



The Church of Scotland

Policies and Procedures of the Communications Department

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In the same way, let your light shine
before others, so that they may see
your good works and give glory to
your Father in heaven

Matthew 5:16

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This guidance outlines the practices and procedures of the Church of Scotland in dealing with all sections of the media. Its purpose is to:

- illustrate the power of effective communications to promote and protect the Church's mission
- actively facilitate clear and effective communication
- provide unambiguous guidance that ensures consistency in the Church's media activity across all Councils and departments.

This document represents Church policy and must be complied with by all employees. Office-holders and members are actively encouraged to use this policy also.

Policies

General Guidance for Church Officials and Congregations

1. Who responds to media enquiries?

At present the majority of media activity relating to the Church of Scotland is managed by the Communications Department with some activity devolved to Councils, Presbyteries and Congregations to enable a shorter and more effective line of communication when appropriate and to help ensure that all information and news is being disseminated at an appropriate level.

To facilitate the operation of this guidance, and ensure that the Church can respond effectively and speedily to enquiries, Council Secretaries, Conveners, Heads of Departments, the Principal Clerk and the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland are the only ones with the authority to authorise press releases on specific policy areas or issues relevant to their area of work.

All media enquiries should be directed to the Communications Department who will then advise on the most appropriate course of action. There may still be instances when it is appropriate for a Council Secretary or other paid employee of the Church to provide information to the media on operational or technical issues. This should only take place after consultation with the Communications Department.

It is always preferable but not always possible that a named respondent should be quoted - not a 'spokesperson'. However, where necessary the Communications Department will respond in such a way after consultation with the relevant parties.

We never give "no comment" as a response since we are an open and accountable charity and also because we do not wish to reject our right of reply. We should explain why we cannot respond if information is confidential, commercially sensitive or the subject of police, legal or disciplinary proceedings. While we may not be able to give specific information, we can still give information about our policies and procedures.

The Church of Scotland will, in order to protect its reputation, respond diplomatically but robustly and swiftly to any inaccurate information appearing about it in the media.

Off the record briefings can only be given with prior discussion and with approval from the Communications Department, or with the approval of the Council Secretary/ Head of Department if the briefing is being given by a member of staff from the Communications Department.

Councils and departments must take care to ensure that employees and representatives who are in contact with the media understand that they do so on behalf of the Church of Scotland and only represent the Church's position in relation to any issue, and not their own. In particular, employees and representatives dealing with the media on behalf of the Church nationally must not give personal views which can be taken to represent the Church's views.

2. Who issues news releases on behalf of the Church of Scotland?

All news releases on behalf of the Church of Scotland nationally and its Councils and departments will be issued by the Communications Department. This includes releases on behalf of CrossReach, the Social Care Council of the Church, the Guild General Trustees and other such bodies.

News releases concerning local events or issues can be issued by Presbyteries and congregations. Indeed such action is very much encouraged. The Communications Department is resourced to offer general guidance to Presbyteries and congregations and bespoke guidance when a story of national significance arises.

All media statements – releases or responses – which could involve potential legal issues must be cleared by the Head of the Law Department. The Communications Department will check that this has been done before issuing any such statement.

All quotes should be approved directly by the individual quoted. In joint news releases, any partner organisations/groups quoted must approve the release before issue.

While the Communications team will make every effort to keep key people informed, “scripting by committee” can take hours and sometimes days, leaving the Church badly exposed. If protocol leaves any doubt the team should establish who is the appropriate lead person to advise and sign off the final draft of a statement. If the Convener is unavailable the Principal Clerk will be the lead person or nominate someone else.

3. Who speaks to the media?

The Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland is perceived as an ambassador for the Church and is often recognised by the media as the appropriate person to comment for the Church. The Moderator is encouraged to engage positively with the media, in full consultation with the relevant Convener and/or Secretary. As an ambassador of the Church the Moderator is not a political figure so does not generally comment on political issues.

Council Conveners are responsible for comment on matters that fall under their remits to provide expertise in the area being discussed by the media. On some occasions, after consultation, it may be deemed that such matters are better presented by the Moderator as stated above. Often a statement will generate press interest if presented by the Moderator rather than a convener.

