MEDIA FELLOWSHIPS

Reports from the British Science Association's 2014 Media Fellows

Contents

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About the British Science Association's Media Fellowships

The challenge:

The jobs of scientists and journalists are different…

It can take a long time in science to get results and your success is measured by peer review.

The media have to entertain and inform, working to tight deadlines and judged by readership and audience figures.

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

The Fellowships

Since 1987, the Media Fellowship scheme has placed over 250 researchers at UK media outlets to help foster greater understanding and trust between scientists and the media. Our Fellows work with journalists during their four to eight week placements to get an in-depth experience of media life and to produce quality content.

After their placement, Fellows spend a week amongst the journalists at the British Science Festival, attending press conferences and reporting on the news and events at the Festival.

When they return to their institutions, our Fellows bring improved writing skills and understanding of the type of stories that will interest the media. They share these skills within their institutions, through seminars and advice to colleagues. They also often combine science communication work with their research, including acting as spokespeople to speak about science news, and writing or producing their own news stories as freelancers.

Fellows' highlights

"Following "Hard Challenges for Soft Robotics", a 74-year old man phoned to thank me. It had given him hope of help for his son following a stroke. It made me feel I had given something to the general public instead of only my peers"
– Michel

"I got to write a piece on the autopsy findings from the Michael Brown case, and use my contacts in the industry and insider knowledge to offer a critique."
– Anna W

"An article on toxicity of childhood cancer treatments, a personal and professional interest. It was my own idea, albeit my colleagues gave me excellent help and advice, without which undoubtedly the article would have not made it to fruition.
– Vicky

"An article on EU Science policy was especially dear to me as it was my first article which had minimal editorial changes made to it, showing improvement in my work."
– Nishad

"First and foremost I am proud to be one of the Media Fellows for 2014. That the Pro-Vice Chancellor mentioned this achievement at this year's Swansea University Science Graduation speech was icing on the cake"
– Aditee

"One [story] about the underground Stonehenge map made the front page of the BBC News website and was second most-read online article that day!"
– Maria

"Providing exposure for causes (HIV kids summer camp), issues (antibiotic resistance) and research (MS) I care about"
– Mike

In numbers…

This year, the Fellows produced:

86 print articles

87 online articles

37 blogs or social media posts

3 TV reports or documentaries

12 radio or podcast items

Professor Michel Destrade
Head of Applied Mathematics
NUI Galway, Ireland

The Irish Times 11-29 August 2014

Testimonial

I joined *The Irish Times* for three weeks in August 2014, and then covered the British Science Festival for one week with my host Dick Ahlstrom. The experience was terrific in every aspect and I cannot recommend the Fellowship scheme highly enough. The support from the British Science Association and from the paper was first class and went beyond expectations.

I enjoyed the steep learning curve, the excitement and urgent pace of popular science writing and of journalism in general. I like to think I did a good job at helping Dick increase the science coverage of the paper while I was there; in any case I gave it my best shot! In the process I developed a deep respect for journalists. Their job is far harder than academic work in many respects. Most of all I truly loved the solidarity and camaraderie of the whole adventure.

Working at the *Irish Times*

In my placement, I wanted to gain insight into what catches journalists' and readers' attention in a news item about science. I wanted to witness and be part of the process of making editorial decisions, chasing up quotes and meeting a short deadline, if only for a short while. I was interested in understanding the mechanics of a newsroom, and bring that knowledge back to my university and colleagues. Finally, I wanted to learn more and improve my popular science writing skills.

My expectations were met beyond my wildest dreams, and then some. It was humbling to sit in the same room as many of the journalists and editors I read and admire, but they were all very welcoming and incredibly open and inclusive. Dick put me to work straight away and I got to find out what it's like to chase specialists and interview them… not an easy task at all! I was surprised at how reluctant some were to talk to the press. I quickly learned to take notes and to ask pertinent questions. Here the training received at the briefing day really helped.

Most of all, it was Dick who had the greatest influence on my writing skills. He showed me how to improve my style, my conciseness, my stories and I cannot thank him enough for his patience and expert mentoring. I hope I wasn't too much work for him. I made sure to learn and apply at once every piece of advice he gave me. He truly is a world-class journalist of the highest calibre.

Working at the British Science Festival

It was just awesome to be a journalist for a week. To take part in press conferences and ask questions there and then. To write like crazy and still keep high standards of English, accuracy and fact checking. To get to know scientists from other fields. To be close to the other Fellows, staff and journalists. I shall never forget it.

Media Fellowship outcomes

I learned that I could write in good English, in journalistic style, which was not obvious to me from the outset since my native language is French. I learned that I could write very fast and still well if I had to. I learned that journalists are a really nice bunch and have very high standards of accuracy and style, not that different from those of academics.

I learned that it was possible to have super-efficient 20 minute conference meetings, with people who come prepared and are willing to take the advice of their peers and implement it straight away. I was totally blown away by this process. I guess there's nothing like a daily deadline to put things in perspective and sharpen the focus. If only universities worked like this!

I learned that the number of journalists on the payroll of newspapers is much smaller than I imagined. It's hard to get a permanent job in academia, but it's nothing compared to journalism.

The feedback from NUI Galway was really supportive and positive. The President wrote to congratulate me on showcasing the university in the best and most respected national newspaper. During the Fellowship I developed an excellent working relationship with the press officer at the university, and I was able to write two articles on research taking place in Galway.

On my return, I wrote a press release for the upcoming involvement of the School of Mathematics in *Maths Week*. The press officer came to take pictures and two of the local newspapers wrote an article on the event!

I also took part in the *Marie Curie Prize* competition, for which I wrote a 250 word piece on "Communicating Science". I sent it off and got an automatic reply saying that due to the very large number of submissions; only shortlisted applicants will be contacted. I thus promptly forgot about it until last week, when I learned that I actually was one of the ten shortlisted candidates! Fingers crossed now.

