Media Training Factsheet

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Who are the media and what do they want?

Who are they? The media is a catch all term for anyone who works professionally in information gathering and dissemination for public consumption. The people you are most likely to meet as an interview subject are: newspaper writers and reporters, specialist correspondents, photographers, TV journalists and camera people as well as radio journalists and web writers.

However, it’s also worth knowing that behind all of these people will be a team of editors and producers, who also have an opinion and say in how a broadcast or written piece in presented.

What do they want? In short: your information. In the case of academics it’s often because you have a published paper out, have won an award or are holding a talk on a particular subject and have issued a press release. In that case, the media will want to speak to you to find out more about that specific topic. They will already have a good grasp of the story from a release, and will only speak to you if they have further questions or need extra information.

If the media approach you to comment on a story that they are working on, or a story that is already in the public domain, then they will be looking to add your expert voice to the information they already have. In that case you are being approached to offer an opinion in an expert capacity.
When they speak with you (in person, by phone or on email) you are on the record. That just means a journalist can quote your words in any piece they broadcast or write. If you specifically don’t want something repeated, but think it might be helpful as background information, say so. That’s called being “off the record” and journalists will respect that and will not directly quote anything you don’t want them to.

Broadcast journalists (TV, radio and video for web) will often ask you to appear on camera or record interviews live.

For radio, these interviews will either be done from a small studio in the University of Glasgow communications office at 1 The Square, in person with a recording device, or in a studio at the base of the broadcasters. In Glasgow that usually means the BBC at Pacific Quay. Any of these kinds of interviews can be recorded in advance, and the journalist should always tell you which one it is. The journalist or editor will almost always brief you in advance about the kinds of things they want to discuss. If they don’t you can ask them to.

In the case of video and television interviews will be done in front of a camera. More often than not these interviews will be pre-recorded, but occasionally you may be asked to do one live. Once again the journalist should be explicit about what is happening and what they would like to speak to you about. Because the University is a beautiful location, you may be asked to do interviews outside. Occasionally they might want to talk to you in your office or lab. Do not worry if your base is ‘busy’ or untidy. Producers want locations to look ‘real’ and not ‘staged’.

**How will they contact you?**

The media will mostly come through the Communications and Public Affairs department, though occasionally the media will contact you directly. In most cases they will submit a request to speak to you (or an expert in a certain field) and we will pass it on to the relevant person(s). There is no obligation to say yes to any request, however if the interview request has come as a result of a press release issued about your work you should be prepared to conduct interviews.

**Interviews based on a release:** Most press releases are issued first thing in the morning on a set date that will have been known in advance by the communications officer(s) and relevant researchers involved. The media will then contact the relevant communications officer if they are interested in doing an interview. That request will be forwarded onto to you. On a day a release is sent out you should expect (though it can’t ever be guaranteed) to receive a few interview requests and clear your diary.
Accordingly. You should also be willing to pass on your phone numbers (work and mobile) and be available on email, even into the evening.

Interviews based on media request: these are request that will come to speak to an academic or expert based on a story we didn’t know about in advance. Often these will come through the Communications and Public Affairs department but sometimes they will come directly to you. In either case it is up to you whether you want to respond. You are under no obligation or pressure to agree to a media request. If you are unsure or want to seek guidance contact the Communications and Public Affairs department. If the media have contacted you directly and you do wish to be interviewed, you do not need to get permission from the communications department to proceed, though it is helpful to alert the department to any media work that you are doing.

What to expect when speaking to the media

What will they ask? Lots of questions! Most of them will be about who you are and what your expertise is. If the interview is based on a press release they will ask you questions related to that specific piece of research so know your stuff!

How can you prepare? You will know your own research and field of research very well, so be confident in that. Practice answering basic questions about your work to a colleague if that makes you feel more prepared. You can also talk through your research and potential media questions with the Communications and Public Affairs team – we are here to help.

If the media have approached you to seek an expert opinion then do a bit of (quick) background reading on what the story they are covering is. If the story isn’t in the public domain then ask them for a copy of the report, paper etc.

In the case of on camera interviews for TV or web video, it’s a good idea to have some notes to hand that you can refer to. If you don’t feel you answered the question properly say so and ask to start again. That’s absolutely fine (unless it’s a live interview, of course).

Will they try to trip you up? Almost certainly not. It happens, of course, but mostly this one is a myth. Most journalists are interested in getting your interview done in a quick and professional manner. They want you to explain your research and your point, because it’s in their interest to get their message across clearly too.
Key questions to know the answer to in advance

What is it about: Know how to distil your research or opinion down to a few sentences including the key lines of what you have discovered/think. If the work is science based or technical and difficult to understand, think about preparing a few short sentences on the research that could be understandable to the public.

What are the implications? It’s a follow up question that journalists might ask. They are really asking about the impact of what you are doing/ have found.

Are there any negative connotations? Are there any down sides to what you are saying/have found? Do you have an opinion on that? It’s worth thinking about these questions and preparing answers in advance if possible.

How to say no

It’s important to know that you don’t always have to say yes to the media. Don’t feel you have to do an interview you don’t want to. Similarly if a question comes up that you don’t want to answer, say so. You are not obliged to give answers that you don’t want to.

If in doubt contact the Communications and Public Affairs Department. We’re always here to help/assist/be a sounding board on media issues and questions that you might have.

What happens next?

Can you see the article before it’s printed? No, that’s very unlikely. Most written journalists do not allow copy approval for interview subjects. There are always exceptions to this rule but it’s important to stress they are very, very rare.

Can you listen to or watch a broadcast? Once again the answer is no.

When will I see the press coverage? The Communications and Public Affairs department receive a comprehensive list of press cuttings every day. The relevant communications officer will send you on any press cuttings that relate to your work or contain a quote from you. If you have taken part in an interview for which the press
contacted you directly, it’s always helpful to flag it up to the communications department in advance so they can look out for any cuttings.

What if I don’t like it? Normally press coverage of your work will be correct and accurate. If there is a factual error we can complain and legitimately ask for it to be changed (or in the case of print articles a retraction or apology printed the following day). If you don’t like the kind of coverage but there are no factual errors the media are under no obligation to change it.

Meet the team

The Communications & Public Affairs team is available for all press and broadcast enquiries about the University of Glasgow. The office is staffed Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm and a duty press officer handles all out-of-hours calls.

General contact details: 0141 330 3535, media@glasgow.ac.uk

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