In the absence of the Conveners it would be expected that Vice Conveners would comment on matters pertinent to the Council remits. In the absence of Vice Conveners it may be expected that the Principal Clerk or Council Secretaries would make comment on behalf of the Councils.

It should be noted that The Guild, which changes its Convener annually, often uses its Secretary to make informed comment on specific issues. The Convener would comment on internal Guild matters and matters of national Guild policy.

For local stories affecting only one Presbytery or congregation, it is entirely in order for local representatives to speak to the media directly. However, where such matters have the potential to impact on the Church nationally or cover an area of national policy the media must be referred to the Communications Department at 121 George Street, Edinburgh, where a decision will be taken on how best to respond. It would also be expected that where a Presbytery or congregation is contacted by a member of the national media, that the Communications Department would be informed. If in any doubt the Communications Department should be contacted for advice.

4. The Web

Identified Risks:

1. Unauthorised external communications
2. Failure to communicate key information

Recommendations:

1. a. Content for upload to website or social media should meet following criteria:
 - Permission must be secured for use of names, quotes, personal information and photographs of identifiable individuals.
 - When content of any kind is sent to the web editor or communications staff by another department with a request it be uploaded to web or social media, the sending department is responsible for ensuring permissions exist.
 - When taking photographs or video at events communications staff should make potential subjects aware that photographs/video are being gathered. Anyone who does not want to be photographed or videotaped has the right to opt out.
 - Any photography or videography that includes identifiable children must have explicit permission from each child's parents or guardians.
 - Young people over the age of 12 (at minimum) can give permission for photographs, videos or quotes so long as they understand what they are agreeing to and for what purpose the content will be used. If in doubt staff should get permission from a parent or guardian.
 - Permission must be secured from the copyright holder before using copyrighted content.
 - b. Content for publication to websites or social media should be reviewed by two communications team members whenever practicable.
 - c. Out of hours or when only one team member is available content may be published to web and social media channels so long as it meets basic standards as delineated in 1a.
 - d. Devices used to publish Church of Scotland content to website or social media channels must be password protected.
2. a. Critical information should be published on the website and on social media channels as soon as practicable. Example: In a disaster or crisis Churches may act as safe spaces/gathering points for community members.
 - b. Critical Church of Scotland news and information should be made available to Church members and the public through the website and social media channels as soon as practicable. This may include:
 - statements from Church of Scotland Councils and office holders
 - changes to Church of Scotland office holders
 - critical issues affecting Church of Scotland members.

5. Photography

- If submission of professional press photos commissioned by the Church is likely to make the difference between coverage and no coverage, as resources allow we will encourage areas of the Church to commission the necessary photos. These photos will also be of appropriate quality for use on the Church website.
- The Communications Department has a very limited budget for photography but sometimes commissions photography which is not the obvious responsibility of another area of the Church. It declines to pay for images which have a slender chance of media coverage. On occasion the team may decline to use in its publications, the website and in press releases photography supplied by Councils and Committees, which it believes to be of inadequate quality.

6. Design

- The Design Team ensures that publications, leaflets, posters etc are of a consistently high standard and are in tune with other church materials and the brand values of the Church.
- The team ensures that output conforms to the house style of the Church of Scotland laid down by the 2011 General Assembly.
- The team aims to ensure the Church's materials keep pace with a changing media landscape including the move towards presenting more information and design online.
- The team coordinates with media colleagues to present materials on a range of media platforms.

Procedures

1. How to secure positive coverage?

At every level in the Church individuals live by its values and render service to others, especially the most vulnerable in society. They do not seek publicity for its own sake. However, it is generally recognised that proactive communication of positive values and deeds has the potential to bring comfort to others at a time of need and encourage people to live their lives in a different way. Coverage also has the potential to stimulate a new or renewed interest in the Church.