Proud moments

That Dick asked me to write a feature article for the Thursday science page. Twice!

That the op-ed editor asked me to write an opinion piece on "Women in Mathematics". I couldn't believe that she would trust me to contribute! I tried my best to rise to the occasion.

That my feature article on concussion prompted an editorial a couple of days later.

That one of my headlines stuck and was not changed by the news editors.

That following the publication of "Hard Challenges for Soft Robotics", a 74-year old man phoned to thank me for "a great article". It had given him hope that soft robots might soon help his son with his re-education following a devastating stroke. It was heart-breaking and it made me feel like I really had given something back to the general public instead of only to my peers.

That I struck up a friendship with Dick Ahlstrom.

Maria Dasi Espuig,
Postodoctoral Researcher
Imperial College London

BBC, 12 August - 5 September 2014

Testimonial

My time at the BBC was hard work and great fun. I got to read, write and talk about a wide variety of topics: archaeology, material physics, chemistry, and astrophysics. It was particularly interesting to cover stories that were not within my field of expertise, to fully appreciate the difficulty of writing accurately and in an understandable way about something you know little about. The job was extremely fast paced compared to my usual daily tasks at the university. From my first day I was impressed by how quick and insightful the science journalists were, while I struggled to read through a paper, interview a researcher and write a story in 24 hours. With time and practice I got quicker at scanning papers, extracting the key points and finding the right questions to ask. I am sure these skills will be helpful in the future!

Working at the BBC

Before my placement at BBC Online I had mixed feelings about the press. Although I think it is very important to have science in the news, I had a couple of tense encounters with journalists and their work was always a mystery to me. I did not know how to reconcile this feeling, but I was sure that getting to know a journalist's job would help.

It is difficult to say how my expectations measured up to my experience, because I had no clue what to expect. I really appreciated that I had the freedom to choose what I wanted to write about, and sometimes chose stories far away from my research topic. I found that it was easier for me to write about topics that were not directly related to my field of expertise. It could be due to the fact that when you do not know about the topic, you ask all the fundamental and basic questions anyone else would have. When I covered a story that was very close to my field I tended to be slightly too detailed and technical. Fortunately I had Paul (the Editor) going through my text before publication to flag jargon and he always checked any major changes with me before publishing the story.

After two weeks writing for the online news section I moved to the radio unit to work with Ania Lichtarowicz and Jeniffer Whyntie in the programme Science in Action. They were both amazing and worked at the speed of light! Most of the science radio programmes at the BBC are weekly, so I thought it would be more relaxed than the online writing, where deadlines are often on the same day you start working on a new story. I was so mistaken! It is very fast paced and requires a lot of organisation and coordination. Science in Action presents four items in each of their 28 minute weekly programme. This means that in a week we have to: find four interesting stories (ideally not covered by the online section) covering different topics; make sure at least one researcher from each story can travel to the studios to be interviewed; read the paper and research the story; pre-interview the scientists; arrange a time when they are available to come to the studios to record the

interview (if they are not based in London then find the closest BBC studio); book the studio at that time (i.e. different times for each story); prepare notes about the stories to pass on to the presenter; record the interviews in the studio; and finally sit in your desk to listen to each interview and cut half of the recordings to fit the most important things in clips of about five minutes. It was impressive to see how they manage everything and still keep the interviews interesting, precise and to a level that is understandable to anyone not familiar with the topics covered.

Working at the British Science Festival

Attending the British Science Festival as a journalist was exhausting and exciting. I got to know how press conferences are done, and see how journalists from other media outlets work and what stories each one is interested in. It was also a great opportunity to discuss with the researchers face to face about their work. And of course, it was great to meet with the other Media Fellows and exchange experiences and practices during our placements.

Media Fellowship outcomes

During my time at the BBC I learnt many new things like how to pitch a story, the structure of a news article, or how a radio show is put together. I also noticed how different the online and radio formats are. Although interviewing scientists is essential in both, radio additionally requires good speakers that speak passionately about their work to transmit the excitement of new discoveries.

With time and practice, at the end of my placement in online and radio I felt that I was quicker at extracting the key findings of a paper and knowing which questions I had to ask. I know this will certainly help me when reading, writing and presenting papers in the future.

Producing results is not the only important thing in research; being able to present and write a paper in a clear and concise way is essential to show the relevance of a new finding and to collaborate with scientists in closely related fields, like Earth's climate and solar physics.

Proud moments

I am particularly proud of two stories I wrote during the British Science Festival. One of them was about the new underground map around Stonehenge, which made the front page and was the second most read online article of the day! The second story was about LISA, the Giant laser observatory. Soon after it was published, one of the scientists I had interviewed contacted me to thank me for the quality of the article and to let me know that the story had circulated extensively within their community receiving a lot of positive feedback. I still keep that email!

I found that in radio, pitching stories is more difficult, so when I found about the Flow Machines and was given the green light from Collin Grant (producer of Click) to research it, I was thrilled.

Michal Eyre **NIHR Clinical Research Fellow, Queen Mary University of London**

Specialty Registrar in Paediatrics
Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals NHS Trust

Honorary Clinical Research Fellow
Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children

BBC Radio Science Unit / BBC News Online

Testimonial

My media fellowship was divided into two parts. At the BBC Radio Science Unit, I learnt how science and health programming is commissioned, written, recorded and edited for radio and television. At BBC News Online I pitched, researched and wrote science and health articles for the BBC's web news service.

