



**Science Media Centre**

*where science meets the headlines*

**CONSULTATION  
REPORT**  
MARCH 2002



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Science Media Centre is an independent venture working to promote the voices, stories and views of the scientific community to the news media when science is in the headlines.

With its roots in the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology Third Report: Science and Society, it will take up the gauntlet thrown down by the Lords to meet the “great challenge” of adapting science to frontline news.

The overall goal of the Centre is to help renew public trust in science by working to promote more balanced, accurate and rational coverage of the controversial science stories that now regularly hit the headlines.

The Science Media Centre sees science in the headlines as an opportunity rather than a threat. While many have noted that science and headline news are a ‘poor fit’, the Centre will work to ensure that the scientific community exploits these opportunities to make the case for science at the very time when the public are most interested in and concerned about science.

The Centre will operate like a newsroom, reacting to the news agenda while pro-actively promoting a spectrum of scientific opinion. It will aim to gain a reputation with the media for a fast, accurate and media friendly response. It will focus primarily on non-specialist correspondents and newsrooms that do not have access to their own science correspondents.

For the scientific community, the Centre offers a specialist resource to scientists and science press officers when their science stories hit the headlines. It will also run a range of activities including media training, horizon scanning and lesson-learning sessions aimed at improving the science community’s effectiveness at engaging with the news media.

The Science Media Centre is unashamedly pro-science and was established in the spirit of the House of Lords Select Committee’s goal of improving science communication as a means to “secure science’s license to practice not to restrict it”. However, the Centre will be free of any particular agenda within science and will always strive to promote a broad spectrum of scientific opinion – especially where there are clear divisions within science. It will not shy away from promoting voices that are critical of particular aspects of science.

The Science Media Centre is housed within the Royal Institution but independent from it. Over 20 sponsors, including scientific institutions, companies and individuals, fund the Centre with donations capped at 5% of the running costs to preserve its independence. The team at the Centre is guided by a Science Advisory Panel and a Board.



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

*'We agree with COPUS: the culture of United Kingdom science needs a sea change in favour of open and positive communication with the media. This will require training and resources; above all it will require leadership. It will inevitably involve occasional embarrassment or frustration. But, if it succeeds it will pay for itself many times over in renewed public trust.'* (House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology Third Report: Science and Society)

As with many of the new initiatives concerned with communicating science to the public, the roots of the Science Media Centre (SMC) can be found in the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology Third Report: Science and Society, published in 2000. After hearing much evidence about the pivotal role of the media in shaping the public perception of science, the Select Committee concluded its report by calling for more resources to be dedicated to finding ways “whereby the scientific community might help non-specialists in the media to cover scientific stories more satisfactorily.” It went on, “The culture of the United Kingdom science needs a sea-change in favour of open and positive communication with the media. This will require training and resources; above all it will require leadership.”

At a meeting of politicians, scientists and journalists to discuss these findings, Baroness Greenfield, Director of the Royal Institution (Ri) offered to take on that leadership role. Baroness Greenfield felt that the Ri, with its tradition of communicating science to the public and its independent status free from any private or public sector agenda, was the ideal place to house a new venture in science and media relations.

As a result an Advisory Council was established, comprising more than 50 representatives from the worlds of science, politics and the media (see Appendix I). It set out to identify the broad aims of the SMC, raise funds for the running costs and appoint a team to run the Centre.

To confirm the Centre’s independent status, it was agreed that all donations to it would be capped at 5% of the running costs (a maximum donation of £10,000 a year). Donations were sought from a variety of sources including industry, professional bodies and individuals (see Appendix II). In the meantime, fundraisers at the Ri secured a private donation of £120,000 and set about transforming a derelict floor in 19 Albemarle Street into a 21<sup>st</sup> century media centre (the Ri has freehold ownership of the newly refurbished property). The 1,500 sq ft Centre was designed by Farrell and Partners and it has both direct street access and also a first floor opening to 20 Albemarle Street, linking the Centre with the Ri.

With the physical space taking shape and a significant percentage of the funding secured, the Advisory Council set about appointing someone to take the lead in establishing and running the new Centre. In September 2001 an interview panel of ten people recruited Fiona Fox, a journalism graduate with 15 years’ experience of media relations. In November the Ri celebrated the completion of the building works on the SMC with a party, at which Cherie Booth QC, Professor Sir Martin Rees and Lord Bragg toasted the new initiative. Fiona Fox started work in December, along with Becky Morelle, a Chemistry graduate from Oxford who was appointed as the media relations assistant.

With the broader aims and vision from the Advisory Council as their starting point, the SMC staff began a major consultation with key stakeholders to identify the day-to-day priorities of the new service (see Appendix III). The consultation was carried out between December 2001 and February 2002 and included around 150 interviews (approximately one third were with scientists and the rest with media specialists). Most of these were conducted on a one-to-one

basis in the SMC, but there were some group consultations – including a meeting of 30 members of the Science, Technology, Engineering and Medicine Public Relations Association (STEMPRA) hosted at the SMC and around 100 members at a meeting of the Higher Education External Relations Association (HEERA). The consultation was also informed by written material and attendance at events/seminars on the subject of science and the media (see Appendix IV). Each consultation meeting followed a similar pattern and aimed to establish: a) what the individual saw as the key problem in the relationship between science and the media and b) how they felt the SMC could contribute to improving this relationship, and thereby improve media coverage of science in the UK.

The consultation was strategic and prioritised certain key groups from the start. These were: a) members of the Advisory Council; b) scientists with experience of and an interest in the media; c) specialist science correspondents; d) non-specialist news correspondents; e) press officers and communications officers of universities and scientific institutions; f) politicians and policy makers with an interest in science. The SMC is aware that the consultation was comprehensive but not exhaustive and there were many people on our target list that we were unable to see. It is the aim of the team to continue consulting key stakeholders in the first 12 months of the SMC and incorporating their views as we fine-tune the role of the Centre.

This report is the product of that consultation. It seeks to show how the service that the SMC will offer has emerged from a general consensus among key stakeholders as to where the real problem lies and how the SMC can best direct resources to make a positive contribution to media coverage of science. It is important to note that in the course of more than 150 interviews held over three months there emerged some passionately held minority views about the role of the SMC. These will be reflected in the paper but will not form part of the SMC's mandate in the short term.

While the purpose of the consultation was to define the role and priorities of the SMC, it is hoped that this report may also be of general interest to those engaged in the wider debate about science and the media.

Much has been written about why it is so important for science to become more effective at engaging the media. Ideas include:

“To the question, ‘who’s misunderstanding whom?’ we answer that all the players in this particular drama have a long history of misunderstanding each other. Unless we can do better, we will weaken our ability to make wise judgements about science, undermining science and our ability as a society to make progress. Nothing less is at stake.” (“Who’s misunderstanding whom?” (Report of an enquiry into the relationship between science and the media by Ian Hargreaves and Gail Ferguson funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, September 2000)

“It is for the public to decide which doors to open and which doors they want to leave closed. But they should be making these decisions on the basis of accurate, balanced information.” (Lord May, President, The Royal Society on Desert Island Discs, March 2002)

“No-one can be a fully engaged, active citizen today without understanding the new developments in science and where they are taking us.” (Dr Paul Martin, Science Writer and Fellow of Wolfson College, Cambridge)

“In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century science is going to be at the centre of all the things we most cherish: food, health, reproduction, education, business, communications and so on. In order to meet the challenges and minimise the problems, the public need the scientific literacy to engage with all the major scientific developments in these areas.” (Baroness Greenfield, Director of the Royal Institution)



## 2. GENERAL CONTEXT

A number of themes emerged repeatedly during the consultation about the climate facing the new SMC. The following are relevant to the shaping of the aims and focus of the Centre.

### A CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE

*“Society’s relationship with science is in a critical phase... public unease, mistrust and occasional outright hostility are breeding a climate of deep anxiety among scientists.”*  
(House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology Third Report: Science and Society)

Lord Jenkin of Roding, Chair of the influential Lords Select Committee, was just one of many consulted who referred to a sense of crisis among the scientific community in the wake of major media controversies over BSE, genetically modified organisms (GMO’s) and, more recently, the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine. There is a widespread belief that the UK’s post-war love affair with science has been replaced by an emerging anti-science mood which both fears the rapid development of science and is losing faith in the ability of science to solve society’s problems.

There was also a consensus that scientists were ill prepared for this decline in trust and have not always summoned their resources effectively to engage in the struggle for public support – especially in the media. Michael Brady, Professor of Information Engineering at Oxford University, said, “As scientists it has taken us a long time to realise that we don’t have the God-given right to public respect and esteem – we have to fight to earn it; and that means engaging with the media whether we like it or not.”

### A COLLAPSE OF RESPECT OF AUTHORITY OR EXPERTISE

It is clear that the declining trust in scientists is part of a much wider crisis of trust and respect for all the UK’s traditional institutions including the Church, Parliament, the police, etc. In fact, scientists do reasonably well when compared to other groups on how far the public trusts them to tell the truth. Figures from MORI show that in 1997 and 1999 63%, and in 2000 60%, of the public said they trusted scientists. This was ahead of journalists and politicians but well below doctors and teachers.

