

**“If scientists don’t speak up and get across the real messages to the public, then who will? I’m happy to talk to the media to get the real story across.”**

**Media Fellow**

## **What Has Been the Impact of the Media Fellowships Scheme from the British Science Association? 2004 – 2008**

**Evaluation March 2010**

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## Background to the Study

- 10 Media Fellowships from the British Science Association per year, awarded to practising scientists across a range of disciplines.
- Fellows are placed into short-term internships with media organisations of national significance, e.g.

BBC

The Guardian

Nature

The Irish Times

- Media Fellows attend the British Science Festival as media representatives
- Opportunity for 2004-8 cohort to give feedback on the Fellowships Scheme.





## Sponsors

- The Media Fellowships are made possible thanks to support from:





## Aims of the Media Fellowships Scheme

- To provide opportunities to learn how the media operate.
- To improve communication skills, particularly writing.
- To increase confidence and willingness to engage with the media.
- To encourage participation and wider public and science debate.
- To disseminate media skills amongst colleagues.

## Aims of the Evaluation

- To assess how far the Fellowships Scheme has achieved its stated aims.
- To compare the impact of the Scheme over the short and the long term.

Communication skills

Dissemination of science

Media confidence

Public engagement in science debate

- To understand how the scheme has affected key stakeholders

Media Fellows

Participating journalists in host organisations

Fellows' employers.





## Methodology

- **Two focus groups with Media Fellows (2004-8)**
- **Online questionnaire survey with Fellows, employers and media hosts (2004-8)**

### Questionnaire Survey

Sample size	57
Media Fellows	39 (78% of the universe of Media Fellows 2004-8)
Media Hosts	5
Fellows' employers/colleagues	13

Questionnaires were placed online for two weeks in January/February 2010.

Each segment completed a questionnaire designed explicitly for them.

Questionnaire Design • Roger Titford, Further Thought

Online hosting • BCDP

Note • Qualitative participants also contributed to the survey research.

# Qualitative Study

## Two focus groups

### Group 1

- Face to face, 6 participants, 2 hours
- February 8<sup>th</sup> 2010, British Science Association Offices, London
- Moderator • Susie Fisher

### Group 2

- Remote discussion via Webex, 5 participants, 1 ½ hours
- February 11<sup>th</sup> 2010
- Moderator • Susie Fisher
- Telephone discussion with trigger material available to all participants simultaneously, online





## Stimulus Material

- Trigger boards, reflecting key research questions.
- Key statistics from the quantitative study.
- Bubble cartoons
  - Before and after
  - If only ...
- Science in the media scenarios
  - Assisted suicide
  - Science Advisory Committees
  - Dodgy global warming statistics
  - MMR



## Executive Summary

- The Media Fellowships scheme was strikingly successful in achieving its stated aims; learning, communication, confidence, willingness to engage, participation and dissemination with respect to the media.
- The Fellows themselves were very enthusiastic and felt they had achieved personal growth through the scheme. Media hosts and employers were mildly in favour by comparison.
- Whether the Fellows subsequently used their skills to engage with the media, was a matter of personality, ambition and opportunity.
- More or less everyone emerged with better writing skills and the capacity to prepare a good science story. Most felt they could now control a media interview and get their point across.
- Most people had helped their own departments with media issues on their return. Ambitious Fellows had set up media relationships and contributed content to the Public domain.
- However, virtually all Fellows were **ready** to respond to media requests if asked. They regretted the lack of opportunities and wanted the British Science Association to provide a clearing house for media requests.
- Media skills were perceived to fade with lack of practice, but not very much. They had become so deeply embedded through the Fellowship experience that past Fellows were still confident, they would know how to handle a media request.
- They would like support from the Association to help them stay in practice and in contact with journalists. The Association could profitably target less extraverted Fellows to help them extend the range of media events in which they currently participate.



# PART I

## Overview

# What Were the Media Fellows Like?



“It’s not a waste of time, it’s an opportunity.”  
Media Fellow

## GENERALIST BROAD VIEW

“I learnt how to take control and get my point across.”  
Media Fellow

Want to help in a quiet way.  
Constructive  
10%

Self motivated, ambitious.  
Communicators.  
Looking to break out.  
45%

**QUIET  
RESERVED**

**EXTROVERT  
CONFIDENT**

27%  
Head down.  
Wedded to the long haul of scientific research.  
Hesitant.

18%  
Passionate about science and thrilled to be able to talk about it.

“You can get so involved in work, you might forget.”  
Media Fellow

## SPECIALIST NARROW VIEW

“I’m keen to raise awareness and I have a real opportunity to do that.”  
Media Fellow

**IMPLICATION • INDIVIDUAL FELLOWS MAKE USE OF THE MEDIA FELLOWSHIP IN THE LIGHT OF THEIR OWN CHARACTERS, PERSPECTIVES AND AMBITIONS. THERE IS NO SINGLE OUTCOME FROM A MEDIA FELLOWSHIP.**



## Who Did We Meet?

- Amongst others, a psychiatry specialist who had subsequently forged a relationship with the College Press Office and initiated a number of journal articles and radio interviews on her own initiative.

**“I got a lot of my own stuff into Nature as a freelancer.”**

**Media Fellow**

- A physicist who had left lab work in order to run a communications unit for his organisation with the aim of communicating obscure research to the outside world.

**“I’ve taken over from the team leader for communications. I’ve gone into a communication job rather than science.”**

**Media Fellow**

- The modest head of a Biobank who had allowed a film crew from BBC Horizon to film her Resource Centre and had featured in the programme.

**“The brain donation thing. Horizon came in and did some filming. I showed them round and he incorporated it in the programme.”**

**Media Fellow**

- A researcher in Psychiatry who had missed the opportunity to pitch for major funding while she was away on the internship.

**“I was seven weeks away from my primary job. I could have written a big grant application. Now I might be made redundant.”**

**Media Fellow**

**COMMENT • FOUR OUT OF ELEVEN FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS (36%) HAD FORMALLY MOVED FROM SCIENCE TO COMMUNICATIONS.**



## Personal Feelings About the Media Fellowships Were Strongly Positive

- Over the longer term, how do you generally feel about the experience of having been a Media Fellow?

Very positive      92%

Slightly positive      5%

Source: Quantitative Survey. Base • 39 Media Fellows

- Everyone in the focus groups felt they had achieved positive learning which had stayed with them.

**“You’re travelling on your own, measuring things. Now I’m communicating with other people. Before, I didn’t have the mechanisms with the media. It makes a personal difference.”**  
Media Fellow

- Fellows were insistent that this kind of embedded, long term media experience was a different animal from so-called media training.