The placement took me from the 24-hour television news studio deep in the bowels of Broadcasting House to the 17th floor helipad of London's Air Ambulance; from deep space molecules to breakfast with robots; and from interviewer of scientists to interviewee on live radio! The experience developed my skills as a writer and communicator of science and opened up dozens of new opportunities, but above all else it was tremendous fun: beginning each day walking into Broadcasting House, sitting down to write a piece that would be read all around the world, was a pretty inspirational way to spend a summer.

Working at the BBC

I had expected to be placed in a writing post so it was a surprise to be assigned to the radio unit. In fact I found that the unit produces almost as much content for television and web as for radio, with most of the team involved in multiple programmes across multiple platforms. Rather than being assigned to a particular person or team, I drifted between a number of programmes and projects and enjoyed a much broader media experience than anticipated. People were approachable and happy to explain the production process.

My expectation of writing for BBC News Online prior to the British Science Festival was that I would be working within my core areas of expertise (medicine and neuroscience) on stories selected by editors and assigned to me as a pre-packaged brief, and that my stories would be extensively edited prior to publication.

The experience surpassed these expectations in every respect. I was delighted to find that my editor immediately allowed me to select, research and write stories with as much independence as I wished. He was happy to advise and exceptionally generous with his time. I was encouraged to bring ideas for pieces, and trusted to choose the approach I felt suited a piece best. Although initially reluctant to venture beyond my areas of knowledge, I found I enjoyed my non-medical pieces the most, and produced better journalism the further I strayed from my comfort zone.

I developed one of my story ideas into a feature on pre-hospital care of cardiac arrest, and spent a day with the "cool car" team attending medical emergencies in East London. This provided an insight into journalism in the field which complimented my desk-based experience nicely. During my time at the BBC I also attended an open meeting on editorial policy which provided further insight into the operations of a large media organisation.

Working at the British Science Festival

The British Science Festival was my first opportunity to write for BBC News Online and was a steep learning curve! BBC reporter Jonathan Webb was tremendously helpful in learning the ropes and I valued his guidance highly. Attending press conferences was the most useful part of the Festival; observing seasoned journalists take apart a presentation by scientists is an object lesson in science-media interaction and will guide my future approach. The Festival was also a welcome opportunity to get to know the other Media Fellows and network more widely outside the BBC.

Media Fellowship Outcomes

I improved in many ways throughout my fellowship:

- As an interviewer - asking a mixture of open and closed questions and drawing out broader significance but also interesting details.
- As a writer - concision, concision, concision! Or to put that more concisely: concision. I found that a structure made things quicker – particularly the inverted pyramid. I also earned not to agonise over the small stuff, especially in the bottom half of the piece!
- As a journalist - the top line test; can I summarise this story in one sentence? Does it make me want to hear more? If not, bin it! I found it was important to work quickly and keep well-organised records of contacts and quotes. Getting the balance between editing quotes down and keeping in the speaker's voice was also a challenge. Finally, I learned that the elements of a story which make it interesting or relevant depend on the anticipated audience.

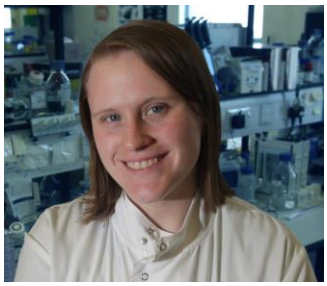
My institution and collaborators enjoyed direct media exposure during my placement and I have informed colleagues of my Media Fellowship via social media and plan to facilitate communication between colleagues and media contacts in future. I also made contact with my university press office during the placement and hope to arrange events with them in future.

In my clinical work, I have led teaching sessions with medical students in which science/media interaction and its impact for patients is discussed.

The enhanced perspective on science communication afforded by my Fellowship should benefit my grant writing and public engagement work.

Proud moments

- Providing exposure for causes (HIV kids summer camp), issues (antibiotic resistance) and research (MS) I care about.
- Being interviewed live on radio as a "BBC science reporter" and not completely disgracing myself or the BBC!
- Reading debates generated online following my story on space molecules.
- Hearing that friends of friends had shared my stories on social media without knowing it was me who wrote them was pretty exciting!
- Positive feedback from researchers ("I think you did a great job summarising our research in a concise way"; "it's the most accurate representation of our work that I've read in a very long time").



Dr Victoria Forster, Postdoctoral Research Associate, Northern Institute for Cancer Research, Newcastle University.

***The Times*, London.**
4 - 31 August 2014.

Testimonial

I was selected to work with the Science Editor at *The Times* in August 2014 in their new London Bridge offices. I thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience, and published just under 30 articles during my time there on a range of scientific subjects. I was also able to work on the occasional collaborative article with other journalists in departments such as education. I particularly liked going to press conferences at the Science Media Centre in central London to hear about breaking research directly from the scientists who did the work.

Reporting for *The Times* from the British Science Festival was a fantastic experience to end my placement as it allowed me to use all of the skills I learned in the office in a different reporting environment, alongside the other British Science Association media fellows and journalists from UK and international media.

Working at *The Times*

I had very few specific expectations before starting my placement, as I wanted to approach the Fellowship with an open mind. I hoped to learn to communicate scientific progress to a wide audience whilst working to deadlines and word limits. I wanted to learn how to sensitively report on matters that directly affect readers, such as cancer and dementia. I also hoped to learn to create engaging reports, whilst avoiding sensationalism or distorting the original research.

The placement met and exceeded all my expectations. All the journalists I worked with, particularly the Science Editor, Hannah Devlin, took a great deal of time to help and give feedback on my stories. I believe this was vital in improving my writing.

I was pleasantly surprised by how quickly I was welcomed into the team and given responsibility considering my lack of formal journalism experience or qualifications. I was also given freedom to investigate possible stories and pitch them to the editors. Although daunting at first, I enjoyed the opportunity to work independently.

My placement also involved going to press conferences at the Science Media Centre. I enjoyed seeing how scientists handled press conferences. This will prepare me for similar situations in my academic career. It was also informative seeing how journalists structured questions and the type of questions they asked.

