

## 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**

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

Many Fellows have become ambassadors in their 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 institutions through improved relationships between scientists and journalists. It has also, in many cases, strengthened relations between academics and their internal press teams.

Testimonials:

*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 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' 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.

### **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

For a detailed personal specification for the Media Fellowships see Appendix 1 and for the Terms and Conditions that Media Fellows need to agree to see Appendix 2.

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

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 consent to releasing the Fellow 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. Once you have provided your shortlist of Fellows to the ABSW it will then be the ABSW's decision as to who is awarded the Media Fellowship and which media outlet they are placed with.

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 ask all Media Hosts for their diversity policy and accessibility statements.

## Meet the 2020 Fellows

The Media Fellowships Scheme was last run by the British Science Association in 2020 on a smaller scale due to the COVID-19 pandemic

### **Professor Monica Lakhanpaul, UCL (sponsored by UCL's Global Engagement Office) placed with the BBC.**

*Monica is UCL Pro-Vice-Provost for South Asia, Professor of Integrated Community Child Health at UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health, Paediatrician and Co-Director to the Childhood Infections and Pollution (CHIP) global consortium. She is committed to improving the health and well-being of the most vulnerable/underserved children and young people through holistic, participatory, multi-sectoral interdisciplinary interventions that encompass health, environment, education, and creative arts in the UK and Globally.*

Professor Monica Lakhanpaul contributed to the following news pieces:

[Reviewing the latest evidence around BAME and COVID-19](#)

[COVID-19 vaccines for children and how to overcome hesitancy in parents](#)



**Dr Clare Oliver-Williams, University of Cambridge (sponsored by University of Cambridge School for Clinical Medicine) placed with The Economist.**

*Clare is a Research Fellow based in the Cardiovascular Epidemiology Unit at the University of Cambridge. Her research interests are focused on investigating the risk of a range of cardiovascular outcomes in relation to female-specific risk factors, including parity and hypertensive disorders of pregnancy.*

Read Dr Clare Oliver-Williams' stories:

[Extinction looms for a bird that has forgotten how to sing](#)

**Dr Martin Khechara, University of Wolverhampton (sponsored by the Institute of Biomedical Science) placed with The Naked Scientists.**

*Martin is a Senior Lecturer in Biomedical Science (Microbiology) based at the University of Wolverhampton. He is also the Associate Professor for Public Engagement in STEM. As part of this, Martin is leading a public engagement group called the STEM Response Team which provides engaging and educational science experiences for schools and the wider community.*

Dr Martin Khechara contributed to the following news pieces:

[Learning In The Time Of COVID](#)

[Fossilised bioluminescent beetle discovered](#)

["Train millipedes" keep eight-year timetable](#)

[If Earth were heavier, would rockets work?](#)

[Old drug is new weapon against tsetse flies](#)

**Dr Priti Parikh, UCL (sponsored by UCL Engineering) placed with New Scientist.**

*Priti is a chartered civil engineer and Associate Professor in Engineering and International Development at UCL. She has over 15 years of*

*engineering consultancy experience in South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and the UK. Priti has successfully championed the need for high-quality research and engineering education to meet the Sustainable Development Goals in resource challenged settings.*

Read Dr Priti Parikhs' stories:

[Stretchy bands generate electricity from body heat to power gadgets](#)

[Soil safely filters 38 million tonnes of waste each year](#)

[Male lyrebirds imitate a flock of birds to scare females into mating](#)

[Google uses fibre-optic cable to detect earthquakes](#)

[Over one sixth of all food produced ends up being thrown in the bin](#)

[Algorithm reveals contents of fragile letters sealed for 300 years](#)

**[Dr Jerone Andrews, UCL \(sponsored by UCL Engineering\) placed with BBC Future.](#)**

*Jerone is a Research Fellow at the UCL Centre for Artificial Intelligence. He currently holds a Royal Academy of Engineering UK Intelligence Community Research Fellowship and is researching deep learning-based image forensics. His research interests and expertise extend across computer vision and deep learning; from self-supervised anomaly detection to human dimensional attention-inspired transfer learning.*

Read Dr Jerone Andrews' articles:

[The hidden fingerprint inside your photos](#)

**[Dr Richard Colchester, UCL \(sponsored by UCL Engineering\) placed with WIRED UK.](#)**

*Richard is a Royal Academy of Engineering Research Fellow in the Department of Medical Physics and Biomedical Engineering at UCL. His research focuses on the development of imaging and sensing devices for use in minimally invasive surgery. The overall aim is the development of an all-optical platform technology which uses optical fibres for imaging, sensing, and therapy.*

Read Dr Richard Colchester's articles:

[Does COVID-killing UV tech work?](#)

[We asked coronavirus experts what summer 2021 will be like](#)

Find out more about the most recent Media Fellows cohort and their experiences of the scheme:

- [Media Fellow Q&A #1: Science journalism reaches new heights](#)
- [Media Fellow Q&A #2: Headlines and deadlines](#)
- [Media Fellow Q&A #3: A global newsroom](#)

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

## Appendix One: Personal Specification

The following specification describes what we are looking for in a Media Fellow, and applications to the scheme will be assessed according to this and other funding eligibility factors.

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Assessed by: Application form (A) Phone interview (P) Letter (L)</b>	<b>Essential (E) Desirable (D)</b>
<b>UK-based scientist, engineer or medic</b>	A	E
<b>Eligible for available funding Post-doc or above</b>	A P - confirm A	E D
<b>Intending to stay in science/at current institution/within the UK and has funding to do so</b>	A P - confirm	D
<b>Interest in the media, how it relates to science and their work: they see media work as important and central to their career</b>	A	E
<b>Clear on how the Fellowship will further their career</b>	A	E
<b>Leadership skills and an interest in sharing their knowledge to change their institution's culture</b>	A - provide example P	E
<b>Pro-active self-starter</b>	A - provide example P	E
<b>Confident and capable when out of comfort zone</b>	A - provide example P	E
<b>Communication skills and creativity</b>	A - quality of writing or examples of quality work	D
<b>Understanding of the funding and terms and conditions (including attending the training and debrief days)</b>	A - confirm	E
<b>Approval from line manager</b>	L P - confirm	E
<b>Feels they have capacity to take on more activity after the placement</b>	A - provide example P	D