comment based on something they had written in their application.

The Briefing Day was said to be invaluable in preparing Fellows for their placement. In particular, the press conference simulation was vital practice for the Festival for those Fellows who did not attend any press conferences during their placement.

Following their Fellowship all the **Fellows rated their personal growth as either very high or high**, with one exception. With the same exception, due to difficulties caused by changes in staff at the host organisation, all the Fellows believe they were either in the high to medium range in terms of productivity during their placement.

On average **each Fellow wrote 9 news articles during their placement**, of which 43% were online. There were no complaints about the logistics of the placements. The BA Festival of Science saw 8 former Fellows attend, as well as 5 of the 2006 Fellows. All the Fellows enjoyed the Festival, with those whose hosts were not covering it contributing 9 articles to the BA website.

At the Debriefing Day, all the Fellows said that their confidence in doing science communication had increased and **88% said that they were more likely to be involved in science communication in the future**. 63% of Fellows said that the scheme had increased their confidence in talking to the media and had also greatly increased their writing skills. So far, **the same proportion of Fellows (63%) have had discussions with colleagues about their experiences and 25% have already given a presentation about their experiences to colleagues**.

2 Evaluation

2.1 Applications

The online application form went live on 1 February 2007 and closed on 18 April (see schedule, Appendix B). As in previous years, visitors to the BA website were encouraged to sign up for email alerts regarding the application process. **260 people signed up and received 5 bulletins leading up to the application closing date.**

Marketing was primarily done using email. Both a PDF flyer and marketing text were widely circulated through relevant networks of scientists. Details were also posted on various websites including those of Nature and Science. A paid print advert was placed in New Scientist on 28 March and 4 April.

2.1.1 Statistics

After weeding out ineligible applicants, **100 scientists applied for a BA Media Fellowship in 2007.** This constitutes a **64% increase in applications** compared to 2006.

53% of applicants had doctorates of whom 13% were professors.

The most common means by which applicants heard of the scheme were either through a marketing email or the BA website (25% each). 18% heard from a friend or colleague and 17% through the BA-lert (a monthly BA e-communication). 7% mentioned seeing an advert in New Scientist magazine.

88% of applicants were White British, 12% were from BME groups. 51% of applicants were female. 15% of applicants were 18-25, 52% 26-35, 22% 36-45, 10% 46-60 and 1% 60+.

2.1.2 Webstats

9157 visits were made to the BA Media Fellowships website during the application process, compared to 8695 in 2006, an increase of 5%. During the application process, on average, there were 824 visits to the webpage per week, compared to 430 per week during the rest of the year (see webstats, Appendix C).

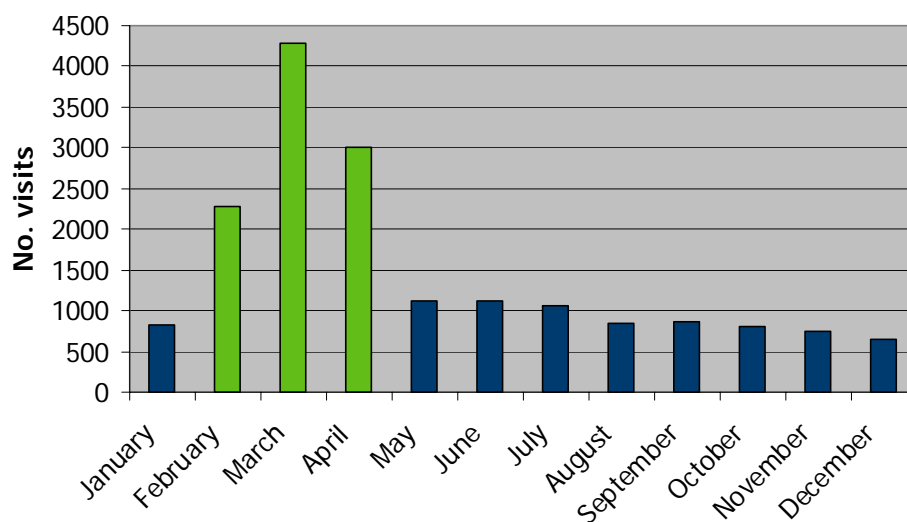


Figure 1
Number of visits to the BA Media Fellows homepage per month in 2007
(months when application process open in green)

2.1.3 Fellows' comments

At the debrief Fellows were asked to comment on the application and selection process.