A significant minority of those consulted saw the growth of public questioning of scientific expertise as a largely positive development and a step towards the widely held goal of “democratising science”. Professor Ian Hargreaves, Director of the Centre for Journalism Studies, Cardiff University, Dr Tom Shakespeare, Director of Outreach for the Policy, Ethics and Life Sciences Research Institute, Dr Jon Turney, UCL, Hugh Aldersey-Williams, Science Writer and Dr Nick Russell, Coordinator of the Science Communication Course, Imperial College all felt that the decline in trust in science reflected a public who are becoming more expert in areas of science that directly effect their lives and are no longer prepared to accept uncritically the mainstream science view. This change in the relative balance of power between scientists and the consumers of science was warmly welcomed as a step forward from the times when the public were expected to have blind faith in the expert in a white coat.

However, a larger group of those consulted feel that the declining trust in and respect for scientists is a worrying development, which can contribute to exaggerated fears that threaten

to undermine public support for scientific progress. Many pointed to the recent MMR debate as evidence that the loss of authority by the scientific establishment should not necessarily be welcomed.

Others felt that the declining trust in scientific expertise was also an area of concern. Professor Simon Wessely, Professor of Epidemiological and Liaison Psychiatry, Kings College, echoed the views of many when he said, “The current trend towards equating all sources of knowledge as of equal value is very dangerous. We need to defend scientific expertise as a basis for sound policy decisions.” Lord David Sainsbury, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Science and Lord Taverne argued that a greater understanding of science amongst the public should not imply a watering down of scientific expertise. Tony Gilland, Science Specialist at the Institute of Ideas, argued that scientists need to confront this issue head on and mount a more aggressive defence of expertise or risk losing more authority in society.

The latter group tended to view the role of the SMC as working with scientists to help win back public trust and confidence in science.

## **THE MEDIA**

There was a strong consensus about the media playing field in which the SMC will have to compete. This can be summarised as follows:

- Science journalism (that is, specialist science stories covered by specialist science correspondents) is thriving. There is more of it than ever before and it is better than ever before. There is no shortage of sources of science stories – science correspondents routinely write up to five stories a day. Editors and the public have a strong appetite for science stories. The Association of British Science Writers (ABSW) is very successful and large numbers of young journalists are fighting to enter science journalism.
- The perceived problems in the reporting of science primarily occur when the science story develops into the news story of the day and is covered by non- specialist correspondents. At this stage the story ceases to be a pure “science story” and becomes a story about politics, health, ethics, etc.

“Science stories – especially the controversial ones – have a habit of growing legs and walking from the science desk to the news desk.” (Tom Miller, Media Relations Manager and Senior Press Officer, Imperial College)

“We conclude that science journalism is currently flourishing in the UK. There are however problems with the handling of science angles of news stories by journalists who are not specialist scientific correspondents.” (House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology Third Report: Science and Society)

## **SCIENCE IN HEADLINE NEWS**

Having established that the main areas of tension between science and the media arise when science hits the headlines, the SMC staff discussed the characteristics of news journalism.

One of the main conclusions of the House of Lords report was that scientists would have to accept the media for what it is.

“Science cannot expect special treatment from the media, or a special Code of Practice, any more than economics, the law, the fine arts or any of the many special subjects which may

find their way onto the front page. Scientists must indeed take the rough with the smooth, and learn to work with the media the way they are.” (House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology Third Report: Science and Society)

In news and current affairs journalism this means scientists accepting – and engaging with – the following:

- short time-frames for comment;
- a bias towards controversy and conflict;
- a concentration on the negative/bad news;
- a penchant for the lone voice speaking out against authority and the mainstream;
- the need for sound-bites;
- the need for yes or no answers;
- lack of specialist knowledge of the issues on the part of the journalist;
- pressure to address the wider political and social consequences of the science in question.

There was a strong consensus that while scientists are constantly improving at engaging with some elements of the media, they are still poor at the ‘front-line news’ end of the spectrum. People repeatedly referred to scientists ‘retreating’ in the face of frenzied media coverage of issues like GMOs, BSE and MMR. There was a consensus amongst scientists and journalists that it was precisely at times when science hits the headlines, that the gulf between science and journalism appeared so wide. Simon Pearson, Executive Editor on The Times, used his speech at a Foundation for Science and Technology debate on science and the media in February 2002, to appeal to scientists to get better at ‘front-line news’:

“Scientists are getting better at media – but this is not the case on the front-line – news reporting- and this is important, because what appears on the news pages of The Times, Telegraph, Guardian and Daily Mail is what appears in MP’s mailbags. These are the issues on which commissions for leading articles and comment pieces are based, on which much airtime on television and radio will be eventually filled. Yet on news we are short of scientists with a public face – even the majority of our science correspondents seem to be the quieter, scientific types. Despite all the scientific advice on BSE, GM, MMR, etc. the public has yet to be convinced. This is not down solely to the vagaries of an irresponsible press. It is also down to the failure of the majority of scientists to stand and be counted in the eyes of the public and put their case across convincingly.”

Other comments include:

“As a former news editor of The Observer I know that most journalists, though they are clever people and usually have degrees, have a blind spot about science. In fact, many have something approaching a phobia about science issues because they do not understand the background to what they’re being asked to write about.” (Paul Routledge, Chief Political Commentator, The Mirror)

“The protest groups target the headline news because they know it makes more impact and they don’t have to have all their facts right.” (Professor Colin Blakemore, Waynefleet Professor of Physiology, Oxford University)

“News is controversy and conflict – that’s the name of the game. Scientists need to learn the rules and play the game – if they don’t they risk losing the game.” (Suzanne Mooney, Science Producer, Today Programme)

“He who puts his side in the choicest language will get the best show.... It is much easier to get coverage for saying ‘We are all going to hell on a handcart’ which is a campaigners’ cry... than to say, ‘Well, we will probably be here in 20 years time nevertheless.’ Which of

course is the rational response, but you do not buy newspapers to be told that everything is going to be all right.” (Tim Radford, Science Editor, The Guardian, quoted in Evidence to the House of Lords Select Committee, February 2000)

“We must distinguish between the news in the front page of the newspapers, which as has been hinted at already, tends to be concerned with things that go wrong.” (Dr John Turney, University College London)

## **A RISK-AVERSE SOCIETY**

The theme of risk emerged repeatedly throughout the consultation. People felt that science is one victim of a society that is increasingly risk-averse. There was a feeling that scientists need to think harder about ways to tackle risk in the media. Lord Bragg, Controller of Arts, London Weekend Television, in particular, feels that much media coverage of risk is alarmist and that growing and irrational expectations for guarantees of 100% safety are undermining scientific endeavour. He argued that science as a whole needs to tackle the issue of risk as a means to ensure a more reasoned and rational discussion about scientific developments.

Several people lobbied the SMC team to work with scientists to develop effective ways of handling risk issues during media interviews.

## **THE SCIENTIFIC PROCESS**

A recurring theme in our consultation was the belief that a key cause of the crisis facing science is the lack of understanding among journalists and the public about the way science works. Many understand the rising criticism of science as the direct result of a fundamental misconception about what science can offer.

In particular, the people consulted referred to the way the public and the news media expect all scientists to work together and arrive at an agreed “science view”. They felt that because people expect certainty and scientific fact, they turn against science when this cannot be provided (for example, MMR). Far from being seen as a strength of the scientific process, disagreement among scientists has undermined public confidence in science.

“Since the media have as a priority a good story, and since scientific discovery is a gradual process of refinement of falsifiable hypothesis.....it is perhaps therefore not surprising that there are many spats and a certain frostiness between the two constituencies.” (Baroness Greenfield, Director, The Royal Institution)

There was a strong sense that scientists could restore public support if they were better at engaging the public about the way science really works – that there is no such thing as 100% safe or 100% certainty, that disagreement amongst scientists is an essential part of working towards the truth. As Clive Coen, Professor of Neuroscience, Kings College remarked, “Science is about testing ideas, not about Gospel truth.’ Lord Stone also emphasised this point, “We need to show that controversy and differences of opinion within science are healthy. In fact, to a certain extent this together with ‘peer review’ is an essential part of the research process.”

Peer review was another aspect of the scientific process that many felt is not understood by the public. It was generally agreed that scientists use the term – even in media interviews – for the benefit of fellow scientists and that no serious attempt has been made to use the media to communicate what this process entails. Given the increasing mistrust of scientists, it was

felt that despite all its flaws and imperfections, peer review – referred to by some as “science’s system of quality control” – could guide the public as to which research to trust.

### **THE SUCCESS OF NGOs**

Many of those consulted referred to the apparently superior media strategies of environmental NGOs, and other protest groups in using the media to get their case across.

Mark Henderson, Science Correspondent from The Times noted that “Greenpeace are great at media relations because they are essentially a protest group – always on the attack, always revealing another scandal – all good for the news agenda.”

Professor Christopher Pollock, Research Director at the Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research and GM expert, said, “Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth are in an ideal position to capture the headlines. They are very happy to say that such-and-such is dangerous. Whereas you’ll go a long way to find a scientist who will be equally forceful in saying ‘this is not and never will be dangerous.’”

It is fair to say that the criticism of the policies of some of these groups was tempered by a grudging respect and admiration for their ability to grab the headlines and set the agenda. Many felt that science would do well to learn from these groups rather than criticise them. Several people, including Professor Vivian Moses, Chair of CropGen, Professor David Cope from the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST), and Lord Taverne argued that the SMC should try to identify spokespeople who could display the same levels of passion and conviction as the campaigning NGOs.

