

Tips on talking to the MEDIA

Media interviews can either be:

1. in response to a media release that has been issued, a research article or conference paper
2. or to gain your expert comment on a current news story.

The news agenda moves quickly! Whether the request has come direct to you or via the Press Office, respond ASAP, but give yourself time to prepare.

Before giving an in-depth response to a print journalist or recording a broadcast interview, find out what is required and arrange a time to talk further.

The media's aim is to find someone who can comment in language that the audience will understand and within their time deadline.

Media interviews are a good opportunity to get Bangor University's name in the media and to raise awareness of the



PREPARATION

Ask what is the programme/magazine/newspaper and its audience? This will help you to pitch your response accordingly.

Ask how long the broadcast interview will be to help you distil your message.

Ask who else is being interviewed for the same piece?

Ask if your interview will be live, as-live or pre-recorded.

Providing that the interview isn't live, you can ask to re-record a reply to a question if you are unhappy. A good reporter will rarely refuse to do this.

You can rarely get the questions in advance, so ask for the general area of questioning. Subsequent questions will be based on your answer, so prepare the points you

want to express in advance. Think of your answers as a means to guide the questions to directions you want to discuss.

Identify a couple of key simple messages you want to get across, and make sure you stick to them. Express them clearly and succinctly with good examples/analogies that everyone can understand.

Broadcasters look for snappy soundbites – prepare a couple in advance.

Have some statistics to back up your message. Big numbers aren't handled very well, find analogies to help illustrate e.g. x football pitches/London buses/half the width of a human hair etc.

Avoid jargon and specialist language, and don't use acronyms.

Anything you say, including before or after, may be used; don't say anything you don't want to see in print/ broadcast.

Try to mention Bangor University in the interview e.g. "Our current research group at Bangor University are very interested in developing this area of research". If you don't, you run the risk of the University not being mentioned at all in the broadcast.

Bear in mind that a general news item will only last a few minutes and your interview may be only a portion of that, so make your point fairly early on.

Be confident! Remember you're the expert.

RADIO

Simplify and be brief. Thinking in soundbites or memorable phrases or messages is particularly useful for radio as listeners are often engaged in another activity e.g. driving/cooking.

Don't attempt to get more than three ideas into a radio interview as it won't last more than a few minutes.

Use examples and language that 'paints the picture' for the listener.

Anticipate any obvious or negative questions from the programme or their listeners' point of view and how



TELEVISION

Remember that a news programme will want pictures to broadcast over the presenter's description of the story. Think of visuals or a location which illustrates your story.

Often other participants will be needed, especially a health related issue - someone affected by the condition etc. You may need to assist in suggesting participants. You may be asked to be filmed in a lab or in the field or any relevant location.

If interviewed, look at the interviewer not the camera. In such cases, keep your eye fixed on, or just above the camera. The exception is if you are interviewed remotely, either at BBC Bangor or over the internet using Skype or similar.

Sit upright and forward slightly to appear energised and engaged, but relaxed- hands not clasped tightly but not waving around to distract viewer or jangle any jewellery. If standing, plant your

feet hip width apart to minimise movement.

Dress smartly, but avoid distracting clothing e.g. busy patterns, novelty ties and garish colours. Dress in the context of the story, e.g. avoiding designer fashion if you are discussing poverty.



PRINT MEDIA

Before the interview, ask the reporter what the focus of their story is, is anyone else being interviewed, and what type of questions will be asked.

Journalists work to deadlines, and they rely on having stories ready very quickly. It is very important to return their phone calls and keep to the deadline.

Try not to distinguish too much between phone calls from the *North Wales Chronicle*, the *Sun* or the *Guardian* as any preconceptions you may have are unlikely to help you give a good interview. It's best to treat all interviews with the same degree of respect and preparation, as you never know where the story might get picked up elsewhere.

DIFFICULT OR UNEXPECTED QUESTIONS

Don't be thrown by a question you can't answer, or think that as you're the expert, you should be able to answer. Say something along the lines of:

"That would be a question for my colleagues, the *thingyologists*. As a *whatsitologist*, what interests me with this issue is...."

Don't be afraid to bring the conversation round to what you want to say.

Use bridging techniques to get people to the point that you want to make, i.e. acknowledge the question, but don't agree the problem, then move swiftly on to

your agenda:

"That's an interesting question, however, as a *thingyologist*/ from my research, I think the important issue is..."

"There's certainly an issue there to be resolved, that's why we're doing..."

"Before we get off that topic, let me just add..."

"Let me put that in perspective..."

"It's important to remember that..."

Don't repeat the negative. Try to correct without repeating the negative phrase:

Journalists may pause before asking the next question after you've finished your answer. Don't be tempted to fill a void in a conversation as you may be led into saying more than you intended.

Don't be thrown by a personal question at the end of the interview. Journalists like to see the human side of academics, a zoologist may be asked about their pet.

AND FINALLY

Accept that the interview may be **heavily edited** or **scrapped** altogether. Unfortunately, a lot of what you have said may end up on the cutting room floor or scrapped altogether because of a lack of space. Don't let this dishearten you - it happens a lot.

Please **inform** the Press Office of any interviews you have given. This assists in our monitoring and your contribution will be listed in the media coverage briefing e-mail sent to the **University Executive** and other senior managers. We can also **promote** your contribution on Social Media.

If in **doubt** about speaking with the media, either proactively or reactively, please discuss the issue with the Press Office.

Remember that there are **media training courses** available and that you may be able to pay from public engagement portion of your research grant. Some limited training is available via the Press Office.