2.1.3.1 Application and web information

Fellows felt that the **Media Fellowships website is excellent** and provides lots of useful information

"It's very useful having the quotes and reports online."

"The tips on how to fill in the application form are good."

Fellows felt the application form is good as it makes you think about why you are applying for the scheme.

"...the length makes people take it seriously, filters people out..."

A couple of Fellows felt two of the questions in the application form were repetitive and could be combined.

2.1.3.2 Selection process

Some Fellows felt it would be helpful to start the application process earlier in order to finalise the Fellows earlier in the year. This would make it easier for Fellows to plan their academic work around the placement.

"Perhaps an earlier deadline in January, bring everything forwards."

Fellows said it was excellent when hosts were clearly familiar with them from their application form. Fellows also appreciated being able to negotiate the exact timing of their placement with their host. One or two Fellows found their hosts to be hard to contact prior to the placement.

FUTURE PLANS

- Develop case studies of what former Media Fellows have done since their Fellowship for BA website
- Enrich BA website with links to relevant articles on science news reporting
- Work more closely with BA Regional Officers to market the scheme
- Highlight more clearly benefits of scheme when marketing
- Continue to work with Science Media Centre to market scheme
- Involve former Media Fellows in marketing of the scheme where possible, for example, BA Science in Society Officer taking a Fellow to speak at a university seminar (a visit to St. Andrew's is planned for April 2008)
- Re-assess application form questions and ensure no repetition
- Reduce length within which application process is open (cannot be started much earlier than end of Jan)

2.2 Briefing day

The briefing day maintained its familiar shape consisting of three main sections: introductory talks from media hosts on working with the media, a Q&A session with former Media Fellows and a press conference simulation (see agenda, Appendix D). The Fellows felt the day was “very good” and had a “good structure”.

Between them, three hosts more or less covered the whole range of media which the Fellows would experience: Jonathan Amos of BBC News Interactive covered web journalism and new media, Jenny Hogan of Nature, print news, and Nicola Cook of BBC Horizon, TV journalism. As a Fellow commented,

“It was good to have different host perspectives”

Hannah Devlin and Helen O'Brien, both Fellows in 2006 fielded a raft of questions on everything from accommodation and journalists' workings hours to how to prepare for a placement.

As in previous years, **the press conference simulation with Stephen White of the British Physiological Society was the highlight for many Fellows**, even though Stephen throws the Fellows in at the deep end. One Fellow said

“An especially good part was ‘how to write a news article’”

Stephen gives the Fellows a brief introduction to the fictional scientist he will become for the role play. Then with Stephen in character, the Fellows have 10 minutes to ask him questions and 20 minutes to write a 200 word news article. Whilst clearly this is a big ask, the process of having to write something opens the Fellows' eyes to the world they are about to enter. Stephen gets each Fellow to read out their piece and, using their articles as examples, he takes them through the whole news-writing process.

FUTURE PLANS

- Produce biographies of all Fellows to give out at Briefing Day
- BA staff to step out of the room for the session with former Media Fellows to encourage honest opinions and to allow any question without fear!

2.3 Placements & BA Festival of Science

Detailed commentaries on the Fellows' placements can be found in the individual reports.

2.3.1 Logistics

Logistics ran smoothly throughout the placements.

"Booking and claiming travel was easy"

Most Fellows are moving away from home for anything up to 7 weeks, living away from friends and family and working in an unusual environment. Whilst for most individuals this is not a major problem, it was suggested that discussing likely accommodation with Fellows even earlier in the process would ensure realistic expectations and ensure the BA is aware of any potential issues. Passing on the contact details of the previous year's Fellows was greatly appreciated.

2.3.2 Productivity & personal growth

2.3.2.1 Self assessment

At the debrief, Fellows were asked to rate, on a scale of low/medium/high, their placement in terms of both *how productive* they had been (no. of articles written, no. articles published) and in terms of *how they had grown personally* (writing skills, understanding of the media, ability to distil complex information etc). With a couple of exceptions, **nearly all the Fellows rated their personal growth as either very high or high**. In terms of productivity, there was a greater spread amongst the Fellows. Nevertheless, bar one Fellow, the Fellows believe that they were either in the medium to high range in terms of productivity.