Media Fellowships = genuine understanding, lifelong learning, change of attitude

Media Training = temporary, untried, not embedded

**“You can’t go on a Media Fellowship and not do it. It’s sink or swim.”**  
Media Fellow

**“It’s not training and it’s not the same as an internship. You get insight.”**  
Media Fellow

**IMPLICATION • THE MEDIA FELLOWSHIPS SCHEME IS UNIQUE AND HIGHLY VALUED BY THE PARTICIPANTS.**



# So For the Fellows, How Does the Media Fellowships Programme Perform Against Its Goals?

## Opportunities to learn how the media operate • Benefits gained

	Year One	After Year One
Increased awareness	95%	54%
New people, new knowledge	92%	46%

## Improving communication skills • Benefits gained

Writing	73%	49%
Interviewing and broadcasting	68%	43%

## Increasing confidence • Benefits gained

Initiating contact	65%	46%
Appearing in the media	65%	57%

Source: Quantitative Survey. Base • 39 Media Fellows

**SUMMARY • EVERYONE LEARNS A LOT, MOST PEOPLE IMPROVE THEIR COMMUNICATION SKILLS AND TWO THIRDS GAIN CONFIDENCE IN DEALING WITH THE MEDIA. AFTER THE FIRST YEAR, ABOUT HALF THE SAMPLE FEEL THEY'VE ACTIVELY RETAINED THESE BENEFITS.**

# Performance Against Goals

## To disseminate media skills amongst colleagues • Benefits gained

Colleagues come to me for help on media issues	41%
Put me forward as spokesperson	27%
Haven't responded or reacted	27%

## Wider participation in Public Science Debate • Benefits gained

Participated in public, event, debate, workshop	58%
Radio/TV appearance	34%
Internet	34%
Writing	32%

Source: Quantitative Survey. Base • 39 Media Fellows

**SUMMARY • JUST UNDER HALF HAVE ACTIVELY HELPED THEIR COLLEAGUES IMPROVE MEDIA RELATIONS IN THEIR ORGANISATIONS. A ROBUST CORE OF SCIENCE COMMUNICATION ENTHUSIASTS KEEP UP THEIR MEDIA PARTICIPATION. A THIRD ARE CONTRIBUTING REGULARLY AND UP TO TWO THIRDS WILL RESPOND TO MEDIA RELATED REQUESTS.**





## Let's Examine the Impact Which the Fellowship Has Had on its Participants

- How might the Fellow feel about being asked to speak to the media, **beforehand?**
  - **“Before, I would have been petrified. I would have said, ‘No’.”**  
**Media Fellow**

No understanding of what it involves. No practice.

Not senior, expert, wise enough. ‘Would anyone want to talk to me?’



Nervous, apprehensive. Petrified, scared.

Worried about losing control. Winging it.

Distrustful of journalists.

**IMPLICATION • MANY ABLE SCIENTISTS DUCK OUT OF SCIENCE COMMUNICATION BECAUSE THEY ARE SCARED OF TALKING TO JOURNALISTS AND HAVE NO FAITH IN THEMSELVES. THIS DISSIPATED ALMOST ENTIRELY AFTER THE FELLOWSHIP EXPERIENCE.**



## After the Fellowship, Participants are Transformed

**“Doing a Media Fellowship makes you more savvy. You can see the benefits of that. You are basically in charge of the interview.”** Media Fellow

**“I can get the real story across.”**

**“Anticipate the question.”**

**“You know what makes a story.”**



**“Better understanding of the processes.”**

**“What do you want to convey?”**

**“I am comfortable doing live interviews now.”**

**“The story will be better.”**

**IMPLICATION • ALL FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS HAD MOVED ON. SOME WERE HUNGRIER THAN OTHERS BUT EVERYONE FELT THEY NOW KNEW WHAT TO DO.**



## **PART II**

**What Did the Media Fellows  
Learn From their Internships?**



## Learning How the Media Operate

- At the outset, many feared and distrusted the media as unscrupulous manipulators, out to twist a story to their own ends.
- By and large, this prejudice was dispelled. Instead, scientists began to see journalists as well-intentioned people with a specific high pressure job to do.

Deadlines to meet.

**“I know if I don’t get back to him by 4pm, he won’t ring again.”**

Media Fellow

Forced to pull together a story at speed.

Dependent on personal interviews and quotes.

Looking for a relevant, newsworthy angle.

**“You’ve got to get the experts’ view and put it all together.”**

Media Fellow

**“You’re not always able to research something thoroughly. You have to get information from other people. And you can’t check the accuracy.”**

Media Fellow

- 50% went into their Fellowships hoping to influence how science was portrayed in the media but only 16% felt they had succeeded.

Mostly, they emerged realising they could not overturn the media juggernaut. Better to learn the rules.

**“We used to say, ‘Why can’t we get the BBC to say exactly this?’ But we’re a little organisation, trying to change a giant. It’s ridiculous. Try and be an influence on them when you know what the rules are.”**

Media Fellow

**“They have their own way of doing it. You have to fit in to their way. You’re not there to give your opinions on what they do.”**

Media Fellow

**IMPLICATION • FELLOWS PICK UP A NEW REALISM ABOUT THE MEDIA WHICH MAKES THEM MORE UNDERSTANDING AND MORE EFFECTIVE.**

## There Is Still a Need to be Watchful

- Journalists will still try and trap a scientist into giving them a juicy quote or a prediction for the future.
    - **“It’s getting them to say something juicy and quoting them anyway.”** Media Fellow
    - **“As a journalist, you want numbers, statistics. It’s the size of a washing machine.”**Media Fellow
  - And this might take scientists beyond their comfort zone. But forewarned is forearmed. A Media Fellow will know how not to be pushed.
    - **“They have to get a spokesperson to get an authoritative view. We want to say, ‘We don’t know yet, more research is required’.”** Media Fellow
    - **“It helps you to know when you shouldn’t say things as well. You have to be aware that what you say can be misinterpreted.”** Media Fellow
  - It is a revelation, however, to discover that journalists are not always masters of their own fate. Individual journalists can prepare a report and find it is hacked about by an editor by the time it is published.
    - **“Scientists hope to re-grow peoples’ brains.’ This was edited and edited and the story altered quite dramatically until it amounted to a misrepresentation.”** Media Fellow
    - **“What surprised me, at the Guardian, is that the journalist doesn’t always have control. The paper forms through the night.”** Media Fellow
    - **“I tried to sell David Shukman early spring. It took two hours to sell to the editor.”**Media Fellow
- IMPLICATION • MEDIA FELLOWS NO LONGER FEEL AT THE MERCY OF JOURNALISTS AND THEY KNOW HOW TO PROTECT THEMSELVES, WHERE NECESSARY.**





## Is the BBC Too Fair?

- Scientists who are expert in a particular area can't bear to see the public grasping at arguments which they know to be unsubstantiated by evidence.

**“It's as though the public think they have a right to know better. People can reply on internet forums and other people can base their opinions on what people are saying. They give non-expert opinion the same weight as a scientist's opinion.”**

**Media Fellow**

- The BBC poses a particular problem for scientists. Reports are set up to give equal airtime to both sides of an argument, even if scientific evidence is against it.

