NOTES FOR FACING THE MEDIA TRAINING

1. Even the briefest appearance on television or radio or the reported outcome of a press conference can deeply affect the public's perception of you as an individual and more importantly of the organisation you represent.

2. During the workshop we will help you to develop your ability to turn every encounter with the press, radio or television to your advantage. We intend to help you to evaluate your:-

2.1 ability to control the direction of the interview

2.2 credibility under stress and pressure

2.3 projection of personality and style

2.4 level of personal communication

2.5 voice production, projection and physical mannerisms.

3. We will explain media production methods, how programmes and stories are developed and give you first hand experience of a studio. We will help you to control the interview, sustain credibility and resist pressure.

4. Through practical exercises we will build on strengths and give you the confidence to deal with any unknown issues that may be raised during an interview.

5. Each of your television and radio interviews will be analysed for style, structure and effectiveness. Broadcast quality television and radio will be used throughout the course.

6. We will discuss how you can get over complicated policy and give the media what they need to produce a good radio or television interview.

7. At the end of the day we will help you to construct an action plan which will pull together what you have learned throughout the day and the positive steps you intend to take next.

FACING THE MEDIA

Television and radio interviews are opportunities to be grasped, not chores to be avoided. The more skilled you are in the field of being interviewed the more you will be able to control the situation with a positive contribution, rather than allowing yourself to be cornered into defensive or negative positions. The object of this booklet is to identify the skills which are necessary, suggest ways of preparing for an interview and how conduct yourself during it.

The Invitation

The invitation to appear must come through Communications Directorate. If you are asked directly for an interview let the appropriate team in Comms Directorate know immediately because they will want to be sure that the programme is appropriate, to establish the aim of the interview, who else is taking part, what the general line of questioning will be and to arrange any necessary clearances. Communications colleagues will also have the necessary lines to take on your subject area as well as any other issues running that day.

TELEVISION

1. Preparation in Advance

There is no reason for you to go into an interview unprepared. The following points should assist you in your planning and should also help you to identify any possible pitfalls.

You have the right to know:

1.1 Who is to do the interview.

1.2 The purpose of the interview.

1.3 How long it will last.

1.4 Whether it is to be broadcast live or recorded, whether face to face or "down the line".

1. 5 The main areas of questioning.

1.6 Whether there is to be an opponent, or a discussion group.

1.7 Whether a film extract is to be used (and if so to be able to view if beforehand).

You have the right to ask:

1.8 To discuss the subject matter with the interviewer/producer beforehand.

1.9 For promotional literature or telephone numbers to be displayed (although you might not be successful): give as much notice as possible.

1.10 To see a recorded interview replayed afterwards. (But remember that once the interview is given it is copyright of the TV company and generally you will have no say on what is or isn't used).

There is a checklist is at Annex A. Use this for your preparation of the subject matter:

1.11 Consider what you hope to achieve by doing the interview, ie what is your overall objective?

1.12 Write down 4 or 5 positive points to make during the course of the interview – examples and illustrations are much better than theory, policy, statistics or figures, so make sure that you have good short and relevant examples;

1.13 Think of likely areas of questioning and plan your answers;

1.14 Most essential is the key phrase or message, which should be used in answer to the very first question and hopefully also the last. This should be short, punchy, almost like a banner headline, which summarises any detail in a memorable way;

1.15 If there are any difficult or emerging issues (even outside your particular remit), assume they will emerge and prepare to deal with them (see resetting the Agenda).

Setting the Agenda

You should always establish the line of questioning beforehand and preferably get to know what the first question will be. You should also, if necessary, make it clear on which areas you cannot answer questions - whether for reasons of confidentiality, sub judice or an enquiry is underway, not your area of expertise: make your reason clear and unambiguous, or the interviewer may think that you are ducking an issue and will ask you anyway!

Resetting the Agenda

If you feel that the interviewer has asked inappropriate questions or is trying to steer you in an unacceptable direction, you can try to change or remove questions. This is often referred to as "resetting the agenda".

Tactics include:

1.16 Asserting your rights eg “I’m unable to go into details for legal reasons – but what I would say is (key message)

1.17 use of the key message eg “I disagree. What I believe is that (key message)

1.18 I cannot speak about a speak about a specific case due to confidentiality but in general terms our policy is…

1.19 The enquiry is underway and you will understand that I cannot discuss the specific issue you have raised but at the time the guidelines clearly set out ….

2. Appearance

The following comments, whilst intended primarily for TV studio interviews, can be of equal benefit for radio due to the increasing the use of live webcams in their facilities:

2.1 Avoid stark contrasts in dress, eg do not wear a very dark suit with a white shirt/blouse. Intermediate colours make a better picture. Avoid checks, herringbone and thin stripes, which can produce an effect on the television screen which appears as a continuous (and a very distracting) ripple. A number of studios now use “virtual” sets to produce their backgrounds. These are created using the effect commonly known in the industry as chromakey or blue/green screen. Avoid wearing light or vivid blue colours (in general dark blue presents no problem for chromakey). If in doubt ask if chromakey will be used before you arrive at the studio (and also what colours to avoid).

