

Science Media SAVVY workshop participant's report

By Kiti Suomalainen

The Science Media Centre (SMC) brought an intensive two-day media training workshop to the University of Otago last week, and – thanks to the Royal Society of New Zealand's Early Career Research Forum for offering me full sponsorship – I was one of the lucky 12 Otago researchers selected to participate.

The workshop was lead by Peter Griffin, founding member of the SMC, Dacia Herbulock, senior media advisor with the SMC and Michael Brown, senior trainer with Skillset New Zealand, and offered the participants first-hand insight into how news and social media work in New Zealand, and how we as scientists can learn to navigate in this environment.

The aim of the workshop was to give the participants an in-depth introduction to media communication and to improve our ability to communicate our scientific findings with confidence and clarity through hands-on, practical exercises.

With this in mind I went in expecting thorough advice and examples of what to do and what not to do when communicating your research to the general public through media. The workshop did go quite a bit further than just sharing advice and experiences. We started on day 1 looking at a few different communication styles, and starting to identify our own style. We talked about being present and engaging with the interviewer, and being earnest to communicate our message. We progressed to practice giving interviews in front of a camera, and analyzing each participants' interview clips for individual feedback.

On day 2 we learned about the New Zealand media landscape and also got a briefing from the University of Otago's Communications Office, and what they can do to help us get our research results out to a wider audience. We then visited the Otago Daily Times headquarters to learn how a daily newspaper works, and how to communicate our science stories to them for best impact. The afternoon was reserved for a 'questions and answers' session with media representatives and the opportunity to pitch our story to real reporters.

The two days were packed with information and hands-on practice getting us to really drill in to what it is we actually want to communicate and how. The printed material we received was very helpful and will likely be extremely useful the next time we need to put these new skills to use again, and look back to what we learned in these two days.

I would definitely recommend the workshop to other ECRs. I would encourage them to think of their key messages, attend the workshop, and boldly start practicing communicating their research findings beyond our scientific community!



Science Media SAVVY workshop group visiting the Otago Daily Times, with Sean Flaherty, Head of News (middle).