**“It's pretty difficult to know how to present a problem. On the BBC they have to put two views across but they are not equal. They're forcing minority views in the interests of fairness.”**

**Media Fellow**

**COMMENT • SCIENTISTS OPERATING IN THE MEDIA HAVE TO LEARN TO KEEP THEIR TEMPER AND MAKE THEIR OWN POINT CLEARLY.**



## How Did the Media Hosts Feel About the Scientists?

What are the benefits to you of hosting a Media Fellow?

5 media hosts replied to the survey

- |                                      |              |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| Extra pair of hands                  | • 4 out of 5 |
| New/exclusive stories                | • 2 out of 5 |
| Easier to access science experts     | • 2 out of 5 |
| Higher media literacy for scientists | • 2 out of 5 |

But the scheme has made almost no difference to the hosts in the areas of

Scientists initiating contact about a story

Scientists being accessible

What have been the difficulties raised by the Media Fellowships Programme?

- |   |              |
|---|--------------|
| Risking unusable material from the scientists | • 3 out of 5 |
| Time consuming                                | • 3 out of 5 |

For the Fellows, there was no doubt about who called the shots.

**“We naïvely thought we could change the way journalism is done, change the rules of the game. But telling them they’ve got it wrong is not appreciated. They work to such tight deadlines. You have to understand.”**

**Media Fellow**

**IMPLICATION • ON BALANCE, THE MEDIA HOSTS SEEM TO GIVE A BIT MORE THAN THEY GET BACK. THEY ARE GENEROUS BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE IN THE CAUSE OF MEDIA LITERACY FOR SCIENTISTS.**



# There Were Great Leaps in Improving Communication Skills

In the main, these fell into the following categories

## Behind the scenes

- Finding the angle.
- Interviewing and pulling a story together.
- Taking an overview.
- Crisp writing.

## In the public eye

- Presenting.
- Preparing for interviews and being interviewed as a science expert.
- Pitching ideas.

**“Scientists are not clued up about writing without jargon so people understand it.”**

**Media Fellow**

**“It was valuable for grant applications. And my teaching. Now, it’s more exciting, enticing. Clinical reports are easier to write that way.”**

**Media Fellow**

**COMMENT • ALL THE FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS WERE THRILLED WITH THEIR NEW COMMUNICATION SKILLS. THEY SPOKE AS THOUGH IT AMOUNTED TO GENUINE PERSONAL GROWTH.**



# Finding the Angle

- This is a very important skill indeed and is, by and large, quite new to scientists. Why? Because they are immersed in their work for years at a time and have come to take as read, its foundation and significance.



This is my research. I will lay it out for you in the way scientists approach their work.

**“Science is very incremental.”**

Media Fellow



I need something newsworthy with relevance to the issues of the day and implications for the future.

**“Something with wow appeal, wacky, a breakthrough.”**

Media Fellow

**“The essence of Science is the detail but you have to link it to the bigger picture. You need a broad knowledge about lots of different things.”**

Media Fellow

**“If you’re a scientist, you’re thinking about my paper which I’ve given in. If you’re a journalist, you want to know about something which has come out. What’s newsworthy is something new.”**

Media Fellow

- Once acquired, this skill seems not to fade.

**“The skill is giving them a hook. I want to do a good job and I’ll know what’s needed, what is newsworthy.”**

Media Fellow

**IMPLICATION • THE ABILITY TO SPOT THE ANGLE, I.E. THE RELEVANCE OF SCIENTIFIC FINDINGS TO SOCIETY, IS THE BIG COMMUNICATION BREAKTHROUGH, RESULTING FROM THE MEDIA FELLOWSHIPS PROGRAMME.**



## Interviewing and Pulling a Story Together

- Journalists work to deadlines. Scientists' normal research avenues; experiment, internet, journals/articles/papers, are therefore not open to journalists because they are too slow.

**“There’s no time in the media.”** Media Fellow
  - They learn, instead, to interview experts and pull the story together on the basis of what other people say, in a matter of hours.

**“It forces you to go and talk to people. You don’t sit and think and look at a website, you phone the number up and ask. It’s more efficient.”** Media Fellow
  - They learn more forensic interviewing techniques, aware that many people will waffle around the point, not grasp the nettle, if allowed to get away with it.

**“You have to learn how to interview properly. I had loads of lovely quotes, but people are expert at not answering your questions. It sounds quite nice but means nothing!”** Media Fellow
  - They get used to working to a deadline.

**“You’d want to respond immediately. It’s got to still have the hook. If I had a day to pull it together ...”** Media Fellow

**“At the Irish Times, we had a dedicated science page every Thursday. I had a set bit to fill and a by-line.”** Media Fellow
- But it takes quite a lot of adrenaline and support from the deadline driven culture around them.
- “You absolutely understand deadlines and then you go back in the lab and you don’t see another person for 3 months. It’s not such a good understanding.”** Media Fellow
- IMPLICATION • MEDIA FELLOWS ARE VERY PROUD OF BEING ABLE TO DO THIS BUT, AS THE PRESSURE DROPS, THESE SKILLS, WHILE STILL UNDERSTOOD, BECOME HARDER TO PUT INTO PRACTICE.**



## Taking An Overview

- Scientists are trained to be accurate about the detail and not to commit themselves to an opinion, unless the evidence is overwhelming.

**“How long before this leads to a cure? You can’t put a timeline on these things. We always say 10-15 years. That’s far enough in the future to be ok.”**  
Media Fellow
  - On this basis, they begin by distrusting the media. They worry that the media will **distort** the science. On the whole, the scientists change their views. They leave with more respect for media output and motives.

**“I was distrustful of the media. I thought they were manipulative. I now realise they are manipulative but they are trying to do a job. An honest job. I am less distrustful now.”**  
Media Fellow
  - Scientists discover that it **is** possible to take an overview which is essentially in the right place, without all the detailed evidence.

**“In producing an article, depth doesn’t matter. You have to get out the key facts of the story. I was over-researching.”**  
Media Fellow
  - And some see that the dissemination of ideas has advantages in itself.

**“There’s a positive side. More people know about it and it feeds back to the living researcher. The detail might not be right but overall that’s not such a bad thing.”**  
Media Fellow
- IMPLICATION • TAKING AN OVERVIEW IS A SKILL WHICH THE MEDIA FELLOWS RETAIN, EVEN THOUGH BACK IN THE LAB THEY MAY NOT USE IT SO OFTEN. CALLED ON TO PRESENT TO MEDIA AND PUBLIC, THEY WILL KNOW HOW TO STATE THE ESSENCE OF THE STORY.**



## Crisp Writing

- This is a skill all the Media Fellows acquire. And they are proud of it. It gives them a real advantage over their more inarticulate colleagues.