2.3 Studio lights and the interview situation can be intense. Do ask for make up or face powder if you think it necessary. The interviewer will almost certainly be wearing make up.

2.4 Much of the interview may be conducted in a 'close-up': that is an on-screen image of your head and shoulders only. The viewer becomes more aware than they normally would be of your appearance, The 1960 presidential debate between Nixon and Kennedy has been the subject of huge analysis over the years regarding the contrasting appearances of both Presidential candidates

2.5 For example a crooked tie or scarf will distract the audience, make sure therefore that you check in a mirror, with a colleague or with the presenter just before going on the air or carrying out an interview.

2.2 Dress appropriately for location interviews. You will feel most comfortable and therefore relaxed in clothing that is familiar to you but a working assumption should always be smart casual as the minimum to business attire unless told otherwise by the production team. If the interview is on location then it might be appropriate to appear in "working or outdoor clothing" say at beach clean up or launch of a forestry walk. If required all appropriate health and safety PPE must be adhered to (hi-vis, hardhats, lab coats, safety goggles etc.).

3. The Studio or location

For a number of reasons that you will be familiar with arrive in good time - don't be late as deadlines may mean if your interview is recorded there may not be time to edit it into the final broadcast package!.

4. The Interview

4.1 Immediately before the interview starts, make sure that you are sitting comfortably. Neither-slouch back in your chair nor lean too far forward.

4.2 Find a relaxed natural position for your hands. Mental tension often expresses itself through them and your message might be ruined by a close-up view of hand wringing or nail picking. Avoid playing with jewellery - it is very distracting for the viewer.

4.3 You may be on screen at any time (not just when you are speaking) so stay alert and look at the person who is talking (unless the interview Is "down the line", when you must look at the camera). The director may ask you to look to the right, or to the left or even slightly above the camera.

4.4 Focus on the interviewer and maintain strong eye contact.

4.5 The success of a TV appearance depends on how the speaker "comes across" to the viewer - so be friendly, confident and well informed. Viewers will be more impressed by sincerity than by a pedantic recital of facts, however accurate.

4.6 Remember you're an expert! You are important to the programme because you know your subject. No matter how well the interviewer has done their homework, they cannot know as much as you do. (Sometimes the 'research' which has been done may be no more than a paragraph cut from a paper or an internet search).

4.7 Let the interviewer finish asking the question before you start giving your answer. There is little time in a short interview for involved expositions, so stick to the point because otherwise the interviewer is likely to cut you short.

When answering, the Golden Rule is: Get your key message over as early as possible, preferably in answer to the first question. There is no point in saving the best till last, because if the interview is ended prematurely, your main point will be lost. If, however, the interviewer asks you for final comments, sum up with the key message also.

4.8 It is of course, important to give what is asked from you, but also to make the points you feel are important. Identify them beforehand, (see Section on Preparation and Annex B) so that even if the interviewer tries to steer you in another direction, you can put them over.

4.9 Do not be caught out if the interviewer puts on the pressure. Looking out for leading questions such as:

Leading questions: *"Would not you agree that this situation has been a disaster from start to finish?"*

Do not repeat the negative in question – use a firm positive statement:

"No I would not. An independent review has shown that procedures were carried out correctly, staff followed industry guidelines and the case was dealt within the timescales agreed with the national regulator."

Multiple Questions: "Why has your Department done nothing about this issue and how many customers will be affected; does this not mean that your policy on is not working?"

Answer the bit you want and throw in a positive point or key message.

Indirect accusation: "Some people might think that your actions amount to a dereliction of duty

Do not rise to the accusation; a firm statement again is better than a series of qualifications and tentative answers.

Avoid answering a negative question by restating it

Q "The radioactive leak at ..... is getting out of hand."

A "No it is not getting out of hand."

Although you are denying the charge, you have used the same negative words, thus reinforcing them. A more effective answer would be.

A "No it is not - we are in control of the situation" and list the positive actions that are taking place, an incident team is in place/an exclusion zone set up/we have secured the site/emergency services are currently in place and working to evacuate the area etc.

Remember do not be drawn into speculation – *it is too early to say what happened our priority right now is the safety of the public, the people who were working at the facility and the emergency services staff who are currently on site.*

False introduction

"With record bankruptcies and rising inflation, it is obvious that the economic dream has turned into a nightmare .... Tell us about your Department's initiatives".

Whilst it is important to deal with this misleading introduction, It is not wise to get sucked into a detailed rebuttal. A response such as.... *"I think your introduction was very pessimistic....."* and following through with your key message, is sufficient.

