



FAQs from journalists

What we do

- **What services do you offer?** We help journalists gain access to accurate, evidence-based information by the following means: [Rapid reactions](#) responding to breaking stories by sending out expert comment and information; [Round-ups](#) putting new research into context by sourcing third-party reaction from scientists and [Press briefings](#) bringing scientists face-to-face with journalists to explain their work.
- **How do you choose which stories to work on?** Our primary areas of focus are: Big, breaking science stories that are the headline news of the day; Controversial, messy, or politicised scientific issues; New scientific studies that may be sensationalised, overplayed or misrepresented; Issues where the scientific community wants to speak out as one.

Contacting us

- **What is the best way to contact you?** To email the press team use press@sciencemediacentre.org. If it's urgent then call 020 7611 8300. If the office is closed we will leave instructions on our answerphone.
- **Do you run an out-of-hours service?** No. Our office is manned from 9am-6pm, Mon-Fri.

Working with us

- **I have an exclusive – can you help me and keep it all confidential?** Yes. If it's your story we'll keep it that way.
- **Do I have to sign an embargo agreement?** We ask all journalists to agree by email to abide by embargoes. If you want to join our lists we'll send you details.
- **How do I get on your lists?** We primarily work with UK national news journalists from mainstream outlets, in particular science, health and environment specialists. We also work closely with: domestic and global news agencies; major regional publications (e.g. London Evening Standard); UK news magazines; freelancers whose work appears regularly in the national news or who have been commissioned by a major outlet; major specialist publications including New Scientist, The Engineer, Science (AAAS) News, Nature News, and BMJ News. If you are in one of these categories please email or phone us to be added to our lists.
- **What about international media and other national UK media?** Features journalists and documentary makers from national media outlets are welcome to attend press briefings but should be aware SMC services are prioritised for news journalists working to short deadlines. Outlets with a mass UK audience will always be the SMC's priority, but

journalists at major news outlets servicing non-UK audiences are free to receive SMC mailings and attend briefings.

- **And what if I don't fit into either of the above?** Regrettably we have insufficient resources to help trade press, science writers, science bloggers, and freelance journalists not working for the UK national news media, although we can provide those journalists with: access to material on the SMC website after the embargo lifts; subscription to [RSS feeds](#); rapid reactions to breaking news using @SMC_London; the opportunity to apply to be on an immediate release mailing list. If we can't help you we will always try to refer you to the press offices of other scientific institutions.

About us

- **How are you funded?** We have around 100 funders from a range of science-related sectors. Donations from any one institution are capped at 5% of our annual income. There are a small number of large Trusts for which we have exceptions such as the Wellcome Trust. All our funders, and more information, are on our [website](#).
- **How do you ensure your independence?** SMC funders do not receive anything in return for their donations, and the SMC's strategy and editorial decisions are decided by staff in consultation with trustees and advisers where needed. We are guided by scientific evidence and the scientific community we were set up to represent.

About the experts we work with

- **How do you select your experts?** The quality of our experts is important to us. The SMC recruits scientists, engineers and other experts who work for respected institutions, publish in peer-reviewed journals and have a track record of high quality work in their specialist field. They are also selected for their willingness and ability to engage with the media when their area of work hits the headlines. They are not selected based on their point of view and on some subjects we may put forward experts who do not agree.
- **Do you check whether your experts have any conflicts of interest?** Each time we issue a comment from an expert, or run a press briefing with them, we ask them to voluntarily declare any interests, paid or unpaid, direct or indirect, which might be regarded by a reasonable and objective third party as giving rise to a conflict with their role as an SMC expert. We make those declarations available to journalists. We assume that for individual media enquiries journalists will ascertain any relevant conflicts for themselves.

How we operate

- **Why do you only put up scientific experts even when the debate is much wider than that?** Our remit is to reflect the views of mainstream science so we will strive to find the best experts to share their views on any relevant story, but we will only ever select scientific experts – there are many places where you can get the views of other kinds of expert.
- **How do you reflect a split in science or offer balanced views?** When there is a valid split in mainstream science, or robust evidence is unclear, you will often see that in our output as we seek opinions from mainstream scientists based on their expertise, not their particular views. However, we do not seek balance from outside the scientific community, nor do we search for scientists who specifically hold a counter opinion. See *Fiona's [blog](#)*
- **Can you find me a woman/ethnic minority scientist to be an interviewee?** Our database is not searchable by gender or demographic. If we cannot find someone who fits your needs we will try and recommend somewhere to try. See *Fiona's [blog](#)*
- **Why do you send so many emails?** We have been asked by journalists to issue comments as soon as we have them, so sometimes we will issue multiple emails on a story over the course of the day - but the number of emails sent does not always reflect a story's significance. The email subject line should help you decide whether to just delete or ignore the message.
- **Do you have archives so I can see what you issued on an old story?** Everything that we issue is placed on our searchable website so that you can look back at who said what and when. If we are issuing comments on a long-running story then we will also endeavour to aggregate our previous work and issue that too.