**“There are fewer scientists writing on research clearly.”**

**Media Fellow**

- They key skills are

Shorter sentences

Jargon free

Vivid

Active not passive

Capturing the point upfront

**“Writing must be in short sentences with the impact at the top.”**

**Media Fellow**

**“It was valuable for grant applications, you use short sentences. All this gets into grant applications.”**

**Media Fellow**

**“I now do it in the active, quirky. It takes practice.”**

**Media Fellow**

- Related to the syntax issue is the whole idea of keeping the story concise and snappy.

**“I make a concise story out of something. Three or four sentences, not a page. I do this so frequently. I look at a draft and it’s very technical. I’m not picking up the snappy facts that are interesting.”**

**Media Fellow**

**“A concise manner and putting across the key messages immediately. It’s not quite the same pressure but it’s good for internal communications.”**

**Media Fellow**

**IMPLICATION • DISCIPLINED WRITING IS A BIG BENEFIT FOR THE MEDIA FELLOWS BUT IT DOES TAKE ENERGY AND PRACTICE BEFORE IT BECOMES SECOND NATURE. SOME FELLOWS FALL BACK.**



# Not Everyone Keeps Their Writing Skills Up To Standard

What benefits have you gained from being a Media Fellow?

Increased writing skills in Year One	73%
After Year One	49%

Source: Quantitative Survey. Base • 39 Media Fellows

- Once they are back in the lab and the pressure is off, some of the Media Fellows revert to their old ways. It's easier.
    - **“Science writing is different to popular writing. Your public writing slips back. ‘An experiment was performed’ ...”** Media Fellow
    - **“It might be this, but on the other hand that ...”** Media Fellow
    - **“You slip back into the mentality, getting all the details right. Your day to day job.”** Media Fellow
  - Fellows who **have** kept their writing skills are disenchanted with the grants system. Funding bodies demand a ‘lay statement’. But the quality of the ‘lay statement’ is not formally included in the criteria on which the grant is awarded. So what’s the real benefit?
    - **“It’s difficult to measure. You might have got the grant without it!”** Media Fellow
    - **“There’s no difference at Cancer UK. It’s not that the science won’t get through because it’s so badly written.”** Media Fellow
    - **“They won’t physically give you the money just because it’s written in a lay way.”** Media Fellow
    - **“Good science, badly written, do they still get the funding? Does it make a difference to the outcome?”** Media Fellow
- QUESTION • IS THERE ENOUGH EXTERNAL REINFORCEMENT FOR SCIENTISTS TO MAINTAIN GOOD WRITING HABITS?**



## Media Fellows Can Cope Much Better with Being in the Public Eye

- Better at presenting in public.  
“I was invited to talk to the **Alzheimer’s Conference**. I built it around a news story, a living case study. It was to do with the clinical trials for a new drug.”  
Media Fellow
- Better at pitching ideas. Catching the attention and imagination of another person in 15 seconds or less!  
“Pitching ideas, you’ve got 15 seconds to catch the essence.” Media Fellow  
“For any science story, it’s why should we care? That stayed with me.”  
Media Fellow  
“**Would YOU be prepared to listen to what you just said?**” Media Fellow
- Better at preparing to be interviewed themselves. Able to take control, use the opportunity to say what they want to say.  
Having an angle.  
Mugging up a few key statistics.  
Knowing what the journalist needs and the key points you want to make.  
“It gave me skills in how to take control and move things on.” Media Fellow  
“You go in with your statistics and bullet points in your head, anticipating what they’re going to say.” Media Fellow  
“You’d know where they [journalists] were coming from. They’re quite formulaic.” Media Fellow

**IMPLICATION • MOST MEDIA FELLOWS ARE NOW ABLE TO PLAN FOR AN INTERVIEW OR PRESENTATION BY THINKING THROUGH FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF AUDIENCE AND INTERVIEWER.**



# Equipping the Fellows with Skills Gave Them Confidence to Engage with the Media

What were the benefits of being a media fellow?

Increased confidence in Year One, (appearing in print/broadcast/web)	65%
After Year One	57%

Source: Quantitative Survey. Base • 39 Media Fellows

- There was a gradual realisation, on the part of the scientists, of the skills they already had which could be mobilised.

Analytical brains

Capacity to weigh up the argument

**“It astounded me, the skills and training I had in physical data research were just what was needed in a news organisation. I’m quite proud of myself.”**

Media Fellow

**“It’s recognising the story in your own material.”**

Media Fellow

- Once they had met and worked with journalists, they could attach a human face to them. No longer so scary.

**“It humanises journalists, they’re no longer scary. You can talk to them.”**

Media Fellow

**“You’re shaking hands and saying hello to a real person.”**

Media Fellow

- Knowing that you now knew what was expected and what to do, gave everyone more confidence. Confidence allowed the Fellows a measure of control which built greater confidence.

**“You can take control and influence, although there are risks attached.”**

Media Fellow

**IMPLICATION • CONFIDENCE BUILDS CONFIDENCE AND PEOPLE FEEL GOOD ABOUT THEMSELVES. FOR THE MAJORITY WHOSE CONFIDENCE INCREASES, THIS BENEFIT DOES NOT FADE WITH TIME.**

## Being Thrown In At The Deep End

**“We had no choice. You had to have confidence or die. It’s the choice you make.”**

**Media Fellow**

- Media Fellows are thrown in at the deep end and it is rising to the challenge which gives them confidence. It is essential that the media hosts put their trust in the Fellows and depend on them to do a proper job.

**“It’s the school of hard knocks.”**

**Media Fellow**

**“I was shocked when I started at the BBC and they said, ‘Have you got any stories?’”**

**Media Fellow**

**“Some placements are better at giving you confidence than others. They treat you as a proper employee and put their trust in you.”**

**Media Fellow**

- Some media hosts don’t put their Fellows to the test and the outcomes are more hesitant.

**“I was in weekly TV and unlike daily news, you’re not thrown in at the deep end all the time. Perhaps I don’t have so much confidence.”**

**Media Fellow**

**“Somebody at the Guardian was just chucked in with their interns. There are no opportunities.”**

**Media Fellow**

- The Fellows admire confidence but they are also aware that some of them are less confident types, no matter what.