- Imagine telling a potential story to a stranger on a train. Would it interest them or might it primarily be of interest to people in the Church, perhaps even people in one area of the Church? If so there is a case for aiming for coverage in the Christian media and on outlets such as the Church's own website, CrossReach News, mainstream and social media.
- Is the story genuinely new and fresh? To use the cliché, dog bites man is not a huge story whereas the reverse would be.
- The mainstream media may be an option. Perhaps the story could be approached in a different way to make it resonate with the general public? Many press releases are written from the perspective of senior figures in an organisation. E.g. "Rev John Smith is representing the Church at an interfaith conference in Middlesville." The trick is to lead with the aspect most likely to interest/matter to a stranger. E.g. "Leading figures from faith groups meet to discuss a potential mass petition in the wake of the atrocities in the Middle East."
- Research or a survey may secure news coverage for an issue. Media organisations such as BBC Scotland have a policy of not considering any survey with a sample size of less than 1,000 in Scotland.
- A strong statement is worth considering on an important issue. This has to be done with care as it can affect the long term reputation of the Church and relations with partner organisations. It is essential that any criticism is well researched and does not align the Church with any political movement.
- A case study -which may take days to find - can greatly increase the chances of coverage on TV in particular. Media organisations regularly do decide no case study no coverage. It would be hard for example to persuade a broadcast organisation to carry a comprehensive report on increasing numbers of vocations, if it were not offered an interview with a fledgling minister.
- Stories may emerge from committees or work handled in offices. However, some stories, especially people-centred ones, often come from people at grassroots level.
- Some issues may not work as news stories but are potential features or opinion pieces. The Communications Department can advise.
- Forewarning the media of a scenario which lends itself to a good photograph can help secure coverage for a tentative story. It could result in publication of the image with an extended caption or if lucky an article. For example children or adults bearing candles may be a natural part of an event and offer a potential strong image.

- To increase the chances of coverage it is advisable to have the press release approved by all in the afternoon, e.g. Monday, ready to go out at 09.30 on Tuesday but embargoed for 00.01 (early hours of Wednesday). This gives reporters and news desks on newspapers enough time to notice and consider the release before the key meeting with the editor, picture desk etc. at about 11am on the Tuesday. It also gives TV and radio staff enough time to notice and organise a brief interview for the following day's breakfast bulletins.
- Putting a reasonable story out with an embargo until the morning also means a chance it will get space on BBC and STV websites and feature on Good Morning Scotland, media platforms which can set the agenda for the day for the rest of the media. TV people also more likely to bite if they have time to set up filming. Evening TV news programmes only have about six full reports (setting aside sport) so competition is often stiff. There is less competition for space on breakfast bulletins. Sometimes a story will get on at breakfast but be edged out of evening coverage. STV has local opt-outs for e.g. Edinburgh and Glasgow areas, on its evening news programmes so has space for some stories that might not make it on the BBC.
- An event staged in the afternoon or evening has to be very strong indeed for it to be picked up as editors have to reserve a hole in the paper or kick out stories already completed. A meaty statement distributed under embargo for use on the day of an evening event, often offers the best chance of coverage.
- Special days offer "pegs" – "excuses" for coverage. E.g. an event or the anniversary of a death/birth/launch/discovery. For example the General Assembly in May provides newspapers with a peg for articles on issues affecting the Church.
- There is much to be gained by anticipating or noticing developing news e.g. a high profile debate or new government figures on health or homelessness. It is essential to put any statement out quickly as otherwise competition may crowd the Church's voice. This should always be co-ordinated through the Communications Department. An invitation to do live or pre-recorded broadcast interviews may follow so it is important to anticipate the need for a spokesperson to be available that day.

2. Management of a Crisis (and less serious situations) in the Church

a) The Essentials

If a reporter is in touch about a story of national significance (e.g. an alleged serious misdemeanour involving a minister or church officer), it is advisable that the recipient:

- is friendly and respectful but indicates it is not convenient to take the call right then. This allows a little time to consider what to say.
- never says nothing or says “No comment” in relation to a controversial story. This is NOT a safe and neutral action. It means the Church has rejected its right of reply and has lost its opportunity to provide a statement balancing whatever damaging claim has been made. The correct response to a reporter is: “Enquiries are being handled by the Church’s Communications Team. Please contact them.”
- is not drawn into a detailed conversation but requests name, number and a brief indication of what information the reporter seeks.
- rings the Church’s Communications Office: 0131 240 2278. Emergency out of hours number: 07854 783 539.

