

Summer Science Exhibition 2019

Introduction to Press Work

Journalists play an essential role in promoting the Royal Society Summer Science Exhibition and making it an unmissable date in London's busy summer cultural calendar.

There is no single winning formula that guarantees press, but at the heart of successful media coverage is the ability to talk like a human and tell a compelling story that can be understood by anyone, whether they are a retail worker, accountant or a grandparent.

Who we are

The Royal Society's press team – Omar Jamshed, Danielle Haddad and Bronwyn Friedlander – manage all media relations relating to the promotion of the Exhibition. We retain full editorial control over the way your exhibit is promoted, including its content and timing. We do this by working with you in the run-up to the Exhibition to find and develop your exhibit's news hooks that will make maximum impact in disseminating your research and promoting the Exhibition as a whole.

What we do

The Royal Society's wider communications strategy combines media relations, advertising and social media to drive visitors to the Summer Science Exhibition. The press office works closely with TV camera crews, radio producers, print journalists and online reporters from every type of publication to ensure the research you are presenting goes beyond the confines of our building in central London. Whether it's a newspaper, tabloid or magazine, we work with everyone to ensure we reach out to as wide an audience as possible.

We will be in touch over the next few months to find out how you fit into the wider promotion plan. The underlying news hook for all journalists is that the Royal Society's Summer Science Exhibition opens on the 1st of July. Reporting it any later would make it old news, so expect the biggest media activity on the first day of the Exhibition.

What makes the news

Grand opening. The first day of the Exhibition is news enough for TV & radio. Both BBC Breakfast and the Today programme (7m+ audience figures each) have previously reported live from the Exhibition floor, interviewing exhibitors at their stands while Royal Society spokespeople talk about the history of the Exhibition and why visitors should attend. Meanwhile, ITV News London (2m+ viewers) filmed prerecord interviews with exhibitors jointly with our Professor for Public Engagement Brian Cox, edit the news package back in the studio and air it later that evening.

For other journalists, your presence at the Summer Science Exhibition isn't a strong enough news hook, which is why we help you develop them from the start. We have included a few more examples below. This is not an exhaustive list that guarantees success – it is just meant to get you thinking about creative ways of making the news.

New research. Timing the publication of a study or report directly relevant to the research presented at the Exhibition bolsters your newsworthiness and makes it feel much more novel

and cutting-edge. This tactic only works if it comes out on the week of the Exhibition (1-7 July 2019). Publishing in a Royal Society journal is desirable as we can help with timing, but not essential by any means.

“Unveiling” or “revealing” technology. This tactic lets journalists use a bit of creative licence to whet the appetites of potential visitors. For example, one exhibit unveiled the prototype of an “intelligent toilet” that can immediately tell your doctor/parents whether you’re at risk of depression or using recreational drugs. Their research was about technology that can recognise traces of molecules in urine. The breakthroughs allowed real-time health monitoring or drug testing in hospitals, and the exhibitors used the “intelligent toilet”, which doesn’t really exist, as a creative way of opening an important public debate on the ethical implications of their work. Another example is exhibitors announcing a patent for one of their quantum computing technologies at the Exhibition, showing that you don’t need the technology to be physically present to make the news.

Unusual access. If you bring something to the Exhibition that the public rarely, if ever, gets to interact with, let us know. One time an exhibit bought a perfume that smells like a comet. This landed them a slot on the BBC’s popular One Show and newspapers reported it as a “heavenly scent to be handed out in London”. If you can’t bring it to the Exhibition but can give journalists early access, we could always send a TV crew to pre-record you in the lab. An example of this is when we put an opera singer and rapper into an MRI machine to study the differences in the ways their larynx moves.

Breath-taking visuals. Sometimes, a picture of your exhibit can tell a story itself. News agencies send photographers that then sell the pictures to national picture desks, which can appear in a print newspaper the next day or as part of a picture gallery on a news website.

Star power. Having a widely-known public figure to join you at your exhibit is a great way of making the news. For example, previous exhibitors invited football legend Sir Bobby Charlton to attend as his charity funded their work. An exhibit about the science of laughter secured up and coming comedians to do a short set. Another group asked a spoken word artist to do a poem about soil weathering.

Public surveys. One group launched a project investigating the prevalence of dry eye disease in UK children at the Exhibition, something which had never been done to this scale before. At the heart of this story was that scientists highlighted a problem (the unknown prevalence of dry eyes) that is relatable (we can all imagine the symptoms) and a sense of urgency (left untreated it’s bad news) that made it truly newsworthy.

YOU! Scientists are human, and the news is people talking about people. If there are researchers in your team with an interesting story to tell – whether it’s about resilience, overcoming the odds or a milestone/anniversary, let us know. For example, an exhibitor had got engaged with a synthetic diamond ring they had fabricated in their own laboratory – and the tech was being exhibited at Summer Science.