**“I’m not the best person to do live interviews. I’m good for liaising.”**

**Media Fellow**

**“Personal confidence matters hugely or you just get pushed aside in the media.”**

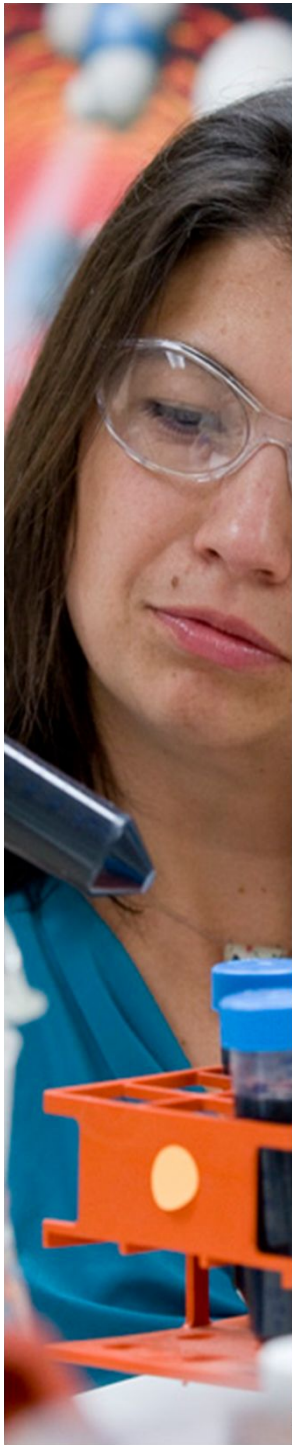
**Media Fellow**

**“You get there by being cheeky and confident. You’re shit scared of course.”**

**Media Fellow**

**IMPLICATION • INCREASED CONFIDENCE IS EARNED BY OVERCOMING OBSTACLES AND ACHIEVING YOUR GOAL. MEDIA HOSTS MUST BE READY TO PROVIDE THIS EXPERIENCE.**





# What Have Been the Frustrations with the Media Fellowships Scheme

## Main problems

	Year One	After Year One
Demands on my time	38%	43%
Not enough media opportunities	32%	43%
Skills are lost	5%	32%

## Not a problem

Incompatible with scientific rigour	6%	6%
Colleagues are not supportive	14%	16%

Source: Quantitative Survey. Base • 39 Media Fellows

Several people wished they had had longer internships.

**“Mine was too short. Three weeks plus one week annual”**

**Media Fellow**

Many wished they had created time free and clear of the lab and the demands of their science/organisational duties. People who were split were distracted and overworked.

**“I would have been better to have dropped work. You’re not concentrating on the Fellowship if you’ve got a conference to go to or a paper to write.”**

**Media Fellow**

**IMPLICATION • THE MEDIA EXPERIENCES WERE SO POSITIVE THAT THE FELLOWS’ FRUSTRATIONS LAY IN NOT BEING ABLE TO GIVE ENOUGH TIME TO IT AND NOT BEING ABLE TO PUT THE EXPERIENCE TO MAXIMUM USE ONCE IT WAS OVER.**



# How Did the Departments Feel About their Media Fellows?

How supportive was your employer?

Very supportive	53%
Quite supportive	29%
Neither	13%

Source: Quantitative Survey. Base • 39 Media Fellows

From the employer’s perspective (15 respondents), what difficulties did it create in the department?

None	69%
Demands on Fellow’s time	15%
Demands on colleagues’ time	15%

Source: Quantitative Survey. Base • 13 Employers

But there were undercurrents

- Envy
- Cynicism, scepticism about the media
- Resentment of Fellows getting time off/slacking off

**“Why engage with the media, they just misquote you anyway. You’re a media tart.”**

Media Fellow

**“We do the science and if they don’t want to read our papers, we don’t want anything to do with them.”**

Media Fellow

**“I was not there for 4 weeks, so I got a bit of criticism. Waste of time.”**

Media Fellow

**“Some scientists are always in the media and it’s not taken seriously. I suppose there’s envy.”**

Media Fellow

**IMPLICATION • MEDIA FELLOWSHIPS ARE FORMALLY SUPPORTED BUT MAY BE INFORMALLY UNDERMINED. IT IS IMPORTANT FOR THE FELLOWS TO GIVE SOMETHING TANGIBLE BACK TO THEIR COLLEAGUES ON RETURNING FROM TIME OUT.**



## **PART III**

**What Did the Media Fellows Do  
With Their New Skills?**

# Some Relevant Considerations

- There are different personality types amongst the Media Fellows. The ambitious extroverts will take their opportunities and run with them. The 'heads down' introverts will do less and their skills will become a bit rusty.

**“Your real job kicks in really quickly and then a month or two has gone by.”**

**Media Fellow**

versus

**“I pitched an idea for a Radio 4 programme about our work.”**

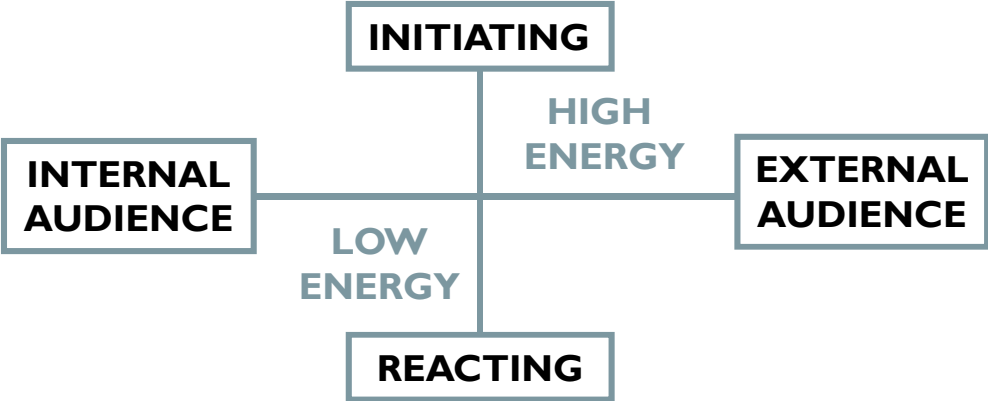
**Media Fellow**

- That said, all focus group participants had been involved with media issues after they had returned to their 'real' jobs.

**“You’ve got to give something back.”**

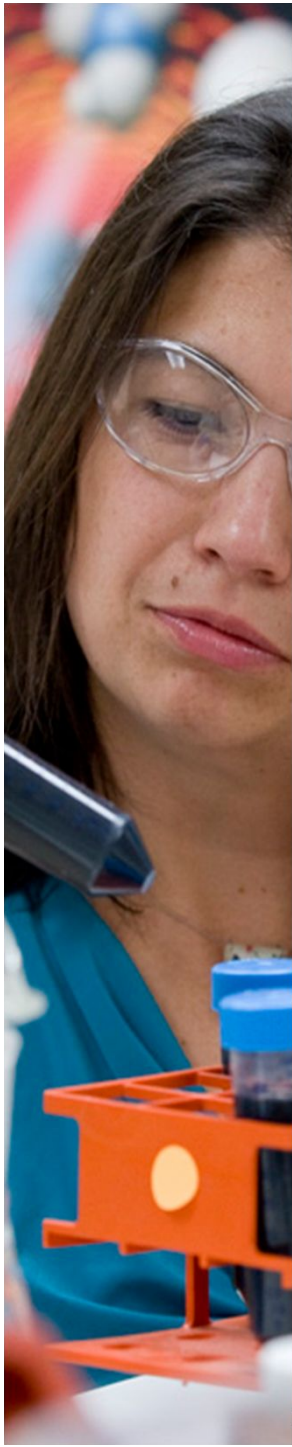
**Media Fellow**

- Media activity can be segmented according to the map below.