Working at the British Science Festival

I worked at the British Science Festival as a reporter for *The Times*. It was particularly insightful to attend press conferences alongside journalists and spend time amongst them in the workrooms, but also at social events during the festival. It was inspiring to

see the camaraderie shown by journalists from different publications and wonderful to meet journalists from abroad. I particularly enjoyed the responsibility of identifying newsworthy stories and communicating this to my media host. It was also nice to be able to work alongside the other Media Fellows and hear about their experiences.

As well as my journalism duties, I was also able to attend various events, such as the women's networking events. This was very useful and I networked with diverse people, including those who are setting up science festivals.

In addition to this, I spoke to a few University of Birmingham scientists as part of my journalism duties, who are within my field of research. I have kept in contact with them with a view to possibly setting up collaborative projects in the future.

Media Fellowship outcomes

During my placement I learned more than I imagined possible. I learned all about how journalists responsibly and coherently cover science and health and also about how they collaborate and help each other out. I saw how they understand and digest even reasonably complex press releases outside of their areas of formal expertise, and create news stories.

I have used my experience to run a seminar at my university to undergraduates undertaking a science communication module. I talked about my experience at *The Times* and gave the students a press release. I gave an overview of how to turn a press release into a *Times*-style story and asked them to structure a story and investigate suitable experts to interview. I handed out the article I had written from the press release and we discussed their structures compared to my article. I received excellent feedback from the students and academic staff who sat in on the session. I hope to continue my involvement with the module.

I was already an active participant in public engagement about my institution's research in collaboration with cancer research charities before the placement. However, my placement has given a different perspective on communicating science. My placement showed me how to communicate science effectively to a wide audience and how to write to captivate the interest of the readers.

I plan to continue science writing alongside my academic career and have already written for *The Conversation* and *The Times*. I have joined the Association of British Science Writers and hope to continue writing alongside my research career.

Proud moments

I am particularly proud of two articles. One was on toxicity of childhood cancer treatments, which is a personal and professional interest of mine as a childhood cancer survivor and now cancer research scientist. It was an issue I have long felt is under-reported, with much (deserved) focus on increased survival rates in children, but a lack of recognition for debilitating side effects. I was most proud of this as it was my own idea, albeit my colleagues gave me excellent help and advice, without which undoubtedly the article would have not made it to fruition.

The second article is one I wrote after the placement for *The Times* Good University Guide. I interviewed our Dean of Undergraduate Studies for the piece. I was pleasantly surprised the next day that it was featured on the front page.

Nishad Karim

Guardian* and *Observer
30 June – 15 August 2014

Testimonial

This summer I was given the rare opportunity of writing at the *Guardian* as part of the science and environment news team. Over six weeks I wrote many articles, partook in podcasts, attended conferences, pitched ideas, obtained a deeper insight into journalism and, in general, learnt so much more than I anticipated. This could not be possible without the generosity of sharing knowledge and encouragement offered by the *Guardian* news team.

Many of the skills obtained have already been used in my day-to-day life, especially with regards to the development of outreach work both written and broadcast. I have learnt how to be a better writer not only in constructing articles, but in engaging interest in a story which is essential to get work noticed. Most of all I had a truly enjoyable and fulfilling experience, which could never have happened without the Media Fellowship Scheme.

Working at the *Guardian*

Before I started my placement I hoped to improve my writing skills to help create more user-friendly outreach material. I also wanted to know how a great article was written in terms of structure and material used. I could already write sufficiently for academic papers, but news reporting was a different kettle of fish. I expected a steep learning curve, at the end of which I hoped to get a few articles published.

In reality, I acquired so much more out of the placement than anything expected. My mentor, James Randerson, threw me straight into the deep end, as I was given the task of writing from the first day. My writing was not perfect, but as James reminded me, this was all new and they weren't expecting perfect work straight away. The more I wrote, the better my articles became. Importantly, I found myself really enjoying the work and the atmosphere created by the members of the science and environment team (and beyond), who were all so open and friendly with their help and encouragement. I had freedom to select and write my pieces, which was a very pleasant surprise. Alongside writing, I was also given the opportunity to podcast science news on the Science Weekly show, and write for the *Guardian*'s Sunday sister paper the *Observer*, both of which offered different aspects of writing and broadcasting skills.

The key two things I learnt were to be proactive, and just write as simply as possible, describing stories so they painted a picture rather than only portraying cold facts.

Working at the British Science Festival

I attended the British Science Festival as a Media Fellow and representative from the *Guardian*. I went to numerous press conferences and wrote pieces on several stories for the British Science Association, as well as providing further quotes and relevant material for Festival stories being covered in the main *Guardian* office. What made

this experience different from the summer was the press circus atmosphere; each morning was packed with conferences, which were filled with journalists from all the main news outlets. This was not only fun to witness, but educational in the questions that were asked by the professionals and the different angles taken to cover the same story, depending on the publication style. Meeting with the other journalists also has shown me the different perspectives of being a science writer and presenter.

Media Fellowship Outcomes

During my time at the *Guardian* I have learnt so many things, including speed and better time management, which were never a problem before the placement, but since working in a busy news room, have sped up significantly none the less. But my main reason for taking part in the scheme was to learn how to write for the general public, which I now have a much better grasp of. I also learned about interviewing techniques, particularly deciding what the important questions are. From the opposite perspective, as a scientist, I've also learnt how to get my work out there, tailoring abstracts so that they will interest news agencies.

Now that I'm back at the University of Leicester, I will give a seminar detailing my experiences over the course of the Fellowship and passing on lessons I've learnt, with a strong emphasis on how to get your academic work noticed by the media.

