



Gewaardeerd!

Science Communication by Scientists: Rewarded!*

Summary

How can knowledge institutions actually “recognise and reward” scientists for their commitment to science communication? That was the key question underpinning an investigation, and possible solutions, incorporated into the *Science Communication by Scientists: Rewarded!* guide.

The *Rewarded!* guide is the result of a programme of the same name commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, and carried out between October 2020 and October 2022. *Rewarded!* started with a pilot fund from which eventually 91 research groups – from all faculties – received a financial contribution for new activities as recognition and a reward for their structural commitment to science communication. To increase the benefit of that one-off incentive, an enrichment programme followed, focusing on networking and knowledge sharing. A central component of this was a study of how science communication by researchers at knowledge institutions can be incorporated more effectively into scientific practice. The study was conducted at the Athena Institute (VU University Amsterdam) and was directed by Dr Frank Kupper, associate professor of science communication and public engagement.

Many scientists are eager to share their knowledge and to involve the public, interest groups, or public authorities in their research. However, these acti-

vities do not yet form a natural part of the duties of Dutch academics, meaning that there is generally a lack of time, resources, and support from the knowledge institution concerned. That situation calls for change, especially because scientists are increasingly expected to engage with the public. Within the desired transition to open science, for example, science communication plays a key role in making scientific knowledge truly accessible to sections of the public. Commitment to science communication therefore deserves a prominent place when drawing up policy for Recognition and Rewards, as one of the areas a scientist can focus on. That does not mean an extra task for everyone, but as a personal choice each scientist can make.

The Athena study revealed a number of interrelated problems that act as barriers to researchers who wish to engage in science communication. The core problem is that science communication is something that researchers do “on the side”, that there are no formal frameworks for the activities involved, and that achievements in this area hardly count, if at all, when assessing the researcher. Many researchers are on a temporary contract and this prevents them from building up systematic contacts with the media, communication professionals, and civil-society organisations within which science communication can flourish.

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Moreover, science communication know-how is scarcely anchored, if at all, within or between knowledge institutions. Nevertheless, sharing know-how and reflecting on the role of science and scientists within society are of great importance now that scientists are increasingly being asked to “go public” and cooperate with parties outside their familiar academic circle. There is also increasing pressure for research that has societal impact. All in all, this often creates an impossible dilemma for scientists: they get sandwiched in between the requirements set and the opportunities science communication offers.

Based on the findings of the *Rewarded!* programme, four key recommendations have been formulated as a guide to recognition and rewards, thus assisting scientists engaged in science communication.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. *Have science communication link up with policy on open science.*

Make reflection on science communication part of the transition to a more open scientific system. Organise dialogue between scientists, communication experts and civil-society stakeholders.

2. *Make science communication a fully-fledged part of the duties of Dutch academics, along the lines of the Impact element of Recognition and Rewards*

Integrate science communication fully into career profiles, alongside research, teaching,

patient care at university medical centres, and/or academic leadership. Scientists should be able to determine the emphases within these duties for themselves.

3. *Integrate science communication into all phases of scientific practice*

Integrate science communication into every research programme, from start to finish. Earmark a percentage of the research budget for science communication. Emphasise the need for carefully thought-out plans for science communication in applications for research funding.

4. *Approach science communication as an actual discipline, with associated expertise and collaboration with communication professionals and their networks*

Provide instruction and training for researchers who wish to become expert at science communication, and broaden their expertise regarding public engagement. Give communication staff scope for systematic collaboration with scientists, and bring together scientists with an interest in science communication. Ensure that know-how gained from experience is preserved and accessible.

The *Science Communication by Scientists: Rewarded!* pilot fund and enrichment programme were undertaken by a project group within Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW), under the guidance of the *Rewarded!* Advisory Board chaired by Prof. Peter-Paul Verbeek.