

Science and the Media: Securing the Future

Science and the Media Expert Group, January 2010

Summary of Actions and Recommendations

Summary of the actions that organisations have already committed to as a result of meeting with Group Members, or in consultation with them:

Science Training

1.1. Expand science training at the BBC

The BBC College of Journalism will develop its **online science training content for all BBC journalists**. In December 2009, this will launch as a public site for all UK journalists to use. A number of organisations have committed to supporting the College as they develop content.

1.2. Create a new post of National Co-ordinator for Science Journalism Training

Subject to securing funding, the Royal Statistical Society will create and host a **National Coordinator for Science Journalism Training** to coordinate the scientific community's efforts deliver Training in the Basic principles of science reporting to news organisations and journalism students. Firm indications of an interest in developing and offering such training have already been shown by the Reuters Training arm, the Press Association, the Permanent Secretary of Government Communications and many undergraduate journalism degree courses.

1.3. Set up new training for science press officers

From 2010, and subject to securing funding, STMPRA will coordinate **regular training**, in line with their aims and objectives, **for Science Press Officers**, in liaison with Research Councils UK, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations and UniversitiesUK. RCUK will explore making the media training available to scientists more systematic and part of the professional development of researchers.

1.4. Roll out Introduction to the media seminars for scientists

Subject to securing funding the Science Media Centre, or a similar organisation, will roll out an **Introduction to the Media Course for scientists**. RCUK will explore standardising the media training offered to scientists and incorporating this into the professional development for researchers.

1.5. Set up a new Media Fellowships scheme to increase the number of scientists working in general news and programme making

Subject to securing funding, the British Science Association will explore creating a new **Media Fellowships Scheme** to increase the number of scientists choosing careers in general news reporting and programme making in the media

Science Programming in a Changing Landscape

2.1. Set up a new high profile Science Lobby Group to advocate for more and better science programming

A number of organisations have expressed an interest in taking part in creating a **Science Lobby Group** to engage decision makers in media organisation. Lord Drayson and officials will explore the most effective way of bringing such a group together.

2.2. Set up a new Science Programming Centre modelled loosely on the Science Media Centre to facilitate links between science and programme makers

The Wellcome Trust is exploring potential for a new **Science Programming Unit**, to facilitate the relationship between programme makers and Scientists. Subject to an ongoing evaluation this is intended to launch in 2010.

2.3. Make lay summaries of research proposals searchable as resource for programme makers

Research Councils UK will make **lay summaries of their research proposals searchable** and accessible on their new website, to launch towards the end of 2010.

2.4. Work to involve the scientific community in the new BBC Buddies Scheme and New Academy

In partnership with BIS, the BBC will pilot the Science Buddy Scheme throughout 2010. A number of group members have committed to being buddies.

Science Journalism and its Future

3.1. Secure more access for journalists to peer reviewed literature

The Association of British Science Writers will lead on securing **access for freelance science writers to peer reviewed literature**.

3.2. Recognise and reward excellent science by getting science prizes included in major national media awards ceremonies such as the UK Press Gazette awards

There is a clear need for a **science journalism prize** and recommend that either the Association of British Science Writers annual prizes are reconstituted or one of the major prizes is persuaded to have a science award. BIS Officials will discuss with key stakeholders to identify the best way to reconstitute a science journalism prize.

3.3 Set up a new Working Group on the Future of Science Journalism to decide which new developments to champion and fund

A **Working Group on the new initiatives in Science Journalism** should be established based on the model of the Royal Society Working Groups to take forward the scoping work of this group and inform decisions about which new ventures the scientific community should be supporting. BIS Officials will examine the benefits of establishing such a working group , and the key elements of its potential remit.

3.4. Create a new 'Before the Headlines' service for Journalists modelled on the successful Behind the Headlines service for the public

Subject to securing funding, NHS Choices and Bazian will explore creating a **"Before the Headlines"** service to dissect press releases for journalists, before they become news.

3.5 Set up new fellowships to allow science reporters time to pursue original and investigative stories

A small number of **one month fellowships** should be provided for science journalists which would allow them to take unpaid leave, releasing them from their regular job to pursue an investigation. This will require funding.

3.6 Start a new annual summer school for science investigative Reporting

Subject to securing funding, City University School of Journalism will run a two day **school on investigative science reporting** over the summer of 2010.

Recommendations for future action

- **Boost investigative reporting on science by ensuring a science strand in the new Bureau for Investigative reporting.**

Money should be found from scientific community to **fund the Bureau for Investigative Journalism to undertake science investigations**. The money would be totally unconditional in respect to the specific content; it would operate under the Bureau's strict rules of editorial independence and be earmarked for science.

- **Establish a new National Commission on the Future of Journalism** - to investigate new ways to secure the future of journalism at a time when the current business model of journalism is no longer working

- **Simplified and improved clinical trials registry**

The WHO and the Government should adopt a policy that the results of all clinical trials should be publicly available and that clinical trials should be searchable on a single portal. The Group welcomes the work of the Department of Health to create a UK Clinical Trial Gateway.

- **Reform Libel law** – it is a major barrier to scrutiny and discussion of science.
- **Scientific advice to government should be communicated to the media in a more open, transparent and independent way.**

The group endorses the Principles **that apply to the media set out in Lord Drayson's principles**, published December 2009.

- **Commercial confidentiality should only be used in exceptional cases.**

Where scientific evidence is submitted to Government bodies by industry, there should be a presumption of openness, with **commercial confidentiality only applied when a positive case** has been made for it.

- The science community should engage enthusiastically with the BBC's Science2010 year
- Programme makers who want to get more comfortable with science should look at how their entry level jobs might be better marketed at scientists
- All journalistic ventures should have their funding model and the degree to which they are editorially independent clearly labelled.
- There should be a public interest defence in cases of whistle blowing on scientific controversy.

- Animal research labs should be more open to the media, to facilitate the public debate of the benefits of using animals in medicine.