I have already used my new skills to write articles for the university postgraduate research magazine, *Frontier* (which I helped create), as a writer and editor. I have also been doing some radio work in the form of science correspondence for BBC Radio Suffolk, giving a roundup of the science news for the week, allowing me to use the podcasting lessons I also picked up at the *Guardian*. However, at present, my main goal is to finish my thesis after which I will concentrate on applying some of the other lessons from my placement.

At the outset, my main aims for the placement were to become more competent at writing science text for the public to aid in my extensive outreach activities. However, having completed the placement, many new opportunities have opened up. These opportunities include the prospect of pursuing science journalism as a full time or part time occupation alongside my academic work, as well as learning how to publicise my own research to news reporters. In the short term I want to continue developing my science journalism skills, both written and radio. In particular I want to produce 30-minute science documentaries on wide topics for my hospital radio station, Radio Fox.

Proud moments

At my placement I was lucky enough to have many highlights, including a major investigative environmental story that was researched for *Guardian USA*, an editorial piece on the supermoon and an article about Darwin's Library,. However my proudest moment was filing an article on EU Science policy. This article was especially dear to me as it was my first article which had minimal editorial changes made to it, showing improvement in my work. An unexpected highlight came in the form of having my own profile page on the *Guardian* website, confirming my role as a member of the team during my stay.

Aditee Mitra

Plankton Modeller
Swansea University

BBC Countryfile
28 July – 22 August 2014

Testimonial

"Keep it Simple" – this is the recurring theme that I have brought back from my Media Fellowship. My placement at BBC Bristol provided me with an informed behind-the-scenes insight on how the One Show, Countryfile, and the flag-ship Natural History programmes are planned and executed. As part of the Countryfile team, I got to experience life as a researcher, I worked with a BAFTA-winning Director, I went on location for filming, I experienced life as a runner looking after logistics during filming and I researched and produced a lead story template for a future episode. At the British Science Festival, I had the opportunity to experience life as a science journalist – I attended press conferences, wrote press reports for the British Science Association, met Nobel Prize winners, and had breakfast with robots. All in all, the Media Fellowship was an opportunity of a life time.

Working at BBC Countryfile

I believe that it is important that my research is not only published in scientific journals but also more widely disseminated to the public. My expectations when I started my placement were very broad – wanting to gain an across-the-board understanding of how the media works, in particular, the ability to identify news-worthy research and how best to translate these into news stories. On the research front, I hoped that my experiences as a Fellow would hone my skills in identifying and marketing the broader impacts of my research.

I had the opportunity to work with a researcher, a director and to attend the filming and editing sessions. Thus, I was part of the entire process from first idea to production. Additionally, I was encouraged to develop lead stories for Countryfile. This experience was invaluable in learning how to translate science articles into media stories specifically catering for the Countryfile audience. The four weeks I spent with BBC Countryfile made me review and reassess the outputs from my research, and indeed all research, from a very different perspective.

I was with the BBC Countryfile team for four weeks. Within those four weeks, every day was different. On my first day I was allocated to a researcher-director team working on the lead story – "Animal Antibiotics". The first eight days involved researching the topic and identifying potential contributors and locations. With the script, film crew, a plan of action and a folder of forms, we went on location. Over 2.5 days we travelled from Bristol to various locations filming in Cambridgeshire, Kent and Wiltshire.

With the filming done, it was time to go to the editing studios – this was where 2.5 days of location activity was edited to 12 minutes. The entire process, from first research to the production of the 12 minute piece was achieved within three weeks.

Working at the British Science Festival

BBC Countryfile does not attend the British Science Festival, so I attended the Festival under the aegis of British Science Association and got to experience life as a science journalist. I attended press conferences side-by-side with professional journalists. I found this a valuable experience as I had a glimpse into how to decipher "news-worthy" stories. The importance of presenting research outputs in a media-friendly manner was also brought home to me. I had the chance to write press reports for the British Science Association. As hitherto during my Media Fellowship I had not the opportunity to write such reports, I found this aspect quite challenging, especially as I was effectively acting in a freelance mode.

Media Fellowship outcomes

The main take home message from my BBC placement is "Keep it Simple". During the placement, I got to see and gain an understanding of the workings of the television media. I learned how to translate complex scientific outputs into a format which could be presented within a Sunday evening prime-time programme. It has made me view my research (and indeed all research) in a more public-facing way.

I recently applied for and was offered a Lectureship. I am quite sure that my experience as a Media Fellow helped me during the presentation and the interview process. Within this role, I plan to engage the students – the future generations – so that they have an improved understanding of the importance of the media and a basic knowledge on how to liaise with them.

Using experiences gained as a Media Fellow, I hope to dispel some of the myths, suspicions and distrust associated with news-reporting and the media that exists in the research community.

Various colleagues have requested my help in the preparation of the "Pathways to Impact" plan for RCUK grants. I have been invited to be a part of the University Public Engagement Forum. I am going to be interviewed for the Young Researcher feature in an upcoming edition of Momentum, the magazine on research that Swansea University sends out to decision makers and prominent academics.

I plan to use my experiences and contacts to help disseminate my research outputs, especially those which have a direct and deleterious impact on humans.

Proud moments

First and foremost I am very proud to be one of the ten Media Fellows for 2014. That the Pro-Vice Chancellor mentioned this achievement at this year's Swansea University Science Graduation speech was icing on the cake, but it also demonstrates how important media engagement is now seen for scientists and researchers in general.

I was delighted that some of the footage that I found and identified on the BBC archive was used in the final product for the Lead Story on Animal Antibiotics.

I was pleasantly surprised that the Producer thought my story template on Ocean Acidification was well produced.

I was very excited when my first press report for the British Science Association was published.

