

Lost in Translation?

Communicating Academic Research to Different Audiences

A Quick Start Guide

Produced by the Environment and Sustainability Institute (ESI), HASS Cornwall, Policy@Exeter, Public Engagement with Research (PER), and the University of Exeter Press Office.

Introduction

Academic research is often rich, complex, and nuanced. These qualities make it valuable, but they also make it challenging to communicate beyond specialist audiences. Researchers must balance clarity with complexity, ensuring that the central message remains accessible without losing depth.

This guide outlines how to translate academic outputs into three key communication formats:

1. Press releases
2. Policy briefs
3. Blog posts

These formats help researchers engage policymakers, journalists, practitioners, and the wider public. The guidance is based on the *Lost in Translation?* workshop, supported by the Environment and Sustainability Institute, HASS Cornwall, Policy@Exeter, Public Engagement with Research (PER), and the University of Exeter Press Office.

1. Press, Media, and Press Releases

Why media engagement matters

- Media coverage can shape public understanding, influence policy, and highlight the impact of academic research.
- Storytelling is central: even niche topics can be engaging when linked to current affairs or everyday life.
- The news cycle moves quickly — relevance and timing are essential.

Working with journalists

- Journalists value academic expertise but work under tight deadlines.
- Interviews differ from political interviews but still carry political angles.
- Most journalism cannot capture full academic nuance; instead, it provides accessible entry points for the public.

Institutional considerations

- UKRI and other funders encourage media engagement but require impartiality, especially around political topics.
- Always check funder guidance and consult the Press Office before commenting publicly.
- It is acceptable to decline questions or avoid topics outside your expertise.

Choosing media outlets

- Be open to a range of platforms but mindful of political leanings.
- The Press Office can advise on outlet suitability and provide media training.

Writing an effective press release

- The Press Office can draft a press release on behalf of researchers.
- Prioritise key points and communicate them clearly.

- Avoid opinion; maintain a neutral tone.
- Begin with a strong headline — it determines the structure that follows.
- Use an “elevator pitch” approach: deliver the core message quickly and concisely.
- Consider limited public attention spans; foreground the main message and name the researchers and the university.
- **Length:** 400–600 words.

2. Policymakers and Policy Briefs

Understanding the policy landscape

- Parliament has several potential contacts. These include Parliamentary Researchers, Chief Scientific Advisors (or equivalent), committee chairs and clerks, and Thematic Research Leads, all of whom can connect researchers with policymakers.
- There are also various relevant groups, such as Parliamentary Select Committees, the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST), and the Knowledge Exchange Unit.
- Policy newsletters highlight committee interests and calls for evidence.
- MPs and Peers engage differently:
 - Peers often have more time and deeper policy focus.
 - Constituency MPs rely heavily on staff.

Engaging with parliamentary structures

- Committee clerks can advise on requirements and expectations.
- Parliamentary Researchers help identify key points for discussion.
- Devolved parliaments (Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland) may be more responsive than Westminster.

Stakeholders and impact

- Consider who will be affected by policy informed by your research.
- Recommendations are more valuable when cost-effective and practical.
- Policy is about societal impact, not researcher credit.

Writing an effective policy brief

- Specific requirements may vary by policymaker, group, or committee.
- Keep it simple, clear, and concise. Use accessible language and present in an accessible format.

- State who you are, your expertise, and what the research addresses.
- Focus on one key policy question.
- Align recommendations with stakeholder needs and committee objectives.
- Provide up to three recommendations:
 1. Already in progress or widely supported
 2. Long-term or more complex
 3. Technical or quick-win
- Maintain a non-partisan tone.
- Ensure factual accuracy — submissions may fall under Parliamentary privilege.
- Length: 1,500–2,000 words.

Follow-up and evidence of impact

- Request written confirmation of how your research is used and its impact.
- This evidence strengthens future funding applications.

Support from Policy@Exeter

- Templates, case studies, newsletters, and training.
- Guidance on preparing for stakeholder meetings.
- Updates on calls for evidence.

3. Public Engagement and Blog Posts

Why public engagement matters

- It increases awareness and understanding of research.
- It can involve the public in design, data collection, or dissemination.
- Blog posts are an accessible way to share research narratives.

Writing an effective blog post

- Use storytelling to create an engaging narrative.
- Write in clear, accessible language.
- Focus on key lessons and public relevance.
- Structure:
 - **Hook** — why it matters
 - **Context** — what need the research addresses
 - **What you did** — brief overview
 - **What you found** — key insights
 - **Why it matters** — real-world relevance
 - **Takeaway** — one clear message
- Adapt your abstract into a narrative form; reduce methodological detail.
- Begin and end with the key message.
- Use quotes carefully and ethically.
- **Length:** 300–800 words.

Style and tone

- Use short sentences and familiar language.
- Write in a conversational tone.
- Include case studies where appropriate.
- Be transparent about uncertainty.

Visibility and SEO

- Use keywords and tags to improve discoverability.
- Consider where to publish — thematic blogs, university platforms, or external outlets.
- If one outlet declines, revise and submit elsewhere.

Developing your public profile

- Blog posts can support applications for funding and long-form writing opportunities.
- Keep your university profile updated.