



Association of British Science Writers (ABSW) Media Fellowships Scheme

Formerly the British Science Association (BSA)
Media Fellowships Scheme

absw
ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH
SCIENCE WRITERS

The ABSW Media Fellowships in a Nutshell

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 Science Unit or the Londonist.

The 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



How does the scheme 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.



2023 Fellow, Liam at the BBC Science Unit in Cardiff

Real Impact for Fellows, Supporting Institutions 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.

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



Fellowship Alumni

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 (pictured)

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



Impact on 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
- Develop new technical skills in broadcasting
- Wider appreciation of new media (video content, social media, podcasts etc)



2023 Fellow, Kristina, with new friends and colleagues at the BBC Science Unit, Cardiff

Impact on Fellow's supporting institution

Better promotion of institution through the media; greater links press office and academics, new contacts, greater understanding of the media process

Increase in science communication activity

Higher quality teaching

Improved writing of funding applications

Opportunities for cross-disciplinary work

Impact on 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

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.

The ABSW provides full support to institutions/employers in all aspects of advertising the Fellowships, and the application and selection process.

There are no costs for the Media Host or for the individual Fellow.



How do I become a Fellow?

Media Fellowships cannot be offered 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.

You must apply for the scheme via your employer/funder and cannot apply for the scheme individually 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 contact the ABSW.

Media Fellowships eligibility:

- practising scientist, social scientist, clinician or engineer with a minimum of 2 years' experience following highest degree. PhD students are not eligible.
- 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

Media Fellowships requirements:

- employer's/funder's support both financially and consent to be released on full pay for the period of the Fellowships
- agree to all the terms and conditions of the Fellowship, including mandatory attendance at the training/development days
- write a short report about the Fellowship



2023 Fellow, Sheri, placed with the Financial Times

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



Filipa Adzic

Filipa Adzic is a Postdoctoral research associate at the Department of Civil, Environmental, and Geomatic Engineering at University College London. Her research focuses on both experimental and numerical investigations of indoor air quality in indoor spaces and public transport.

Filipa worked part time with The Londonist from July to October. Whilst there she wrote stories on subjects as diverse as the Camden Fringe Festival to the Science Museum's new gallery dedicated to engineers.

Filipa said: *The Londonist media fellowship placement allowed me to immerse myself fully in the dynamic world of online media and to learn more about business operations.*

Filipa's fellowship was supported by UCL Engineering



Liam Collins-Jones

Liam Collins-Jones is a Research Fellow in the Department of Medical Physics and Biomedical Engineering at University College London. His research focuses on developing new methods to study brain activity in the baby brain.

Liam worked with the science team at the BBC in Cardiff, he also spent time with the health team working on radio programmes such as 'Unexpected Elements', 'Inside Science' and 'Healthwatch'.

Of his Fellowship Liam said: *I was excited to learn about methods to captivate audiences outside of science and inform about advances in science and engineering in an engaging manner. I enjoyed getting insights from professionals in journalism and broadcasting about how we as scientists can work effectively alongside the media.*

Liam's Fellowship was supported by UCL Engineering.



Maria Paula Escobar

Maria Paula Escobar is a cultural and environmental geographer with an interdisciplinary background in Political Science and History from the Universidad de los Andes in her native Colombia. She moved to the UK, to complete an MA on Environment, Politics and Globalisation and a PhD in Geography, both from King's College London. She joined Bristol's Veterinary School in September 2017 where she is now a Senior Lecturer in Environmental Geography having worked in post-doctoral fellowships related to livestock farming governance and regulation funded by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Defra.

Maria Paula worked with the science editor at WIRED UK throughout August and wanted to develop further her interest in the relationship between the media and environmental concerns.

Whilst at WIRED UK Maria wrote about subjects from why some urban species thrive to the effect of heatwaves on cattle.

Her Fellowship is supported by the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Bristol.



Niall Jeffrey

Niall Jeffrey is a cosmologist working at University College London. To answer questions about the origin and evolution of the Universe, he develops specialised machine learning and statistical techniques. Recently, he led the team that created the Dark Energy Survey's dark matter map. He is now also working on the European Space Agency's Euclid mission (launched 1st July 2023).

Niall worked on the science desk of The Times during September and October: *As a Media Fellow, I worked to understand the connections between scientists, journalists, and the public. High-quality coverage of science is essential to cut through the hype for important topics and controversial stories.*

Whilst at The Times Niall produced a whole range of news items from the use of AI in sewage management and schizophrenia diagnosis to the first Euclid space telescope images.