### 3. SPECIFIC ISSUES FOR THE SMC

#### A FOCUS FOR THE SMC

*“The main thing you need to do is cut yourself a new piece of turf – a new island to stand on. Whatever you choose to focus on, be clear about it and stick to it.” (Nick Russell, Science Communication Course Coordinator, Imperial College)*

*“You’re in a crowded playing field – the first thing you need to do is establish what is your distinctive role” (Lord May, President, Royal Society)*

*“It would be hugely refreshing to have a body that is clear about its role.” (Caitlin Watson, Co-coordinator, Science Line)*

It was clear from our consultation exercise that there was a need to identify a clear niche for the SMC that could be seen as “value added” to existing services. Many of those consulted – especially those in other scientific institutions – felt that what they had heard about the new initiative was rather vague and broad, and appeared to replicate initiatives that already exist.

#### WHAT THE FOCUS SHOULD BE

Following the first month of the consultation, two key things had become clear:

- when scientists complain about the coverage of science in the media, they are nearly always talking about science as a headline news story (examples include the media coverage of GM, BSE, human cloning, MMR, etc);
- there is no existing media relations operation within science focussing exclusively on newsdesks and non-specialist reporters.

The idea of positioning the SMC in the area of science as news was warmly welcomed by the vast majority of those consulted. A key factor in this is the belief that the public understanding of science is increasingly influenced by how science is covered in the news. Many of those consulted felt that the people who read the science journals or who seek out science programmes or science articles produced by specialist science correspondents already have an interest in and understanding of how science works and what it can offer.

“The problem lies not with those who wish to know about science and come into institutions such as the Royal Institution, or who greedily devour popular science books, but rather those who feel that science is too hard, too unpleasant, too distasteful, or even too evil to contemplate.” (Baroness Greenfield, Director of the Royal Institution, the Independent, November 2001)

The SMC has commissioned a MORI poll which seeks to shed light on the relative influence of the news media on people’s views of new developments in science.

Positioning the SMC to address science in the headlines also appears to fit well with its origins in the Science and Society report, where this issue was repeatedly raised by witnesses and highlighted in the Lords’ conclusions:

“We agree with Stephen Cox, Executive Secretary of the Royal Society, who described this (science stories covered by non science reporters) as ‘the great challenge’. (House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology Third Report: Science and Society)

## SCIENCE AS NEWS

***“You need to understand the media. Not just us - your friendly science correspondents. But the snarling, biting 24 hour news machines that need constant feeding, that have little time for analysis but need a line.” (Pallab Ghosh, BBC Science Correspondent, addressing scientists at Foundation for Science and Technology event, February 2001)***

It is important to spell out what the SMC means by “science as news”. Arguably, anything that appears about science in the newspapers or on the radio is “science as news”. But it is important to emphasise that nearly everyone the SMC team consulted – including the science correspondents – drew a distinction between science stories that appear in the science pages of newspapers (at the back) or science programmes on TV and Radio (Science at 9 on Radio 4 or Horizon) and those that are covered in the headlines of the major TV and radio news programmes and appear in the front end of the newspapers.

The ideal scenario for most of those consulted would be for the science correspondents to keep hold of the story when it moves into the headlines – and this sometimes happens. However, the reality is often different.

Many of the science correspondents we met stressed that their newsdesks come to them for information, contacts and interviewees on science stories. Others admitted that this does not happen as often as they would like.

The news journalists we met said that while their own science correspondent is their first port of call, they would welcome additional sources because:

- Sometimes the science correspondent is unavailable
- Some news outlets do not have the luxury of their own science correspondent on the staff
- The individual TV and radio programmes like to set up their own interviews and therefore need a large source of potential interviewees (BBC News 24 are often looking for different guests on the same issue every hour)

Lindsey Grist, producer in the Science and Environment Unit at the BBC, said, “My own view is that the more sources the better. There is such an appetite for science stories I think the SMC will definitely be called on to find new guests, different voices and different angles on running stories.”

The report on the media coverage of the GM debate in the first half of 1999 carried out by the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology shows a good example of this trend. During the crucial two days in February 1999 when the GM story broke, in the 11 national newspapers surveyed:

- no news articles on GM foods were written by science journalists; 45% were written by political journalists.
- commentary came largely in editorials, opinion columns and letters to the editor: none came from science writers.

Since the consultation began in December 2001, there has been on average one science story a week that fits our category as science in the headlines. These have included stories on genetic screening, Dolly's arthritis, human cloning, BSE in sheep, stem cell research and of course MMR. Some have been covered by science correspondents and others not.

Some of those consulted defended the coverage of science stories by non-specialist correspondents, insisting that science is often only one element of a story that includes politics, environment, news, health, business, etc.

A primary focus on the news desks also found support amongst the news journalists consulted. Adrian Van Klaveren, Head of News Gathering, BBC News, Lucy Thorpe, Head of Planning, BBC Radio 5 Live Breakfast, Anthony Baxter producer from ITN/Independent Radio News, Vivienne Parry from The News of the World and Ruth Peacock from the BBC's Regional Radio news unit all strongly endorsed the need for a new service to help them to cover the big, controversial science stories that hit the headlines. They all acknowledged that while they do approach their own science correspondents, they also need others to advise on the relative importance of stories, to find good interviewees within a short time-frame and to get ideas about angles, packages, etc.

Lucy Thorpe from Radio 5 Live, after consulting other colleagues, reported that there was a general sentiment in the Radio 5 newsrooms that, "we need the equivalent of a BMA or Law Society for science. We go to the BMA and say, "We need a doctor who will say this within the next half hour,' and we go to the Law Society to find a lawyer who will comment on that. We currently don't have a kind of one-stop-shop to go to get 'a scientist who will speak on this."

"The Science Media Centre should be there for the 22-year-old news reporter on The Daily Express who comes in on a Monday morning to find he is covering a breakthrough in cloning. He would know all he has to do is phone the SMC to get everything he needs from the science side." (Dr Tristram Hunt, former adviser to Lord Sainsbury)

## **SPECIALIST SCIENCE CORRESPONDENTS**

It was clear from the consultation with specialist science correspondents and the science journals that they were not in need of the services of the SMC. Already doing an excellent job, they know exactly who to contact where. (Tim Radford from The Guardian was offering to help the SMC with contacts rather than the other way around!!). This group is also well served by the science press officers.

It is worth noting that all the science correspondents stressed that they are now inundated with good science stories. Several newspaper journalists including James Chapman, Science and Environment Correspondent of the Daily Mail and Dr Roger Highfield, Science Editor of the Daily Telegraph, report that it is not unusual to file five science stories a day. They quoted their main sources as the peer-reviewed journals, scientific institutions, Eureka! Alert and Alpha Galileo. (This conflicted with the views of some consulted who urged the SMC to put out science stories on the basis that there are not enough.)

As a result of the consultation, the SMC will not focus its efforts on science correspondents – but it is hoped that they will occasionally benefit from the services and activities offered from the Centre. In particular, this group responded well to the idea of horizon scanning sessions with leading scientists. Other ideas that emerged from this group were: off-the-record briefings when things have gone wrong (e.g. testing of sheep for BSE), more minority voices including women and ethnic minorities, bringing together three or four key scientists early on in a breaking controversy like MMR, GMOs, etc.



## **SCIENCE AS CONTROVERSY**

It became clear at an early stage that most people consulted feel the SMC should focus on the issues in science that are causing public concern. It was felt that these are the areas where science tends to hit the headlines and where science is failing to get its message across effectively.

Others had a more positive view, that these scientific controversies in the news provide a great opportunity to seize the headlines and deliver a message. Professor Ian Hargreaves believes that scientists need to flock towards the media “when it really matters”, as during the MMR crisis, because these are the rare times when the public really are interested in science. Tim Radford, Science Editor of The Guardian says that scientists should start viewing intense media interest as an opportunity rather than a threat, “Many scientists I think should look upon this as a wonderful chance to start to kick the process of public education a little further on.”

On the whole, the SMC is being lobbied to position itself in the arena of science as news, science as controversy and in areas of public concern about science. This is perceived as the area in which there are the most problems, the most potential, and because to date no other initiative has this as its primary focus. This lobbying has been very influential on the direction and priorities mapped out below for the SMC.

## **WHO TO TRAIN - THE SCIENTISTS OR THE JOURNALISTS?**

Having identified science as news as a key area of concern, the House of Lords Select Committee made a pertinent comment:

“This challenge can be met in two ways: by changing the behaviour of the media, or by changing the behaviour of scientists in dealing with the media.” (House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology Third Report: Science and Society)

This was discussed during the consultation. It is an area where there was less agreement. There was strong lobbying from some key people for the SMC to turn its attention to helping the news media to understand how science works. Dr Simon Singh, Science Writer and Broadcaster, Caitlin Watson of Science Line and Trevor Phillips of the Greater London Assembly all argued that the standard of science coverage by news journalists is poor because they lack the basic understanding of the scientific process that they need to cover stories well. The journalists, therefore, demand the yes-or-no answers, the scientific certainty and the scientific consensus that science cannot deliver.

“The best function of the SMC would be to devise a long term strategy to create scientific literacy amongst news journalists. Most journalists have a tool kit for their trade including all the basics about politics, foreign affairs, etc. You need to add science to their tool-kit for understanding the world.” Trevor Phillips, Deputy Chair, London Assembly

It is clear, however, from talking to news journalists that the SMC would not have the kind of leverage with journalists that it could have with the scientific community.

