

## Association of British Science Writer's (ABSW) Media Fellowships

Formerly the British Science Association's (BSA) Media Fellowships Scheme\*



The ABSW 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 the Londonist.

The ABSW Media Fellowships:

- Engage – give scientists the confidence to engage with the media
- Foster Trust – tackle mistrust and misrepresentation
- Bridge the Gap – between journalists and scientists
- Build Understanding – between science and society

\*The British Science Association (BSA) ran the scheme from 1987 – 2020 as part of their commitment to increasing the accessibility of the sciences and providing opportunities for discussion and debate.

## **ABSW Media Fellowships Brochure**

### **Contents:**

**ABSW Media Fellowships: A story of real impact for Fellows, their Supporting Institution and Media Hosts (p3)**

**How Does it Work? (p5)**

**What Does it Cost? (p5)**

**How do I become a Media Fellow? (p5)**

**How do I support a Media Fellow? (p7)**

**How do I become a Media Host? (p7)**

**Diversity and Inclusion (p8)**

**Meet the 2020 Fellows (p8)**

## **ABSW Media Fellowships: A story of real impact for Fellows, their Supporting Institution and Media Hosts**

Many Fellows have become ambassadors in their supporting institutions, advocating to develop better relationships between science and the media. Some Fellows have gone on to lead institutions, and others have made the move into media. Behind almost every major science story, from black holes to giant squids, there's at least one article written by a Fellow.

The scheme has a real impact on the Fellows and the media contacts involved, and positively affects the Fellow's supporting institutions through improved relationships between scientists and journalists. It has also, in many cases, strengthened relations between academics and their internal press teams.

Testimonials:

*Through the Media Fellowships our members have helped develop the narrative of biomedical science news stories at national and regional level and their experience has ensured that more people are aware of our profession and the vital role our members play at the heart of healthcare.* Dan Nimmo, Head of Communications, Institute of Biomedical Science

*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

*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

The Fellowship alumni includes:

Prof. Nick Petford (1995), Vice Chancellor, University of Northampton

Dr Ruth McKernan CBE (1992), Former Chief Executive, Innovate UK

Dr Helen Czerski (2005), physicist, UCL research fellow and TV presenter

Hannah Devlin (2006), Science Correspondent, The Guardian

Prof. Tom Crick MBE (2011), computer scientist, Swansea University

Dr Suzi Gage (2013), psychologist, University of Liverpool

Vicky Forster (2014), TED Global Fellow

Prof. Clare Elwell (2018), medical physicist and charity leader, UCL

Below are some of its impacts on Fellows, their supporting institutions, and media hosts.

### *Fellows*

- Better understanding of how the media work
- Understanding of how to get research across accurately with minimal 'spin'
- How to pitch a story to news editors
- Improved writing skills
- Ability to work to tight deadlines
- Taking part in press conferences
- Increased confidence
- Wider understanding and appreciation of science beyond personal field
- Network of media contacts
- Ability to match photos with stories
- Experience writing for different audiences
- AV and TV technical skills
- Wider appreciation of new media (blogs, podcasts etc)

### *Fellows' supporting institution*

- 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
- Higher quality teaching
- Improved writing of funding applications
- Opportunities for cross-disciplinary work.

## *Media hosts*

- Kept up to date with the work of practising researchers
- Fellows find a new angle and ask original questions about stories
- Access to new science and health story news
- Access to academic contacts
- Help researching stories, finding pictures and writing copy

To find out more watch this YouTube video made by the British Science Association (BSA) who formerly ran this scheme:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sU9mK\\_INNKU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sU9mK_INNKU)

## **How does it work?**

Scientists, clinicians, and engineers are identified and shortlisted by their supporting institution, who fund their Fellowship.

The ABSW identifies media hosts and then carries out the final selection process to match individuals to media hosts.

The Fellows receive training from the ABSW prior to taking up their placements and are supported by the ABSW throughout their placement and beyond.

Placements normally take place for 2-6 weeks during the summer to fit with University teaching commitments. There is plenty of flexibility in the scheme to suit home and work commitments.

## **What does it cost?**

Media Fellowships are paid for by the supporting organisation/employer and cost £5,000 per Fellow. This covers all expenses necessary for the Fellow (relocation/travel/accommodation), training and the administration of the scheme.

The supporting organisation/employer must also agree to release the Fellow on full pay for the duration of the Fellowship (2-6 weeks). Annual leave may be used for part of the placement

## **How do I become a Media Fellow?**

The ABSW is **not able to offer Media Fellowships** to freelancers, undergraduate students, PhD 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.

To be eligible to apply for the Media Fellowships scheme you must fulfil 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 not eligible as experience has shown that the scheme does not work well for those at this stage of their career.
- 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 support both financially and in terms of 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

You must apply for the scheme via your employer/funder and cannot apply for the scheme directly to the ABSW as you need the support and funding of your organisation to become a Fellow. Speak to your employer/funder and inform them of the scheme and if they are interested suggest they get in touch with the ABSW to find out more.