The particular Fellow who rated the experience very low compared to the other Fellows, was not well looked after by the host organisation, following two changes in staff. We are in discussion with the host organisation about this situation and a different format for the placement is being explored.

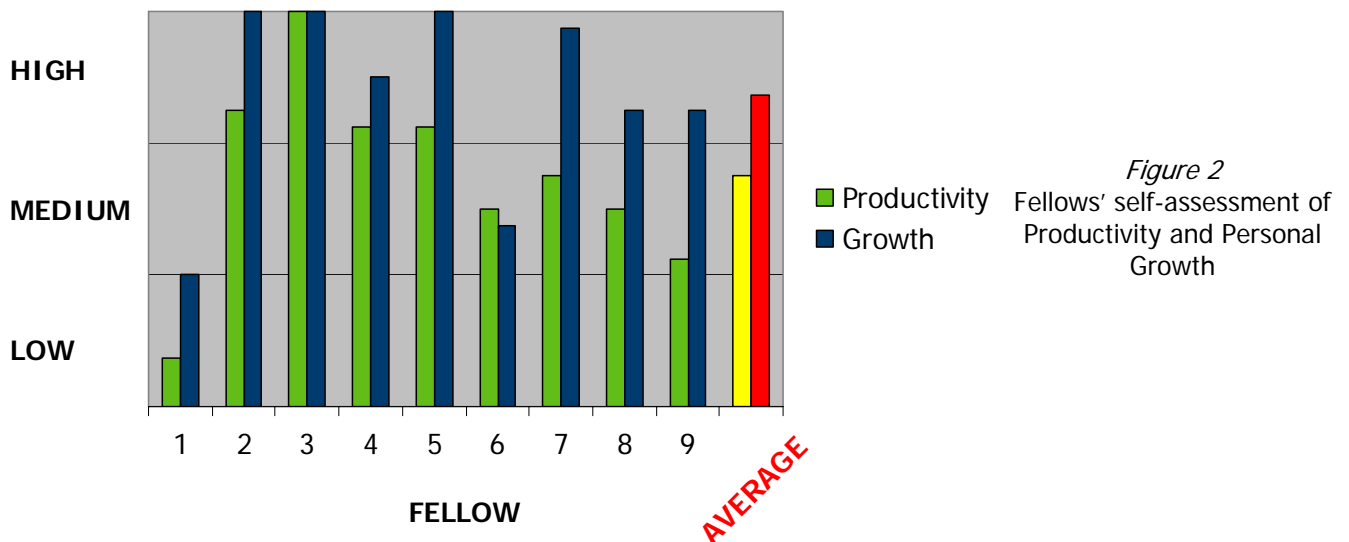


Figure 2
Fellows' self-assessment of
Productivity and Personal
Growth

2.3.2.2 News items produced

The 2007 Fellows on average produced 9 news articles each during their placement. This is consistent with the level of recent years and reflects the increase in articles being placed online (43% in 2007), even if they do not make the print edition of a newspaper, for example. At The Guardian in particular there is increased involvement in non-print media such as blogs and podcasts.

2.3.3 BA Festival of Science

A key part of the Fellowship experience is the BA Festival of Science. Working alongside their placement host, the Fellows attend a constant stream of press conferences and file copy each day. For some Fellows this is quite different to the rest of their placement – some write articles based purely on desk research and telephone interviews. However, most Fellows are extremely busy at the Festival. Once they have got their bearings they soon get to work. 2007's Fellows were no exception.

“We had clear instructions in advance as well as directions to the various locations.”

Nevertheless there are usually a couple of Fellows who are less busy, particularly those placed in television. In one or two previous years this has proved difficult, with some Fellows complaining they had nothing to do. In 2007, no such problems were encountered. A couple of Fellows wrote articles for the BA website working alongside freelance journalist Wendy Barnaby whilst one took the opportunity to get out of the press centre and around the campus visiting Festival sessions. This Fellow managed to unearth stories which the other journalists did not have time to discover. Another Fellow contributed as an expert to BAcKchat, part of the Young People's Programme at the Festival.

