



## Science Communication Working Lunch

### Working with the Media

#### Thursday 6 and Friday 7 April 2006, Our Dynamic Earth, Edinburgh

The Working Lunch aimed to incorporate presentations and discussion of case studies which outline successful partnerships between science communicators and the media. It will identify strategies for understanding mutual needs, overcoming barriers and developing effective partnerships.

**SPEAKERS:** Sue Bird, Rowett Research Institute (Chris York on Friday)  
Sue Charles, Northbank Communications  
Stuart Brown, Royal Society of Edinburgh

The Working Lunch ran twice over two days and was attended by approximately 30 people each day.

#### Summary

- In order to create a partnership with the media, encourage scientists to speak to journalists early on. Comment on other research, so that when the scientist wants to tell their science story, journalists already know them. It's a two-way relationship – if you help the journalist first, then they'll return the favour.
- Trust was the key word that was raised. Trust the journalist to report correctly and the journalist will trust the scientist to provide a quote.

The Working Lunch began with a brief introduction by the speakers, and then participants were asked to identify why one might want to work with the media.

#### Points included:

- To get a particular message across
- To reach different audiences
- To encourage younger scientists to talk about their work
- To reach wider than just peer group
- To build trust with journalists
- To use the media to recruit members of the public for certain research
- To use the media to disseminate public views for future research

The 3 speakers then each presented for 15 minutes.

- Sue Charles stressed the importance of scientists to be willing to comment on an area of research (not just their specific area). When acting as a viewpoint for someone else's research, the scientist helps to make up a balanced panel. This prepares them for when they want to use the media for their own research. The Science Media Centre was noted as being a good place to look for such scientists.
- Stuart Brown suggested that when providing a story, graphics, images or a good photo is really useful to the journalist. Giving an exclusive to a particular newspaper can be an attractive offer and a good way to get your research in the news. You must build trust with the journalists and set parameters with them, so that everyone has the right expectations. Prepare the scientist well, providing good quotes for the journalist.
- Sue Bird highlighted the Science Snaps case study where scientists gave a one-minute explanation of topical science issues, recorded and broadcast on a commercial radio station. Scientists who were able to communicate clearly were chosen to take part and it proved a great experience for the scientists involved.

In the discussion that followed, participants were asked two specific questions –

1. What makes a good partnership?
2. What are the success criteria for creating a good partnership?

### **What makes a good partnership?**

Trust – between journalists and scientists

Respect – scientists should respect the expertise of the journalist and *vice versa*

Care – be careful what you say to journalists; be clear with your message

Understanding – have a realistic understanding of what each party wants; set clear aims and objectives

Plan a clear message that is relevant to readers/listeners

Build a relationship between the scientists and the media

Expectations – make them reasonable

Support – have support from management

### **What are the success criteria for creating a good partnership?**

Good planning

Read the article – what is actually reported, is it a fair report?

Factual, avoid speculation

Whether new collaborations are formed due to the media

Finding new scientists in the same field, or other interested parties such as consumer groups.

Does it bring in new business?

Becoming a future contact that journalists turn to for comments

If a science story turns into a news story

Ongoing news stories published