The Communications Officer can then contact the Head of Communications, the Principal Clerk and other key figures as required. The Communications team should aim to monitor social media through electronic alerts and also more traditional media channels to assess how a story is being reported.

b) Damage Limitation in a Crisis

Action by Church Officials

The standard crisis management advice from communications professionals is to act quickly:

Issue at least a holding statement

A common error is to wait too many hours before releasing even a holding statement. While it is obviously wise not to attempt a comprehensive statement until the picture is fairly clear, saying nothing is high risk. It allows public suspicion to grow and allows speculation and criticism to spread unimpeded. Twitter, Facebook and other social media distribute information very quickly. Journalists pick up many stories and the nuance of stories from Twitter.

Emerging stories are in newspapers and broadcast websites and bulletins very quickly. It has never been more true that: “A lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes.”(Twain).

If a misleading, damaging report about the Church appears mid-morning, it can be viewed as established fact well before lunchtime. It is imperative to get a rebuttal out fast before this happens.

Apologise

When an organisation is unequivocally in the wrong it is usually wise to issue an apology. Failure to apologise can inflict reputational damage which lasts for years, affecting for example its status, its relations with external partners and its ability to fundraise and recruit. In years gone by many organisations had limited awareness of the consequences of reputational damage. They focused almost entirely on perceived loss of face and the link between an apology and potential litigation or raised insurance premiums as a consequence of potential compensation claims.

Restricting the flow of information to the media and avoiding an apology is advisable on some occasions. It could be the Church is not the main organisation at fault and too free an apology could result in reputation damage and questionable compensation claims.

If a further damaging angle emerges and there is a reasonable chance the media will eventually discover it, it is usually best to proactively let this be known on the day so that it is mopped up into the main bad news that day. The aim is to ensure the organisation is not still in the news one or more days later – and possibly accused of a cover-up.

Indicate action

Indicate the Church's planned course of action e.g. an internal investigation, an inquiry by an independent agency, calling in the police, a planned overhaul of procedures.

c) Who does the interviews?

- Please note the protocol of who speaks as laid down in Communications policies.
- It is essential the interviewee is an authoritative, reasonably confident figure in broadcast interviews. Sometimes it is worth considering setting aside protocol and putting forward a church person on the scene who is very well informed on the situation.
- Usually it is important the interviewee is in a town where there are TV crews. There are few crews and they rarely have time to make a round trip to somewhere far afield.
- A Communications Officer should aim to use their phone to film a short clip for use on the Church's website and social media.

d) What should be in a Press Statement?

In a major incident it is advisable to put out holding statements on social media and on the Church website e.g. "We are aware that x or y appears to have happened and are urgently investigating. We hope to release further information later this afternoon". Keep rephrasing and refreshing this statement even if there is nothing substantially new to say. It is important that reporters and the wider public feel the Church is aware of their concerns, is very concerned itself and is trying to keep in contact and communicate appropriately.

Leave wriggle room in case a situation is different or more nuanced than it originally appears. It could emerge for example that the Church of Scotland is not the organisation at fault.

If a strong attack is made against an organisation it is usually best to reply in a restrained way. A heated response may make the Church appear less dignified. Additionally reporters can then legitimately describe the issue as a row. Stories which lend themselves to a first sentence such as: "A row has broken out between the Kirk and" are more likely to appear on page 3 than page 33 of a newspaper. Sometimes attacks are so wild and inappropriate, it is best to decline to make a statement on it or to produce an extremely low key reply of one or two sentences.

Busy reporters often take the first usable paragraph in a statement, particularly if a response is not sent out until mid to late afternoon. For that reason it is essential to make the first point the strongest point.

It is important to think not just in terms of defence. Sometimes it is possible to share with reporters a new development e.g. announcing an inquiry into the incident. This strong new angle to an issue often puts an organisation in the first paragraph of a story taking charge of it rather than on the back foot talking only about what has gone wrong.

e) A swift statement

The team will suggest a tight deadline for agreeing a holding statement at least. A potential holding statement could be along these lines: "We are aware of reports indicating x or y may have happened. We are investigating and will release more information once the situation is clearer."