2.3.4 Past Media Fellows

Following their unique experience, Fellows return to their day job at the end of the scheme. All share their learning, in some form, with their immediate colleagues, their department and some much more widely. Nevertheless after a number of years, with extra pressures as their career moves forward, it can become harder for Fellows to integrate their work and their media skills. Recognising this, over the last few years, we have offered previous Fellows a small bursary to attend the BA Festival of Science, to refresh their contacts with science journalists and their host and build new networks. We were delighted that in 2007, **8 former Fellows attended the Festival, including 5 of the 2006 cohort**. There did not appear to be sufficient interest in a specific Media Fellows session but this will be revisited for 2008.

2.3.5 Celebration

In a similar vein, with the scheme having now completed 21 years, we are looking to celebrate this milestone in 2008 with a networking event. We plan to invite all previous Fellows and hosts for an evening drinks reception in London. We are presently looking for sponsors for this event and are aiming to raise £5k.

FUTURE PLANS

- Discuss accommodation with Fellows at the Briefing Day
- Consider renting a flat for London Media Fellows to share
- Share all Fellows' placement dates as soon as they are confirmed
- Continue to seek sponsorship for BA Media Fellowships 21st Birthday networking event

2.4 Debriefing day

The debrief followed a similar pattern to the previous year (see agenda, Appendix E). Fellows were given the opportunity to comment on every aspect of the scheme, from the logistics to their individual hosts and placements, as well as a chance to offer their suggestions for the improvement and development of the scheme in future years.

The BA's Science in Society Officer who coordinates the scheme was touched to receive a Marks & Spencer Christmas gift box from the 2007 Fellows as a thank you for his hard work which enabled the scheme to run smoothly throughout the year.

2.4.1 Fellows' future involvement in science communication

Fellows were asked whether they were more or less likely to be involved in science communication in the future as a result of the scheme. One Fellow said there would be no change in his involvement in science communication as he was already heavily involved prior to the Fellowship. All the other Fellows said they were more likely to be involved in science communication in the future. No Fellow said they were less likely to be involved in science communication as a result of the scheme. **Fellows said that their confidence in doing science communication had greatly increased**, that they had new skills, were no longer scared of journalists and could see what might be possible, especially in terms of publicising their own research.

2.4.2 Future employment

Fellows were asked to respond to the comment, "I will leave research science in the next 5 years." This statement resulted in a lot of discussion. One Fellow said he would definitely stay in research science. Of the other Fellows, 57% sat on the fence and said that they were always constantly weighing up their career and they could easily stay in research, or not. All the Fellows felt that the scheme had opened their eyes to new possibilities and had shown them how their skills could be used in a variety of ways.

2.4.3 Impact of the scheme

Fellows were asked to identify impacts of their BA Media Fellowship.

2.4.3.1 On the Fellow

Clearly the deepest level of impact of the scheme is on the Fellows themselves. **63% of the Fellows said that the scheme had increased their confidence in talking to the media and also had improved their writing skills.**

"I developed confidence to seek feedback on my writing more quickly and so move forward more quickly."

25% of Fellows said that they now understand what makes a good and a bad press release, that their communication skills have developed and that they have more confidence and appreciation of how to write for different audiences. 25% also said that they now know what works when approaching the media,

"I can see things through the journalists' eyes and so can evaluate a science issue or story for newsworthiness."

"I know where journalists obtain their stories, leads and ideas and how the information network functions."

and that their presentation skills have improved.

"I will now give much more thought to style, wording and content of presentations and reports."

Other impacts mentioned by Fellows included having an understanding of how a newspaper works, having a better appreciation of their own job, knowing that they can say "No" to media requests and developing good contacts through the placement and the other Fellows.

2.4.3.2 On the Fellow's institution

Whilst a media training workshop has many advantages, one of the strengths of the BA Media Fellowship scheme is that each year, it sends a group of scientists back into the academic world with intimate hands-on

experience of the media. One Fellow commented that he did not realise how significant the hands-on aspect of writing a press release would be – until it took him a whole day to write one!