**IMPLICATION • ALL MEDIA FELLOWS HAVE IMPROVED SKILLS. WITH POST-FELLOWSHIP SUPPORT, IT IS LIKELY THE 'HEADS DOWN' FELLOWS WILL WANT TO DO MORE.**





## How Much Media Activity Has Ensued?

### What media activity have you participated in since being a Media Fellow?

None at all	5%
Public event/debate/workshop	58%
Radio/TV appearance	34%
Internet contribution	34%
Freelance science writing	29%
Other	32%

Source: Quantitative Survey. Base • 38 Media Fellows

### What has been the reaction of your colleagues/employer?

Came for advice and help on media issues	41%
Put me forward as spokesperson	27%

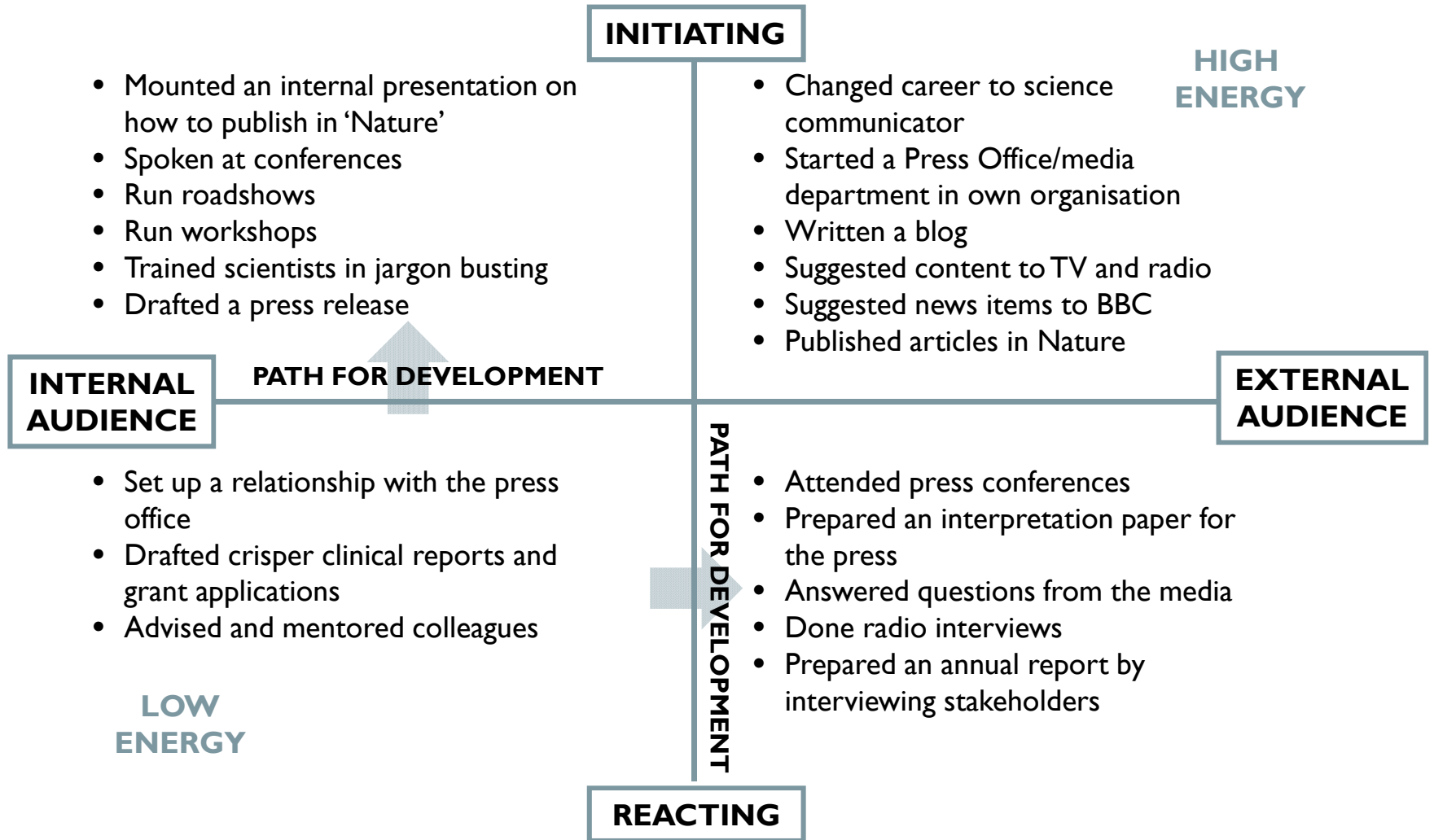
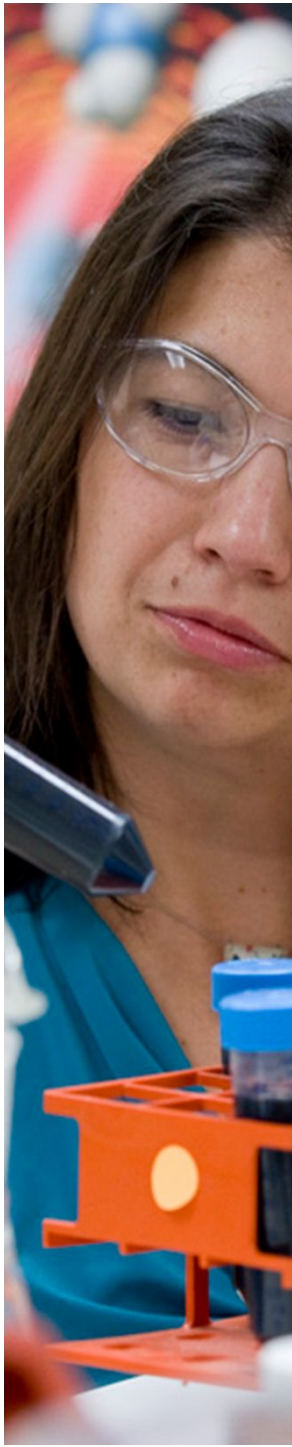
Source: Quantitative Survey. Base • 37 Media Fellows

### And from the employer's side, what has been the most important benefit?

Made us more aware of the role of the media	53%
Gave us a better understanding of what we do in relation to the public	36%

Source: Quantitative Survey. Base • 11 employers

# What Kinds of Media Projects Have Our Fellows Taken On?



**IMPLICATION** • **THIS IS A BUSY, ACTIVE MAP OF MEDIA RELATED ACHIEVEMENT. IT SHOWS PATHS FOR DEVELOPMENT TO EXTEND THE REACH OF THE 'LOW ENERGY' SECTOR.**



## In Summary, What Were the Impacts on Fellows' 'Subsequent Behaviour'?

Listed below are the behaviours which, between them, the Media Fellows undertook which they probably would not have attempted before.