Obviously more time should be taken over more definitive statements.

f) Language

It is advisable to avoid jargon and committee language. It distances readers and may even alienate them. News teams deal with an immense amount of material in any given day. Concise statements are far more likely to be read and used in their entirety.

g) The Truth, the Whole Truth

In order to attempt damage limitation the Communications team needs the whole truth. Sometimes people downplay a situation to make colleagues feel better or because they do not realise the potential way this story will play in the media. Perhaps subliminally they wish to protect themselves from potential accusations in any post mortem. However it is vitally important to share all information with the Comms team. A crisis may never erupt in the public domain if the team is forewarned and able to take action. If it does erupt the ability of the Communications team to minimise the impact depends on accurate information.

The worst possible outcome is that a misinformed Communications team gives out false or misjudged information which compounds a crisis, causing damage from which an organisation takes a long time to recover. It is often a perceived cover-up which is the most damaging aspect of a story.

Offering misinformation may inflict long term damage on an organisation's reputation. It also means the Communications team loses its position of trust, its ability to kill off future genuinely untrue stories by simply telling reporters there is no substance in them.

Assertions have a certain impact. It is often wise to seek out statistics and facts which highlight mitigating circumstances.

h) Is an Interview always best?

- Radio and TV interviews offer an opportunity to humanise and strengthen our response – but an “absence of interview” can sometimes help to distance an organisation from an event.
- It is important to think hard about accepting an invitation. Other organisations may more obviously be in the frame and have turned down media invitations. The Church could become the focus in a situation in which arguably it is peripheral.

i) Interview Don'ts

It is advisable to avoid joking or exaggerating to dodge an unhelpful question. Humour is not always evident when words are written up in an article.

3. Crisis Management (Tragedy in a Community)

a) Advice for Ministers

In the event of a tragedy such as a plane crash or a high profile murder, the minister or chaplain may quickly be under siege from the media. He or she is in need of support as a bewildered community looks for solace and humble leadership and the press is keen to be the medium for that.

If a reporter is in touch it is advisable that the recipient is friendly and respectful but indicates it is not convenient to take the call right then. This allows a little time to consider what to say and to ring the Church Communications Office: 0131 240 2278. Emergency out of hours number: 07854 783 539.

The Communications team may often indicate there is no obvious risk in speaking to reporters. The team can however issue a statement, advise on interview requests and if necessary arrange a press conference. Sometimes the minister may choose not to speak in which case the Communications team can issue a statement to that effect. Either way involvement of the Communications Team may considerably reduce the number of media calls and the general pressure on ministers.

If questioning is hostile, the suggested response to a reporter is: "Enquiries are being handled by the Church's Communications team. Please contact them." Never throw away the Church's right of reply by saying: "No comment."

It is important to avoid being drawn into a detailed conversation but request a name, number and a brief indication of what information the reporter seeks.

b) Action by the Communications Team

The Communications Officer should contact the Head of Communications, the Principal Clerk and other key figures as required.

The on duty Communications Officer should trace the minister using the Yearbook, CIS or Churchfinder on the website.

If appropriate the on duty Communications Officers should track down the Moderator and ask for a short statement. The Church's much needed voice at a time of tragedy may be lost if its statement is released three hours after the tragedy so a timely response is important. Aim to issue the Moderator's statement to the media within the hour of a confirmed major incident occurring but avoid speculating on what has happened. Even if the Moderator is some way from the scene they could perhaps do some of the broadcast interviews if asked.

If the Communications Officer is alone he or she should probably stay at 121 and handle any media calls. If necessary one member of the team can be sent to the scene to support the minister on the ground. It could be there is a need for a second shift particularly if a service is rapidly arranged. After major incidents there may be a need to call in whatever assistance can be sourced outside the team.

If only one person is despatched they may prefer to travel by train so that they can script releases and statements, email and take calls. In other circumstances travel by car may be preferable as it offers more flexibility and protection from the weather at the scene of the tragedy.

It is important to liaise with other bodies such as the emergency services and potentially the Scottish Government or a school or local authority, to let them know the Church is providing comms support for the minister or other Church figure.