Peter Shadbolt, Research Assistant,
Imperial College London

The Conversation, TBC

Testimonial

This report should be read with the understanding that I have not yet completed my Media Fellowship. I have undertaken one week's work, but we are still working together to find a suitable time-frame for the body of the work. My time has been severely limited due to funding bid deadlines, travel for work, moving to London, and my viva.

As an academic funded by a number of public institutions, it is important for me to spend time communicating the results of academic research to the layperson - the taxpayer who ultimately pays my rent. I have thoroughly enjoyed and appreciated this opportunity to write and work for a non-academic audience.

Working at The Conversation

My expectations of work at The Conversation were largely drawn from my experience writing a News & Views article for *Nature Physics* and articles for various University Magazines. I have also been interviewed by the press on a number of occasions, in light of press releases etc. I anticipated having to write articles, edit copy, and chase stories. I did not have any expectations with respect to the workload, or the nature of the Fellowship itself.

My expectations of work at a media organisation were largely met. The Conversation differs from many news sources in that all articles are written by academics. The work consists of editing commissioned text, and ensuring that the pieces are well-written, scientifically correct, and free from opaque academic language. A fraction of the time is spent searching for figures and captions, and ensuring that copyright requirements are met.

A typical day at The Conversation begins with a news meeting at 9am, where upcoming stories and other administrative issues are discussed. The remainder of the day is spent editing articles.

Articles are submitted by academics through an online content management system. There is considerable variation in the extent to which any given article meets the requirements for publication. Some articles can be published immediately, with very little modification, while others require a near re-write due to problematic use of English, relevance, or an overly academic tone. Authors must sign off on a modified article prior to publication, sometimes requiring multiple edits and an on-going conversation with the author.

Working at the British Science Festival

I worked at the British Science Festival for a week, attending press conferences in the morning and writing in the afternoons. Working at the Festival provided me with the opportunity to experience press conferences "from the other side of the table", and to see clearly the differences in priorities between academics and press.

Media Fellowship Outcomes

In the time that I have been at The Conversation, I have learned a great deal about the nature of media work. I was surprised (perhaps I should not have been) by the speed at which articles are generated – this is in stark contrast with the glacial pace of academic publishing. It has been interesting to see the metrics by which a story is judged – public interest, timeliness etc. I have also gained further practice in writing.

I am proud of the articles I have written. I enjoy writing for a non-academic audience, and I am happy with the work that I have done to make initially very challenging ideas more accessible.

My institution and colleagues will certainly benefit from my role as a high-bandwidth channel between academia and the media. My improved understanding of the priorities and measures of worth employed by the press will be useful in writing press releases and attending press conferences. I have also gained some insight into the mechanism and utility of the press office, a facility which is sometimes neglected by academics.

The greatest difference between working in science and in the media is timescale. In my experience as an academic, most experiments or research projects operate on the order of months or years, and there is a large stack of prerequisites which must be met before each stage of the project can progress. This allows time for a researcher to become intimately acquainted with their subject.

In contrast, the nature of news media is such that articles must typically be written and published within hours, or at most days of an event. As a result, the goal is always to gain a minimal viable understanding of a subject as fast as possible, in order to ensure that the article is correct – but no more than that. It is a question of trading-off depth for breadth of understanding.

Let's wait until I have completed my Media Fellowship to see whether I am a convert to media work. However, my experience will certainly influence my future interaction with the press, which will hopefully increase over the coming months.

Based on my experience at The Conversation, which has been very positive, I will advise my colleagues to engage with the media with more confidence. Having seen the internal workings of The Conversation, I have been impressed by their integrity and commitment to accurate representation of science – a fact which might come as a surprise to some cynics.

I would also emphasise the large disparity in the rate at which articles are published. Academics are used to a multi-stage process of review, editing and proof-reading which can sometimes take months, providing many opportunities to correct mistakes or change the tone of a sentence. I have seen a number of academics taken by surprise as their article is published within minutes of submission, which can sometimes lead to difficulty.

Finally I would like to sincerely thank my hosts, the British Science Association and EPSRC for giving me this opportunity, which has so far been extremely worthwhile.

Tyler Shendruk, Long-Term Fellow,
University of Oxford

Financial Times, 26 August – 19 September 2014

Testimonial

By placing me at the *Financial Times*, the British Science Association gave me the unexpected opportunity to see the research that we scientists do from a new and broader perspective. It was a chance to share exciting research with a wide audience that I didn't expect to ever have. I wrote about everything from herding sheep to high-tech "smart-skins" on military aircraft (examples from the first week alone) and I now have a better understanding and appreciation of media coverage of science news.

The placement was a great experience for me and I hope that I was able to give back by writing accurate and engaging pieces. The BSA was amazingly supportive and the *Financial Times* was extremely welcoming and trusting. Thank you.

Working at the *Financial Times*

What sort of crazy, half-baked scheme takes scientists with no training in journalism from the laboratory bench and plops them in the middle of the most respected newsrooms in the world? A surprisingly successful one, apparently. The Media Fellowship scheme gave me the chance to write science articles for the *Financial Times* and gain insight into how UK media organisations approach science news. But before starting my placement, I was wondering just what I had signed up for.

I visited Clive Cookson prior to my placement and he made it clear that I would be thrown head-first into writing articles. I wondered what this would be like in practice. Would my writing style be grossly inappropriate? Would my articles be so heavily edited that even I wouldn't recognise them (if they were even publishable at all)? So I suppose that my trepidation wasn't so strange at all: I was simply anxious.

In reality, my Media Fellowship at the *Financial Times* was wonderful. The science desk was extremely welcoming and the placement was a flurry of fast-paced days, which ordinarily began early since I had to catch the bus from Oxford to London.

Working at the British Science Festival

Attending and reporting on the British Science Festival was extremely rewarding for me. As a non-British visitor to the UK, I really appreciate that science is such a strong element of the national culture and it is clear that the British Science Festival is a keystone piece of this. The fun atmosphere was immediately welcoming.