4.10 Things to avoid

4.10.1 When you have answered the question, STOP TALKING. An interviewer may pause at the end of your answer to encourage you to commit yourself further than you might wish to. It is for the interviewer to fill the pause, so keep quiet.

4.10.2 Avoid jargon, because it will alienate viewers who find it incomprehensible or irritating. But if you must use jargon explain what you mean in layman's terms. Avoid initials - HMG, DTI, NPL, LGC. Better still, paint clear pictures with examples, illustrations, anecdotes and analogies.

4.10.3 There will be less time than you think to put your point across, so avoid background details unless they are necessary, and even then keep them down.

4.10.4 Avoid the temptation to fight fire with fire. The audience will only judge you to be rude also. If the interviewer is openly rude or hostile resist the temptation to fight back. Stay calm and state your case. Being thoroughly reasonable is what persuades an audience.

5. Discussions

If you take part in a group discussion do not rely on the Chair to bring you in. It will be up to you break in, particularly if the Chair feels that sufficient information is being given by the others. Have all the facts at your fingertips, so that you are able to make relevant points and thus contribute effectively to the discussion. Remember that all the participants are competing for air time. Make sure you get your share.

A useful tip for dealing with a long-winded "opponent" is to bear in mind that there will always be a camera on you (even when you are not speaking). This is important - your body language can be used to your advantage, ie slowly and deliberately shake your head. The producer may intercut this shot of you, which obviously allows you to disagree with someone without you saying a word!

6. Down the Line

The sort of interview where you are miles away from the interviewer, who is speaking to you via a screen (monitor), and where you will probably be fitted with a 'deaf aid' to hear the questions.

Many of the rules for face to face interviews apply here. But the main difference is that you will have to concentrate harder. In a television down-the-line interview, remember to talk to the camera You might be in vision even when you are not speaking - ie in this situation, always assume that the camera is on you.

7. On-the-spot News

There is an outbreak of industrial trouble or perhaps a public emergency and you are involved in an official capacity. A microphone is thrust in front of you. How should you react? Even though you are authorised you to speak, remember that ill-chosen answers could be damaging. Be brief. Interviews and statements in such circumstances demand coolness, quick thinking and knowledge of the facts. Be aware of the implications of the situation for both the Scottish Government and the public. Be as reassuring as is truthfully possible-

Accidents or emergencies are news and reporters are trained to ask vital questions - who, what, when, where and why? In effect, you may be asked to apportion blame. Remember “It’s too early to say”followed by a list of the positive actions that have been put in place.

8. Using locations

Interviews can take place in a studio, but more often are conducted in other environments (following on from a press conference, in your office, even in the street). Always be sure that the location does not reflect negatively on your point of view; in a location interview you will not only be conveying words but images as well and it is important that the image does not contradict the message.

For example if an area in you portfolio has made a potentially unpopular decision or produced controversial findings, do not be interviewed in front of placard-waving protesters, picket lines etc.

But also if you are interviewed at an exhibition, you may want to create business-like atmosphere by having background hustle and bustle.

9. The Radio Interview

The techniques for radio interviews are broadly similar to those for television. There are, however, some important differences:

9.1 Anecdotes and relevant case studies/human interest stories are crucial, as are illustrations and examples to back up main points.

9.2 Analogies are also important: the TV viewer can be shown a picture. The radio listener must be able to draw their own mental picture from the information the interviewee gives them.

9.3 It is still important to look presentable and sit properly – the webcam point made earlier. You will feel more confident.

9.4 There is no thinking time on radio. On TV the viewer has the picture to look at when there is a few seconds of silence. On radio there is nothing. Knowing the brief is the only answer.

9.5 It is much easier to have notes for guidance; on TV it would be a distraction but please do not rustle them. Keep these notes as aides they should be short bullet points - around 6-8. You can have a few key statistics/figures to hand but remember it is not possible to go through a long document to find the ones you need!

9.6 Demonstrating enthusiasm and sincerity is easier on camera: you can look the part. On radio it is all in the voice. You must sound interested, no matter how often you have said the same things before - the listener has not heard it before.

Recorded Interviews

9.8 Avoid monosyllabic answers to questions. Answer each question with a positive point or statement. It gives the producer more of a selection to edit.

9.9 It is even more important when doing recorded interviews to make every word count and to keep statements short and punchy. The finished interview may be only be a couple of minutes.

9.10 Clear your line with the interviewer beforehand about rerunning questions you are not happy with.

Annex A

FACING THE MEDIA - INTERVIEW PREPARATION SHEETS

Name:

Division/Organisation:

Good News: ☐

Defensive: ☐

Other: ☐

Subject (title) :Possible reasons for interview and whether radio or television is more likely:

Your objective or what you hope to achieve during the interview :

Positive points you wish to make in the interview (mention any examples which would illustrate or reinforce your points)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Expected questions (include at least one which has the potential to get you into difficulty)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

What is your key message or phrase?