



*'debates about science must involve the people actually doing the science'* 'Scientists should be involved in public debates about science so the general public can get a true picture of the topic or debate. Otherwise, scientific issues and principles are dominated by commentators, sensationalists, political motives, religious mythology, etc.' 'If we are not willing to stand up and be open about our research and our techniques, how can we expect the public to fund us?' 'Scientists have the skills to analyse and debate science-based arguments and are less likely to have a political agenda.' 'we need to learn how to communicate the importance of our work effectively to the general public' 'the public seem not to see past "books" PhD to experts which could remember the idea that scientists are just stuck in their ivory towers with little public contact'. 'I think that

## Standing up for Science

A guide to the media for early career scientists

having experienced scientists speaking and making arguments is important, however maybe younger scientists would make more of an impact as they are easier for members of the public to relate to' 'young scientists represent the future of science, they need to be more visible now and prevent career from being jeopardised'. 'younger people in the general public are more likely to listen to younger scientists' 'it is important to provide young people in society with access to scientists who are similar to themselves, so they can see that it is not 'them or their own' making decisions behind closed doors'. 'early career scientists have their own opinions and represent an important sub-section of society'. 'young people scientists bridge the gap between layperson and expert and so have the potential to contribute positively to these debates particularly when it comes to encouraging young people to study science'. 'only people prepared to sustain a debate should talk in debates'

# Early-career researchers are told stand up for science!

It can often seem that the public's perception of science is of men in white coats working away behind closed doors determined to alter lives in unwelcome ways. This detachment of scientists has led to recent debates over scientific issues being alarmingly misinformed. Sense about Science, which works with scientists to promote evidence and good science in public discussion of topical and controversial issues, has been running Voice of Young Science (VoYS) media workshops since 2004. These workshops enable early-career scientists to voice concerns about talking to the media and provide an opportunity to form views on how science is portrayed and communicated, and to question people on the 'frontline' directly. What was apparent in the workshops was the enthusiasm of early-career scientists to get involved in promoting good science, but uncertainty as to how to go about it. With that in mind, our VoYS writing team, made up of early-career scientists determined to resolve this problem, has compiled a short-guide to the media; *Standing up for Science*. This colourful guide contains interviews with scientists and journalists to give an insight into how the media reports science and gives practical tips on how they can get more involved in public debates about science.

SGM is one of our partners. Janet Hurst, Deputy Executive Secretary, highlights why they wanted to be involved: *'With so many scientific issues in the headlines affecting not only our own well-being but that of the planet, it has never been more important for scientists to interact pro-actively with the media ... SGM is therefore delighted to support this guide, which seeks to encourage early-career scientists to communicate enthusiastically and clearly to the media about their work.'*

Television, radio, newspapers and the internet reach into the home and the workplace throughout the country. It is a fact of 21st century life that the media is inescapable and, like it or not, most scientists will find that they are approached by journalists at some point in their career to talk about their own or someone else's research. Whilst this may be a daunting prospect, it needn't be a negative experience; speaking to the media allows them to share their enthusiasm for their subject, and gives the opportunity to influence public opinion and public policy. The concerns dealt with in the guide go from why not all science journalists have science backgrounds, to the fear of misrepresentation in the media and the fear that when simplifying the language for the interested lay person

you will end up saying something that sounds inaccurate, stupid or both. Everyone interviewed agreed that these problems were easily avoidable and all the interviewees, scientists, journalists and press officers alike, expressed their optimism at the part which early-career scientists can play in the communication of science, forming the perfect bridge between the public and the professor.

*Standing up for Science* is the culmination of months of hard work fuelled by a belief that with a helping hand, early-career scientists really can stand up and make a difference. It is by no means a definitive guide to all dealings with the media, but it gives individuals the knowledge, tools and inspiration to go out and stand up for science themselves.

A copy of *Standing up for Science* is enclosed with every SGM Postgraduate Student Member's copy of *Microbiology Today*. It is available on our website, [www.senseaboutscience.org/VoYS](http://www.senseaboutscience.org/VoYS), where hardcopies can also be freely ordered. Here you can also find other ways to get involved in the VoYS network. Contact Frances Downey at [fdowney@senseaboutscience.org](mailto:fdowney@senseaboutscience.org) or 0207 478 4380 for further information.

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