

# ESPA Policy on Press Releases and Publicity (Mandatory).



## **Background**

As a research programme funded by the UK Government via its three funders, ESPA is required to adopt current Government guidelines and best practice when dealing with the media in the UK and internationally.

Press releases and other types of publicity are an important tool for the ESPA programme and projects to reach the media. ESPA's policy on press releases is designed to assist projects to produce copy that is likely to be effective in communicating the potential impact of ESPA's activities, while also minimising the risks associated with a number of areas of potential sensitivity which could reflect poorly upon researchers, projects, the programme or its funders.

### **This Policy is Mandatory**

Any failure to comply with this Policy will result in sanctions being imposed against the individual researcher, project or institution involved directly from NERC on behalf of the programme. The nature of the sanctions applied will be case specific and proportionate to the level of non-compliance.

The Policy takes effect from 17 February 2015 and may be updated by the ESPA programme as appropriate.

## **Objectives**

The main objectives of ESPA's policy on the production of press releases are to:

- Provide guidance to projects on how to produce effective press releases which enhance their potential impact, while also reducing the risk of reputational risk to researchers, the ESPA programme and ESPA's funders
- Provide a simple mechanism for the programme to review and approve all ESPA-related press releases before they are issued to the press. **No press release may be published without this approval**
- Provide a mechanism for the press offices of ESPA's funders to link ESPA project work to their own communication activities. This will give advance warning of media releases, and sharing drafts will enable funders to see where they can add value through their own communications channels.

## **Guidance for Projects**

All ESPA press releases need to present a balanced view of projects and their activities which emphasise the expected benefits to poor people in developing countries, the innovation of ESPA research and the international partnerships that deliver ESPA research. It is worth remembering that media interest is sparked if you can relate your "news" to a relevant external event in a national or international context.

Specific guidance follows:

- **Titles should have a link to the expected outcome**, either development or research impact. Avoid titles such as "*University of xxxx receives more funding*".
- **Provide both narrative and quantitative information**. For example, "as a result of this research, over 500,000 people in xxxx could benefit through enhanced access to clean drinking water and reduction in disease yyyy which currently kills zzzz each year, worldwide".
- **Make the press release relevant to people**. The text should describe how the research will eventually change lives.

- The press release should have **clear links to ESPA-funded research and the programme's [vision](#)**. If there is no clear link, the ESPA Director will in the first instance discuss this with the project PI to understand why the press release is being prepared. If no clear links emerge then the press release will be declined.
- In exceptional circumstances the Directorate may approve **press releases to be produced which are linked to ESPA projects, but do not mention the programme or ESPA's funders**. The Directorate will inform project PIs when this is an option if it is not possible to authorise a press release that has an explicit link to the ESPA programme.
- When mentioning researchers and research organisations, **equal weighting should be given to partners in developing countries**, even if the press release is targeting the press in OECD countries such as the United Kingdom.
- Press releases **must not include any information about the financial value of the research grant**.
- **ESPA's funders should not normally be mentioned** in the body of the press release beyond any acknowledgement relating to their funding of the programme. **Press releases should not make any commentary on the policies and practices of ESPA's Funders, UK Government Departments or their Ministers**.
- **All press releases must mention the ESPA programme**, using standard text provided in Annex 1.
- **The names of the ESPA Programme and its funders must be written in full** when used in a press release or in notes to editors. Notes to editors should be used as standard practice as these provide an extremely useful mechanism to provide relevant detail that does not fit comfortably into the main body text.

## ***The Approval Process***

Projects must allow at least one full working week for approval. If your release is tied to a specific event or embargoed to a particular date remember that you will need to circulate to the media at least ten days beforehand and therefore factor in the approval process on top of this. Draft text should be sent to the ESPA Directorate at [communication@espa.ac.uk](mailto:communication@espa.ac.uk). Any draft that meets the guidelines outlined above should be able to be approved for publication within two working days.

If the main body of the press release makes direct reference to any of ESPA's funders it will be necessary to refer it to press offices representing all of ESPA's funders. This will normally add at least 5 working days to the approval process. Please note that ESPA's funders reserve the right to request modifications to drafts and may require releases to be withdrawn in some circumstances.

If the Directorate's review identifies significant issues or opportunities, these will be discussed with projects as soon as possible. If it is not possible to resolve issues during the review and approval process and more than three versions of a draft press release have been prepared, the project will not be permitted to publish the press release.

## ***Working with the ESPA Funders' Press Teams***

The Directorate will notify ESPA's funders of press releases which may be of interest to their press and communications teams. **ESPA projects must not approach funders directly in relation to draft press releases**.

If ESPA's funders wish to link their own activities to a press release, the Directorate will contact projects to facilitate the process.

## **Purdah**

The term 'purdah' has come into popular use across central and local government in the United Kingdom to describe the period of time immediately before elections or referendums when specific restrictions on the activity of civil servants are in place. The term 'pre-election period' is also used.

As a research programme funded by the UK Government, the ESPA programme is expected to follow UK Civil Service rules relating to 'purdah' or the pre-election period. Principal Investigators will be informed of any specific requirements when these are published.

In order to assist projects in their planning, the following guidance has been provided by the ESPA programme and is also on the ESPA website <http://www.espa.ac.uk/grant-holders/toolkit/espa-programme-policies>

1. No press releases or other types of publicity may be issued during the pre-election period. This is currently interpreted to include publicity about academic publications funded by ESPA.
2. No announcements should be made relating to projects and their activities during the pre-election period.
3. Project-related events (e.g. training) may take place, but ones targeting external stakeholders should be limited or preferably be delayed. If projects are planning such events during the pre-election period, the PI should contact the Directorate's Operations Manager ([manager@espa.ac.uk](mailto:manager@espa.ac.uk)) for further guidance.
4. **PLEASE NOTE. This component of the policy also applies to researchers and organisations located outside the United Kingdom.**

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## **Annex 1. Text Templates**

### ***Acknowledgement in main text***

All press releases **must** acknowledge support from ESPA:

"This [work/project/research] [is/was] supported by the UK Government through the Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation (ESPA) research programme".

### ***Acknowledgement in the notes to editors***

Notes to editors **must** include the following

"The Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation (ESPA) programme ([www.espa.ac.uk](http://www.espa.ac.uk)) is a global development research programme funded by the UK Government, supported by the Natural Environment Research Council, Department for International Development and the Economic and Social Research Council. ESPA aims to provide new world-class research evidence demonstrating how ecosystem services can reduce poverty and enhance well-being for the world's poor."

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