



ROTHAMSTED
RESEARCH

Communications and Public Engagement Strategy

INFORM INTERACT INSPIRE



Rothamsted Research
where knowledge grows

INFORM INTERACT INSPIRE

Rothamsted Research Communications and Public Engagement Strategy

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Rothamsted Research receives strategic funding from the BBSRC



Our aims and aspirations

Rothamsted is the longest running agricultural research station in the world, providing cutting-edge science and innovation for nearly 170 years. Our mission is to deliver knowledge and new practices to increase crop productivity and quality and to develop environmentally sustainable solutions for food production and bioenergy.

This mission aims to benefit society by finding solutions to the global challenges of increasing demands for food, energy and water as populations grow, socio-economic demographics change and we mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change (1).

Communicating our science appropriately, as well as engaging stakeholders and the wider public in our work is essential in achieving our mission. We believe that understanding the broader socio-economic and political dimensions of these global challenges must be built into our organisation to ensure our science provides solutions that genuinely benefit society.

The Rothamsted Research communications and public engagement strategy supports our overarching scientific strategy (2) and is based on three guiding principles: to inform, interact and inspire. This will ensure we listen, we educate and we lead when reaching people unfamiliar with the detail of our science. These guiding principles are underpinned by four core values:

- Being objective and open-minded
- Building partnerships and relationships
- Leading, educating and inspiring
- Listening and adapting

Rothamsted Research shares the UK Government's Universal Ethical Code for Scientists of Rigour, Respect and Responsibility that aims to foster ethical research, encourage active reflection among scientists on the wider implications of their work, and support constructive communication between scientists and the public on complex and challenging issues (3).

Our responsibilities

Our scientists are dedicated to objectively gathering new knowledge, independently and free from bias, with the ultimate goal of helping society become more healthy, prosperous and sustainable through scientific advancement in agriculture. But we recognise that to help society we need to better understand it, which is why we strive to consider the wider social and political parameters when formulating our scientific strategies.

At Rothamsted Research, we understand the many reasons why effective public engagement and communications are crucial to delivering new science and technology. These include:

- Social responsibilities. As scientists, we are ethically obliged to both inform society and work with society. We are also obliged to ensure we are spending public money effectively.
- Contractual obligations. As part of our conditions of grant from BBSRC (our majority funder), each grant-holding scientist is expected to spend at least two days each year doing public engagement and science communication. Public engagement and science communication are also encouraged under Pathways to Impact (4).
- Better science. The relevance of our science can only be strengthened by introducing other expert opinion to our work, for example input from social scientists, economists, political commentators, historians, interested observers, NGOs, industry and other professionals to help us think 'outside the box' and look for different, less typical, collaborations.
- Better scientists. A scientist's career does not stop at the bench. At some stage they may wish to become involved in government committees, or act as advisers to industry or NGOs. As such, an understanding of the wider socio-political implications of their science will help develop them professionally.



How we will communicate and discuss our science

We realise that the science and technology we develop may be novel, complex or may prove controversial. Equally, our science and technology may simply be of general interest to the public. This is why, when discussing and communicating our work in public, we will endeavour to:

- Demonstrate the benefits and ensure these are evidence based
- Put the technology into the wider context, making it relevant to the audience and explaining the drivers behind our work
- Invite dialogue about our work

We will build on our existing good practice of being open, objective and accessible. This includes our quarterly public open meetings, our work within the local community and schools, our public open days, as well as our presence at numerous events and exhibitions. But we will do this with a greater emphasis on our role as a listening establishment.

We will also develop new tools and opportunities for scientists to better communicate and engage with the public, making better use of social and electronic media.

But ultimately, to deliver the strategy we will ensure senior scientists are leading by example and emphasising a long-term approach to embedding public engagement into our culture.

“Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not to his own facts”

Senator Daniel Moynihan c.1994

Defining communications and public engagement

Communications, public engagement and knowledge exchange do have a degree of overlap and commonality (figure 1), for example you cannot engage the public in the absence of communications, likewise the stakeholders involved in knowledge exchange activities are also members of the public. But for the purposes of this strategy we have defined their parameters in accordance with definitions provided by the BBSRC and the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE)

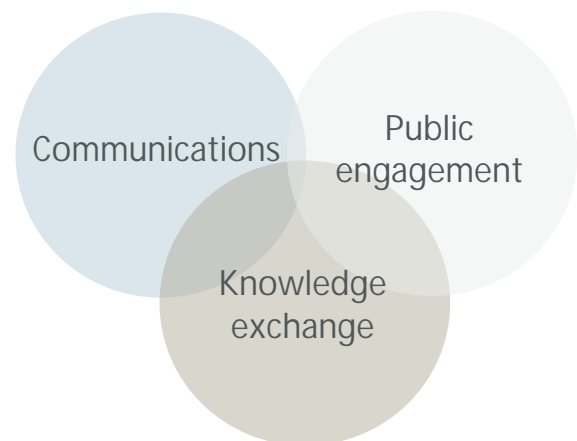


Figure 1: there is an inevitable overlap between communications, public engagement and knowledge exchange



Defining communications and public engagement

Knowledge exchange

Although not included as part of this strategy, knowledge exchange primarily involves generating and maintaining business relationships with those who have a direct stake in the outcomes of our research (stakeholders). Examples of these stakeholders include:

- Farmers and fellow scientists when discussing sustainable agricultural research and practice
- Industry professionals when discussing how to translate our scientific findings into practical technologies
- Policy makers and NGOs when discussing how our research can inform policy or practice

Communications

Communications is defined as corporate communications which includes activities such as promoting our science, products or brand, managing our reputation, raising awareness, educating, marketing, recruitment and opinion forming.

It also includes disseminating research or research processes which is primarily one-way communication. Examples include working with the media, public exhibitions, public lectures, science festival stands, newsletters and static websites.

This form of communications is often the stepping stone into public engagement.

Public engagement

According to the NCCPE Definition, “public engagement describes the myriad of ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education and research can be shared with the public. Engagement is by definition a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit” (5).

It should be based on deliberative communication and dialogue. It is about listening to the expert views, knowledge and values of others, developing shared understandings, collaborating and being open to change our own views.

It is made up of:

- Inspiring young people in both formal and informal learning environments, for example through school visits to our research facilities, our scientists visiting schools and working with children's activity groups.
- Public dialogue, or two-way discussions with people from other professions and with other expertise around an area of research or scientific issues with the aim of informing research directions, policies or strategy. This includes using advisory groups, focus groups and inviting discussion through our existing public meetings and social media.
- Public attitude surveys and consultation to gather opinion to help understand public views, values and attitudes around an area of research, for example using surveys, feedback forms, polling and citizen juries.

The BBSRC and NCCPE provide many examples and guidance to help scientists that we fully endorse in this strategy (5, 6).



Delivering the strategy

The strategy will be implemented from 2013 to support the development of our future scientific strategies.

It is envisaged that this strategy will take 3-4 years to fully embed and evaluate, although many of its constituent activities will be delivered far more rapidly.

The strategy will fully utilise the existing good work that has evolved throughout our 170-year history.

This includes our:

- Schools Programme, which encourages our scientists to directly interact with children
- Open meetings for the public
- Developing posters and exhibitions at major science festivals and at broader, non-science events
- Open weekends
- Meetings with special interest and community groups
- Attending local authority Town Hall meetings
- Involvement with local community projects and events
- Using interactive tools
- “Open door” policy to information and on-site visits, within our resource constraints
- Working with our sister institutes within the BBSRC community

But we will also be developing innovative new approaches.

These will include:

- Adapting our training programmes to emphasise communications with non specialist audiences
- Forming a strategic advisory board (with social science, economics, politics, ethics, NGO, industry and other expertise)
- Establishing focus groups for specific issues
- Inviting non-scientific speakers to give 'outside the box' lectures and seminars to staff
- Developing a recognition and rewards programme for good practice
- Creating staff forums to share ideas and best practice
- Utilising modern technology to develop innovative methods, for example comments boards, real-time open interaction, online consultation and social media
- Establishing an internal network of public engagement champions
- Running horizon scanning events for staff to discuss future technologies and their possible social impacts
- Investigating the use of Communities of Practice, engaging the Public as Researchers and Participatory Research Partnerships (5)
- Setting up an evaluation framework to seek to independently monitor our progress against the objectives laid out in this strategy
- Providing an annual report, which will feed into reports provided to our funders



References

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