This does not rule out a role for the SMC in working with the news media to improve coverage of science stories. The idea of short background briefings on topical issues such as cloning has been well received.

Others consulted were quite clear that the role of the SMC is to work with scientists to improve their media skills. Dr Phillip Campbell, Editor in Chief of Nature Titles, emphasised

this role, “You need to train scientists to expect the worst and not be shocked by the way the media works.”

Professor Sir John Krebs, Chairman, Foods Standards Agency also urged the SMC to target its efforts at training a new breed of young scientists who can be effective media operators.

The conclusion of the House of Lords committee was that scientists would have to deal with the media as it is. A majority of the people consulted for this report reluctantly agree. This in itself reflects that the SMC is starting work at a time when more and more scientists are acknowledging the need to engage with the media and are looking to the SMC among others to support and advise them about how to do so.

Overall the SMC view is that these two objectives are not mutually exclusive. It believes that the overall impact of more scientists engaging with the media will be a media and a public who are more scientifically literate.

## **MEDIA TRAINING**

We were heavily lobbied to run media training courses for scientists and most consulted felt that there is space for more initiatives in this area. Whatever we do in this area will be influenced by our focus on science in the headlines. One idea we favour is to investigate ways to introduce scientists to the distinct culture of the news media. This may entail running ‘Introduction to the News’ days where we invite in key news journalists to explain the ways news operates and the constraints that scientists will necessarily have to face in engaging the news media.

## **PRO-ACTIVE vs RE-ACTIVE**

There was much discussion of whether the SMC should be pro-active or re-active – and what this would mean in practice.

From the SMC’s own monitoring of media coverage, it was notable that many pro-active media initiatives emerging from science received good coverage – but it was often limited to one day’s worth of stories and often slotted into non-headline news slots (i.e. the back pages of the broadsheets or the magazine-type packages on broadcast media). Science stories only tended to hit the headlines if they included a major scientific breakthrough or involved an area of public concern or controversy. The campaign by the Research Defence Authority to put the positive case for animal experimentation received good coverage but only for a morning. The new public information campaign about GMOs, ABC, launched by the European biotechnology companies was covered in only one national newspaper. Yet these organisations have been forced to react to massive media interest at times not of their choosing.

On the whole, there was agreement that the SMC will be pro-active primarily in reacting to the news agenda. This may sound contradictory but it isn’t. In effect the Centre will react to the media agenda by pro-actively promoting comment, interviews and articles from scientists and others when science hits the headlines.

With the help of the Science Advisory Panel and the horizon scanning sessions the SMC will endeavour to anticipate and prepare for the next major news story or controversy in science and be ready for a swift response (lining up interviewees, articles, comments on several subject areas in advance, etc)

“We don’t need more stories about science – but what we do need is a swift response when a science story hits the news agenda. We need advice about the right interviewees and advice on the significance of the story.” (Adrian van Klaveren, Head of Newsgathering, BBC)

“The SMC should be anticipating the next controversy and preparing short, simple background briefings for the newsdesks on the science of cloning, mobile phones, stem-cell research and so on.” (Clive Cookson, Science Editor, the *Financial Times*)

## **REGIONAL MEDIA**

It is clear that the regional media fits extremely well with the SMC’s core role. It covers science stories when they hit the national news agenda, generally does not have its own science correspondents and is consumed by millions of people every day.

Pallab Ghosh, BBC science correspondent, and Stephen White, Publications and Communications Directorate Manager, the British Psychological Society (BPS) and several press officers from regional universities lobbied the SMC to provide a service to regional media.

“We get several calls every day from the regional media. Some are generated by PA and the nationals, but increasingly they are finding their own stories and needing expertise. This tends to be news rather than features. So I genuinely feel that a local/regional service could do us all a lot of good.” (Stephen White, BPS)

Ruth Peacock and the team from the BBC’s GNS (which feeds interviews on national news stories into local BBC radio shows) were extremely enthusiastic about the SMC and had no hesitation that they would approach the SMC for interviewees.

## **CONNECTION TO THE Ri**

Several people urged the SMC to be clear about its relationship with the Royal Institution. The Press Officers of the scientific institutions in particular felt that they would be less likely to use the SMC if it operated as “a glorified Press Office for the Ri”. Journalists also emphasised that they would approach an independent Science Media Centre very differently from an Ri Media Centre.

The SMC is housed in premises that belong to the Ri for which we pay rent. The SMC also has its own funding and governance. In fact, Baroness Greenfield is herself very clear that the SMC will be independent of the Ri. In her view the Ri’s role has been to act as “midwife” to the SMC which will now work on behalf of scientists and the scientific community as a whole.

The Ri will work with the SMC on the same basis as any other science institution and the team is already working with Dr Gail Cardew and the events team to discuss doing media work on some of the more newsworthy lectures and events taking place at the Ri this year.

Having said that, it is clear that there will always be a strong link between the SMC and the Ri by virtue of the fact that the SMC is housed within the Ri. For many of those consulted this link is to be welcomed and will allow the SMC to reflect in the Ri’s firm tradition for disseminating science to the public.

It also became clear that it is this independence from any one science institution that also gives the SMC its added value to the world of science media relations. Most science press

officers told us that when they are contacted by the media they are restricted to offering their own institution's scientists and staff – and often under pressure to promote their own institutional brand name. By not being a part of any one institution, or promoting its own brand name, the SMC can potentially look to the whole world of science for spokespeople and comment.

Obviously this is dependent on the SMC building strong relationships with press officers in universities and throughout the science world. If the SMC does develop as a first port of call for some news desks, it is clear that there will be benefits for all sides if this relationship works.

## **POSITIONING: NEUTRAL OR PRO-SCIENCE?**

This was another area of much discussion but no consensus. Several people pointed out that some media coverage of the new SMC initiative had suggested that the Centre would be neutral at the same time as acting as a “spin operation for science”. Many saw this as a contradiction and urged the SMC team to be clear about positioning from the start. Nick Russell said, “You can't be PRs for science and neutral brokers.”

The different views on this issue appear to reflect a broader debate about the status of science. Some, including Dr Tom Shakespeare, Dr John Turney and Hugh Aldersey-Williams, feel that much recent criticism of scientists has a sound basis and that the pressure on scientists to account for their work and fight for public support is a positive development. They and others consulted made the case that the SMC should not be “pro-science” as such, but neutral – allowing positive and critical views about science to be accessed from the Centre. Trevor Phillips also argued that the Centre should provide access to dissenting voices on science from NGOs and protest groups, and perhaps include representatives from these groups on the Board.

However, the majority of people consulted – including many of those who helped establish the initiative – had a slightly different starting point. They reminded the SMC team several times that the impetus for the initiative came from people who are concerned about improving the image of science and renewing public trust in it. They also pointed out that the impetus for the Centre emerged from a strong consensus that media coverage of such issues as GM and BSE had been “bad for science”. While many feel that the SMC must be independent of any particular agenda, they argue that the overall vision for the Centre is to balance the rise in negative media coverage of science with more effective promotion of the benefits of science to society. Baroness Greenfield has always been clear about her vision of the Centre's position:

“The SMC is unashamedly pro-science but it is also independent of any particular agenda. That means the SMC will provide access to the wide spectrum of scientific opinion on any one issue. We can provide an anti-GM scientist and a pro- GM scientist, a pro-legalisation of cannabis scientist and an anti-, etc, etc. However, the institutions, companies and individuals who have made the SMC a reality are all agreed that science has enormous benefits for society and that the media can be a key way to communicate these benefits to the wider public.”

There was also a feeling that the voices that are often critical of science, including environmental NGOs, pro-life groups and others, are extremely good at engaging the media. They do not need the help of the SMC and in some cases may receive a disproportionate amount of media exposure by virtue of their superior media skills. These people felt that the SMC should attempt to influence the overall balance of debate by finding more voices to put the positive case for science.

It is important to note that although the majority of those consulted wanted the Centre to position itself as pro-science, they were at pains to emphasise that this does not imply uncritical support of science or any apologia for bad science. Instead, they wanted to be known as people who think that “on the whole, science is good for society” or alternatively, that a growing antipathy to science and scientists is, on the whole, not good for society. Almost all of them felt that scientists should have to fight for public trust and respect; no one that the team spoke to demanded uncritical public support.

Some of those consulted warned against the SMC against becoming the ‘PRs for science’ and suggested that journalists may not use the Centre if that was the case. The SMC feels that it is better to be clear and honest about the Centre’s positioning from the outset rather than aspire to a neutrality that is inconsistent with the Centre’s roots and overall goals. The Centre does not accept that being seen as ‘PRs for Science’ will put the media off using the Centre and this was confirmed in conversation with several journalists. However we do accept that it means that the media will use the Centre with the scepticism that good journalists should always employ when speaking to any press officers. It is hard to think of any Press Office in the UK that is not a ‘PR for something’ (even the civil service’s neutrality is hotly contested!) yet this does not prevent journalists from using them.

The SMC will endeavour to become respected by news journalists as a press office that will provide access to a wide range of scientific opinions, reflect the divisions within science and not shy away from promoting voices that criticise science when bad science has damaging consequences.

