Media Fellowship Scheme

The British Science Association’s Media Fellowships provide a unique opportunity for practising scientists, clinicians and engineers to spend two to six weeks working at the heart of a media outlet such as The Guardian, BBC Breakfast or Sky News.
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The Challenge

The jobs of scientists and journalists are different:

- The media have to entertain and inform, working to tight deadlines and judged by readership and audience figures.
- It can take a long time in science to get results and have your success measured by peer review.

We want to:

- increase the amount and quality of science coverage in the media
- boost the public’s exposure to science as part of everyday life
- broaden the media’s view and banish stereotypes of who does science, by giving them access to a diverse range of researchers
- improve scientists’ understanding of how the media works
Aims of the programme

The Media Fellowships aim to give scientists, engineers and their colleagues, the confidence and willingness to engage with the media and tackle issues of mistrust and misrepresentation and to give journalists access to new scientific expertise.

The scheme has been running since 1987 and reflects the British Science Association’s commitment to increasing the accessibility of the sciences and providing opportunities for discussion and debate.

The Media Fellowship scheme is the only one of its kind in the UK.

**Engage** – Give scientists confidence to engage with the media

**Bridge the gap** – Between journalists and scientists

**Foster trust** – Tackle mistrust and misrepresentation

**Building understanding** – Between science and society
Media Fellows ‘In a nutshell’

Every year up to fifteen Media Fellows are mentored by professional journalists and learn how the media operates and reports on science, how to communicate with the media and to engage the wider public with science through the media.

After their media placement, Fellows attend the British Science Festival in September, which provides an opportunity to gain valuable experience working alongside a range of media organisations from all over the UK in our dedicated Press Centre. The Festival also offers opportunities to learn from a wide range of public engagement activities and network with academics, journalists and science communicators. The scheme has been placing researchers in the media and shaping their attitudes and skills since 1987.

For more information on how the Media Fellowships connect scientists and the media, please watch this video.
How it works

February

To find highly skilled researchers, clinicians, and engineers, we run an open call across the UK universities who sponsor the scheme.

March – April

Applications close, fellows are selected from a shortlist and placements are arranged by matching successful applicants to a media host.

May

Training Day for fellows on working with the Media in London.

June – September

Fellows complete a 2-6-week placement at a UK media outlet such as The Times, The Guardian and The BBC.

September – October

Fellows attend the British Science Festival Media launch in London and the British Science Festival in Chelmsford (hosted by Anglia Ruskin University) in September. Fellows present at a Leadership Day in October.
Who runs the scheme?

The scheme is run by the Cultural Development department at the British Science Association. It’s our mission to bring together those involved in science communication by sharing best practice, embracing experimental modes of public engagement and improving the quality of engagement activities through our core programmes, training schemes and consulting on external projects. We work with researchers of all different kinds to help them engage the public with their work.

Media Placements

Some of our previous and current media placements include:

- BBC Radio Science
- Huffington Post
- Sky News
- The Guardian
- The I
- Londonist
- 5Live
- Jeremy Vine (BBC Radio 2)
- Financial Times
- The Mirror
- Daily Mail
- The Economist
- BBC Wales
- BBC Scotland
Benefits for Fellows and their institutions

What difference does a Media Fellowship make? Below are some of its impacts on Fellows and their institutions.

How can doing a Media Fellowship impact on a career? What do Fellows really get out of the experience?

Benefits for Fellows:

Developing media-savvy scientists

“So far ten academics from The University have participated in the scheme and each one has reaped the benefits of getting behind the scenes of a major media organisation – turning media sceptics into believers.”

Lindsay Brooke – Press Officer (Faculty of Science) at the University of Nottingham

Investing in researchers’ communications skills

“As the trustee of a charity, biotech board member or council member of the Medical Research Council, proficiency in science communication has consistently been regarded as an asset.”

Dr Ruth McKernan CBE, 1992 Fellow and Former Chief Executive, Innovate UK
• **Media Skills**
  - Media Fellows are twice as confident writing about topics outside their research area following their placement.
  - 100% of Fellows rated the skills learned as “very good” or “excellent”.

• **Confidence**
  - Media Fellows are twice as confident pitching a story to an editor following their placement.

• **Sharing experiences**
  - 77% of Media Fellows interacted with their press office following their placement.
  - 92% Media Fellows interacted with the media following their placement.

”I have developed a new relationship with the Press Office in my university. I am more confident. I have spoken with colleagues about press releases they’ve been working on.”

**Benefits for Fellows' institutions**

• Better promotion of institution through the media; greater links between press office and academics, new contacts, media workshops, greater understanding of the media process
• Increase in science communication activity
• Improved writing of funding applications
• Opportunities for cross-disciplinary work

For a list of Media Fellow alumni alongside case studies of fellow experiences and what they got out of their placement, please visit here.
Eligibility

If what you’ve read has inspired you to apply for a Media Fellowship scheme, please check that you are eligible by fulfilling the following criteria:

- are a **practising scientist, social scientist, clinician or engineer** and have a minimum of 2 years’ experience in your field following your highest degree. PhD students are eligible although we don’t recommend it due to the heavy workload.

- are employed, and based, part or full time in the UK.

- work at any level in an academic or research institution, industry, civil service or any other similar organisation.

- have your employer’s/funder’s consent to be released on full pay for the period of the Fellowships. Annual leave may be used for part of the placement.

- agree to all the terms and conditions of the fellowship, including mandatory attendance to the training / leadership days and the financial support provided.

A comprehensive checklist for Media Fellowship 2020 eligibility criteria can be found here.

Please note that unfortunately, we are not able to offer Media Fellowships to freelancers, undergraduate students, those who work in PR or communications, those who are based outside the UK, or those who want to change career full time into science communication.
Useful additional documents

- Terms and Conditions
- Letter to send to your employer to tell them about the scheme

If you have any further questions or you’d like to receive some extra information, please contact us.