

Engaging the media with research

Stuart Gillespie & Matt Pickles

Media Relations Managers

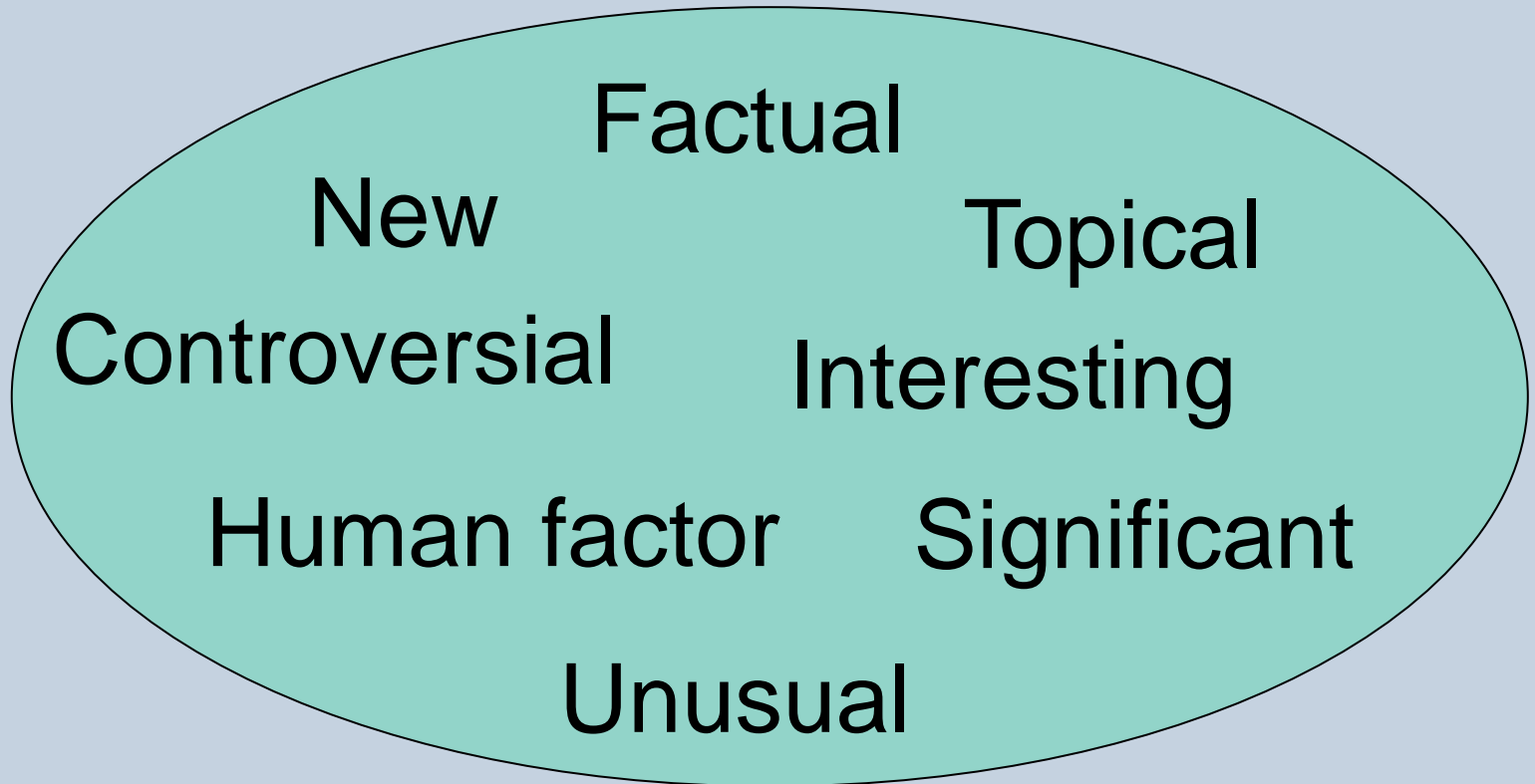
News & Information Office, Public Affairs Directorate



News Office

- Deals with media enquiries (around 6,000 per year)
- Protects the reputation of the University in the media
- Promotes public understanding of the University's research
- And much more...

What is news?



Some recent examples of Oxford research in the media...

THE TIMES
Science
 News | Opinion | Business | Money | Sport | Life | Arts | Puzzles | Papers | Irish news

Bigger and faster: how rogue waves are whipped up in a perfect storm



Tom Whipple Science Editor
 Published at 12:01AM, December 16 2010

The captain of the QE2 described it as a wave that "came out of the darkness". It approached, he would say later, like "the white cliffs of Dover" — a monstrous wall of water from nowhere, into which he had to steer the liner to prevent the full force crashing into its side.