What you can do now

This handout is intended to get you thinking about how to work with us to ensure your research has wide impact. Start discussing with your team about the ambitions for your exhibit and think about what’s newsworthy about your work and the creative ways you can bring it to

life. We also recommend getting in touch with your institutional press officer and get the dates of the Summer Science Exhibition in their diaries. Find out how much support they can provide you at this stage and in the run up to the Exhibition, and let us know about it.

Frequently Asked Questions

Are exhibitors expected to talk to journalists?

Yes. Journalists can disseminate your work to millions around the world, creating new opportunities for people to learn about your work and raise the profile of your research team and institution. As the national academy of sciences, it is also our responsibility to inspire people with advances in technology – ideally by enthusing them enough to come visit us in person after reading about your research in the news.

Can you guarantee our exhibit will generate media interest?

No. Breaking news can emerge at any time and more often than not science is lower down the pecking order when competing with, for example, political developments. Luckily, the UK has specialist science and technology correspondents at most news desks, meaning there will be a minimum amount of coverage we can expect from the Exhibition as a whole. We will ensure we develop your news hooks as much as possible to give you the best fighting chance in a competitive environment.

How does the Royal Society pick which exhibits to promote?

We normally choose **four to five exhibits** to promote widely via press releases, but this number varies greatly depending on the year and whether we are competing against other high profile events (for example, the World Cup, Olympics, or Wimbledon). In general, these exhibits will cover a wide breadth of science and have news hooks that appeal to a variety of media outlets.

A further **eight to ten exhibits** are chosen for strategic, targeted pitching. This is when we reach out to one or two journalists directly, giving them early or exclusive access to the story. We cannot write press releases for all exhibits to avoid spamming journalists' inbox, which is a counterproductive strategy and makes it less likely they cover the Exhibition as a whole.

It may also be that your exhibit lends itself more to an in-depth feature in a Sunday newspaper because it requires more nuance than we can provide in a press release. Another reason is the research at the exhibit was covered too recently, making it old news for press release but providing new opportunities for TV & radio from the Exhibition floor.

Not writing a press release does not mean your exhibit won't be promoted, as we often find that coverage begets coverage. For example, a bespoke pitch we made to the Mail on Sunday last year made it on to The Times and the Daily Star the following morning, and was later picked up by BBC World Service.

What if my exhibit isn't picked at all?

Please note that the news making process is fickle and this **does not** reflect on the strength of your research, people or institution. Your work will still be promoted regularly in all our general mailings to journalists about the Exhibition as a whole, and they may be in touch directly if your exhibit description catches their eye. We will also be in touch with you separately to provide

materials and encourage your institution to promote your presence at the Exhibition. In this situation, working with your institutional press officer is the best way of maximising your chances of coverage (see below).

When does the Royal Society start promoting the Exhibition?

We start reaching out to journalists as early as December 2018 to ensure the date is in their diary. Some publications, e.g. in-flight magazines or event listings like Time Out, require advanced notice to feature in their print editions. With some exceptions (see below), there will be limited press coverage in the run-up to the Exhibition, with the highest flurry of activity coming through on the first day of the Exhibition.

What happens on the first day of the Exhibition?

We officially open to members of the public at 11AM on Monday 1 July, but all exhibits are ready and staffed a few hours earlier for an exclusive **press preview**. This is a small window of opportunity for journalists to come talk to exhibitors and film/take photographs before the crowds come in. There is also a strong chance that BBC Breakfast or ITV's Good Morning Britain will run a live segment of their show early in the morning. We will be in touch separately if this happens as it will affect some exhibits depending on where they are located, requiring them to set up earlier that day.

Are we allowed to promote our work before the Exhibition?

Unless the Royal Society press office instructs otherwise, **all exhibit content is embargoed until 11.00 Monday 1 July 2019**, which is when the Exhibition officially opens to the public. There are exceptions, for example if we place an interview in a Sunday paper ahead of the Exhibition. We will be in touch with you directly if we plan to do this with your work.

What happens during the rest of the week?

Journalists attend the Exhibition throughout the entire week. Those with imminent deadlines like print news reporters and TV crews visit on Monday, while others like BBC Radio 4 Inside Science, New Scientist or the Economist visit at other times. Sometimes journalists examine the Exhibition programme beforehand and will let us know who they want to talk to. In these cases, we will text you in advance to ensure you can meet them.

Anything else I should know?

Agility and speed are essential in the world of news, and journalists must be able to talk to exhibitors directly. There will be no time to build consensus by email with your wider research group to find a common position on something. Please bear this in mind in the weeks running up to the Exhibition and especially on Sunday 30 June and Monday 1 July 2019.

We do not expect to hoard all your announcements, so please give us advance notice on any news coming out of your exhibitor group before the Exhibition opens – the earlier, the better. If you are chosen as one of the lead exhibits for promotion but make national news in June because of a newly published paper, it has important knock-on effects on the entire press plan. Finally, if you are not picked for bespoke promotion, please work with your institutional press office to make your presence felt at the Summer Science Exhibition. Your research will have news value at regional level at the very least, and depending on what's on at the time, it could still be successful more widely.