**“I would never have put myself forward for writing press releases. It would have seemed like compromising my principles.”** Media Fellow

### HIGH MEDIA INVOLVEMENT



- Becoming a professional media communicator yourself; changing job.
- Initiating media relationships and suggesting content.
- Putting yourself up to the media as a science expert for interview and comment.
- Responding to the media, when asked.
- Disseminating media learning to colleagues and professional audiences.
- Enhancing the internal affairs of the Fellow's own organisation.

**“You CAN talk to the media more. I was happy and it was a relief for them.”**

Media Fellow



# How Has Their Subsequent Experience Impacted on the Fellows Themselves?

## Becoming a professional media communicator

**“I’m proud of creating a media programme from scratch. It’s more outward. I still find my research exciting but I’m interested in communications.”**

**Media Fellow**

**“About a year after, I went into the science communication job. The Fellowship flipped me. It was the trigger.”**

**Media Fellow**

**“As a scientist, you’re working on your own a lot of the time.”**

**Media Fellow**

- These scientists had been put in touch with other people in a world full of adrenaline and current events. It made the science seem protracted, isolated and lonely. Communications was a life saver for them.

## Initiating media relationships and suggesting content

**“I got in touch with my press officer at Kings. What are the different questions?”**

**Media Fellow**

**“When I find research I am really interested in, I pitch it to Nature.”**

**Media Fellow**

**“The opportunity to have your science story reported lies with you as much as the news organisation. You have to be certain of what you want and be very clear.”**

**Media Fellow**

**“I tried to sell David Shukman early spring.”**

**Media Fellow**

- These scientists were brave and clued up. They were confident that they could recognise a story when they saw one. They were confident that it would be an angle which the journalist could use. And they used their contacts. They were career building and proud of it.



## Impact on the Fellows

### Putting yourself up to the media as a science expert

**“You had to create opportunities.”**

**Media Fellow**

**“I got in with the public engagement coordinator. I fed him with information for the public and he recommended me to the Wellcome Trust.”**

**Media Fellow**

**“I’ve given talks to the public on my research. I give quotes to journalists all the time.”**

**Media Fellow**

**I’ve done radio work and TV. I focus around talking about the work of our labs. A conversation about how science works.”**

**Media Fellow**

- These scientists were talking about what they knew and enjoying their public platform. They liked the attention and sense of importance attached, the chance to explain.

### Responding to the media when asked

**“I’ve sent press releases to the Press Office.”**

**Media Fellow**

**“The Press Office asked me to interpret a paper for someone from the press and then I ran a workshop. It was a double act with the Press Office.”**

**Media Fellow**

**“They’ve rung me when they’ve wanted to film a brain.”**

**Media Fellow**

**“I haven’t had much opportunity to do it. I deal with questions from the media, rather than going to the media. It’s nerve racking.”**

**Media Fellow**

- These scientists were more hesitant about their abilities. But were, in fact, well able to handle media questions. They depended on other people to identify occasions when they were needed to talk to the press.



## Impact on the Fellows

### Disseminating media learning to colleagues

**“When I came back I did an internal conference and the Director called me in and said, ‘That’s really interesting’.”** Media Fellow

**“You can advise and mentor other scientists in the organisation.”** Media Fellow

**“I do an annual report for a professional organisation. And I do it by interviewing and networking people in the field.”** Media Fellow

**“Some people have said, ‘I’ve got this press release, can you help me with it?’”** Media Fellow

- These scientists were recognised as having a valuable skill and they actively enjoyed being able to help their colleagues.

### Enhancing their own organisation

**“I’m more aware of sentence construction. Whoever the reader is, it’s easier to understand.”** Media Fellow

**“How can we present this in a way that’s appealing? Before, we would have said, ‘That’s the start and finish of it.’”** Media Fellow

**“I’m not pushed around by the media. And my Institute is really pleased from the point of view of public awareness.”** Media Fellow

**“Putting lay statements in our grant applications. Things are changing.”**

Media Fellow

- These scientists experienced a lift in their own confidence and professionalism. It was obvious that they were able to do things better.



## Some Scenarios Give Us Insight Into the Fellows' Perceived Boundaries I

**Scenario One** • Terry Pratchett calls for a tribunal for assisted suicide.

**Scientist's role** • Expert Scientist in public debate.

**Overall response** • **Fright**

- Too controversial for me.
- Not my area of expertise, scientists should stick to what they know.
- Needs someone senior.
- Too political.

**"It's hard to think of the science for that. You'd need an ethics person."**

**Media Fellow**

**"Your feet are in what you know. This is political."**

**Media Fellow**

**"I think the big controversial topics probably are still for senior management, not lowly scientists."**

**Media Fellow**

**"Unless they were involved in issues to do with dementia, they wouldn't go anywhere near it."**

**Media Fellow**

- Only one or two would attempt to frame an answer from a scientific standpoint.

**"If you are on the Question Time panel, it would be because you were well regarded. It would be your personality, not your expertise. A wise person with scientific training."**

**Media Fellow**

**"How would you go about it? The mechanics? You'd look at both sides."**

**Media Fellow**

**IMPLICATION** • **MEDIA FELLOWS NEED HELP TO DEAL WITH CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECTS AND PRACTICE IN BRINGING SCIENCE BASED ARGUMENTS TO THE PARTY.**

## Scenarios and Boundaries II

**Scenario Two** • Home Secretary dismisses the Chair of his advisory committee on drugs and ignores his advice

**Scientist's role** • Write a newspaper piece from your department's point of view.

**Overall response** • **Careful, these are the funders**

- Already involved with these kinds of policy issues.
- Comfortable with articulating a statement of principle.
- Don't want to engage on one side or the other.
- Anxious about compromising future funding.
- Need senior support.

**"It can be very tricky when you're collaborating with other Research Council funders. You're dependent and independent of Government."** Media Fellow

**"I helped write down what messages we wanted to inform policy. We don't influence."** Media Fellow

**"Yeah, I'd have given it a stab, with the appropriate guidance from the Heads of Department and the press office."** Media Fellow

**IMPLICATION** • **FELLOWS ARE CONFIDENT IN THEIR ABILITY TO ARTICULATE POLICY BUT WANT TO STAY WELL OUT OF POLITICAL AND FUNDING ISSUES.**



## Scenarios and Boundaries III

**Scenario Three** • Statistics on melting glaciers and the Himalayas undermine the credibility of global warming.

**Scientist's role** • Explain the science on BBC TV news.

**Overall response** • **Anxiety. It's too big time. I might fluff it.**

- May not be allowed to give a balanced view.
- Might be overridden by the Producer and the science distorted.
- Outside my area. Couldn't assess the credibility.
- Ok on a radio show but not 'News at 10'.