Not surprisingly, the issue of minority voices was raised in this context and people challenged the SMC staff to state whether they would give a voice to minority views within science, including people like Dr Andrew Wakefield and Dr Arpad Pusztai. On the whole, the view expressed was that where there are clear divisions within science, the SMC should endeavour to offer access to the broad spectrum of views. (Examples given were conflicting views on cannabis, GM, human cloning, climate change.) However, it was felt that in an area of major public concern such as the MMR vaccine, where the vast majority of scientists took one view and the alternative view was held by a very tiny minority (but received disproportionate media exposure), it was important that the SMC work with the majority of scientists to help get their case across.

Other comments include:

“You don’t need to say you are ‘pro-science’, just that you stand for using the scientific process as a basis for knowledge.” (Professor Colin Blakemore, Waynfleet Professor of Physiology, Oxford Centre for Cognitive Research)

“The Centre should be reminding people that while BSE and MMR show up the disagreements in science, everything we need to know about how to solve these problems comes from science. If people conclude from affairs like BSE that we should give up on science, they are undermining our only means of finding the right solutions.” (Professor Clive Coen, Professor of Neuroscience, Kings College)

“We are aware of the dangers of good science being badly used, but our view is that on the whole science has enormous benefits for society.” (Lord Andrew Stone of Blackheath)

Taking heed of the advice of Nick Russell and others, a clear message from the consultation was that it would be better to be clear about SMC’s positioning from the outset than to render it ineffectual through a struggle to meet conflicting agendas. This will be kept under review with the Board.

## **‘SPINNING FOR SCIENCE’**

Some people consulted expressed a fear that the SMC would become a ‘spin operation’ for science, attempting to control news about science in the manner that New Labour spin-doctors are widely criticised for.

The SMC has no intention of ‘controlling’ the news agenda (it would also seem a rather over-ambitious goal for a new venture). Most people consulted agreed with the SMC team that criticism, debate and controversy about science are a healthy aspect of a free press in a democratic society. However it is the SMC’s aim is to ensure that media coverage of controversial science issues is not imbalanced because journalists were unable to access the views of science within the restraints and time frames within which they have to operate.

Both Ruth Peacock from BBC regional news and Anthony Baxter from Independent Radio News admitted that they often repeatedly use the same people because they know they are reliable, good and will deliver what they need – even at the expense of achieving balanced coverage. Ruth Peacock admitted that on GM foods she always approaches Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth on this basis.

## **NON-SCIENCE SPOKESPEOPLE**

Several people suggested that the SMC should seek to recruit more non-scientists as spokespeople for science. Because the SMC’s focus is primarily science as news, it was suggested that the Centre should be looking for people who are prepared to talk about the broader political, social and cultural implications of science stories. Often, politicians or non-science staff at scientific institutions could do this. It is widely acknowledged that non-scientists such as Melvyn Bragg have made a major contribution to the promotion of science as a key part of UK culture.

This issue was discussed with the heads of communication of the Research Councils at a consultation meeting in Swindon. In an interesting discussion about what went wrong with the media coverage of GM in the first half of 1999, Sheila Anderson, Head of Communications, Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), made the point that politicians and policy makers wrongly left it entirely up to scientists to discuss the wider political implications of GM. The consensus in that group is that the SMC could “add value” by recruiting a wider spectrum of spokespeople for science. Andrew Kurzfeld, Head of Communications, Central Laboratory of the Research Councils (CLRC), said, “When Greenpeace are on the Today programme discussing science issues they are Greenpeace spokespeople not Greenpeace scientists. Science needs to find more ‘spokespeople for science’ who are knowledgeable about science and also happy to engage in the wider debates about science.”

In addition, Lucy Thorpe and her colleagues at Radio Five Live, and Professor Simon Wessely urged the SMC staff to find “members of the public” to speak out for science. Lucy Thorpe gave the example of looking for parents who would speak out for giving the MMR vaccine to balance those parents’ groups who were speaking out about their fears. An interesting example of this took place during the consultation period when the Research Defence Association launched a campaign in defence of animal experimentation by offering media interviews with a variety of ill people who are alive today because of drugs tested on animals.

## 4. WHAT THE SMC WILL AND WILL NOT DO

So far this report has focused on the broader themes that emerged from discussions about the context in which the SMC operates and the wider goals that it should adopt. What remains is the crucial question of *how* to go about making an impact on the issues identified. What the Centre will – and will not – do on a daily basis formed a major part of this consultation. Not surprisingly, it featured more in discussions with the people at the coalface – the press officers of the bodies that do science in the UK, the news journalists, etc.

As the Centre is a new initiative without obvious precedent, the following list is necessarily tentative. However, it is a useful indicator of the things the SMC will attempt to do. After the first 12 months, the staff will be in a better position to work with the Board to evaluate which services are making the greatest impact on achieving the Centre's goals.

### WHAT THE SMC WILL DO

#### **A press office for news journalists covering science stories**

The SMC will promote itself to news-desks of national and local media as the place to come for information, comment and interviewees on science stories that hit the headlines.

#### **When a science story hits the headline the Centre will offer:**

- to provide spokespeople for interview from a variety of perspectives within the time-frame required by the news media;
- to refer journalists to the appropriate specialists on the story;
- to advise journalists on the importance, significance and credibility of breaking stories;
- to offer fresh sound-bites and comments from key spokespeople;
- to offer opinion pieces for comment pages;
- to find non scientists affected by the controversy;
- to find good visuals or photo-opportunities to accompany the story;
- to provide brief, simple guides to the current controversy (e.g. *A Guide to Cloning, A Guide to Stem Cell Research*).

#### **Anticipate and plan for the next major science controversy**

- Hold horizon scanning sessions with leading scientists, journalists and press officers to anticipate the bubbling issues of public and media concern.
- Build on these sessions by working with scientists in the areas identified to prepare them to engage with the media; and prepare materials including briefings, feature articles, sound bites, etc.

#### **Facilitate events in the Science Media Centre that will bring scientists and journalists together**

There are a variety of ideas about how to use the SMC space creatively to bring scientists and journalists together. Here are a few of them:

- Horizon scanning sessions (see above);
- media training days – with a clear focus on science as news;
- lesson-learning sessions: the Centre will bring key people together after a major science as news story to evaluate what lessons can be learned about how to handle intense media

interest in science at such times. The first of these will be a seminar about the way the science world handled the MMR controversy;

- brainstorming sessions on ways to improve the communication of scientific process through the media. These could cover such issues as how scientists use media interviews to communicate peer review, scientific uncertainty, risk, and so on. The goal would be to take the best sound-bites from these sessions and turn them into short written guides for scientists doing interviews;
- off-the-record briefings with key figures at the centre of controversial issues who want to communicate with the media without being quoted directly (for example, what really happened with the mistakes over testing sheep for BSE);
- on-the-record briefings in the middle of a major science story bringing two or three key people together with science and news correspondents (this was one clear demand from the science specialists).

### **Working alongside the bodies that do science in the UK**

It is hoped that the SMC will work closely with scientific institutions, **especially when the science they are publicising is likely to hit the news agenda**. The SMC staff met many press officers during the consultation and discussed ways of working together to promote science to the media. The most important things the Centre can offer the press officers of the scientific institutions are:

- the support of a team specialising in science in the headlines for times when their stories are likely to fit this criterion;
- a team with strong contacts and an extensive database of journalists from the non-specialist media;
- a free venue for press briefings or interviews in central London which is equipped with ISDN facilities;
- a London base for scientists and press officers who are based outside London to meet journalists, hold briefings, etc; (the staff hope that the SMC space will be used by institutions and journals for press conferences to launch new research. Both Phillip Campbell and Peter Wrobel of Nature have indicated that they would be happy to use the SMC as a venue for press conferences or briefings).

### **Working with individual scientists**

The vast majority of scientists consulted did not envisage using the Centre to publicize their own research findings. That is primarily because they already have established ways of getting these stories out – through their university press offices, institution press offices and through the press work done by the peer review journals, etc. Much of the science that is promoted through the SMC will come via these press offices rather than directly from the scientists.

However, many of these scientists were willing to talk to the media about issues arising from their area of expertise. The main role of the SMC in relation to individual scientists will be to ask them to give interviews, provide comments, or draft features on their subject **when it becomes an area of public concern and hits the news agenda**.

### **Finding spokespeople for media**

Many journalists use databases, such as Alpha Galileo as a resource for finding scientists. However several busy news journalists did bemoan the passing of the Media Resources Service formerly run by the Novartis Foundation because it also provided a person on the end of the phone who would find the right spokesperson in record time. Responding to this the Centre will offer to help newsdesks find good interviewees within the time-frames they need



them. This will be done both through building up an SMC list of spokespeople and by liaising with the universities, research councils and other science bodies.

### **Use of SMC space and facilities**

The SMC has 1500 sq foot of space that is divided into two rooms. The SMC already makes a distinction between the service that the staff of the SMC provide on a day-to-day basis to the news media (taking place in the front room of the SMC) and the events and activities that take place in the SMC space (taking place in the back room). On the latter there are only two stipulations at this stage:

- 1) that the event **must have a clear connection between science and the media;**
- 2) that people must book the space in advance.

The space and facilities of the SMC will be available free of charge.