However, it is crucial that institutions and departments know how to make best use of these returning Fellows. It was therefore very encouraging that 75% of Fellows said that they have returned to their place of work with a set of skills that can be drawn upon. **One Fellow is talking with his head of department about being relieved of some of his administrative responsibilities in order to give him time to act as a liaison between his department and the university press office. Another Fellow is in discussion with her head of department about how to raise the department's media profile.**

63% of Fellows have already had discussions with their colleagues about their experiences.

“Colleagues consult me when they are asked to give interviews and speak to journalists.”

“I have shared insights with colleagues informally.”

38% of Fellows said that they would like to write and contribute to press releases coming out of their institution.

25% of Fellows have given a presentation about their experiences to colleagues.

“I have given a presentation to colleagues from my department on the scheme, how the media works and how to get your research reported.”

“I am going to deliver a workshop on working with the media for our staff development festival.”

Fellows also mentioned having written an article on the Fellowship experience for their company's internal magazine and developing student activities based on their media experiences.

2.4.3.3 On the hosts

Fellows were also asked to describe any impacts they felt that have had on their media host. 38% said that they have passed on ideas to their hosts for stories based on ongoing work at their institution and 38% also said they have written further articles following the end of their placement.

“I have continued to feed the journalists news from academic conferences.”

“I continue to contribute to blogs and podcasts.”

A number of Fellows are still in contact with their host. One Fellow felt she had reminded her host how a scientist's mind works.

FUTURE PLANS

- Add, to BA website, information on benefits to institutions of a BA Media Fellow
- Ask all Fellows in 2008 to give a departmental seminar/talk on their experiences as a Fellow, to ensure learning is shared widely
- Encourage Fellows to join Science Media Centre list
- Hold debrief in November, rather than December, to ensure scheme finished by end of calendar year
- Develop list of key learning points to give to Fellows at end of debrief

2.5 Reports

All the Fellows' reports can be found on the BA website www.the-ba.net/mediafellows. Although Fellows are given free rein in terms of the format of the report, a simple guidelines document was written this year to provide guidance which had previously been provided verbally. All reports include links to examples of the Fellows' work online.

2.6 Hosts

The BA continues to maintain strong links with the various media hosts. Significant time is invested by the BA Science in Society Officer each year in maintaining these relationships.

As ever, a very impressive [short]list. It is always extremely difficult to choose. ...my experience has always been that these BA Media Fellows are just simply too clever by half, and so whoever we choose will do a great job.

Jonathan Amos, BBC News Interactive

[Our Media Fellow] was great and produced a really useful report for us – she seemed to get a lot out of the experience as well. Put us down for another Fellow next year if you feel that the placement has fulfilled the requirements of the scheme!

Nancy Mendoza, Science Media Centre

We were very happy with Mary this year and I don't have any particular suggestions for how to improve the program - it seems to work pretty well.

Jenny Hogan, Nature

A particular success this year was the first placement since 1998 with a tabloid, the Daily Mirror. The Fellow in question spent two weeks at the Daily Mirror as well as two weeks at the Science Media Centre. The Fellow reported having an excellent experience with both organisations. We plan to continue this joint placement in 2008 in its current form.

I think it went very well. Rehana was lively and curious and very keen to see both sides of the problem in communicating science. I think she had a glimpse how different stories are treated and that it's not always the tabloids that sensationalise them! She had loads of goes at writing stories so was able to see some of the problems in translating scientific facts into newspaper copy. She is a lovely person and we got on well and it was a pleasure having her here.

Mike Swain, Daily Mirror

The host organisations for 2008 will be, more or less, the same as for 2007. In 2008, we expect to include the Financial Times, who host a Fellow every other year. Based on the experience of 2007 we will aim to run a modified version of the BBC Horizon placement in 2009.

Two of 2007's Fellows each spent 3 days at the Royal Society working in their press office as part of their placement. This worked extremely well with both Fellows reporting back very favourably.

The scheme continues to arouse interest and we have received inquiries from other media organisations about hosting Fellows. We are investigating a couple of possibilities that look of interest.

FUTURE PLANS

- Strength links with Daily Mirror
- Include Financial Times as a host in 2008
- Develop BBC Horizon placement for 2009, in consultation with BBC Science

2.7 General comments

A selection of interesting quotes from the 2007 Media Fellows precedes the combined reports document. The following are more general comments on the scheme:

"It was a privilege to have had the opportunity to undertake a BA Media Fellowship and I would have no hesitation in recommending the experience to others."