**"I'd be concerned because normally they want you to be on one side or the other and we want to offer a balanced view."**

**Media Fellow**

**"I would definitely not do a credibility issue. It's outside my area of knowledge. I would decline that opportunity."**

**Media Fellow**

**"On a radio show, I could talk about the credibility of science ok."**

**Media Fellow**

**"Why is this in the news? Because it's a controversy. My role is to present a balanced picture and take out the hype."**

**Media Fellow**

**IMPLICATION** • **MEDIA FELLOWS NEED HELP IN ASSESSING WHETHER AND WHEN TO TAKE SIDES ON A SOCIALLY CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE, WHERE THE SCIENCE HAS SOMETHING DEFINITE TO SAY.**



## Scenarios and Boundaries IV

**Scenario Four** • The Lancet issues a retraction of Dr. Andrew Wakefield's paper linking MMR and Autism.

**Scientist's role** • Science expert on radio phone in.

**Overall response** • **Ready to put the record straight**

- It was the media's fault to begin with.
- The science is clear.
- The evidence all points one way.
- The credibility of the Lancet needs to be rescued.

**"The editors thought it was a fantastic news story, whereas the scientists would say, 'Let's stop running it.'**

Media Fellow

**"At what stage should it be reported? The BBC is guilty."**

Media Fellow

**"It's the credibility of 'The Lancet'. It's pretty shocking in the journal."**

Media Fellow

**"You have to distinguish between theory and fact and the weight of evidence which falls one way or another. This is about risk and the evidence is shifting to a different outcome."**

Media Fellow

**IMPLICATION** • **MEDIA FELLOWS ARE READY TO EXPLAIN SOME OF THE SCIENTIFIC FUNDAMENTALS LIKE RISK AND EVIDENCE BUT THEY ARE STARTING FROM SCRATCH. DO THEY NEED HELP TO THINK THROUGH AND EXPRESS THESE?**





# **PART IV**

## **The Way Ahead**



# Recommendations for Developing the Media Fellowships Programme

## What makes Media Fellowships unique and valuable?

**“It’s an immersive experience. You spend more than a day. You settle into the rhythm of how that world works. Three hours training is not real, it’s very shallow. It’s not the real experience.**

**Each year, 10 or 12 people have a deeper understanding of the passions and opportunities in the media. We’re catalysts, nuclei of experience, you don’t get it any other way.”**

**Media Fellow**

- The principle of immersion, doing a real job in the media, must not be compromised.
- Media Fellows are highly motivated to ‘give something back’ and put their new skills to good use.

**“If they’d come to us more often, I’d do quite a lot for them. They’ve given me a great opportunity.”**

**Media Fellow**

- The question is how to support the Media Fellows once their internships are over, so that they get more opportunities to use the new skills which they undoubtedly have.



## There are a Number of Roles for the British Science Association to Consider

- Making the initial arguments to scientists in favour of media skills and communication with the media.
- Setting up the parameters of the Programme itself

Briefing media hosts

Briefing employers

- Mentoring the Fellows subsequent to their internships and keeping their skills and ambitions up to the mark.
- Creating media opportunities for the Fellows to make a contribution.
- Providing practical support for the Fellows to achieve their media ambitions.

Let's unpack these a little ...



## Making the Arguments in Favour of Media Skills

- A significant tranche of scientists distrust the media and want nothing to do with them. This calls for a 're-sell'.
- Fellows believe scientists would respond to the argument about public duty.

**“Sell it to the scientists. Give them a reason to buy in. They’re funded by the public so they’re answerable to the public. Where has the money gone?”**

**Media Fellow**

- Supporting arguments.
  - More effective in making grant applications.
  - Important to get the real story across.
  - Able to take control in media interviews.
- As the Fellows see it, the aim should be to give all scientists media experience and get them younger too.



# Setting Up the Parameters of the Programme Itself

## Briefing the media hosts

**“It’s the way they throw you in at the deep end.”**

**Media Fellow**

- Stress that the Fellow needs to be given a real job of work, with deadlines and something real at stake.
- Some media hosts let their Fellows get away with just observing or doing a teenager’s job. This is not the way to learn.

## Briefing the employers

How much do you know about the Media Fellowships Scheme?

A lot	0%
A little	100%
Nothing	0%

Source: Quantitative Survey. Base • 13 employers

- Employers know only a little about the Programme. They might appreciate knowing the kinds of things they could reasonably ask their Media Fellows to do for the Department once they return.
- This should certainly include the Press Office, where fertile relationships can be built, post-internship.

## Mentoring the Fellows

**“The Association does nothing to capitalise on the people after their dispersal. Once they’ve done the Fellowship, they’re just cast aside.”**

**Media Fellow**

- Fellows would like the Association to provide continuing support.
  - Reviewing their personal goals in media communication.
  - Taking an interest in media events which they have taken part in.
  - Keeping skills in practice through speaking/writing/appearing on behalf of the Association.
  - Training for commenting on general science issues, which are important to society and may be controversial
- Media contacts fall away after Year 1. Media hosts claim the Fellowship makes very little difference to their capacity to contact scientists. Fellows can lose confidence to contact journalists.
  - The Association could help reverse this by keeping the media/Fellows network active (through email, news, events?)

**QUESTION • IS IT THE JOB OF THE ASSOCIATION TO DO THIS?  
IS THERE A ROLE FOR THE SCIENCE MEDIA CENTRE?**



## Creating Media Opportunities

- All Fellows would respond to a request mediated by the Association to speak to the media on a topic where they felt knowledgeable and confident.
- They seem to feel that the Association **should** provide media opportunities in order to make use of the people they've trained.

**“They’ve got 10-20 trained experts who are familiar with how the media works. They could be called in to talk about specific topics.”** **Media Fellow**

- The favoured idea is a clearing house to be used by journalists and Fellows which will provide science input when the media needs it.
- Some people believe the Science Media Centre does this already but it is seen as ‘Masonic’ and secretive. At the very least, the Association is being asked to create links.

**“They could work with the Science Media Centre and have a database and link in.”** **Media Fellow**

**“They need to oil the wheels. Perhaps they should host a Fellowship at the Science Media Centre.”** **Media Fellow**



## Supporting Media Ambitions

- Most Fellows have a private dream of what they would like to do in the media, given a chance.
- These are more far-reaching than what they have actually done.
  - TV programme to show the value of the Science of Water.
  - 5 minute snippets on YouTube, from the Met Office.
  - Travel programme, going round the world explaining material science.
  - TV series on space exploration.
  - Scientists present TED to a web audience.
  - Host a radio series talking to different scientists.
  - Local news, local perspective, local radio.
- Should the Association provide support for them to further these dreams?





## A Last Thought

Without the Media Fellowships I could never have ...

**“Got my job.**

**Put myself up for public debate.**

**Gone to the Press Office myself.**

**Put myself forward as an expert.”**

**Media Fellows**

What would be lost if there were no Media Fellowships Programme?

**“The British Science Association would lose credibility.”** Media Fellow

**Nothing less!**