

# Media training: finding new SEFARI trusted communicators





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# The brief

SEFARI Gateway was tasked by the Scottish Government and Institute directors with organising a programme of media training to increase the size of the pool of trusted communicators across the institutes. Trusted communicators are people who can be relied upon to speak to items in the news and respond to requests for media interviews.

[David Lee Media and Events](#) was appointed to carry out the research. They offered a bespoke and thorough approach and good value for money.

Institute directors appointed participants from across the SEFARI network: 20 in total.

Participants were chosen for having potential to become trusted communicators. They were not necessarily people who already had considerable experience engaging with the media.

Five half-day sessions were organised, at [Moredun Research Institute](#) and [James Hutton Institute Aberdeen](#). These were held in December.



# Participants

Participants were nominated by institute directors

## Moredun Research Institute:

Valentina Busin

Lynsey Melville (unable to attend)

Eleanor Watson

David Griffiths

## BioSS:

Katherine Whyte

Altea Lorenzo Arribas

## The Rowett Institute:

Jules Griffin

Baukje de Roos

Alex Johnstone

Wendy Russell

David McBey

## James Hutton Institute:

Alexis Walter

Trinity Ndlovu

Kathryn Colley

Stefan Jindra

## SRUC:

Ann McLaren

Louise McNicol

Emma Baxter

Lesley Smith

## RBGE:

Olwen Grace



# The training

Training took the form of a theory session updating participants on the current media landscape and giving practical interview techniques, followed by two mock broadcast interviews for each participant.

Each session involved four participants, from a mix of institutes, and lasted half a day.

Mock interviews were carried out by a practising journalist and filmed by a cameraman. Each participant was given their interview scenario in advance and it was directly relevant to their area of research or expertise.

For example:

*Dr Katherine Whyte, Senior Ecological & Environmental Statistician, Biomathematics & Statistics Scotland.*

*Scenario: The Herald is interviewing you about the effect of marine renewable energy projects on seabirds and marine mammals as part of a series of articles exploring the future of renewable energy in Scotland. The interview will also be recorded so clips can be used online.*

*Dr David McBey, Advance Research Fellow, Rowett Institute*

*Scenario: Radio 4's The Food Programme is interviewing you about the ongoing LESS Meat study. As well as broadcasting*

*the interview, they want to film some clips for the programme's website.*

If they performed well in the first interview, they were pushed harder in the second with challenging questions, some of which put them in difficult positions that they had to use techniques to overcome.

In the first interview they spoke to a real person. In the second they spoke just to a blank screen—a realistic scenario in today's media landscape.

The films of the interviews were then displayed on a large screen and analysed, with verbal feedback given.

Following the session detailed written feedback on each participant was provided to SEFARI Gateway.

This has been passed on to the communications teams at each institute to help inform their understanding of whether the participant is ready to be a trusted communicator.



# Participant feedback

A brief anonymous four-question survey was sent to each participant following the training. Responses were overwhelmingly positive.

Each participant was asked how useful the training was on a scale of 1 to 5. The majority scored it 5. Average rating was 4.6

Answers to qualitative questions about what they liked or disliked about the approach included:

“I learned so much in such a short space of time. The team were extremely knowledgeable and clearly brought a wealth of experience from across the sector. Their feedback was excellent - constructive, insightful, and delivered in a way that steadily built confidence throughout the day. The realistic interview scenarios were particularly valuable, and I now feel well prepared for when the next media opportunity arises. The only thing I would change is that I wish it had been longer! It was the most worthwhile training I have undertaken in years.”

“I found it particularly useful to be trained by journalists who gave a realistic experience.”

“The media training was very effective because it was practical and clearly structured. It encouraged me to reflect on how I engage with the media, and the advice was straightforward, actionable, and easy to put into practice.”

“Though slightly daunting at first when faced with two filming sessions with honest feedback - it was very useful to have this 'warts and all' approach amongst a small group.

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“I found the simulated practice interview sessions really helpful, as well as reviewing the recorded interviews and getting bespoke feedback (and viewing and learning from the other trainees' interviews too). More broadly, I found the key points covered in the training were comprehensive but easy to remember, with a clear focus on a few key aspects of media engagement techniques. I liked that it was kept relatively simple and the course didn't try to cover too much material for its runtime. This meant it was easy to remember the key points in the practice interviews and going forward.”

“I found this training session hugely beneficial. As someone who has no experience of media engagement on camera, I now feel more confident and better able to prepare for opportunities that may arise. It was particularly useful to practise both speaking to an interviewer and straight to camera and to watch back afterwards.”

Just one participant said they did not find it useful, (scoring it 3), for the reason that they had undertaken similar training in the past:

“I liked to approach taken by the team, but the content was very similar to a media training course I did 1.5 years ago. This course was perhaps more useful for someone who hadn't had media training before.”

# Next steps to maximise impact

The key next step will be to build stronger links between the communications teams within the SEFARI institutes.

This will enable maximum impact to be achieved from the training, as each communications team will be able to respond to, and generate, media opportunities for those participants who have the skills to be trusted communicators.

Feedback on each participant has already been passed on to each communications team.

A new SEFARI communications group is now being formed, initiated by SEFARI Gateway.

\*This group will meet for the first time later this month with the aim of building stronger links between the communications teams within the SEFARI institutes.

If further rounds of media training are delivered, the new group will be key to ensuring suitable participants are chosen and the training can deliver maximum impact.



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SEFARI works across six Research Institutes who deliver the Scottish Government funded Strategic Research Programme.

