

Economic & Social Research Council/University of Essex - gaining national media attention for academic research

"Amanda works hard to get the best results for her clients. She applies good strategic thinking and real know how to achieve a successful outcome. We were delighted with the scale of national media interest she generated for our findings".

Professor Paul Whiteley, University of Essex.

The Brief:

A major 5-year, £3.5 million research programme, funded by the Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC) was undertaken to examine voluntary activity by the British public that directly or indirectly influences government policy making. Amanda Barry-Hirst was appointed to create a communications strategy that would launch the study and then promote the key findings during and at the conclusion of the programme.

PR Objectives:

To ensure the findings reached a wider audience outside of the usual academic publications and special interest media. Achieving editorial coverage in the mass media was of prime importance.

PR Strategy:

A launch event was held at the House of Commons to introduce the aims and scope of the programme. Local elections due to take place at the same time, were used as a topical hook for the story, which resulted in national media interest. An interim conference mid-way through the 5-year programme provided further opportunity for media coverage and once again, the strategy of co-ordinating the media activity with local elections ensured results.

At the end of the programme, a final conference was organised to present the main findings, with the then Home Secretary Rt Hon David Blunkett as keynote speaker. Mr Blunkett agreed to take part in a BBC Radio 4 interview with Professor Whiteley on the morning of the conference, which boosted interest and attracted several journalists to the event.

A follow-up summary booklet of the key findings was produced and its publication used as another opportunity to gain national media interest.

Results:

Good national media editorial coverage was achieved at each key point of the campaign. The final findings secured the all-important national media attention, with The Daily Telegraph running a page 3 main feature, and the Daily Mail and The Week running news pieces. Several websites also covered the story, including bbc.co.uk. Professor Whiteley appeared on GMTV to discuss the implications of the research and took part in several regional radio interviews across the country.