

## **Media Fellow Report 2007**

### **Kirstin Goldring, Tissue Bank Manager, Imperial College London The Irish Times**

I arrived in Dublin with a bag full of painkillers for a bad toothache that started the day before. Really not sure what to expect or how I will cope. I was based at Trinity College, great accommodation, perfectly situated, just lacking pots and pans and a TV.

#### **Day 1 20<sup>th</sup> August 2007**

A 10.45 start, very nice, especially as it is only a 5 min commute from Trinity instead of my usual 1 hour 30min journey. Dick shows me around and gives me a rough explanation of how everything works, who sits where and where everything is. It is all open plan and gets more hectic throughout the day. We attend the morning meeting when all the section heads discuss the stories for the next paper; I also get to see how these develop by attending 2 other meetings later in the day. It is interesting to see how they decide how long the paper will be and where stories go and what may need to be kept for later. By lunch time I have an ID badge so that I can get in and out. It would never be that quick in a University!

Dick then takes me for a lovely lunch and we share a bottle of wine. The wine numbs the pain from my tooth! Dick tells me more about himself and journalism. He also tells me I must also make sure I take time to see Dublin whilst I am here. I really like this already. Over lunch we also discuss possibilities for me to start working on that are in my 'comfort zone', but Dick assures me once I have those under my belt he will encourage me to move out of it. Back in the office I start looking into possible stories, including one on the Tissue Bank where I work, so arrange to interview my boss the following day. I also have a possible contact in Ireland working at Trinity, a friend who used to work in the Department, so I send an email to her. Dick says it would be good if I could have a couple of articles to him by the following Monday.

#### **Day 2 21<sup>st</sup> August 2007**

After a night of interrupted sleep I have emergency dental treatment! I pop in to a conveniently located dentist on campus and they see me, do an x-ray and tell me I have an infection underneath a filling. I end up have the first stage of root canal surgery and then head in to work with a numb mouth just after noon. Dick says I should go home if I am in pain when the anaesthetic starts to wear off, but I feel much happier now and can't feel much. So I ring and interview my boss, another member of the Department and a researcher in Ireland who uses tissue from one of the Tissue Banks in the Department. They are all very helpful and more than willing to provide info.

Dick explains how crucial it is to write up the interview notes straight away, whilst it is fresh in your mind and you have half a chance to read/remember what you have written. I discover this is an extremely good piece of advice.

I get the article on the Tissue Bank to Dick by the end of the day. A successful day, first article complete even with a slightly sore jaw!

Before I leave I ask Dick for another article to start on as I have not yet heard from my contact in Dublin. He hands me a press release on brain tumours, saying this is

right up my alley. I have to agree it is not my field but at least it also involves the brain so I am on familiar territory.

Day 3 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2007

Toothache complete gone and very little pain!

Dick takes me through the article I had written on the Tissue Bank and makes changes. He advises me on certain aspects of 'in house' style which you just have to go along with and then makes appropriate changes. I can see why he makes them and it is not as bad as a thought, some paragraphs do not get changed at all, but I think that is because they are further down the article and people are less likely to read them! He comes up with a more 'hooky' approach to the first paragraph, but other than that the main content stays the same. It may make next week's Thursday Science page (30<sup>th</sup>). The Science page for the current week has already pretty much been sorted, they are completed in advance, by the end of play on Tues if possible, unless something new comes up.

I ring the press office from Imperial College to see if they can arrange a photo of my boss for the Tissue Bank piece. They do not have a photographer so I ring my group and ask them to do some for me. If we can get a good picture it may make the article the central piece for the page.

I ring the Irish Cancer Society to get the contact details of the scientist regarding the tumour story, but she is off today.

I also ring my contact at Trinity but find out the reason she has not replied is as she is on holiday.

I have hit a couple of dead ends for now so ask Dick for something else. I immediately regret this when he hands me a press release on Elliptic Curve Cryptography (ECC), which is certainly out of my comfort zone! I ring the Professor who is involved with ECC, he is lovely but I have caught him on the hop, so arrange to ring him back in 30 mins. When I do he is very patient with me when I explain that I have no idea about ECC, he explains it all for me and offers to send me through some links that may help me. I am very grateful as he does right away and they are really helpful. He also provided me with some useful quotes on the phone, so away I go!