The following is a list of the kind of events the Centre has been approached to host – all of which the staff are happy to accommodate:

- the launch of the ABSW “So you want to be a science writer” pamphlet for would-be science journalists;
- press briefings organised by Nature magazine together with different universities or research institutions;
- the press launch of new science books (one on risk, one on the science behind sleep, one on mobile phones);
- ABSW briefings;
- occasional meetings of STEMPRA, the group that represents press officers in science;
- the press launch of ABC – the new public information campaign on GM foods set up by the European biotechnology companies.

It is important to note that while any activity to do with science and the media can take place in the SMC, priority will be given to those activities that fall into its focus area of science in the news.

### **A Web Site**

We have established a website at [www.ScienceMediaCentre.org](http://www.ScienceMediaCentre.org) which will regularly post comment and analysis from leading scientists on the science stories in the headlines. These stories will link, where relevant, to our SMC *Guides* to hot topics, such as stem cell research, MMR etc. The website also gives details of our Science Advisory Panel, the SMC Board, and our sponsors. This service is intended for use by the media and is not aimed at members of the general public.

### **WHAT THE SMC WILL NOT DO**

There was strong lobbying from many key stakeholders that the SMC should not replicate services which are already being provided effectively. It may therefore be useful to note some of the things that the SMC will **NOT** do:

- the SMC will not focus its activities on specialist science correspondents and the science journals.
- the SMC will not seek to promote its brand name in the media.

- the SMC will not offer any service direct to the public. Instead we will refer them to the Science Line at Broadcasting Support Services .
- the SMC will not produce a directory or data-base of experts for use by the media.
- the SMC will not publicize its own scientific research
- the SMC will not offer an SMC position statement on the burning issues in science

## **MINORITY VIEWS**

In the course of the consultation several strongly held views were expressed about possible roles for the SMC that have not yet been reflected in this report. This is because they were put forward by only one or two individuals and did not form the kind of consensus the SMC is seeking from stakeholders. It is important to note that the SMC is not ruling out any activities in these areas. However, none of them will form its primary focus. Here are some examples:

- Steve Jones, Professor of Genetics at University College London, urged the SMC to do more to obtain media coverage for research published in less well-known scientific journals. He is frustrated by the media's rather narrow focus on papers, news and features published in Nature, Science and the New Scientist and wants someone to work on promoting the breakthroughs that appear every week in other respected scientific journals.
- Pallab Ghosh, the BBC's Science Correspondent, felt that the best role the SMC could play would be to focus on the next generation of science writers, "the next level down" from the established science correspondents. He feels that supporting and working with these 20-year-old, up-and-coming science correspondents is a good investment in the future quality of science journalism. These aspiring science journalists are currently struggling to find stories and are often neglected by press officers in the scientific institutions. He urged the SMC to consider a strategy for this group, including networking opportunities, parties, bursaries and ways of accessing stories and job opportunities.
- Michael Kenwood, science writer and editorial consultant, urged the SMC to take on a co-ordinating role amongst the press officers of the scientific institutions. He feels that the SMC's position as an independent initiative handling all areas of science and the media puts it in the perfect position to take on the badly needed role of co-ordinating the many varied PR initiatives.
- Alun Anderson, Editor-in-chief of New Scientist, urged the SMC to provide facilities to non-UK science correspondents visiting this country to cover science stories.

## **STAFFING**

The Centre has now appointed its full quota of three staff (see appendix V).

The Head of the SMC – Fiona Fox - will be overall in charge of running the Centre and will work with the Board to set the strategic direction, priorities and an annual operational plan. She will be directly accountable to the SMC Board.

The Media Relations Assistant – Becky Morelle – will be primarily responsible for communicating the Centre's key messages to its target audience – namely the national and regional media. She will manage the media database and be the first port of call for journalists calling the Centre.

The Science Information Officer – Dr Mark Peplow – will be primarily responsible for liaising with the Scientific Community. He will establish and manage the Science Advisory Panel and organise several of the activities listed including the horizon scanning sessions, lesson learning sessions, etc.

## GOVERNANCE

Everyone agreed that the large Advisory Council – set up to be as inclusive as possible while the outline and broader aims of the new initiative were agreed – was now too large to act as a Board of Governors to the Centre.

The SMC will have two governance bodies with distinct roles: an SMC Board and an SMC Science Advisory Panel.

## THE BOARD

The SMC staff will be accountable to the Board for all operational matters including:

- agreeing the annual strategic plan including clear objectives and strategies;
- agreeing the key priorities for the Centre in its first year;
- setting and monitoring the budget;
- discussing and brainstorming new ideas for SMC activities;
- evaluating the performance of the SMC against the agreed goals;
- ideas and strategies for future fundraising efforts.

This group will meet quarterly and represent a cross-section of the people consulted for this report. The head of the SMC will be accountable to the Board as their governing body.

The following people have been approached to join the SMC Board:

Lord Melvyn Bragg, Broadcaster and Controller of Arts at LWT

Mr Clive Cookson, Science Editor, Financial Times

Professor David Cope, Director of the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology

Dr Peter Cotgreave, Director, Save British Science

Dr Tristram Hunt, Historian, TV presenter and former advisor to Lord David Sainsbury

Dr Paul Martin, Science writer and former Director of Communications at Cabinet Office

Tom Miller, Media Relations manager, Imperial College and member of the STEMPRA committee

Ms Vivienne Parry, writer, broadcaster and tabloid journalist

Mr Trevor Phillips, Deputy Chair, London Assembly

Mr Paul Routledge, Chief Political Commentator, The Mirror and former News editor of the Observer

Dr Simon Singh, Science writer and broadcaster

Lord Stone of Blackheath, House of Lords

Mr Alan Winter, Head of Operations, Royal Institution

Mr Adrian Van Klaveren, Head of News Gathering, BBC

## THE SCIENCE ADVISORY PANEL

The role of the SMC's Science Advisory Panel (SAP) is completely distinct from that of the Board. The purpose of this panel is twofold:

- to provide scientific credibility to the SMC by showing that it has the support and endorsement of scientists who are widely acknowledged as being at the top of their area of interest;
- to agree to share some of their precious time to advise the staff of the SMC – **especially when their area of science is in the headlines.**

Because of the time pressures on this group of people, the SMC will not ask for a particular time commitment and will not organise meetings for the panel as a group. Instead, members of the panel will be invited to take part in or contribute in some way to the activities most appropriate for their area of expertise. In particular, members of the SAP have been asked to be available by phone or e-mail to advise staff at the SMC on science issues arising in the news media.

The following scientists have been approached to be members of the Science Advisory Panel:

Professor Sir George Alberti, President of the Royal College of Physicians and Department of Diabetes and Metabolism, University of Newcastle

Professor Peter Atkins, Department of Chemistry, University of Oxford

Professor Richard Catlow, Director of the Davy Faraday Research Laboratory and Department of Chemistry, University College, London

Professor Mike Brady, Department of Engineering Science, University of Oxford

The Baroness Greenfield, Director of The Royal Institution of Great Britain and Professor of Pharmacology, University of Oxford

Professor Lord Julian Hunt, Department of Space and Climate Physics, University College, London

Professor David King, Department of Chemistry, University of Cambridge; Chief Scientific Advisor to H. M. Government; Head of the Office of Science and Technology

Professor Brian Johnson, Department of Chemistry, University of Cambridge

Professor Steve Jones, Department of Biology, University College, London

Professor Sir John Krebs, Food Standards Agency and Department of Zoology, University of Oxford

Professor Chris Leaver, Department of Plant Sciences, University of Oxford

Professor Sir Chris Llewellyn – Smith, Provost and President of University College, London, and former Director General of CERN

Professor Bill McGuire, Benfield Greig Hazard Research Centre, University College, London

Professor Simon Wessely, Institute of Psychiatry, King's College, London

Professor Lord Robert Winston, Institute of Reproductive and Developmental Biology, Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine, and Hammersmith Hospital NHS Trust

## **COMMUNICATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS**

Keeping in touch with its non-media stakeholders is a key communications issue for the SMC. The staff team's initial thoughts on this include:

- a wide distribution of this report of the consultation to all stakeholders;
- distribution of a copy of the annual operational plan and budget – due to be agreed by the first Board meeting in May 2002;
- a quarterly newsletter called *SMC in the News*;
- an annual party for funders;
- regular attendance and reports to key groups including STEMPPRA group and HEERA;
- maintaining channels for communication between the science information officer and the scientific institutions (including e-mail alerts, the SMC website, etc).

## 5. CONCLUSION

The House of Lords select committee called for a “sea-change in the culture of UK science in favour of open and positive communication with the media”. Eighteen months on from that conclusion, the Science Media Centre is both a reflection of and a further contribution to that sea-change. Preparing to meet what was called the “great challenge” of science as news, the Centre has been set up by representatives of the scientific community who are already committed to and often actively engaged in working with the media on its own terms.

As a brand new initiative with no obvious precedent, it is inevitable that the SMC will change directions occasionally before arriving at its final niche. Along with its Board it will evaluate its activities and decide which ones make the best use of limited resources.

By way of conclusion there are two points that should be emphasised about the values already embodied in the staff and supporters of this initiative. These are:

- that the SMC is a place for science – it is based within science rather than the media – but it will work to adapt and deliver the messages of science to the media agenda;
- that the SMC sees science in the news as an opportunity rather than a threat. We at SMC agree passionately with Ian Hargreaves and Tom Shakespeare that the time for scientists to shout the loudest and fight their corner is when the public is intensely engaged because science is headline news. Traditionally, this is exactly the time when scientists have been most cautious. The SMC hopes to make a small but significant impact by identifying, supporting, advising and training those scientists and others with an interest in science who are willing to engage in these debates.