That night, in 1996, the QE2 survived something long spoken of in sailing lore, immortalised in the film *The Perfect Storm* and dismissed for centuries as existing only in salty sea tales: the rogue wave.

Now though, mathematicians believe that they can explain the phenomenon which may be behind some of the ocean's greatest mysteries.

Rogue wave

The Great Wave off Kanagawa, by the artist Hokusai, depicts a rogue wave

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Breakthrough in world's oldest undeciphered writing

By Sean Coughlan
 BBC News education correspondent

25 October 2012 | Business



Experts working on proto-Elamite hope they are on the point of a breakthrough

The world's oldest undeciphered writing system, which has so far defied attempts to uncover its 5,000-year-old secrets, could be about to be decoded by Oxford University academics.

Global education

Top 10 exam rituals of stressed students

the guardian

UK world politics sport football opinion culture business lifestyle fashion environment tech travel

Books

Oxford academics translate French plea for tolerance in honour of Charlie Hebdo

More than 100 Oxford students and academics translate extracts, quotes and philosophy by European writers in new English version of hit French anthology assembled after terrorist killings at magazine a year ago

Alison Flood

Thursday 7 January 2015 15:15 GMT

448 9




Newsweek

Genetically Modified Rice Could Withstand the Ravages of Climate Change



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Researchers study 17th century undelivered letters found in a leather trunk

Thousands of undelivered 17th century letters found in a leather trunk in the Netherlands are being studied by an international team of researchers



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Male tits would rather starve than give up their partner, study suggests

Oxford University found male great tits would rather starve than leave their mate