The minister is requested to tell broadcasters that any interview bids go to the Communications team first. With many competing bids it is usually TV that takes priority as it reaches many more people. The priority is to communicate to Scotland and on stations with very large audiences. It is advisable to ensure that broadcasters are the priority but be aware that with many newspapers offering websites and twitter feeds, they too seek quick access.

It may be necessary to take responsibility for looking after the minister in a practical way with food, water and encouragement to ring fence time for a rest when possible. There may be a second wave of media bids from less relevant programmes. They are not a priority particularly if the minister is exhausted at this point.

It is advisable to warn the minister that the media may ask him to pass on requests for interviews from the family. They may also try to obtain information on the family or on police investigations from the minister.

As a matter of courtesy the Communications Officer may seek to transfer some interview requests to e.g. a chaplain of another faith. However the Church of Scotland is Scotland's largest national church so in many circumstances is the most obvious source of interviewees.

c) A Community Service

Worship, a vigil, prayers or some other form of service seem to meet a real need in the community particularly in the first few days after the tragedy. Ministers often hesitate to arrange such an event and commonly need reassurance that people will come. Providing they make arrangements quickly, enabling the media team to publicise the event effectively, people come in significant numbers. It may be helpful to make clear that the event is open to people of faith and no faith.

In notices at the front door of the church it is advisable to highlight restrictions on media presence. The time of 11 am at weekends and 6 pm in the evening seem to be times which make it possible for many people to come.

Operation Note (issued to the media in advance of any service or press event)

Reporters are usually respectful at services arranged after tragedies and write sensitive pieces. The Operation Note to the media should usually offer access to reporters but indicate they are not allowed to approach anyone in church or on church grounds outside.

Photographers are usually also respectful but a battery of cameras is intrusive. For still photos access should normally be restricted to one person from agencies such as Press Association, Reuters or Getty. It is wise to rotate the privilege to ensure continuing good relations. Flash should be forbidden and the photographer reminded to use a long lens to create a distance between photographer and subjects.

Access should normally be restricted to one broadcast operation. As the BBC has greater resources they often do the filming for the pool and proactively approach Sky and STV/ITN to make arrangements.

The press is not normally allowed into church for a funeral service. To ensure they stand at a distance there is sometimes a pen arranged by the police. Sometimes a family agrees to a sound feed from the church so that media can report the eulogy and other tributes to the deceased.

The Communications team can provide support through this process to ensure appropriate arrangements are in place.

4. Photography

- Research indicates that readers and viewers remember images long after words are forgotten. It is important that the national Church presents itself well in photographs. Amateur photos or photos of record such as members of a committee lined-up in a row are often good enough if the event is modest and the desired coverage is on social media. (However even on this channel a professional photo is likely to attract more attention.)
- An event may be of reasonable significance but there is no guarantee that the media will send a photographer not least because newspaper resources have diminished considerably in recent years. Organisations are increasingly commissioning their own photography of a high standard so that it may be considered for use in newspapers and on the Church and other websites.
- A high quality camera is like a paintbrush. The images it produces are only as good as the professional training and experience of the person who wields it. There are many with modest expertise offering low cost photography – unfortunately with modest results. Even a technically competent photographer may produce disappointing results as their aptitude may primarily be for e.g. landscape photography. They may not have the experience, the speed or the confidence to persuade people to cooperate in a way which produces an eye-catching image for the press. It is for these reasons that for most newsworthy projects the Communications Department would recommend using an accredited professional photographer in the planning and budget.

5. Social Media

Social media is a rapid form of communication which is not dependent on third parties such as newspapers taking an interest. It can create a buzz as well as a sense of kinship and common purpose among followers, fostering interest and loyalty to the Church. It offers the possibility of engaging a broader age group, contact essential for renewal and growth in the Church.

It is important to feed it frequently and also to monitor it systematically as users are not passive recipients. The Communications Officer should aim to engage in dialogue as appropriate or take remedial action if comments are hostile. Sometimes it is better not to engage as some zealous correspondents escalate an exchange into a row that attracts attention. Users often vent spleen online at speed and without deep thought. One stinging tweet can go viral causing rapid reputational damage. Journalists often pick up stories from social media. Sometimes it is best to encourage the correspondent to direct message more details so that conflict can be diffused “off stage”.