"I am very pleased I took part in the BA Media Fellowship scheme and will remember it all my life. Some of my colleagues were jealous, whereas others thought I was mad!"

"Although I was occasionally thrown in at the deep end, I was never left to drown."

"On the day that I left, I gathered all my stories together to take home and I was amazed not only at the amount that I had written over five weeks, but also the vast improvement from my first stories to my final pieces."

Appendix A – Fellows

Name	Media host	Organisation	Subject area
Simon Belt	BBC Horizon	University of Plymouth	Environmental Organic Chemistry
Tristan Farrow	The Guardian	University of Cambridge	Semiconductor Physics
Kirstin Goldring	The Irish Times	Imperial College London	Neuroscience
Rehana Jawadwala	Daily Mirror & Science Media Centre	University of Central Lancashire	Sports Science
Mary Muers	Nature	University of Oxford	Molecular Haematology
Liz Seward	BBC New Interactive & BBC Radio Science Unit	EADS Astrium	Space Missions Science
Louise Sutton	The Times Higher Education Supplement	Leeds Metropolitan University	Sport and Exercise Nutrition
Leonora Weil	The Times	The Royal Free and University College London Medical School	Medicine
Michael Wilson	The Scotsman	University of Aberdeen	Biology
Claire Witham	BBC Countryfile	Met Office	Atmospheric Dispersion Science

Appendix B – Schedule



Schedule for the 2007 Media Fellowship Scheme

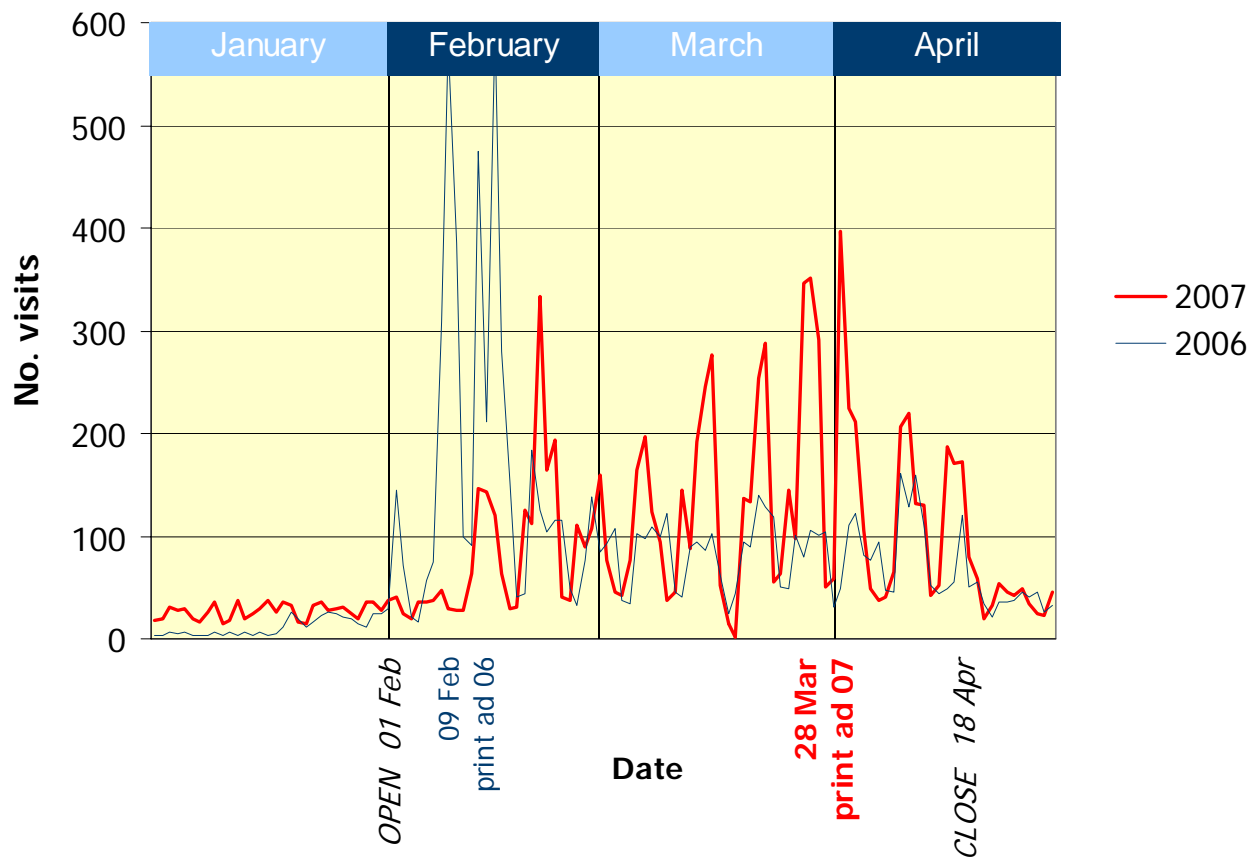
1 Feb	Applications open
18 April	Applications close
23 April	Applications collated and initial shortlist produced
1 May	Shortlist sent to hosts
18 May	Deadline for hosts to decide fellow
25 May	Decisions emailed to applicants
1 June	Fellows' details sent to Royal Society to select two fellows to visit their press department
14 June	Briefing day Placement dates confirmed
18 June	RS decisions finalised
July – October	Placements take place and vary from 3-8 weeks
9-14 September	Fellows attend the BA Festival of Science as a representative of their host
30 November	Fellows are required to submit a report on their placement
13 December	Debrief day