Niall's Fellowship is supported by UCL Global Engagement.



Enrico Mariconti

Enrico Mariconti is an assistant professor in the Department of Security and Crime Science at University College London. His research areas include cybercrime, AI and defence systems and cyberattacks.

Enrico undertook his placement with New Scientist where he worked with the visual content team who are instrumental in delivering science video content for audiences across the New Scientist brand, including building a huge TikTok and YouTube following. Whilst at New Scientist he worked on a variety of subjects including the story of an activist who swam the Bristol Channel dressed as a mermaid to protest about the state of our rivers.

On his Fellowship Enrico said: *Often, academics are seen as arrogant, as if their knowledge places them above everyone else; it is important to change this stereotype and I strive to be one of the academics working towards this goal.*

Enrico's Fellowship was supported by UCL Engineering.



Sarah Pitt

Sarah Pitt is a Principal Lecturer in Microbiology at the University of Brighton. She is a Fellow of the Institute of Biomedical Science, a member of the IBMS Council and the Chief Virology Examiner. Sarah's areas of research include investigating the antimicrobial properties of snail mucus, evaluating biomedical scientists' development as professionals throughout their career, including clinical placements, and developing new approaches to teaching microbiology.

Sarah was placed with BBC Future in London and worked with them throughout August. Sarah says: *Due to my professional background in diagnostic virology and my role at the IBMS, I did regular interviews during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly on BBC Radio. Through the Fellowship I learned how journalists think and work and developed my skills on the other side of the microphone as interviewer rather than interviewee.*

Sarah's Fellowship was supported by the Institute of Biomedical Science.



Oksana Pyzik

Oksana Pyzik is an award-winning Educator, Global Health Advisor, Pharmacist and Lecturer at University College London (UCL), School of Pharmacy, as well as the Founder of UCL Fight the Fakes, a collaboration hub on substandard and falsified medical products (SFMP). In 2015, Oksana launched the UCL Global Citizenship Programme on pandemic preparedness and she is a regular contributor in the media on global health topics.

Oksana worked on the science desk at The Guardian in mid-August with her placement running until mid-September. Speaking about her thoughts on the media, Oksana said: "Pharmacists are under-represented in the media whereas, doctors and nurses' perspectives on topical health issues are widely covered. As a pharmacist working in the media, I hope to normalise pharmacy voices in the media and public platforms. Working with the media is one of the most powerful ways that academics, health care professionals and global health organisations can fight misinformation, bust stereotypes, and provide new role models"

Whilst at the Guardian Oksana wrote on topics ranging from a newly discovered walking leaf insect species to British people's sex lives.

Oksana's Fellowship is supported by UCL Global Engagement.



Sheri Scott

Sheri Scott is a Senior Lecturer at Nottingham Trent University. Her areas of expertise include Biomedical Science practice and education. Sheri joined Nottingham Trent University in 2018 after a career covering 22 years working in Clinical Biochemistry in NHS laboratories. She is a champion for sustainability.

Sheri worked with both the science and health desks at the Financial Times. Her first joint byline alongside Science Editor, Clive Cookson, was on an entirely novel approach to controlling malaria.

Sheri worked at the FT for three weeks during August and her Fellowship is supported by the Institute of Biomedical Science.



Kristina Wanyonyi-Kay

Kristina Wanyonyi-Kay holds the position of Senior Research Associate and Research Programme Leader at The Healthcare Improvement Studies (THIS) Institute, based at the University of Cambridge. Her primary area of focus lies in enhancing the quality of healthcare services.


Kristina relocated to the BBC in Cardiff to work with the science and health teams in early September. Whilst there she contributed to a range of programmes including being a panelist on a live recorded World Service discussion that explored the evidence that links the health of our mouths with the rest of our bodies.

Speaking about her placement Kristina said: *The Fellowship provided an invaluable chance for me as an academic to learn from the media who have a widespread influence across all sectors of society. The Fellowship equipped me with the skills to effectively communicate research findings more broadly and maximise the impact of my research evidence.*

Kristina is going to continue working with BBC Health Check as a presenter's friend and has plans to be a presenter and producer for a series which may be recurring on the BBC.

Kristina's Fellowship was supported by the School of Clinical Medicine, University of Cambridge.





For further details of the Fellowships
please contact Sallie Robins,
Executive Secretary, ABSW

Sallie Robins

sallie.robins@absw.org.uk

07733 330344