One of the most interesting things about this experience was having a "control group" of journalists from other media outlets covering the same stories from the same set of press conferences. It was fascinating to see the different stylistic and editorial choices that were made.

Another interesting observation was that there is a strong camaraderie between science journalists. I found the mood to be very similar to that between scientists in that people were friendly and helpful to one another, while there clearly existed an underlying competition built into their roles as journalists from competing news organisations.

The week at the British Science Festival was also an opportunity to get to know the other Fellows. As might be expected, they were kindred spirits. These were successful academics from a variety of fields who all felt strongly enough about the importance of science communication that they spent a prolonged period of time in a news organisation. I'm glad that being a BSA Media Fellow gave me the chance to meet such amazing people.

Media Fellowship Outcomes

Prior to the BSA media placement, I had known that universities issue press releases but I certainly hadn't fully appreciated their keystone role in the interaction between science and the media. They act both as an announcement of new discoveries and as the primary source of information. Papers and interviews all come later – we scientists must ensure that press releases representing our work are accurate.

Being fully available is also important. If my institution or a journal ever issues a release on my research, I will write a guiding script for myself that I can refer to during interviews, and extend my work hours for the duration of the embargo period in order to be more easily available to international journalists.

I also won't judge journalists for the headlines above their articles - headlines are not written by journalists but by a subeditor, whose job it is to make articles clear, correct, concise and consistent. This doesn't mean that sensational or incorrect headlines should be accepted but does help explain their prevalence.

Newspaper content is never for experts. I'm now content with that level of detail. I hope that my writing engaged casual readers with the excitement and importance of scientific discoveries. I was lucky enough to be widely published while at the *Financial Times* and I am proud to have written 18 articles during my 19 days in the newsroom.

During my time at the *Financial Times*, I also wrote 15 blog posts for "Scientist on Assignment", which was hosted by the Department of Physics at the University of Oxford. It was very generous of the department to set this up for me and I tried to take full advantage of this direct line of communication with the physicists within the department. Each post that I wrote was geared specifically towards giving scientists a look into the inner workings of science journalism.

Likewise, I wrote an article, for EMBOencounters, the European Molecular Biology Organization's newsletter, about my experiences at the *Financial Times* that is scheduled to be published later this month. EMBO funds my research on modelling the streaming flows that biologists often observe in cells as an active matter phenomenon and they were not only charitable enough to allow me time to participate in the BSA Media Fellowships but also invited me to share my experiences with EMBO scientists across Europe.

I have been invited to continue writing for the *Financial Times* and I plan to take full advantage of this invitation. It is my goal to invest a handful of workdays per month producing science content for the public.

Anna Simmonds, Research Associate
Division of Brain Sciences,
Imperial College London

Nature News, 14 July – 8 August 2014

Testimonial

Being a 2014 British Science Association Media Fellow was a great honour and an incredibly beneficial experience. My hosts at Nature were fantastic and I learnt so much from them. It was extremely valuable learning from expert science journalists about how to report on science without misleading the public or misrepresenting the scientists. I hope to continue to establish productive links between scientists and journalists in my own field of neuroscience.

Having had the opportunity to learn more about how the media operates and reports on science, I have shared my findings with my colleagues back in the lab, hopefully encouraging others to develop their own links with the media and promoting effective collaborations between the two fields.

Working at *Nature News*

My placement at *Nature News* was an excellent experience. I was bracing myself for an intimidating environment, but everyone was incredibly helpful and welcoming. Most of the writing I did was for the online part of *Nature News,* although I also got the chance to have a go at other types of writing, such as short captions for the Facebook page. I also got experience in writing research highlights for the print magazine, where papers are summarised in less than 150 words.

Working in a global news teams brings its own challenges, and the conference calls that brought together the whole team were impressive. As well as being able to access sources across the world, it also meant that staff members were able to cover stories around the clock.

I was impressed with the journalists' knowledge of previous stories, similar to a scientist being aware of the wider literature and being able to refer to past papers. So what might look like an exciting idea may have actually been covered earlier and is no longer news. I loved watching how the reporters pitch a story – they're really good at summarising it, focusing on the main finding, linking it to what we know already and thinking about how to get a story out of it.

Working at the British Science Festival

Unfortunately I wasn't able to attend most of the British Science Festival as I had a trip to MIT the same week, but I enjoyed the day I spent there. The range of exhibitions on offer was impressive and it was a great opportunity to catch up with the other Media Fellows. I went to the press conference the week before which was a great experience.

Media Fellowship outcomes

From the fellowship I gained a better understanding of how to present research accurately and explain its significance, without over-stating its implications or making the story go beyond the data, as was the case in some press releases I came across. I appreciated being able to learn how journalists decide what to cover as a story and learnt how not to get swept up in the hype of a press release. I discovered it's important to ask: is this surprising? Didn't we know this already? How does this add to what we already knew? What did they do exactly? Why has no-one done this before? Who does it benefit? What are the immediate implications? Learning from the reporters about how they challenge papers before deciding whether to cover them as stories has also helped my role as reviewer for published journals.

I increased my knowledge of science beyond my personal field and learnt all kinds of things about sandflies, robots and Darwin's library on board HMS Beagle among other topics.

Finding 'sources' for the story was crucial and I underestimated this at the beginning. Without a network of contacts to draw upon, it was a challenge to find experts able to comment on the work of a colleague, and willing to do this in a very short timeframe. Usually when peer-reviewing for a journal, we are given a couple of weeks to do so and yet journalists ask for comments within a couple of days, if not hours.

I've given a presentation to my department about my experience as a Media Fellow, which led to an interesting discussion about science and the media.