[sallie.robins@absw.org.uk](mailto:sallie.robins@absw.org.uk)

As a Media Fellow you will be required to commit to:

- Attending a training day prior to your Fellowship
- Being available during the summer for the placement (2-6 weeks)
- Consider relocation, if required, to take part in the placement
- Attending an evaluation and leadership day after your Fellowship to present a set of objectives to use the skills and disseminate the knowledge you have gained during your placement. These will be assessed after six months.
- Liaison with your Fellowship funder and organisation's press office and public engagement team, which may include a few days in the press office and involve public engagement or media activities

- Write a short report about the Media Fellowship

### **How do I support a Media Fellow?**

There are many benefits to your organisation of supporting the Fellowships including:

- Better promotion of your 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
- Higher quality teaching
- Improved writing of funding applications
- Opportunities for cross-disciplinary work.

You will need to support the Media Fellowship both financially at a cost of £5000 per Fellow, and ensure they have consent to being released on full pay for the duration of the media placement (2-6 weeks).

The ABSW can provide materials to assist you at every stage of the process from publicising the scheme to your staff to your application and selection process. Whether you select your final Fellows or whether you ask the ABSW to decide based on your shortlist is negotiable. The ABSW will then decide along which media outlet they are placed with considering both the Fellow's and the Media Host's preferences.

To find out more about becoming a supporter contact:

[Sallie.Robins@absw.org.uk](mailto:Sallie.Robins@absw.org.uk)

### **How do I become a Media Host?**

The ABSW is always looking for placements for Media Fellows. There are many benefits of becoming a media host including:

- Keeping up to date with the work of practising researchers
- Fellows find a new angle and ask original questions about stories
- Access to new science and health story news
- Access to academic contacts
- Help researching stories, finding pictures and writing copy

If you can commit to hosting a Media Fellow during the summer for 2-6 weeks and provide them with a real insight into your work, then get in touch to find out more. [Sallie.Robins@absw.org.uk](mailto:Sallie.Robins@absw.org.uk)

## Diversity and Inclusion

The ABSW is committed to equality, diversity, and inclusion, and want Media Fellowships to be open to all. There are several ways we are working to support participation in the scheme:

- We collect anonymised diversity data as part of the Media Fellow application process
- We provide guidance for our partners to reduce bias in the promotion, application and shortlisting process
- We work with Fellows to accommodate requests for part-time, remote, and flexible working
- We offer placements in a range of UK locations
- We try to find a varied source of funding for the Fellowships

## Meet the 2022 ABSW Media Fellows

The Media Fellowships Scheme was run as a pilot by the ABSW in 2022 with a restricted number of Fellowships available. The success of the pilot means the scheme will be expanded in 2023 to aim for at least 10 ABSW Media Fellows.



### Charlotte Maughan Jones

EPSRC Post-doctoral research fellow, Advanced X-ray Imaging Group (AXIm), Department of Medical Physics and Biomedical Engineering, University College London (UCL) based at The Londonist with Matt Brown, Editor at Large.

This Fellowship was funded by [UCL Engineering](#)



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[Inside One Of The UK's Life-Saving Milk Banks](#)

[The Building Where London Is Road Tested](#)



**Maria Perez Ortiz**

Lecturer, AI Centre, UCL Computer Science, Deputy Director MSc AI for Sustainable Development based at WIRED UK with Rob Reddick, Science Editor

This Fellowship was funded by [UCL Engineering](#)

[Teaching 'Selfish' Wind Turbines to Share Can Boost Productivity](#)

[To Ditch Pesticides, Scientists Are Hacking Insects' Sex Signals](#)

## ABSW Media Fellow 2022

Dr Sarah Pitt



### Sarah Pitt

Principal Lecturer, School of Applied Sciences, Centre for Stress and Age-Related Disease, University of Brighton based at BBC Future with Richard Gray, Editor. Sarah Pitt will undertake her placement in January/February 2023

This Fellowship was funded by the [Institute of Biomedical Sciences](#)

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### Leonie Tanczer

Associate Professor in International Security and Emerging Technologies, UKRI Future Leaders Fellow (#UKRIFLF), Computer Science Department, University College London based at Babbage podcast, The Economist with Hannah Marinho and colleagues

This Fellowship was funded by [UCL Engineering](#)

- [How psychedelics could fix the brain](#)
- [How Science Can Save The World](#)
- [How To Use The Pandemic To Tackle TB](#)
- [Will Ethereum's Merge Transform Crypto?](#)



**Stijn Van Ewijk**

Lecturer (Assistant Professor) in Environmental Engineering, University College London (UCL), based at The Times with Tom Whipple, Science Editor

This Fellowship was funded by [UCL Engineering](#)

[Drastic ways to fight climate change, from volcanoes to millions of mirrors](#)

[Does it really make sense to eat dairy but not beef?](#)

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Find the [full list of Media Fellow alumni here](#)