The SMC will work with the new Board to agree a statement of Vision, Mission and Values which will guide the Centre’s strategic plan. Following the consultation, the proposal to be put to the Board is:

### **VISION:**

**Good public policy decisions on science based on a more balanced, rational, accurate debate within the news media about science issues.**

### **MISSION:**

**To work with scientists and others to ensure that they engage more effectively with the media, in particular at times of heightened public concern about science and when science stories hit the headlines.**

### **VALUES:**

**Reliable, fast, authoritative, committed, articulate, rational, independent, media savvy.**

## APPENDIX I - THE ADVISORY COUNCIL

The Advisory Council was set up to establish the broader vision of the SMC and to raise the running costs.

Professor Sir George Alberti, President, Royal College of Physicians  
Dr Mary Archer, Member of Council, the Royal Institution  
Professor Peter Atkins, SmithKline Beecham Fellow and Tutor in Physical Chemistry, University of Oxford  
Professor Ray Baker, ex-Chief Executive, BBSRC  
Dr Jon Bell, Deputy Chief Executive, Food Standards Agency  
Dr David Boak, Director of Communications, The Royal Society  
Professor Michael Brady, Professor of Information Engineering, University of Oxford  
Lord Melvyn Bragg of Wigton, Controller of Arts, London Weekend Television  
Professor Richard Brook, Director, The Leverhulme Trust  
Dr Philip Campbell, Editor in Chief, Nature Titles  
Dr Gail Cardew, Head of Programmes, The Royal Institution  
Sir William Castell, Chief Executive, Nycomed Amersham plc  
Mr James Chapman, Science and Environment Correspondent, Daily Mail  
Mr Clive Cookson, Science Editor, Financial Times  
Mr Michael Dangerfield, Head of Development, The Royal Institution  
Dr Paul Drayson, Chairman & Chief Executive, PowderJect  
Mr Winston Fletcher, Chairman of Council, The Royal Institution  
Dr Ian Gibson, Member of Parliament, House of Commons  
Mr Peter Green, Project Director, AlphaGalileo  
Dr Roger Highfield, Science Editor, The Daily Telegraph  
Dr Tristram Hunt, Journalist and Historian  
The Rt Hon the Lord Patrick Jenkin of Roding, The House of Lords  
Mr Clive Jones, Chief Executive, Carlton Television  
Professor Steve Jones, Professor of Genetics, University College London  
Mrs Christine Kent, ex-Chief Executive, Broadcasting Support Services  
Professor Sir John Krebs, Chairman, Foods Standards Agency  
Professor Christopher Leaver, Sibthorpe Professor of Plant Sciences, University of Oxford  
Mr John Lynch, Creative Director, BBC Television  
Professor Paul Matthews, Department of Clinical Neurology, John Radcliffe Hospital  
Lord Robert May, President, The Royal Society  
Mr Geoffrey Moore, Head of Public Understanding of Science, ESPRC  
Lord David Owen of Plymouth, House of Lords  
Ms Vivienne Parry, Columnist, News of the World  
Mr Trevor Phillips, Deputy Chair, London Assembly  
Mr Tim Radford, Science Editor, Guardian  
Ms Sara Ramsden, Head of Science & Education, Channel 4 Television  
Sir Martin Rees, Astronomer Royal, Royal Society Research Professor, Kings College, Cambridge  
Ms Sarah Roberts, Vane Percy & Associates  
Lord David Sainsbury of Turville, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Science  
Dr Lindsay Sharp, Director, The National Museum of Science and Industry  
Mr Roger Sharp, Special Adviser to the Secretary of State for Trade & Industry  
Mr Geraint Smith, Science Correspondent, The Evening Standard  
Ms Dianne Stilwell, Public Affairs Manager, Institute of Physics  
Lord Andrew Stone of Blackheath, House of Lords  
Lord Dick Taverne, QC, Author, Journalist and Politician, House of Lords  
Sir Crispin Tickell, Leading Environmental Expert  
Ms Juliet Upton, Head of Communications, Engineering and Technology Board  
Lord William Waldegrave of North Hill, House of Lords  
Sir Peter Williams, Chairman, Science Museum Trust  
Professor Lord Robert Winston of Hammersmith, Professor of Fertility Studies Department of Reproductive Sciences & Medicine, Imperial College  
Mr Alan Winter, Director of Operations, The Royal Institution

## **APPENDIX II - SPONSORS OF THE SMC (To Date: March 2002)**

Beeson Gregory  
BP-Amoco  
British Energy  
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Conoco  
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EPSRC  
Merlin Biosciences  
Pfizer  
The Posen Foundation  
PowderJect  
Royal College of Physicians  
The Science Council  
Smith & Nephew  
The Society for General Microbiology  
Tate & Lyle  
Tesco  
Trinity Mirror PLC  
Dr David Moore  
Dr Geoff Andrews

Refurbishment costs have been met by a generous donation from John Ritblat. In recognition of this vital support, the main office of the Science Media Centre has been named the John Ritblat room.

The Dixon Group PLC has generously donated the IT equipment and Trinity Mirror PLC have donated money towards furnishing the Centre.

## **APPENDIX III - PEOPLE CONSULTED ABOUT THE SMC (December 2001 to March 2002)**

Ms Noorece Ahmed, Press Officer, The Wellcome Trust  
Professor Sir George Alberti, President, Royal College of Physicians  
Mr Hugh Aldersey-Williams, Science Writer  
Dr Denis Alexander, Head of Molecular Immunology Programme, The Babraham Institute  
Ms Sheila Anderson, Head of Communications, NERC  
Dr Teresa Anderson, Coordinator, Café Scientifique  
Dr Alun Andersun, Editor in Chief/Publishing Director, New Scientist  
Professor Peter Atkins, SmithKline Beecham Fellow and Tutor in Physical Chemistry, University of Oxford  
Ms Alexandra Baker, Press Officer, Science Museum  
Ms Sarah Ball, Chair, Science Council  
Mr Alastair Balls, CEO, International Centre for Life Centre for Life  
Mr Peter Barratt, Head of Communications, PPARC  
Dr Elspeth Bartlett, Scientific Liaison Officer, Institute for Arable Crops Research  
Mr Richard Bateman, Treasurer, STEMPRA  
Mr Anthony Baxter, ITN/Independent Radio News  
Ms Jo Belsten, Press Officer, Institute of Food Research  
Professor Sir Colin Berry, Professor of Morbid Anatomy and Histopathology, Queen Mary, University of London  
Professor Colin Blakemore, Waynfleet Professor of Physiology, Oxford Centre for Cognitive Research  
Dr David Boak, Director of Communications, The Royal Society  
Professor Chris Bostock, Director and Head of Division, Institute for Animal Health  
Dr Alice Bows, Press Officer, Institute of Physics  
Mr Simon Bradley, Research Manager, Social Issues Research Council  
Professor Michael Brady, Professor of Information Engineering, University of Oxford  
Lord Melvyn Bragg of Wigton, Controller of Arts, London Weekend Television  
Mr Peter Briggs, Chief Executive, British Association  
Ms Liz Brodie, Head of Press and PR, The Royal Society  
Professor Sir Richard Brook, Director, The Leverhulme Trust  
Dr Philip Campbell, Editor in Chief, Nature Titles  
Ms Linda Capper, Head of Press & Information, British Antarctic Survey  
Mr Brian Cass, Director, Huntingdon Life Sciences  
Mr James Chapman, Science and Environment Correspondent, Daily Mail  
Dr Belinda Clark, Science Liaison Manager, Norwich Research Park  
Mr Robin Clegg, Head, Science and Society Programme, PPARC  
Professor Clive Coen, Professor of Neuroscience, Kings College  
Ms Lynne Cole, Marketing and Publicity Officer, Society for Chemical Industry  
Dr Peter Collins, Director of Science Policy, The Royal Society  
Mr Clive Cookson, Science Editor, Financial Times  
Mr Peter Cooper, Science Director, Institute of Physics  
Professor David Cope, Director, Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology  
Dr Peter Cotgreave, Director, Save British Science  
Sir Neil Cromwell, Director, Natural History Museum  
Ms Linda Cuthbertson, Press and PR Manager, Royal College of Physicians  
Professor Philip Dale, Genetic Modification and Biosafety Research Group, John Innes Centre  
Mr Duncan Dallas, xytv  
Ms Miriam de Lacy, Head of Media Relations, The Wellcome Trust  
Dr Bernard Dixon, Science Writer  
Mr Brian Emsley, Media Relations Manager, Royal Society of Chemistry  
Ms Shona Falconer, Head of Science Promotion, The Royal Society  
Ms Diana Garnham, Chief Executive, Association of Medical Research Charities  
Mr Andrew Gay, Marketing Director, Huntingdon Life Sciences  
Ms Jane Gizbert, Head of Corporate Communication, MRC  
Professor David Goldstein, Wolfson Professor of Genetics, UCL



