A career in Science Communication

Introduction

This handout is aimed at students who are wondering whether a career in science communication might be for them. So it’s not really aimed at students who are on an MSc in Science Communication or Science Media Production, as much of the information included here would already be well known to you. This handout addresses the following questions

1. What is science communication and what type of jobs are people doing?
2. Who employs people involved in science communication?
3. How do I increase my chances of getting into work involving science communication?
4. How can I gain relevant work experience
5. How do I find out more?

1. What is it?

Roles involving science communication may be called a wide variety of ‘job titles’ and be found in a range of different organisations. Someone working in science communication work won’t necessarily be called a ‘science communicator’. This section lists many examples of careers / occupations in the wider publishing / broadcasting / journalism / other sectors, that involve communication. Within this occupational area, there will be a sub-group of people who are doing mainly or solely science communication work. For a general overview of how to get into the careers / occupations listed in this section, go to www.prospects.ac.uk/links/occupations. Also consult the next few sections which are more specifically focused on science.

Range of roles in this sector –
This article, albeit with a US slant, highlights the importance of digital print, and related skills - http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v494/n7436/full/nj7436-271a.html

You can get an idea of what some past MSc Science Communication alumni (from Imperial) do afterwards by looking at some alumni case studies - http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/humanities/sciencecommunicationgroup/masters/alumnuscasestudies

You will now see examples of occupations related to communications – presented in a structured way. For more information on any of these occupations – see www.prospects.ac.uk/links/occupations

Publishing / broadcasting / journalism (science content)

- editor, sub-editor, copy writer, web producer, copy-editor, commissioning editor
- print production planner, media planner
- journalist (newspaper / magazine / broadcast media), magazine features editor, press sub-editor
- researcher for programmes (broadcast / film / video)
- picture researcher / editor
- production manager, director, producer, production assistant, runner (film / video / TV / radio / multimedia)
- technical author, medical communications role, science writer

**Public relations / advertising / events management / marketing / sales**

- public relations officer, public relations assistant, public affairs consultant, public relations account executive
- events organiser
- advertising copywriter, advertising account executive
- marketing executive, sales executive

**Environmental / conservation / wildlife and parks / energy / recycling**

- environmental education officer, nature conservation officer, ecologist, zoologist, marine scientist, nature conservation adviser
- environmental consultant, environmental manager
- countryside manager, forest manager, zoologist
- recycling officer, energy manager

**Education / teaching / lecturing / outreach**

- teacher (secondary / primary in state or private sector), lecturer (FE College, HE, university)
- outreach worker (eg in university outreach department or for professional body), community development worker, museum education officer, community arts worker, adult guidance, youth worker, careers adviser
- e-learning provision, producing / developing materials
- education administration / marketing

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**2. Who employs people involved in science communication?**

Just as there is a wide variety of roles involving science communication, employers are found in a wide range of sectors.

**Obvious starting points –**

- science publishers (scanning library resources will familiarise you with main ones)
- scientific media (magazines, journals, associated websites) as well as science broadcasting, programme and film-making (you will be aware of many journals, magazines, programmes, films, DVDs already; find out who produces them)
Other types of organisations also need people to work in roles related to science communication –

- government and government departments (whether Department of Health, DEFRA, BIS, defence organisations such as DSTL, MoD etc); local authority (departments such as environment, planning, education etc)
- charity / not for profit sector including professional bodies, professional associations, medical / cancer charities, (Wellcome Trust, Nuffield Centre for Bioethics are just two examples; but Society of Biology may offer internships in communication or policy related areas too); you might find yourself working within departments such as education / careers / professional development, public engagement with science, public relations / community relations, publicity via web or newsletter, events organisations such as science festivals (see useful weblinks)
- national or local museums, wildlife and nature conservation centres, zoos, botanical gardens
- science-based industries eg pharma / healthcare / food and drink / fast moving consumer goods / cosmeceuticals (working in marketing / sales / PR / business or product-related roles (eg nutrition or health advice / information) / customer liaison / CSR (corporate social responsibility), nutritional / health benefits etc)
- education sector – schools, colleges, universities, adult education colleges
- NHS, healthcare communications consultancies

3. How do I increase my chances of getting into work involving science communication?

In order to communicate science effectively, you need an ability to write clearly and coherently about sometimes quite complex topics. There are several national science writing competitions open to students and young researchers. Entering one of these is an ideal way to improve and demonstrate your skills.

The links at the end of this article can reveal opportunities to gain relevant work experience. The websites won’t necessarily advertise vacancies but provide a spring-board for you to do your research and then make your direct speculative approaches to organisations or schemes of interest to you.

