Chair of Trustees: Science Media Centre

The Science Media Centre is looking for a new Chair of Trustees. Applications are invited from anyone who would like to be considered for the role.

**Deadline:** Fri 18 June 2021  
**Location:** London, currently online  
**Salary:** Unpaid voluntary role  
**Interviews:** Thu 8 July, Wed 14 July 2021  
**Start date:** Oct 2021

THE SCIENCE MEDIA CENTRE

The SMC is a charity that acts as an independent press office for science. It was established in 2002 as a division of the Royal Institution of Great Britain, and became an independent charity in 2011.

The SMC’s mission is to promote and disseminate accurate, reliable and evidence-based information about science through the media. Its activities centre on topical and controversial scientific issues, in particular when they become part of the news agenda.

The SMC operates by bringing together scientists, journalists and communications teams to help ensure that the reporting of science is as accurate as possible. It maintains a database of more than 3,000 scientists, and encourages and enables them to engage with the media; it works with science journalists, to connect them with the best and fastest expertise available on science stories in the news; and it supports press officers working on controversial and difficult science stories. The SMC shares its own expertise by giving evidence to committees and others looking at aspects of the media coverage of science, and through roles on boards or advisory committees of other scientific organisations.

The coronavirus pandemic has put a particular spotlight on the work of the SMC. Over the past twelve months, staff have been working at an unparalleled level of intensity. There has been recognition in government, the media and the scientific community that the SMC has made a major contribution to the accurate and proportionate reporting of the crisis.

The SMC has a staff of nine, headed by a Chief Executive. The board of Trustees is the principal decision-making body of the SMC, and meets three times a year. Trustees are distinguished in the fields of science, media and communications among others, and the overall make-up of the board is intended to reflect this broad range of activity. The current board consists of a chair, a treasurer and eight Trustees. The Trustees are themselves guided by an advisory committee, whose members are also drawn from the fields of science, media and communications. All non-staff roles are voluntary and unpaid.
As a charity, the SMC is dependent on donations from a wide variety of scientific institutions and others – more than 100 in all. A full list can be found on the SMC website. To protect the SMC’s independence, no single donation can exceed 5 per cent of annual income (which is in the region of £600,000), unless agreed by Trustees.

More information about the SMC, its activities and governance, can be found on the SMC website

CHAIR OF TRUSTEES

The term of office of the current chair of Trustees runs out in October 2022. The SMC is now seeking a new chair of Trustees, who would become a Trustee in 2021 and have a full year of observing and taking part in the organisation’s activities, before acceding to the chair in October 2022.

The Chair of Trustees is not involved in the day-to-day running of the SMC. The role is about overarching governance, of keeping the SMC on track with its original and unique mission and charitable aims and, on occasion, being called on for advice and support on how the SMC should respond to controversial, challenging or sensitive issues.

The principal duties of the chair are as follows:

– ensure that the SMC fulfils its core mission, vision and values

– work with the Chief Executive to support employees, and ensure that the organisation is efficiently and fairly run, and maintains a strong and positive culture and ethos

– ensure that the board of Trustees fulfils its responsibilities for the efficient and compliant governance of the SMC as set out in its Articles and Regulations, charity law and all relevant legislation or regulation.

– provide leadership to the board in its support of SMC staff in pursuing the organisation’s strategic direction

– make the necessary time to chair the meetings and carry out the various other duties outlined in this document

with specific relation to the Trustees:

– approve the annual cycle of Trustee and Advisory Committee meetings; approve agendas, chair meetings; ensure that proceedings are formally recorded and that decisions are implemented

– consult Trustees as appropriate outside the formal meeting cycle if important information needs to be shared, or decisions taken before the next scheduled meeting

– monitor the activities of the two sub-committees of the main board (the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, and the Remuneration Committee) and facilitate discussion of their recommendations at full board meetings

– maintain quorate, diverse and proportionate membership of the board of Trustees and the Advisory Committee as members retire at the end of their terms and new members are appointed.
– ensure that the Trustees keep under review the long-term strategic aims of the SMC, its organisational structure, goals and means of evaluating performance

– foster and maintain a strong working relationship between the Trustees and the Chief Executive

with specific relation to the Chief Executive:

– lead discussions at board level to guide the CE in the overall strategic direction of the SMC

– set objectives for the CE through an annual appraisal

– maintain a regular dialogue with the CE and be available to provide advice and support on key editorial issues flagged by CE, and governance/employment issues as required. Day-to-day issues around management, editorial decisions and the running of the organisation are the responsibilities of the CE and senior management team.

– work with the CE to mitigate any potential reputational or financial risk to the organisation, and to respond to complaints

– sit on appointment panels as required

– ensure adherence to good working practices around HR, health and safety, diversity, equality and staff development

– leading with CE on assessing future trends in science and media and facilitating discussions about how the SMC adapts to the changing media and media relations ecosystem
PERSON SPECIFICATION

A major recent shift has been the changing landscape of science media relations, particularly in universities, and the evolving role of the science press officer away from news and towards organisational strategy. Past Chairs of Trustees have come from a background in science and journalism. While welcoming applications from across the fields of science and media, the SMC especially welcomes interest from senior media relations/communications professionals with a deep understanding of this changing landscape.

The successful candidate will have extensive senior level experience. They will display the experience and skills implicit in the above description of the role, including:

– an understanding of, and support for, the SMC’s vision, objectives, methods and ethos

– an understanding of the context and wider environment in which the SMC works

– an understanding of, and a willingness and ability to help shape, the SMC’s future strategy and activities

– an understanding of the legal and other duties and responsibilities of being a Trustee, and of the importance of compliance and effective governance

– a willingness to commit the necessary time to carry out responsibilities – which can sometimes mean a concentrated burst of activity at short notice. Overall this amounts to about 6-10 days a year

– independent judgement and political impartiality

– comfortable dealing with controversial topics, and occasionally being personally in the spotlight

APPLICATION PROCESS

Applicants for the role of chair of the Trustees are invited to apply via email to jobs@sciencemediacentre.org, setting out in not more than 500 words their reasons for wishing to undertake the role, and attaching a curriculum vitae. The closing date for applications is midday on Fri 18th June 2021. You will receive an acknowledgement of your application.

You will subsequently be informed whether or not your name has been put on a shortlist. Shortlisted candidates will be invited to an interview with the Chief Executive, Head of Operations and two existing Trustees. Interviews are scheduled for Thu 8 July and Wed 14 July. Shortlisted candidates will be offered the opportunity of an informal conversation with the current chair in advance of the interview.