What’s the impact of a Media Fellowship?

Media Fellows 1987-2013

case studies

A British Science Association scheme
About these case studies

These case studies brings together individual accounts from Media Fellows from 1987 to 2013. Find out what they are doing now and what they got out of their Media Fellowships.

The Media Fellowships in a nutshell

The Fellowships provide a unique opportunity for practising scientists, clinicians and engineers to spend three to six weeks working at the heart of a media outlet.

Every year up to ten 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 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.

How do I get involved?

If you’re inspired by the stories that the Media Fellows have to tell, get involved:

- apply to be a Media Fellow. The scheme is open to full- and part-time researchers and engineers from any discipline based in the UK or Ireland.
- support the scheme by making a contribution or putting us in contact with relevant organisations
- contact us to discuss any collaboration ideas

For more information, have a look at the Media Fellowships webpages.

Who runs the scheme?

The scheme is run by the Science in Society team 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.

To find out more, including how we can help you, please visit our website.
Since his Media Fellowship he has edited six text books and is author of several books including ‘Post-traumatic Stress Disorder: Malady or Myth?’, 2003 which the Observer reviewed as “This book is essential reading for anyone interested in trauma”, and ‘Cognitive Foundations of Clinical Psychology’. He contributes to the media and in was interviewed for the BBC about post-traumatic stress disorder in survivors of the 2005 London Bombings.

“The Fellowship greatly increased my awareness of media constraints on the reporting of science and helped me to work to short deadlines. It increased my confidence in dealing with the media, for example when promoting conference presentations in my role as Chair of the British Psychological Society's Press Committee.”
Ruth gained her PhD at London's Institute of Psychiatry and has 20 years' experience in posts including Head of the Merck Neuroscience Research Centre. She is Vice President for External Research in Europe and is a visiting Professor at King's College, London. Her first book for non-scientists, "Billy’s Halo," was short-listed for the 2007 MIND awards.

“My media fellowship let me believe I could write and encouraged me to write a book. More broadly, it gave me confidence dealing with the media and prepared me for difficult and important communications in years to come. Having validated communication skills opened doors in other spheres. 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.”
Since her placement, she has been News Editor for the Journal of Medical Engineering and Technology (1991 – 1998), Abstract Assessor and Moderator of the EDTNA/ERCA on-line Journal Club and has written for the Guardian’s Public Voices: Public Values blog. She is on the European Renal Best Practice Advisory Board and in 2004 was named ‘Healthcare Scientist of the Year’ in the national NHS awards.

“The most important things I learned were that you should be able to use simple language to explain a complicated scientific subject, that you should get the important point over to your audience as soon as possible and that you should make it a good story. It’s no use having a brilliant idea if you can’t communicate it to potential users because they don’t understand you or they get bored.”
Dorothy has gone on to write three popular science books ‘Viruses: A Very Short Introduction’, ‘Deadly Companions’, and the ‘Invisible Enemy: A Natural History of Viruses’. She has also written a monthly science column for the Scotsman newspaper and contributed numerous articles and interviews about her work to the media, given public lectures across the country and was appointed the first ever Assistant Principal for the Public Understanding of Medicine.

“The fellowship was the beginning of my career as a popular science writer which led to my becoming Assistant Principal at the University of Edinburgh for the Public Understanding of Medicine”
Wendy has an international reputation in biomedical research. She was Chairman of the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Network in the East of England (STEMNET) among many other role on regional and national bodies. She has written opinion pieces for the Guardian and quoted in the Financial Times and tweets @WMPUPVC.

“I thought it was wonderful! The fellowship helped me really understand the social obligation to communicate the science I was doing myself and also the means by which I could communicate to a non-specialist audience. It encouraged me to look for ways to open up my science and the scientific endeavours of others to engage the public. I went on to develop public understanding of science within my department, to support public engagement and community science projects and activities and this has stayed with me throughout my academic career to my current role as VC where I am still a strong advocate of communicating and engaging folk with science.”