In addition, whilst still at university you could -

- Seize any opportunities to write or communicate for the public
- Student journalism (writing articles, editing, designing etc)
- writing blogs, (either starting your own, or by contributing to reputable blogs, twitter feeds etc – see weblinks at end )
- approaching editors of newspapers / magazines, or newsletters (of professional bodies) and suggesting ideas for articles you would be qualified to write about, on freelance basis
- writing letters to the Editor commenting on articles already written
- enter student writing competitions which may be advertised by broadsheet media eg Guardian, relevant professional bodies, cancer / medical charities, HE Academy (Centre of Biosciences), British Science Writers, Wellcome Trust etc (register on several websites to keep abreast of events and competitions)
- seize opportunities eg via student societies or competitions, to present in public eg posters, presentations, drama / music / dance productions
- produce your own film or video; get involved in radio production / broadcasting (eg student radio / hospital radio)
- consider getting involved in university outreach activities, Open Days etc;
- think about how you could get involved in writing for a science-related website or newsletter (perhaps beginning as a student member of a professional body or producing a newsletter for your department or a student society); approach people direct with ideas about what you could write about for them, having first done your research

Furthermore you can also consider undertaking a taught MSc course in science communication or related. Prior relevant experience is strongly recommended and may be a requirement for entry onto the course.

4. How can I gain relevant work experience?

- direct speculative approaches to organisations and employers of interest is the usual way in; your letter and CV should demonstrate your ability to communicate clearly and convincingly
- initial work experience in sectors such as journalism and broadcasting is often on a voluntary basis because of the competitive nature of the work; this may also be the case for publishing and other popular work eg environmental / conservation related work, science museums, PR / fundraising / marketing work in cancer / medical charities
- any experience in roles or sectors mentioned above that involve communication of science would help demonstrate commitment and increase your chances of moving into your preferred role and sector later or gaining place on a relevant postgraduate course eg in journalism / science communication

  
  **N.B.** Many first positions in the media are unpaid however - so be aware of your rights; for more on this, see here – [https://www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-work-experience-and-internships](https://www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-work-experience-and-internships)
Are there any useful courses or postgraduate qualifications?

- MSc in Science Communication such as one at Imperial can help develop your career. Reputable ones often require plenty of prior relevant experience / achievements – see http://www.prospects.ac.uk/about_postgrad_study.htm

- Other postgraduate diplomas or Masters in journalism / broadcasting / media / film production etc

- Related skills and experience eg teaching experience or qualification (PGCE) or computing / IT skills especially in multi-media / web development eg Adobe, Java, Flash

- Short courses, by reputable organisations, to develop publishing skills can be useful and help show that your commitment eg www.train4publishing.co.uk.

5. How do I find out more?

The Association of British Science Writers has published a handbook, So you want to be a science writer? Written by professional science writers, it’s packed with useful advice and information. The handbook can be downloaded as a PDF from the ABSW website www.absw.org.uk. The Association also provides information on courses, internships, as well as competitions, fellowships and a bursary scheme funded by the Wellcome Trust.

Publishing
A few large periodical publishers have graduate entry schemes. Blackwells and Elsevier have been known to offer summer internships but direct approaches should be made to all the major science publishers.

See Occupational folder on Publishing and www.prospects.ac.uk/links/sectorbs > Publishing

Broadcasting / media / journalism

Internships are few and far between but one or two may be advertised on Jobs Live. You should focus efforts on researching and making direct speculative approaches to ask for work experience; this may be unpaid initially. However, have a look here -

See Occupational folder on Media / Broadcasting / Journalism and www.prospects.ac.uk/links/industries > Media

Scientific journalism, writing and editing

Many trainee science writers or editors begin as a junior scientific desk editor and move to more senior editorial posts. In view of the competitive nature of the work, it’s vital to start getting involved in writing or editing any publications as soon as you can. This could be for a departmental newsletter or by setting up a newsletter of your own eg for a society. Experience in producing copy for print is of course useful. As well as meticulous attention to detail, you need an ability to re-draft text, think of headings and layout, to make the article or publication appealing and of the right length. You also need to work to strict deadlines and communicate well with others in the team.

For more information on careers in media, publishing, journalism etc

See the relevant Occupational Profiles on roles such as Copy Editor, Web Editor, Journalist (newspaper, magazine and broadcast media) etc. www.prospects.ac.uk/links/occupations.

Also see the AGCAS publications on Publishing Sector, Broadcasting and Media and Science Sectors www.prospects.ac.uk/links/industries.

Science Promotion

Experience of organising events to promote ‘public engagement with science’ is very useful. Volunteering at a science festival (eg Imperial Fringe) can be a great beginning or volunteering for you university department at an Open Day or outreach event, through involvement in a university club or society, or for National Science Week events.

For more information on all of the above – see the ‘Useful weblinks – science communication’ in the next section.