Mr Pallab Ghosh, Science Correspondent, BBC  
 Mr Tony Gilland, Finance and Business Director, Institute of Ideas  
 Dr Dougall Goodman, Director, Foundation for Science and Technology  
 Mr Simon Gregor, Head of Press, PHLS  
 Mr Peter Green, Project Director, AlphaGalileo  
 Baroness Susan Greenfield, Director, The Royal Institution  
 Ms Lindsey Grist, Science Producer, BBC News  
 Dr Rosie Hails, Ecologist, CEH Oxford  
 Mr David Hall, Hazards Forum  
 Ms Kathy Ham, Director, External Relations Division , ESRC  
 Professor Ian Hargreaves, Director, Centre for Journalism Studies, Cardiff University  
 Ms Penny Hawley, Senior Consultant, Countrywide Porter Novelli  
 Mr Mark Henderson, Science Correspondent, The Times  
 Dr Steven Hill, University Lecturer in Plant Sciences, University of Oxford  
 Mr Nicholas Hillier, Science Communication Officer, British Association  
 Ms Catherine Holden, Head of Communications, Natural History Museum  
 Ms Rachel Howell, Head of Marketing and Commuications, EPSRC  
 Lord Professor Julian Hunt, Department of Space and Climate Physics, University College London  
 Dr Tristram Hunt, Journalist and Historian  
 Ms Jackie Hutchingson, Press Officer, CLRC  
 Dr Frank James, Reader in History of Science, Royal Institution  
 The Rt Hon the Lord Patrick Jenkin of Roding, The House of Lords  
 Professor Brian Johnson, Professor of Inorganic Chemistry, University of Cambridge  
 Professor Steve Jones, Professor of Genetics, University College London  
 Ms Claire Jordan, Press Officer, Newcastle University  
 Dr Keith Kendrick, Head of Neurobiology Programme, The Babraham Institute  
 Mr Michael Kenward OBE, Science Writer and Editorial Consultant  
 Mr Scott Keir, Officer, Copus  
 Professor Sir John Krebs, Chairman, Foods Standards Agency  
 Ms Shuk Kwan Liu, Public Relations Officer, Institute of Physics  
 Mr Andrew Kurzfeld , Head of Communications, CLRC  
 Professor Christopher Leaver, Sibthorpiian Professor of Plant Sciences, University of Oxford  
 Dr Maggie Leggett, Public Affairs and Education Manager, The Physiological Society  
 Professor Steven Ley, President, Royal Society of Chemistry  
 Dr Peter Marsh, Director, Social Issues Research Council  
 Dr Paul Martin, Science Writer and Fellow of Wolfson College, Cambridge  
 Ms Natasha Martineau, Manager, COPUS  
 Mr Neil Martinson, Director of Communications, Foods Standards Agency  
 Dr Ray Mathias, Head of Science Communication, John Innes Centre  
 Lord Robert May, President, The Royal Society  
 Professor Johnjoe McFadden, Professor of Molecular Genetics, University of Surrey  
 Mr Andrew McLaughlin, Media Officer, BBSRC  
 Professor Sheila McLean, Director, Institute of Law and Ethics in Medicine, Glasgow University  
 Ms Claire McLoughlin, Press Officer, Royal Society of Chemistry  
 Ms Laura Miles, Manager, Alpha Galileo  
 Mr Tom Miller, Media Relations Manager and Senior Press Officer, Imperial College  
 Dr Hugh E Montgomery, British Heart Foundation Senior Lecturer, University College London  
 Ms Suzanne Mooney, Science Producer, Today Programme  
 Professor Vivien Moses, Chairman, Cropgen  
 Mr Toby Murcott, Editor, Einstein TV  
 Ms Jill Nelson, Director of Science Communication, the British Association  
 Ms Annie Ogden, Press and PR Manager, University of East Anglia  
 Dame Bridget Olgilvie, Chair, Copus  
 Ms Gill Ormond, Press Officer, PPARC  
 Mrs Mary Pallister, Science Communications Officer, University of East Anglia  
 Ms Vivienne Parry, Columnist, News of the World  
 Professor Joe Perry, Plant & Invertebrate Ecology Division, Institute for Arable Crops Research  
 Mr Trevor Phillips, Deputy Chair, London Assembly  
 Professor Chris Pollock, Research Director, Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research  
 Ms Kelly Quigley, Publicity and Education Officer, Society for Chemical Industry

Mr Tim Radford, Science Editor, Guardian  
Dr Mary Read, Deputy Head of Corporate Affairs, The Babraham Institute  
Ms Jane Reck, Press Officer, EPSRC  
Dr Wolf Reik, Head of Developmental Genetics, The Babraham Institute  
Ms Catherine Reynolds, Head of Communications, Institute of Food Research  
Mr Paul Routledge, Chief Political Commentator, The Mirror  
Dr Nick Russell, Science Communication, Imperial College  
Lord David Sainsbury of Turville, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Science  
Ms Deborah Scopes, Dana Centre Programme, Science Museum  
Dr Tom Shakespeare, Policy, ethics and Life Sciences, Newcastle Centre for Life  
Mr Roger Sharp, Special Adviser to the Secretary of State for Trade & Industry  
Dr Simon Singh, Science Writer and Broadcaster  
Ms Melanie Smallman, Co-ordinator, Young Science Communicator's Network  
Ms Rosalind Smith, Producer, BBC  
Ms Elaine Snell, PR and Communications Consultant, Medicine, Science and Health  
Ms Dianne Stilwell, Public Affairs Manager, Institute of Physics  
Lord Andrew Stone of Blackheath, House of Lords  
Ms Jane Sutton, Public Relations Manager, Royal Academy of Engineering  
Mr Alan Sweetman, Dana Centre Programme, Science Museum  
Lord Dick Taverne, QC, Author, Journalist and Politician  
Dr Mark Tester, Senior Lecturer, department of Plant Sciences, Cambridge University  
Ms Lucy Thorpe, Head of Planning, Radio 5 Breakfast  
Sir Crispin Tickell, Leading Environmental Expert  
Dr Jon Turney, Department of Science and Technology Studies, UCL  
Ms Juliet Upton, Head of Communications, Engineering and Technology Board  
Mr Adrian van Klaveren, Head of News Gathering, BBC  
Mr Andy Veitch, Science Correspondent, Channel 4 News  
Mr Rob Walker, Director, Impact Evaluation services Ltd  
Mr Bob Ward, Press and PR, The Royal Society  
Mr Mick Warwick, Head of Press and Communications, Newcastle University  
Ms Caitlin Watson, Coordinator, ScienceLine  
Mr Tim Watson, Press Officer, British Association  
Professor Simon Wessely, Professor of Epidemiological and Liaison Psychiatry, Kings College  
Dr Martin Westwell, Research Director, Synaptica Research  
Mr Stephen White, Publications and Communications Directorate Manager, The British Psychological Society  
Mr Simon Wilde, Science Communication Officer, BBSRC  
Ms Judith Willetts, Director of External Affairs, British Association  
Ms Monica Winstanley, Head of Public Affairs, BBSRC  
Mr Peter Wrobel, Editorial Manager, Nature  
Mr David York, Managing Director, Ballast Phoenix Ltd  
~100 members of the Higher Education External Relations Association (HEERA)

## **APPENDIX IV -LITERATURE**

The 'Great GM Food Debate' – a survey of media coverage in the first half of 1999',  
Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, May 2000

'Who's Misunderstanding Whom?', Professor Ian Hargreaves and Galit Ferguson, ESRC,  
September 2000

Politics of GM Food – Risk Science and Public trust, ESRC Oct 1999

Science and Society: What scientists and the public can learn from each other, from a lecture  
at the Ri – Robert Worcester, Oxford University Press, Dec 2001

House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology Third Report: Science and  
Society, Hansard, June 2000

House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology Third Report: Science and  
Society, Evidence, Hansard, Feb 2000

(Un-) professional Discourse? Journalists and Scientists -stories about scientists in the media,  
Rosslyn Reed, Journalism -Theory, Practice & Criticism, Volume 02 Issue 03, December  
2001

## **APPENDIX V - STAFF BIOGRAPHIES**

### **Fiona Fox – Head of The Science Media Centre**

Having completed a degree in journalism Fiona commenced her 15 years experience in media relations. She held the position of senior press officer for the Equal Opportunities Commission for six years, followed by two years running the media operation at the National Council for One Parent Families. A total change of environment followed as Fiona became Head of Media at CAFOD, one of the UK's leading aid agencies. During this role she founded the Jubilee 2000 press group and helped to force serious Third World issues on to the media and political agenda. Fiona is an experienced public speaker and a trained journalist who has written extensively for newspapers and publications, written several policy papers and contributed to books on humanitarian aid.

### **Dr Mark Peplow – Science Information Officer**

Mark studied Chemistry at Oxford University, and completed a PhD in Synthetic Chemistry at Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine. After a Postdoctoral Research Fellowship at McMaster University, Canada, Mark decided to turn his personal interest in communicating science into a fully-fledged career. He won an Association of British Science Writers scholarship to study on the MSc in Science Communication at Imperial College, which led to an internship at The Daily Telegraph. Mark then freelanced for BBC Online and The Institute of Biology (among others), before joining the Science Media Centre in March 2002.

### **Becky Morelle - Media Relations Assistant**

Becky graduated from Oxford University in July 2001, with a first class degree in Chemistry. After completing her fourth and final year working on a research project and thesis on an enzyme implicated in Alzheimer's Disease, she began work at the Royal Institution in September 2001. Becky then spent a short spell working in the fundraising department and the Director's Office before being appointed to her position in the Science Media Centre in December 2001.