17 years on – Vice Chancellor and Chief Executive, Plymouth University
Since the fellowship he has written widely for non-specialist audiences in a wide range of publications including BBC Wildlife Magazine, and the Times Higher. He has also gone on to write several popular science books, notably, Seaweeds (2002), Frozen Oceans (2004), The Biology of Polar Regions (2008) and Introducing Oceanography (2012). His work has featured on national and international television and radio. He was also one of the RI/Times/Novartis Scientists for the New Century in 2001. He currently Chairs the NERC Arctic Programme Advisory Group.

“It was an amazing experience, where I learnt a lot in an incredibly focussed and intensive summer. I do not hesitate in recommending it to others, since for me it totally changed the way I looked at presenting my science to a wider audience.”
Peter Foote is Executive Scientist at BAE Systems and was awarded a Media Fellowship in 2001 at the Irish Times. Since then he has written for the Engineer magazine and had his work covered in many publications.

‘The Media Fellowship worked really well for me. It led to a successful company newsletter which I wrote and edited for a number of years using the skills I acquired during my time at the Irish Times.’

12 years on – Head of Composites Centre, Cranfield University
Following her Fellowship, in March 2012, she co-presented a three part series, *Orbit: Earth's Extraordinary Journey*, on BBC Two. She has also appeared on *Operation Iceberg* (BBC Two), *Museum of Curiosity* (BBC Radio 4), *The Transit of Venus* (Horizon), *Stargazing Challenges* (BBC Two), *Scrapheap Challenge*, *Dara Ó Briain's Science Club* and *The Secret Life of the Sun*. She presented her own programme *POP! The Science of Bubbles* on BBC Four in April 2013.

Helen also writes a blog, “23 degrees”, for the BBC2 website. She has also been a science consultant for the BBC children’s science program “Whizz whizz bang bang” and has made many Youtube videos communicating science to the public.

“The Media Fellowship showed the internal workings of the media world, and changed my perspective on how science "news" is made.”
The writing and editing skills she learned during her Media Fellowship were invaluable and she is now a Joint Editor of the Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and writes numerous papers and book chapters. She is a confident public speaker, gives regular international presentations and has presented her work in the House of Commons though SET for Britain. She regularly supports the RHUL Science Festival and has hosted A-level students through the Nuffield Bursary Scheme.

“My Media Fellowship inspired me to engage the public in new and innovative ways. In 2012 I co-founded an internet campaign to Raise Awareness of Language Learning Impairments which has received more than 100,000 views from 136 countries around the world.”
Since her fellowship, Maria has continued to write for various media as well as doing a part-time PhD in Marine Science. She also helps to co-ordinate her institute’s social media channels.

“I was feeling rather disillusioned with science, after completing a tough MSc I felt I was not getting the most out of my qualification and always being interested in expanding my science communication skills, I applied. The Fellowship had a major impact on my life. Firstly it renewed my love of marine science and the scientist involved in the deep sea news story offered me a PhD, which I am now doing part time. I am also one of the science feature writers for London Student, Europe’s largest student magazine and have just applied for a job as a freelance writer for a website.

The institute where I work now has 4 volunteers, including myself dedicated to science communication with the use of Facebook, Twitter, googleplus, and I recently used the science being undertaken here to write a science feature for London Student.”
Lorna has since appeared on several BBC radio shows explaining whether the use of forensic science in science fiction and documentaries like CSI is realistic or not. Lorna also helped secure a substantial public engagement grant from the Scottish government to develop a series of educational activities and workshops that give children and adults the chance to engage with scientists and learn how science impacts on their everyday lives and the workshops went on to win the ‘Best Live Communications Event’ award at the CiB Scotland Awards 2009. She also gave a press conference at the 2011 British Science Festival.

“The Media Fellowship helped my communication methods for science and expanded my horizons. Now I am on secondment with the Scottish Government and communicating science to policy makers.”
Since her fellowship, Kate has given talks to colleagues about working in the media and is a speaker at careers days. She has also co-written a guide for health professionals interested in working overseas and participated in a 2011 Public Attitudes to Science workshop to find out the public opinion of science and wrote about her experience for the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills’ blog. She has also set up the charity Medic to Medic which supports medical students in Malawi through their training.