Appendix C – Webstats

Number of visits to the BA Media Fellows webpage in 2007

	Total visits	Average visits	
		per day	per week
Application period	9061	118	824
Non-application period	17637	61	430

Number of visits to the BA Media Fellows webpage in 2007 and 2006, during the application process



Appendix D – Briefing day agenda



Briefing Day Thursday 14 June 2007 10.30 – 17.30

10.30 – 11.00	Registration – tea, coffee, juice
11.00 – 11.10	Introduction to the day and to the BA
11.10 – 12.00	Introduction of 2007 BA Media Fellows Fellows introduce themselves and what they do They describe their experiences of the media so far, expectations of the scheme and what they hope to learn
12.00 – 13.00	The Media - on line, print and broadcast Jonathan Amos, <i>BBC News Interactive</i> , Jenny Hogan, <i>Nature</i> , and Nicola Cook, <i>Horizon</i> , will give a brief introduction to working in 'the media'
13.00 – 14.00	Lunch
14.00 – 15.30	Press conference simulation Stephen White, British Psychological Society, will give advice and feedback on articles that the fellows write following a mock press conference
15.30 – 16.00	Refreshments
16.00 – 17.30	Panel of past BA Media Fellows Hannah Devlin (2006 Media Fellow, <i>The Times</i>) and Helen O'Brien (2006 Media Fellow, <i>The Guardian</i>) talk about their experiences and answer questions about the scheme
17.30	Close Drinks in nearby pub (optional)

Appendix E – Debriefing day agenda



Debrief Meeting

Thursday 13 December 2007, 11.00-15.30
d.study, Dana Centre, Wellcome Wolfson Building

Agenda

- 11.00 Arrival and coffee
- 11.30 Welcome and introduction
- 11.45 Brief overview of the Fellowships
- Each Fellow will be asked to give a brief account of their placement
- 12.20 Productivity/personal growth
- 12:30 **Looking at the logistics**
- application and web information
 - selection process
 - briefing day
 - support and preparation provided by the BA
 - accommodation and travel arrangements
 - BA Festival of Science
 - reimbursement of expenses
 - any other comments
- 13:00 **The hosts and placements**
- suitability of host organisation
 - types of activities
 - support provided
- 13.30 Lunch
- 14.30 Involvement in science communication
- 14:40 **The outcomes**
- fellows
 - own institution
 - hosts
- 15:00 **The future: suggestions and recommendations**
- 15:30 Close

Appendix F - Sponsors

The 2007 BA Media Fellowships were sponsored by:

Biotechnology & Biological Sciences Research Council
<http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk>

Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council
<http://www.epsrc.ac.uk>

Medical Research Council
<http://www.mrc.ac.uk>

Natural Environment Research Council
<http://www.nerc.ac.uk>

The Royal Society
<http://royalsociety.org>

The Wellcome Trust
<http://www.wellcome.ac.uk>