The experience has helped improve my writing, particular shorter pieces such as abstracts for manuscripts or conference submissions. The research highlights in the print magazine force you to focus on what's most important as there's no space for superfluous detail, but also even when word counts were not so tight, such as for the online pieces, every word still has to be important. I also think this will help in future grant applications that I write.

I would also like to continue developing my links with the media, perhaps writing articles more closely linked to my own subject area. It would be great if one day I could also be called upon as an expert to comment on the work of others.

Proud moments

I found it really insightful to be able to read how other journalists have covered the same story. That never happens in science – you write about your research and you're the only team writing exactly that. But in the news, many people cover the same story. It's interesting to see what others choose to focus on and how that differs from your own angle.

It was also interesting reading comments to other articles. For example, in the comments section of the coverage of the harassment story by 'Science', someone commented that the journalist hadn't mentioned selection bias in their story. This was something we were careful to include, so that made me feel proud of our piece!

Dr Anna Williams,

Senior Lecturer in Forensic Anthropology,
University of Huddersfield

New Scientist,
28 July – 22 August 2014

Testimonial

The Media Fellowship scheme is like an extreme exchange programme, where for a few weeks, you step into someone else's world and learn the immersive way. At first, it is a bit uncomfortable, but you soon learn to adjust and enjoy it. I got to see first-hand how a magazine is built, how stories are pitched, written, tweaked and sculpted, and how page space is won and lost. I got to write about all sorts of weird and wonderful topics, from toxic algae and fluoride in llama teeth, to cancer-fighting starches and Antarctic midges. I learned how to meet two hour deadlines, to attend press conferences and ask the right questions of scientists to get tasty little quotes. I also met some incredible, inspirational people, on the *New Scientist* team and amongst the Media Fellows themselves. The whole experience was wonderful, challenging, difficult, stimulating and immensely rewarding, all at once.

Working at *New Scientist*

On the wall in the *New Scientist* offices are five international clocks, telling the time all over the world, including an alternate reality. This seemed particularly apt, as in the first few days on my placement, I felt as if I had stepped into a parallel universe. The people appeared familiar, and they spoke a language I recognised; but the tasks, attitudes and goals were different to those I was familiar with.

In academia, I am spoilt with slowly approaching deadlines, indulgent 'blue skies' thinking, and being able to choose what to research. At *New Scientist*, the deadlines came thick and fast, and the needs of the audience underpinned every decision.

I attended conference call meetings with the section editors from both the London and USA offices, where we discussed the articles that would make it into the next magazine. These were exciting and riveting, as I got to hear how the stories were approved, which subjects were popular, and how an interesting fact or piece of research could be dressed differently in order to make a viable article. Generally, if people wanted to know more immediately, and felt that the story passed the 'would you tell your mates in the pub?' test, then it was in!

Once stories had been approved, I researched, and phoned or emailed researchers for interviews or comments. I talked to some fantastic scientists, about everything from Egyptian mummification to US court cases. One was willing to speak to me at six in the morning on his holiday – that's dedication! It was clear that they were keen to communicate their research to the wider public, and be quoted in print.

It surprised me a little that the sub-editors and editors tended to make a significant contribution to the article but weren't credited. The lack of attribution and each article having only one named author made it look like the work of just one person rather than a team. This means the author takes all the glory (or all the blame!).

Once I had got a week under my belt, I felt more comfortable and got into the swing of writing and pitching stories. I wrote about algal blooms, anoxic ocean zones and the Terracotta Army. I really enjoyed these as they were so far removed from my everyday life that it was refreshing to think about something different!

Over the course of my placement, I was lucky enough to get the opportunity to write about some topics close to my heart and my expertise. I got to write a piece on the autopsy findings from the Michael Brown case, and use my contacts in the industry and insider knowledge to offer a critique.

Working at the British Science Festival

I hadn't been to a science festival before, so I wasn't sure what to expect. I imagined something akin to a school sports day, but with science-flavoured activities. What I got was much more sophisticated, attractive and engrossing. I was really impressed by the sheer imagination that went into each nugget of science.

It was interesting to attend press conferences, and hear other journalists' take on a story, or the aspects they noted down. These seemed very different to my instincts, which were to probe the science and spot limitations. It was lovely to see how the Media Fellows had settled into the role too, and evolved from naïve proto-journalists to fully-fledged, ruthless story hunters by the time of the Festival.

Media Fellowship outcomes

I came away from the Festival brimming with ideas for organising a county-wide science festival in my area, perhaps in conjunction with other universities in the locality, and very keen to give talks and host activities at existing events. I have joined the organising committee of the Otley Science Festival, and I am excited about what I can learn.

I got a lot more than I ever expected out of the Fellowship. Firstly, I had an invaluable experience and opportunity that others would kill for. Secondly, I met some amazing, inspirational people who I would never otherwise have met. Not only the fantastic, talented and diverse people at *New Scientist*, but the other lovely Media Fellows too.

Thirdly, I have picked up some invaluable lessons about giving science the place it deserves in society. As someone who identifies herself as a scientist, I believe science is pretty important and fundamental to society, culture and life itself. However, there are still a lot of people for who science is a scary, intimidating, closeted thing reserved only for 'boffins' or *other* people.

The Fellowship and my time at *New Scientist* has shown me that science only gets shouted about, published, blogged about and re-tweeted if people can relate to it, and if ordinary people want to chat about it down the pub. Scientists can do a lot to meet the journalists half way.

I believe that my science writing skills have improved, and I am keen to continue to hone these, through blogging and writing for media outlets, online and in print. I think that the skills gained through the Media Fellowship will be invaluable for grant applications, science writing and broadcasting, and engaging the public with research activities. These will help to raise the profile of my research and that of my institution, whilst also, hopefully, encouraging the public to embrace science and scientific learning.