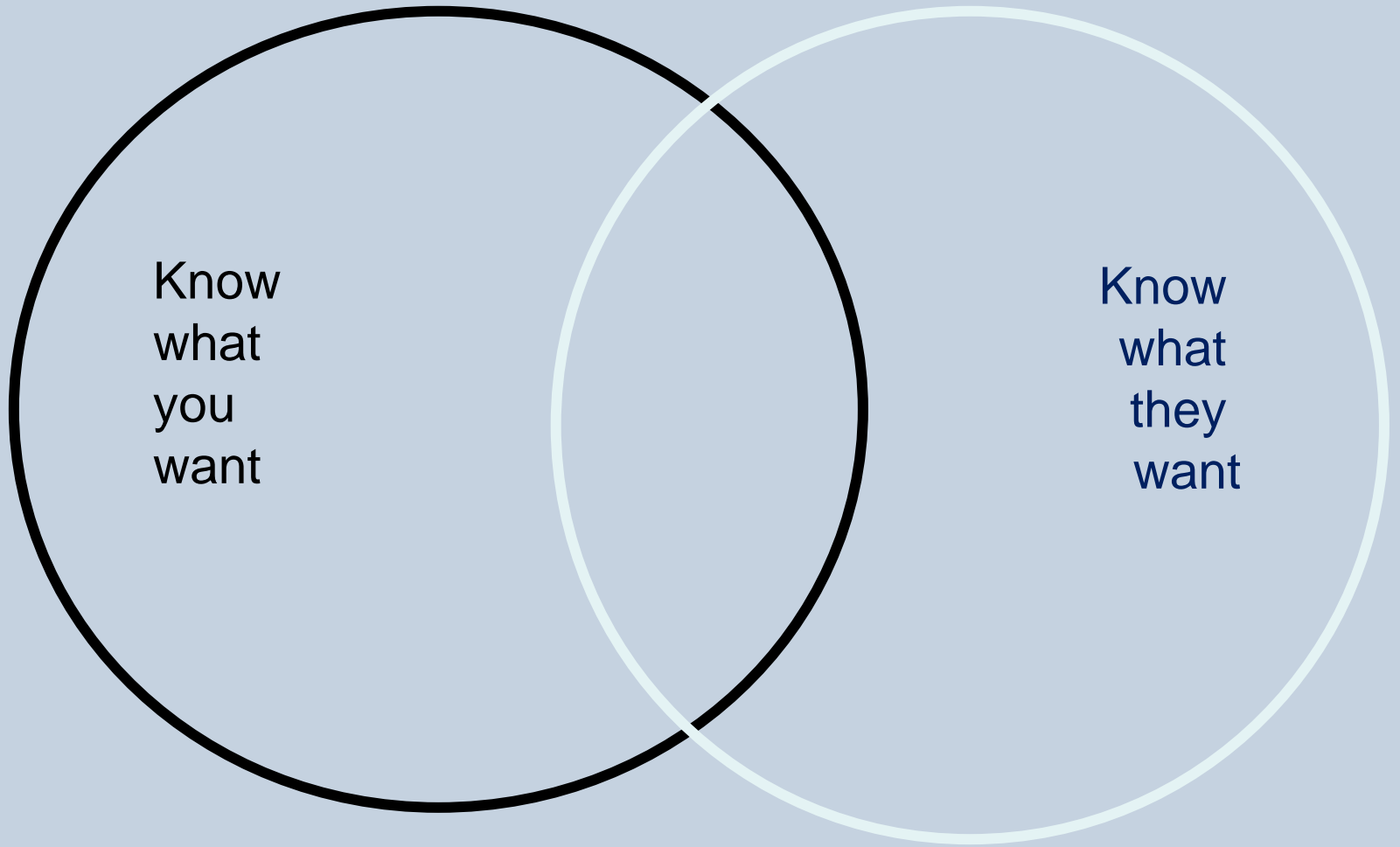



Why seek media coverage?

- Disseminate research findings
- Encourage participation e.g. crowdsourcing project, clinical trials
- Lobbying, start conversation
- Please funders
- 'Cheap' (in £ not time)
- Trust

What are your goals from media coverage?

- Not for sake of it – e.g. farmers
- What is aim?
- What audience best for that aim?
- What are your key messages?



Options for coverage

- News or feature or comment piece? Long-form?
- Exclusive or not?
- Embargoed or not?
- Not just broadsheets! Don't just preach to converted
- Online a good option (consider paywall)
- TV/radio

Other channels

- University website(s)
- Social media
- Arts Blog and Science Blog
- The Conversation
- Many more, such as Guardian Professional Networks



Newsroom

- Hundreds of calls/emails a day
- Competition between journalists for space – pitch to news editor, who pitches to editor
- Story needs to stand out
- Cultivate contacts, don't bombard them or try to guilt them. Build their trust



Pitching

- Where you are from, what the story is (imagine the headline), why it is significant
- Short punchy email – or call
- Ask how best to send more information
- Ask if they have ideas on how to make story better – work with them
- Make sure you've read their newspaper!

Email pitch

Re: OXFORD UNIVERSITY: Lions in Africa 'nearly extinct', report warns

Dear X

We have an exclusive for you – a new report by Oxford University zoologists suggests lions in Zimbabwe are at their lowest ever numbers. If the government does not change its conservation policy, the experts predict lions could die out in the country by 2030. The study is published in Nature and embargoed until Friday at midnight but Professor Smith is available to speak to you today on 07777 777777. I've copied the press release below. Please let me know by the end of the day if you are interested or would like more information.




Possible story: extinction of Balearic shearwaters

Stuart Gillespie

Sent: Wed 09/03/2016 17:49

To: Helen Briggs

Message  Genovart_etal_2016_JApE.PDF (529 KB)

Hi Helen

Thanks for covering the ichthyosaurs story – looked great.

Quick email to ask if you might be interested in a story based on some new research involving Oxford University scientists.

The study looks at the most endangered European seabird, the Balearic shearwater, and predicts complete extinction of the species in 60 years. However, the researchers say this could be avoided with more night-setting of fishing gear, as much of the species' mortality stems from becoming 'bycatch' on fishing hooks as they are being set (the Balearic shearwater does not dive at night – another of the researchers' findings).

The research also looks at the European ban on discarded fish and how that might adversely affect the Balearic shearwater population.

The senior Oxford academic is Professor Tim Guilford, who leads the Oxford Navigation Group. He says: 'Europe's only critically endangered seabird is on the line to extinction. The science shows just how serious the problem is, but also that there is a technically simple solution – the setting of demersal long-lines at night. Now it is up to the politicians to decide.'

The study is now online in the *Journal of Applied Ecology*, but I only found out about it today and we haven't done anything with it yet.

Do let me know if you might be interested. I've attached a copy of the study.

Kind regards

Stuart

Stuart Gillespie

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Pitching exercise

- Summarise your story to partner
- Decide between you:
 - Who is target audience
 - What is aim of coverage
 - What is best channel for that
 - Any particular outlets you would pitch to?