“I found the inside knowledge on how the media works incredibly useful for a career in public health. Now I understand more instinctively what journalists want from a story and the practical workings of a newspaper. This has allowed me to a) respond far more effectively to journalistic interest and b) what angle I should pitch potential stories from public health to journalists to get them hooked. The Media Fellowship gave me a unique opportunity to gain this understanding.”
Since completing his fellowship Simon was also awarded a fellowship with the Software Sustainability Institute – which featured ample writing opportunities – and was appointed an associate editor of the journal ‘Sports Engineering’.

“I used my fellowship to combine my passions of sport, technology and engineering, writing and contributing to several articles and features. The fellowship fuelled my passion for scientific writing and encouraged me to start the blog ‘engineeringsport.co.uk’. This is a repository for sports engineering stories and a vehicle for other keen writers to exercise their skills. The experience and confidence I gained on my fellowship was instrumental in developing my career as well as giving me very fond memories.”

4 years on – Research Fellow – Centre for Sports Engineering Research
Since her fellowship, Jean has completed the PGCert in Practical Science Communication at UWE, started and continues to edit a research centre blog on the day-to-day joys and frustrations of doing public health research and she is now Communications lead for her research centre, working alongside their full-time communications officer.

“The fellowship gave me a lot more confidence in working with the media and I have since done quite a few press releases, TV, radio and print interviews. This has been great for my professional profile both within and outwith my institution and I think (although difficult to be sure) that it has helped with achieving impact for my research. Since my fellowship, I’m also much better at working out, in advance, what work will be interesting to the media and so should be press released. I’ve developed a good relationship with the university press office and they know that I’ll bring them good stuff and work hard to promote it.”
Since the Fellowship, Andrew has continued as Reader at De Montfort University, but become more involved in media matters – leading on setting up a new website for his institute, and helping people with press issues. He recently appeared on local BBC television news at the press launch of a ‘solar house’ which stores solar heat underground for winter heating, and is being monitored by the university.

“The Fellowship helped me to understand how the press works, and deals with science, puts a spin on stories and is very selective about what to report. It also helped me write articles more quickly as press deadlines are much shorter (hours) than academic ones (weeks, months). I’ve also written a few press releases since, been on local radio and advised colleagues.”
After carrying out ground-breaking research in quantum computing and energy materials at Oxford University and Imperial College London, Ling has progressed to senior management at Imperial. Following the fellowship, Ling has been contributing regularly to the Financial Times promoting science, innovation and public health across the globe. She is also an invited columnist for the Wired Magazine, a features writer for the Grocer Magazine and the Huffington Post.

"It was a privilege and one of the most memorable life chapters to work at the FT for my Media Fellowship. I thoroughly enjoyed every moment there. I was fortunate to have world's leading science journalist as my mentor, whose expertise and dedication are immensely admirable and inspiring. Following the fellowship, I was frequently interviewed by international media where I used skills gained from the experience to talk to the media with much greater confidence."
Since his Fellowship, Richard has organised and chaired a panel session at Solo13 on the challenges of balancing science communication with an academic career. He is also writing two postgraduate courses on the media, science communication, and public engagement, in addition to a seminar talk entitled ‘Communicating Research’. He has also been invited to sit on the judging panel for the EPSRC Scientific Photo Competition, and is now in the process of trying to develop the public engagement strategy for Swansea University.

“For me, the Fellowship didn’t finish when I left my media host, Nature. I’ve been able to develop ideas and initiatives as a British Science Association Media Fellow that will hopefully benefit many more researchers. The Fellowship gave me a new insight, new expertise, and a new perspective on both the media and publics, and I aim to continue developing these activities and engagement strategies as a Media Fellow. My time at Nature led to some of the most varied and valuable experiences of my academic career, and I hope to pay this forward.”