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Media Release

10 March 2015

Communicating Science – helping scientists to engage with the media

The Irish Academy of Public Relations hosted *Radio Skills – A special evening for Scientists* in the Dublin Institute of Technology FOCAS Research Institute recently (4 March 2015). Prof. Hugh Byrne, Head of FOCAS and science journalist and broadcaster, Sean Duke, discussed the issues that get in the way of clearer and more open communication between scientists and the media.

It was clear from the discussion that one of the key issues that caused apprehension among scientists in taking part in interviews was trust. The scientists were concerned about being misquoted, or their research being misrepresented in the media. They also expressed uneasiness about the response by their peers to any interaction with the media, and a reluctance to “put themselves on a pedestal” as scientific experts.

Scientists present in the audience voiced frustration that some scientists who regularly participated in interviews with the media often commented on topics which were outside their area of expertise, and thus sometimes presented misleading or incorrect information to the public.

Commenting on the event, Prof. Byrne said, ‘The communication of science to the wider public via the media is an important issue. This evening’s event provided a great opportunity to have honest and open discussion about the issues that get in the way of more dialogue between scientists and journalists. It is of great value for organisations like the Irish Academy of Public Relations to promote science engagement, and to educate scientists about communication in order to bridge the gap between science and the media.’

Mr. Duke said, ‘It is crucial that scientists and journalists in Ireland learn that engagement between them is both essential and mutually beneficial. The days when scientists could bury themselves in the lab, doing their research, without any reference to the outside world are gone. So too are the days, not too long ago, when the Irish media ignored science because it was felt that it was too difficult to understand.’

He continued, 'Scientists should understand that they have more control than they realise in their dealings with the media, and that they can, to a large extent dictate the 'terms of engagement'. There are huge benefits for scientists to be gained from interacting positively with the media. Journalists, meanwhile, must understand that, while a good story is always the priority that it is essential to get the scientific facts of a story correct and the best way to do this is by working closely and collaboratively with scientists.'

Ellen Gunning, Director of the Irish Academy of Public Relations commented, 'There is a huge interest in scientific issues. The public is curious to find out more. Scientists are not trained to respond- they are trained to question! Our course will help them learn how to communicate effectively with media and with radio audiences'.

By presenting the typical agendas from the points of view of the scientist and the journalist, Prof. Byrne and Mr. Duke clarified the issues that hinder scientists-media interactions and put forward suggestions about how these hindrances could be overcome, and how to build trusting professional relationships between scientists and journalists.

At the event the Irish Academy of Public Relations also launched their new studio course, *Radio Interview Skills for Scientists*. The first course starts on 11 April. For details please contact info@irishacademy.com or go to <https://eventbrite.com/event/15948933690/>

Ends

Photo caption

(L-R) Science journalist and broadcaster - Sean Duke with Director of the Irish Academy of Public Relations – Ellen Gunning and Head of FOCAS – Prof. Hugh Byrne pictured at the *Radio Skills – A special evening for Scientists* event held in the Dublin Institute of Technology FOCAS Research Institute.

Photo: Tara Murphy

Websites :

Irish Academy of Public Relations <http://www.irishacademy.com/ie/>

Link for *Radio Interview Skills for Scientists* course booking
<https://eventbrite.com/event/15948933690/>

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