

Science in the media

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A major new report into science and the media has drawn on research by Cardiff University which found that that in some respects specialist science news reporting in the UK is in relatively good health. However the research also warns about the serious threat to the quality and independence of science reporting posed by the wider crisis in journalism.

The study 'Mapping the Field: Specialist science news journalism in the UK national media' was led by Dr Andy Williams of the School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies. It was based on a survey of UK science, health, and environment news journalists, and 52 in-depth interviews with specialist reporters and senior editors in the national news media.

According to the research there has been an increase in the number of specialist science journalists in the UK national news media and there is a growing appetite for science news within newsrooms. On the other hand, the economic and institutional constraints under which science journalists now operate have led to extreme workload increases, less time to seek out stories, check facts, and do basic research, increasing reliance on PR material from a very limited pool of news sources, and a growing homogeneity in science coverage.

Dr Williams' research has contributed to a new report by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) - Science in the [Media](#): Securing the Future - produced by an expert working group as part of the UK Science and Society strategy.

Dr Williams said: "It was important to do this research because it looks at science journalism in its broad economic and institutional contexts. I found a mixed picture. It has to be a good thing that there are double the amount of specialist reporters covering science, health and environment news now than there were 20 years ago. But it's not all good news. Most of the journalists we interviewed complain about severe workload increases, almost half say they're mainly passive recipients of news rather than uncovering original stories themselves, a fifth say they don't have enough time to fact-check stories they publish, and around the same number say they rely too much on PR material. These are all serious problems for the quality and independence of [science news](#).

"I was really pleased when BIS asked me to do this work, and it was even more pleasing to see that the findings are being taken seriously, and have been published alongside their own report and recommendations."

More information: A summary of Dr Williams' research and a link to the full article is available at: [cf.ac.uk/jomec/research/research ... /mappingscience.html](http://cf.ac.uk/jomec/research/research.../mappingscience.html)

Provided by Cardiff University

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