Allianz der Wissenschaftsorganisationen

Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung
Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft
Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft
Hochschulrektorenkonferenz
Leibniz-Gemeinschaft

Nationale Akademie der Wissenschaften Leopoldina
Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
Helmholtz-Gemeinschaft
Max-Planck-Gesellschaft
Wissenschaftsrat

26. Mai 2020

Ten-point plan for science communication

Agreement to develop the Alliance's and its members' communication

Preamble

Science and research change and shape our everyday lives and the world of work. They have an impact on the life of every individual and our society, on our political actions and our economic performance. They help us to understand social, political, and cultural change and issues, as well as to find solutions to them. Thus, both the outcomes of science and our understanding of it, the way it works and how it generates knowledge, are fundamental to an informed society that can make its own decisions. Independent science journalism plays a crucial role in this. Science, in turn, is dependent on the support of society: in order to work freely in the pursuit of knowledge it needs trust in its expertise and integrity as well as appropriate use of the funding at its disposal.

The fundamental transformation of the media and communication landscape confronts today's scientists with new demands but also opens up new opportunities. Digitisation ensures fast, immediate access to scientific information and provides new openings for participation, transparency and exchange. Science can benefit from the capabilities of digital communication and gain new impetus. At the same time, the transformation poses new challenges. The number of communication channels has multiplied, and target groups have become more differentiated. Social media, above all, have changed communication. It has become harder to maintain an overview, misinformation spreads faster and the tone is sometimes more abrasive.

Under these new general conditions, the Alliance of Science Organisations considers it a joint responsibility of science and its institutions to continue developing the dialogue between science and society and to create the requisite preconditions for doing so. The PUSH Memorandum, adopted 20 years ago by the Alliance of Science Organisations, the Stifterverband and the German Federation of Industrial Research Associations, has accomplished a great deal: science communication has established itself and become professionalised as an educational and occupational field, new teaching and exchange formats have been developed, and a number of awards and funding opportunities now promote science communication. But not all the goals formulated at the time have been achieved. How researchers should communicate with a lay public is still not a self-evident component of scientific work because the institutions have hardly introduced the relevant incentives.

It is therefore high time for the Alliance of Science Organisations to find answers to both new and as yet unsolved challenges. The Alliance of Science

Organisations has identified four fields of action in which it intends to engage to a greater extent and for which it has formulated recommendations for action. These recommendations pursue the goal of underlining the importance of science in society, taking account of societal expectations and perspectives on science, reinforcing scientists' communicative competence and promoting networking amongst the various players active in science communication.

Fields of Action

Field of Action 1: Taking account of societal relevance

Increased scepticism vis-à-vis cultural and political institutions as well as vis-à-vis science itself is threatening trust in science and its processes of acquiring knowledge. The Alliance of Science Organisations therefore considers itself and all science organisations under an obligation to make greater efforts to address the questions ensuing from advances in knowledge and developments in science. In the future, the kinds of topics and aspects that are of immediate importance to society or are a subject of public debate should be picked up more often and play a greater role in communication. To this end, science must expand its perspective beyond purely scientific and science policy issues.

Field of Action 2: Adopting the role of the recipient

There is no "general public." The digital transformation of the media and communication landscape clearly reveals differentiations in target groups. If we are to reach the various segments of the public more effectively, their expectations must be anticipated, and their concerns, opinions and interests must be heard. Embracing relevant communication formats and appealing to the emotions help to ensure science is perceived as more authentic and trustworthy. The Alliance of Science Organisations wants to anchor science more firmly in society in order to pull the carpet from beneath misrepresentations of and myths about science.

Field of Action 3: Reinforcing communicative competence

Communicating their own research and knowledge gained must become part of scientists' work. They are important ambassadors for transferring science and its findings to society. They can demonstrate best how science functions, why scientific freedom is important for our democracy and what differentiates scientific knowledge from opinions. Not everywhere, however, do they as yet enjoy the necessary incentives and opportunities to acquire the expertise pertinent to this responsibility. The Alliance of Science Organisations does not regard communication as an add-on, potentially disadvantageous for one's career, but, on the contrary, as an integral part of science that deserves recognition. A communication culture of this kind must be established in every scientific institution.

Field of Action 4: Promoting cooperation and networking

Partnerships between scientific institutions as well as between science and other national and international actors in civil society, the media, culture, business and politics are important for strategic science communication and also have an influence on science itself. In general, the networking potential is nowhere near being fully exploited, especially as digitisation offers new options. The Alliance of Science Organisations intends to make much greater use of the synergistic potential inherent in partnerships.

Undertaking and recommendations for action

In the following, the Alliance of Science Organisations formulates recommendations for action for science, its actors and institutions, including the establishments and partners involved in science communication, which it also undertakes to observe itself.

1. The members of the Alliance will increasingly adopt a position on issues that concern society. To this end, they will identify socially relevant scientific topics, such as genetic engineering, vaccinations, climate change and artificial intelligence, and channel their positions into the public discourse.

2. The members of the Alliance will make even clearer how the process of acquiring scientific knowledge functions, what role scientific freedom plays, what provisional status and diversity of voices mean in science and who the people behind science and research actually are. They will thus campaign for greater understanding for the processes, conditions, necessities and limitations of science.

3. The members of the Alliance will take greater account of the recipients' perspectives and, in their communication, link up with the recipients' respective everyday lives, not least in view of the enormous competition for people's attention. They will continue to develop and implement relevant formats and tools.

4. The members of the Alliance will seek to achieve greater exposure for science in audio-visual media and fictional formats in order to reach a wider audience. They will, moreover, strive for joint representation on broadcasting and media councils with the aim of reinforcing these councils' awareness for scientific content in their programmes.

5. The members of the Alliance will support individual researchers' engagement both with legacy media and with social media. They will promote it more and include it in their own science communication.

6. The members of the Alliance will strive to ensure that the communication of scientific topics is anchored in academic training and in all stages of a scientific career as a core element of scientists' training and continuing education.

7. The members of the Alliance will generate time and financial resources so that researchers can integrate communication elements in their scientific routine. They recommend creating incentive and reward systems for communication services within the institutions.

8. The members of the Alliance will campaign for permanent financial support for communication activities in the institutions in order to guarantee sustainable science communication.

9. The members of the Alliance will communicate with one another more regularly with the aim of identifying topics at an earlier stage and implementing joint communication activities.

10. The members of the Alliance will intensify national and international exchange on research and best practice in science communication. They will, moreover, include international developments and perspectives in their own communication.