Press releases

- Journalists will decide within seconds
- Must have an eye-catching heading (and email subject line...)
- Good: **Home counties blamed for car pollution in the south-east**
- Bad: **Regional strategy needed to tackle environmental problems in south-east**
- Bad: **Oxford academics give new insights into car pollution**

Home counties to blame for car pollution



Ben Webster Environment Editor
Published at 12:01AM, February 29 2016

The leafy home counties are far less green than London — at least where greenhouse gas pollution from cars is concerned.

More than three quarters of carbon dioxide from cars in the southeast is produced by drivers living outside London, an Oxford University study found. The population of 12 million living in the southeast but outside the capital produced 77 per cent of the region's car emissions in 2012, compared with 23 per cent created by the eight million inside the capital.

The average daily car mileage per person was 7.7 miles for Londoners, less than half the 15.6 miles by people in areas neighbouring the city.

Dr Caralampo Focas, author of the study published in Transport

09 Jun 2013, Cornwall, England, UK — Driving a Mini Cooper convertible car along country lane on touring holiday of Devon and Cornwall in Southern England, UK — Image by © Tim Graham/Corbis Corbis

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Press releases

- Think about your 'top line'
- Include usable quotes: think in soundbites
- Keep it as concise as possible (without skimping on essential detail)
- Avoid jargon or technical/academic language as far as possible

University of Oxford news release

Strictly embargoed until 1600 GMT (1100 EST) on Monday 11 January 2016

Scientists pinpoint unbroken section of Nepal fault line and show why Himalayas keep growing

- *'Kink' in fault explains long-term growth of highest mountains in years between earthquakes*
- *Satellite technology shows Himalayas subsided by up to 60cm after April 2015 disaster*
- *Rupture in fault line stopped 11km below Kathmandu, suggesting earthquake hazard remains*

An international team of scientists has shed new light on the earthquake that devastated Nepal in April 2015, killing more than 8,000 people.

A study published in the journal *Nature Geoscience* shows that a kink in the regional fault line below Nepal explains why the highest mountains in the Himalayas are seen to grow between earthquakes. This kink has created a ramp 20km below the surface, with material constantly being pushed up and raising the height of the mountains.

The researchers, from the UK's Centre for the Observation and Modelling of Earthquakes, Volcanoes and Tectonics (COMET), as well as academics from the USA and France, also demonstrate that the rupture on the fault stopped 11km below Kathmandu. This indicates that another major earthquake could take place within a shorter timeframe than the centuries that might be expected for the area.

Lead author Dr John Elliott of Oxford University, a member of the COMET team, said: 'Nepal has some of the highest mountain ranges in the world that have been built up over millions

place. It's simply a case of countries and cities making sure they are well prepared for when it does happen.'

The research was a collaboration between scientists from the University of Oxford, the University of Leeds, the University of Cambridge, California Institute of Technology, PSL Research University (France), and engineering consultancy Arup.

The majority of the work was funded by the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC).

ENDS

For further information, please contact Stuart Gillespie in the University of Oxford press office at stuart.gillespie@admin.ox.ac.uk or on +44 (0)1865 283877.

Alternatively, contact Sarah Reed in the University of Leeds press office at s.j.reed@leeds.ac.uk or on +44 (0)113 3434196.

Dr John Elliott of Oxford University can be contacted at john.elliott@earth.ox.ac.uk.

Notes to editors

* The paper 'Himalayan megathrust geometry and relation to topography revealed by the Gorkha earthquake' J. R. Elliott, R. Jolivet, P. J. González, J.-P. Avouac, J. Hollingsworth, M. P. Searle and V. L. Stevens is published online in *Nature Geoscience* at 1600 London time/1100 US Eastern Time on 11 January 2016, DOI number 10.1038/NGEO2623.

* The Centre for the Observation and Modelling of Earthquakes, Volcanoes and Tectonics (COMET) is funded by the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC). The COMET Directorate is based at the University of Leeds.

* The Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences Division (MPLS) is one of four academic divisions at the University of Oxford, representing the non-medical sciences. Oxford is one of the world's leading universities for science, and MPLS is at the forefront of scientific

Press release task

- Select one of your research stories from the pitching task
- Write the heading and intro of a press release
- Pair up if you don't have one – or make something up!

Risks of research in the media

- Funding
- Stage of publication – be clear and honest
- Different agendas – Daily Mail on immigration
- ‘Taxpayer money’
- Misrepresentation
- Sensitive topics – from mafia research to Jane Austen!
- Comments section

Managing risks

- Clear and accurate press release – if necessary, say 'it does not show X'
- Place exclusive with reputable journalist
- Make press release available online
- Seek correction or clarification if necessary
- Work with us
- But most research coverage is good!

Contact us

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