I then have a quick discussion with Dick before he heads home as he will be on the late night stint on the news desk for the rest of the week and over the weekend, then he has a couple of days off with some relatives that are visiting, so I won't see him till the end of the next week. He makes sure I am happy with what I am doing though. He is a little concerned that he only has 2 articles (including the Tissue Bank one) for the Science page next week (he needs 3) and he likes to have them sorted by Tues but won't be around to do 'Science' in that time. So there is a chance that another one of my stories will fill the gap. He also has to prepare 3 stories for the following week and needs 3 in hand for when we are away at the BA Festival of Science in York. I hope I will be able to help him with some of this!

Dick is actually writing an article on a new arm of the Ape lineage, arising from the find of a tooth. His knowledge of palaeontology is amazing and puts me to shame. He knows about such a wide range of things. The article is to go in the main section of the paper the following day.

Day 4 23rd August 2007

I speak to work about the possible photos for the Tissue Bank piece and they send two sets through. To be honest I do not have a clue if they are what Dick wants as I do not have an eye for these things. I send some to Dick by email.

I ring the person from Irish Cancer Society to get further details and find out how to contact the researcher for the brain tumour piece. I get the contact number I need and one for the person at Cancer Research Ireland. I ring them both but get answer machines. However, they both ring back really quickly, the power of a journalist! They are very helpful and the tumour researcher explains things very slowly and really clearly, making it very easy for me. She is very good at explaining things in lay terms.

I write up the interview notes straight away!

I then start on the tumour piece. By the end of the day (9.30pm as I am waiting in the office till my husband arrives from London) I have both articles pretty much finished.

I email the ECC researcher again to check a few details.

I send the ECC article to Dick.

Day 5 24<sup>th</sup> August 2007

I make a few changes to the tumour article in the fresh light of day and I send the tumour article and the finalised ECC article to Dick and breathe a huge sigh of relief.

I ask Dick if he has anything more for me to do.

I answer a few emails from work and then head off to do a spot of sightseeing.

Day 8 27<sup>th</sup> August 2007

Dick has not read the articles yet. He gives me advice on how to use the journalist package to put the articles in the format for the paper. I start having a think about possible stories to discuss with Dick. Dick has given me advice on the photo for the Tissue Bank piece, we need a combination of some of the parts of the shots we already have.

I catch up on some emails, but not much coming in as Bank Holiday at home.

Day 9 28<sup>th</sup> August 2007

Get in just after 9 and start reading through and doing some corrections on a grant that we are submitting.

Dick rings and suggests places to look for my next articles. He also gives me info for the picture desk so I can send them the Tissue Bank photos we have to see what they think. They get back to me and agree with Dick on the format for an appropriate photo so I arrange for work to try and produce it. Work sends through a series of photos. I send a couple to pic desk and I hope they are OK.

I also speak to someone about getting a photo of myself done for the by-line photo for my articles. They suggest doing in the morning when they have someone in to do it. At least gives me time to do my hair!

Dick has edited the ECC piece and I can see it if I go in to the appropriate software to see it in article form. So, I have a play with HERMES and eventually find the article (it is really picky on getting the details of saving right to retrieve an article).

I then spend the rest of the day researching possible future articles and come up with a list to present to Dick tomorrow. I go through the many Irish University

websites and look for their research news and press releases and try out Alpha Galileo (a journalist site for press releases).

Day 10 29<sup>th</sup> August 2007

No-one will be available to take my picture till after lunch, good news as I need time to wake up.

Research more possible story ideas and add to my list, until Dick comes in.

Dick shows me the Science page for tomorrow, with one of the pictures from work of my boss in the middle. It means the story will take centre stage, so I am more than happy. My ECC story is there too and Dick explains the changes he made which were not too major, except the opening line he has come up with which is great again. I have to learn how to do that.

I have my photo taken for my by-line in the studio downstairs! The photographer is on a one year placement from Australia. I have to feel sorry for her, she must have picked the worst summer in history to be over this way!

I go through my many possible stories with Dick and he finds a couple he thinks I should go with, one on a bone grafting project joint between Dublin and Belfast, also one on research into allergies using worms. Dick also has something for me; he says it will be a good one to get me to do a quick turn around. There is a Professor from the States giving a talk on breast cancer, Monday night at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland. He is free during the day for an interview and Dick wants me to do it and then turn the article out by the end of Tues so will be ready for next week's Science page. The pressure is now on!

