

## Researcher Toolkit: Working with the Media for Arts and Humanities Researchers

This guide aims to give an introduction to the ways in which arts and humanities researchers can engage with the media. The need to demonstrate the value of publicly-funded research is growing all the time and public support is crucial to long-term investment.



### Who is interested in your work?

The media has a huge need to find interesting, unusual and 'human' stories and almost any research subject in the arts and humanities will be of interest to people outside of academia and therefore to the media.

Arts and humanities research touches the lives of all of us and in ways that we sometimes don't always recognise. The challenge is to showcase the subject or the results of your research in such a way that those aspects of your work which might resonate beyond academia are brought to the fore and presented in ways that are understandable to a broader audience.

### What makes a good story?

Take a look at any broadsheet newspaper and you'll see that the vast majority of its articles conform to the TRUTH test. In other words, they will generally be:

- Timely
- Relevant
- Unique
- Topical
- Human

"It is easy to forget that the media themselves are not your audience - they are a means of broadening that audience."

Dr Tom Charlton (University of Stirling),  
New Generation Thinker 2014

All of these are important but the most important is the final one – the Human aspect.

Luckily, for arts and humanities researchers, this should be relatively straightforward. Other aspects, such as relevance and uniqueness should also be general characteristics of your research. Qualities such as topicality and timeliness will need some planning.

Consider, for example, a future event or anniversary which might relate to your research and which you could use to contextualise your research for the media. With all of the TRUTH characteristics, advice and guidance will be needed to ensure that your research is presented in the most engaging and compelling way possible, whilst of course ensuring that it loses none of its rigour and excellence as research. Institutions and funders will have press teams which can assist you in communicating with media professionals.

Remember that the press and media are extremely broad and cover the full spectrum of outlets from documentaries and prime-time television programmes, to highly specialist and niche publications and local news outlets. Not every piece of research will be featured on News at Ten. But everyone has a story to tell and part of the telling of any story is knowing who wants or needs to hear that story and how best to reach them.

## **Being prepared**

Media professionals face many serious challenges in their line of work — perhaps the two most important being that they face very tight deadlines and they sometimes must cover stories they know very little about. If you would like to communicate with the media, then making it easier for a member of the press to understand the importance of your research is an important first step.

You could be asked questions about your research at short notice and with little time to prepare. One way to be prepared for this is to draft a series of bullet points when you begin your project that clearly articulate what is unique about it. By posting this list on the wall next to your PC you can add to or amend the list as your project develops. It also enables you to keep fresh in your mind what might be the most important part of your research for the wider non-academic world.

### **Advice**

Professor Jane Chapman (University of Lincoln) has worked with the media as a producer and as an academic. She says:

“Successful media engagement serves to widen dissemination, and enhances the profile of an academic as a public intellectual. In addition, media engagement can be linked to a bigger package for a future REF case study. Evidence of media engagement allows RCUK to justify the usefulness of their expenditure. The challenge is to select and present complex research findings in an accessible way that will satisfy the agenda of your chosen media outlet. Therefore the trick is to communicate clearly and simply without diluting the message.”

Professor Jane Chapman's tips are:

- Understand not only the practical constraints (such as deadlines, content parameters) but also specific news values and the culture of organisations you are dealing with.
- Linked to the above, find out more about the perceived audience for your specific media content, so that you can cater for them.
- Don't be so flattered by media interest that you allow them to be too demanding or manipulative. Be honest about the limits of your knowledge on the specific topic that they want. Negotiate in circumstances where their agenda seems different to yours, remembering that they need you as much as you need them.
- Don't give too much for free, because sometimes they milk you."

## Digital opportunities

As well as sharing your research with a wide range of newspapers, publications, television and radio programmes, the changing role of the media in the digital age means that sharing your research online is increasingly effective and easy to do. You could:

- volunteer to write a guest blog post or article for a relevant online website or community
- use social media to raise the profile of your research
  - find out more in our Twitter Guide
- create your own website
- produce your own podcasts or short films to communicate your research
  - this material could be reused by the media
- appear on the AHRC website as a case study, feature, event listing, film or press release
  - we regularly feature AHRC-funded research and our Communications team can help to share your research widely and with the media

These activities may mean that your research communicates directly with the public, bypassing the need for 'traditional' media outlets. Attracting

"There is so much that researchers learn by making documentaries. But, it is important to know where you're unwilling to compromise - which points are too important to be left unmade."

Dr Richard Clay (University of Birmingham), AHRC Commons Fellow

"It's important to remember that journalists and other people in media often come with a story in mind, and just want an expert to validate their view. You have to really think about whether you agree with what you are being asked to do."

Dr Jason Dittmer (University College London)

online attention will demonstrate the potential wider interest in your research story. Increasingly, the media are seeking stories online and they may become aware of the online buzz around your research.

## **Further Resources**

[National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement, Working with the Media](#)

[Guardian Higher Education Network live chat on building good university-media relationships](#)

[LSE Blog, How to work with academics for media folks](#)

[Read the AHRC's other Toolkits for further suggestions to improve research communications.](#)