Photos and videos are becoming much more prevalent in social media, a development the team is keeping pace with.

Communication through social media does not just happen Monday-Friday 9-5, if you wish to grow a social media following you need to engage and respond regularly.

6. Guidance on TV and radio

Targeting TV and radio is a strategic imperative as for example the evening news programmes on BBC and STV in Scotland have a combined audience of almost 1 million, eclipsing the reach of all newspapers combined.

Case Studies

If the story is about research into e.g. dementia, TV teams doing a full one minute 45 seconds package will want to film elderly people and interview a carer or researcher at a centre reasonably near a broadcasting base. Does the centre have signed consent forms from relatives? It can take several days and weeks to arrange access for TV crews which is why advance notice can increase the chances of coverage.

Interviews

If interviewed by a reporter look at him or her. In a studio remote from where the TV presenters are, you look directly into the lens of the camera - and pretend it is the face of someone you know and like, not a lump of glass and plastic. That is the key to appearing warm and personable on screen.

Avoid jargon and other aspects of bureaucratic committee-speak. It distances viewers and may even alienate them. Try to convey in a very human way what this information means to real people. E.g. "We are not suggesting this research will cure this disease but we hope it will improve patients experience."

Be clear and concise. Sometimes experts want to go into several subordinate clauses which qualify their main point. But there is likely to be just 10-20 seconds of airtime available to you so try to make the most of it.

Your aim is to impart a nugget of information which is so interesting and uncluttered viewers will remember it.

It is important to not say anything of significance in the minutes before going on air as this may be picked up by microphones.

Any BBC TV clip is likely to be dubbed off for use on radio too and you may receive a separate invitation to appear on Good Morning Scotland. A live interview makes for better listening and a better slot on the programme although a pre-record may be the only option if you are unavailable at the given time.

The Communications team should establish the ground the interview is likely to cover. The reporter is unlikely to tell your team the exact questions. In any case pre-prepared answers read from a sheet of paper sound awful.

For radio do prepare bullet points so that you remember what you would like to get across. These points can make you sound more focused and offer a territory you can divert the conversation towards if questions are sticky.

Please make every effort to get to a radio studio as a telephone interview sounds inferior and usually rules you out of the best slots on the programme (07.10-07.20 and 08.10-08.20). Ideally go to the Glasgow studio so that you can read the facial expressions and be generally more connected with the presenters there.

Arrive in plenty of time to find the studio, have the coffee in your flask and perhaps skim a couple of papers in case a related issue is in the news.

If interviewees are a little anxious they are more likely to “em” and “er”. Try to use as few as possible. A tiny silent pause often sounds better than an “em”. Be yourself but consider slowing your speech down to give yourself a little time to think.

Be engaging not dull. Listeners’ are more influenced by the tone than the content of your speech. Avoid over preparation. It can make your mind so cluttered you are less inclined to talk in a naturally engaging way.

Appearance on TV

Appearance should not matter but research indicates it very much affects viewers’ impressions of you, your argument and your organisation. Famous research by UCLA indicates that astonishingly content of speech amounts for only 7% of the impact of a speaker. At a subliminal level viewers are influenced by body language, clothes, tone, accent etc.

- Be relaxed but sit up and slightly forward so that there is no hint of complacency
- A tie is not necessarily appropriate on the sofa of STV’s Scotland Tonight programme. Denim jeans are rarely appropriate for a studio interview.
- Guests under studio lights may perspire making them look nervous, possibly even shifty. Men and women in the main studios therefore usually go into the make-up studio before going on air.
- Do not just think in terms of dealing defensively with each question. Be engaging and interesting! This creates a good impression - and greatly increases the chances of more invitations to do media interviews.

Live or pre-recorded interviews outside the studio

Consider preparing a sound bite to convey the key points you want to get across. Broadcasters may use up to 30 seconds (90 words) but often in reality less and TV in particular may use a clip of as little as 10 seconds (30 words). So there is a case for really distilling what you want to get across. Commonly people want to offer too much detail which uses up valuable time, missing the chance to convey substantive points.



The Church of Scotland

Communications Department

www.churchofscotland.org.uk

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