I start making phone calls to arrange more interviews for my next set of stories!

On the Monday I did my first face to face interview and get the story written up and sent to Dick. I am getting the hang of this.

The rest of the stay continued in a similar vein, although Dick took me out to a couple of evening meetings at the Royal Irish Academy and the Royal Dublin Academy and Dick introduced me to Nobel prize winner Dr James Watson. Dick was really great at making sure everyone knew who I was.

### **The BA Festival of Science**

The Festival itself was a very different experience. Attending press conferences all morning and then having to get the articles in by the end of the day was a little hectic. Dick and I shared out which stories from the press conferences we would write up. We were lucky in that The Irish Times allowed us a page nearly every day, so we knew our hard work would pay off. It was also interesting to see how all the other journalists worked. It was enlightening to find out what makes a story and how journalists develop stories from what they are told in the conferences. The angle they see on some of the research is certainly not what you would take away as a scientist.

Meeting all the other Fellows and finding out about their experiences was also fascinating. We had great fun and everyone got on really well.

## The future

I hope that I will be able to use what I have learned from the experience in the future. I think it is very interesting to see how the media works and what they need from scientists and how best to give them information.

My colleagues were surprised to find out how many stories I got in the paper whilst I was there and the variety of subjects. They were all very interested to hear of my experiences and how you can best provide information to journalists so that they focus on the information you want them to.

## Published work

- *Copying nature is turning chemistry green*, Science Page, Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> October  
<http://www.ireland.com/newspaper/sciencetoday/2007/1011/1192007611846.html>
- *Targeting brain tumours*, Science Page, Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> October  
<http://www.ireland.com/newspaper/sciencetoday/2007/1004/1191223103060.html>
- *Cross-Border bone builders*, Science Page, Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> September  
<http://www.ireland.com/newspaper/sciencetoday/2007/0920/1190060135416.html>
- *Bird and baby vocal learning processes similar – scientist*, Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> September (Festival)  
<http://www.ireland.com/newspaper/ireland/2007/0915/1189076432350.html>
- *Appliance of science makes sporting excellence an achievable objective*, Friday 14<sup>th</sup> September 2007 (Festival)  
<http://www.ireland.com/newspaper/ireland/2007/0914/1189076326647.html>
- *Using X-rays to reveal words within scrolls*, Science page, Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> September 2007 (Festival)  
<http://www.ireland.com/newspaper/sciencetoday/2007/0913/1189076230198.html>
- *Autistic traits linked to raised testosterone levels in womb*, Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> September 2007 (Festival)  
<http://www.ireland.com/newspaper/ireland/2007/0912/1189076163446.html>
- *Chocolate could extend your life*, Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> September 2007 (Festival)  
<http://www.ireland.com/newspaper/ireland/2007/0912/1189076163450.html>
- *Research aims to help track 'scent' of terrorists*, Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> September 2007 (Festival)  
<http://www.ireland.com/newspaper/ireland/2007/0911/1189076092147.html>
- *Biomass crops to change rural landscape*, Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> September 2007 (Festival)  
<http://www.ireland.com/newspaper/ireland/2007/0911/1189076092111.html>

- *Deep sea creatures can't hide from climate change*, Monday 10<sup>th</sup> September 2007 (Festival)  
<http://www.ireland.com/newspaper/ireland/2007/0910/1189076001649.html>
- *Software uses facial features of children to aid diagnosis*, Monday 10<sup>th</sup> September 2007 (Festival)  
<http://www.ireland.com/newspaper/ireland/2007/0910/1189076001645.html>
- *Eye-tracking technique used in autism study*, Monday 10<sup>th</sup> September 2007 (Festival)  
<http://www.ireland.com/newspaper/ireland/2007/0910/1189076001647.html>
- *Switches that turn on cancer identified*, Science page, Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2007  
<http://www.ireland.com/newspaper/sciencetoday/2007/0906/1188603599093.html>
- *Mind over grey matter*, Science page, Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> August 2007  
<http://www.ireland.com/newspaper/sciencetoday/2007/0830/1188336358884.html>
- *Throwing curves to protect the internet*, Science page, Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> August 2007  
<http://www.ireland.com/newspaper/sciencetoday/2007/0830/1188336358888.html>