

Science Media Centre response to consultation on Principles on Scientific Advice to Government

The Science Media Centre believes that Independent Scientific Advisory Committees **should** use independent science press officers from outside government to launch their main findings to the media.

Given that existing Guidance for SACs allow for this already, the SMC is concerned that most SACS do not take up this option which we believe would be good news for science in the media and good news for the public understanding of science. The SMC would like to see this principle enshrined in the main body of the Principles when it's published.

Some supplementary points

1. Not all SAC reports will be of media interest so this Principle does not mean that all reports must have big media launches. Science press officers will be able to advise Chairs of SACs as to which reports need a media launch and which do not.
2. The independent science media relations support could come from a variety of sources:
 - a) The Science Media Centre could work with SACs when their work comes under our remit of controversial stories likely to hit the headlines (we already do this routinely for groups like the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, ACRE etc)
 - b) University and institutional press officers connected to the Chair or members of the committee could provide media support (I have spoken to press officers at Wellcome Trust and Imperial College London and they have agreed that they would be happy to do this)
 - c) If neither of these was possible, SACs could use an accredited list of respected free-lance science press officers with considerable experience of handling these kinds of science stories. This last option is the only one with cost implications but since most SACs could be looked after by SMC or university press officers we do not envisage this would be a huge cost to Government.
3. The SMC is uncomfortable about the section referring to the need for government to media train members of SACS and decide on whether a SAC needs a media strategy. We believe this is a hostage to fortune. It is absolutely right that scientists sitting on SACs must be media aware and if government wants to offer media training to SACs that would be great. But that should be separated from any notion of the Government department deciding on the media strategy for the SACs' findings – that should be decided on by the independent advisers and their independent science press officer.
4. At all stages the science press officer working for the SAC should communicate with the relevant Government department press officers.

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