Professional Bodies
These organisations are in the business of representing and promoting their area of science to wider public. So find out what the relevant professional bodies are up to – www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/resources/weblinks/researchjobs/professionalbodies
Usful Websites

At Imperial College London – find out about opportunities to get involved in Outreach – or Volunteering
http://www.imperial.ac.uk/outreach
http://www.imperial.ac.uk/volunteering

Externally -
STEMPRA is an informal network for people working in science communication (Science, Technology, Engineering and Medicine Public Relations Association); the website has online resources to help you to plan science communication events. http://www.stempra.org.uk/

PSCI-COM www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/psci-com.html (forum for discussion and notifications (eg ‘volunteers sought for Cheltenham Science Festival’) on anything related to public communication of science and public engagement with science)

The British Science Association - your first port of call to find out about anything and everything related to science communication (including awards, fellowships, conferences et) http://www.britishscienceassociation.org/

Association of British Science Writers http://www.absw.org.uk/

Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers http://alpsp.org.uk

European Association of Science Editors www.ease.org.uk

Healthcare Communications Association www.hca-uk.org
For company names (eg healthcare communications consultancies), click on HCA Members

Medical Communications www.medcommsnetworking.co.uk

Useful portal for jobs and discussion forum on science communication issues, public engagement with science; details of events, meetings, workshops, conferences also posted regularly - www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/psci-com.html

Nature http://www.nature.com/naturejobs/science/


Welcome Trust Public Engagement www.wellcome.ac.uk

See under ‘Funding Opportunities’

See also Research Council websites
e.g. Medical Research Council - Public Engagement Opportunities
http://www.mrc.ac.uk/Sciencesociety/Publicengagement/index.htm

There are links to Media Fellowships, Science and Engineering Ambassadors Scheme plus other opportunities.

Example of publishing company - www.future-science-group.com

Healthcare advertising / Pharmaceutical Marketing - www.pmlive.com

Pharma Times – www.pharmatimes.com

emedcareers - www.emedcareers.co.uk

Recruitment agency with advertising jobs (across all sectors) - Graduate Recruitment Bureau - http://www.grb.uk.com/industry_profiles.0.html?industry_id=37

The Royal Society www.royalsoc.ac.uk

Science Media Centre www.sciencemediacentre.org

Assoc. of British Science Writers http://www.absw.org.uk/

European Medical Writers Association www.emwa.org

Society for Editors and Proofreaders http://www.sfep.org.uk/

Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers www.alpsp.org

Women in Publishing www.wipub.org.uk

The Society of Young Publishers www.thesyp.org.uk

Science’s Next Wave http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/

New Scientist www.newscientistjobs.com/

The Guardian www.guardian.co.uk

Society of Biology www.societyofbiology.org.uk – just one example of bioscience related professional body. Browse this and other professional bodies’ websites for links relating to communication to the public, science policy, education, special interest groups etc; link to ‘list of member organisations’ ie more professional bodies. You may also find relevant internships and awards.
For other professional bodies – see www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/resources/weblinks/researchjobs/professionalbodies

Society of Experimental Biology - see Careers section eg http://www.sebiology.org/education/profiles.html

The Association for Science and Discovery Centres (ASDC)
The ASDC represents over 50 science centres in the UK and a similar number of discovery centres in museums, botanic gardens, aquariums and zoos. The website includes a jobs listing page. http://sciencecentres.org.uk/

www.ecsite.eu (European Network of Science Centres and Museums)

Wellcome Trust - http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/Wellcome-Trust-websites/index.htm

Wellcome Trust – Big Picture - http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/Education-resources/Teaching-and-education/Big-Picture/

www.cafescientifique.org (Cafe Scientifique) – networking events in cafes etc

Euroscience www.euroscience.org/

General / other recommended careers resources
www.prospects.ac.uk/links/industries and www.prospects.ac.uk/links/occupations are starting points to research occupations mentioned in this handout and relevant sectors such as

Internships – Media - http://www.mediargh.com/ N.B. many first positions in media are unpaid so be aware of your rights; for more on this, see here – https://www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-work-experience-and-internships

Publishing or Media

www.vitae.ac.uk - careers resource for research students and staff to help them develop their careers whether aiming for academia or outside academia.

Social media and blogs

www.Linkedin.com – professional networking site enabling you to make potential valuable career connections
www.twitter.com - real-time information-sharing network enabling you to communicate with others in very brief messages, as well as 'follow' professionals and companies; some positions even get advertised and offered via twitter

www.careers.guardian.co.uk/forums - discussion forums of which Guardian is just one example; these will also exist on professional bodies’ / associations’ websites or on the websites of many organisations of interest to you

**Blogging** - Reading, contributing to, or creating your own blog - or web log of commentary, news or diary - is an opportunity to promote your writing skills and creativity as well as to keep abreast of developments in all areas and of interest to you - www.wordpress.org ; www.blogger.com (Google) ; www.blog.co.uk ; www.scienceblog.com ; www.imperial.ac.uk/blog

**Reference books –**

Reference books related to science communication can be found in Main Library with a few available also in Careers Advisory Service

**Writers and Artists Yearbook** - available in Careers Information Room on reference

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