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Winners announced in national competition

Primary school children and university students have been unpicking the evidence to find the real research behind news headlines.

Rewrite the Headlines is a national competition encouraging school children and students to explore how the latest research is turned into headline news, and the winners are announced today (28 January).

Working with schools and universities throughout Scotland, the Rewrite the Headlines competition aimed to help young people better understand what research is, how it gets translated from specialised areas to popular media, and then how they might translate it back.

The initiative was run by the academics and researchers behind Research the Headlines, a blog which discusses research and the media, created by members of the Royal Society of Edinburgh Young Academy of Scotland.

After completing workshops, schools were encouraged to find their own media report of research, unpick the story and then give the piece their own new headline. This new headline and a short explanation of their changes formed their entry into the Rewrite the Headlines competition.

The winning class, from St Roch's Primary School, Glasgow, turned the recent headline 'Processed meats do cause cancer – WHO', into 'Eating processed meat slightly increases risk of cancer'. The research story was one which had generated a lot of interest and confusion when originally released and the judges were impressed with how the class explained their new headline.

Dr Sinead Rhodes, Senior Lecturer in Psychology, School of Psychological Sciences and Health at the University of Strathclyde, commented, "The class very cleverly explained the concept of risk and had worked out that eating processed meat is associated with an enhanced risk of one extra person per 100. They used this knowledge to alter the headline to be more accurate. It was great to see our schools really getting into their chosen stories, often coming up with much clearer headlines than the original."

In the university category students were tasked with preparing a short blog exploring a recent research finding which had been discussed in the media and was open to students from across Scotland. Dr Alan Gow, Associate Professor in Psychology in the School of Life Sciences at Heriot-Watt University, noted, "We were delighted by the high quality of the entries received and the diversity of areas covered. The winning entries all showcased the skills the students have been developing during their undergraduate training in interpreting and evaluating research studies, and ensuring that these often complex findings are effectively communicated to different audiences."

The winning undergraduate entry was from Abbey Wrathall, a student at the University of Edinburgh. In her blog entry entitled 'So, should you wait until Monday to take your child to hospital?', Abbey explored recent media coverage about whether weekend versus weekday hospital admissions might be associated with poorer outcomes. This topic is still very much in the news, and the judges recognised the importance of careful reporting given that it might directly affect the choices which people make.

Dr Gow said, “We’d like to thank the British Academy for funding this initiative. We’ve also been overwhelmed by the support received from our colleagues and universities, and the enthusiasm of the school children and students who took part.” Dr Rhodes added, “Given the interest in Rewrite the Headlines, we’re exploring further opportunities to ensure it can become an annual event.”

The Rewrite the Headlines competition was supported by funding from the British Academy with additional funding from the University of Strathclyde. The prize giving ceremony is being hosted at Our Dynamic Earth, Edinburgh, with the winning school receiving a VIP tour before receiving their prize from Dr Bunhead.

You are invited to send a reporter/photographer to the event on 28 January at Our Dynamic Earth, Edinburgh. Arrival at the event is from 12.30pm, and the prize giving will run from 12.45-1.30pm, followed by a reception until 2.00pm. To attend, please contact Vivienne Macdonald (V.M.MacDonald@hw.ac.uk). Photographs will be taken at the event, including of the winning school. If you require images to accompany your coverage contact Alan Gow (A.J.Gow@hw.ac.uk).

Competition details can be accessed at <http://researchtheheadlines.org/rewritetheheadlines>, and the winning entries will be showcased at <http://researchtheheadlines.org/> from 29 January onwards.

For further information, please contact:

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Dr Sinead Rhodes: sinead.rhodes@strath.ac.uk; 07801 363736

The full list of winners is:

School competition

Winning school: St Roch’s Primary School, Glasgow:

‘Eating processed meat slightly increases risk of cancer’

Original headline: ‘Processed meats do cause cancer – WHO’

Subject prize in Physics: St Francis of Assisi Primary RC School, Glasgow:

‘12% chance that a large solar flare could hit Earth - The White House is taking notice’

Original headline: ‘White House is preparing for catastrophic solar flares which could wipe out power around the world for months - bringing an end to modern civilization as we know it’

Subject prize in Life Sciences: St Joseph’s Primary School, Glasgow:

‘Scientists discover hormone in the fight against diabetes’

Original headline: ‘Forget the gym: Scientists discover a hormone that gives you the same benefits as exercise without breaking a sweat’

Runners-up: Sandaig Primary School, Glasgow:

‘Roast and toast less for a healthier diet’

Original headline: ‘Your breakfast May give you cancer: Food safety watchdog warns dangers of crunchy toast and roast potatoes’

St. Mun’s Primary School, Dunoon:

‘Could The Fresh Sea Air Be Life Threatening?’

Original headline: ‘Fresh sea air ‘full of deadly pollution’

Highly commended:

Towerbank Primary School, Edinburgh:

'Aliens or otherwise? Unusual light patterns surrounding star confuses scientists'

Original headline: 'Alien megastructure' could surround giant star baffling scientists looking for new planets'

St Fillan's Primary RC School, Glasgow:

'Can champagne boost the brain?'

Original headline: 'Drinking three glasses of champagne every week 'could prevent dementia''

Milesmark Primary School, Dunfermline:

'Some pigeons are smart enough to detect breast cancer, but not smart enough to replace doctors'

Original headline: 'How pigeons can detect cancer – and could replace doctors'

Undergraduate competition: Titles of winning blogs

Winning student:

Abbey Wrathall, University of Edinburgh: 'So, should you wait until Monday to take your child to hospital?'

Subject prize in Social Science:

Sarah Keith, University of Aberdeen: 'Can films really boost your memory?'

Subject prize in History:

Dalia Sara Gala, University of Glasgow: 'Ötzi the Iceman and his bacteria – did he really suffer?'

Subject prize in Social Policy:

David McElroy, Abertay University: 'How did The Sun work out that "1 in 5 Brit Muslims have sympathy for jihadis"?'

Commended:

Fraser Barker, University of Strathclyde: 'Will a square jaw help Trump win in 2016?'

Hannah Miller, University of Glasgow: 'Can societies without electricity reveal how our ancestors slept?'

Emmi de Vries, University of Glasgow: "'Dr. Dillner' Dilema". Or: The Challenges of a Practical Application of Research Findings'

Ajay Shah, University of St. Andrews: 'OMG, Bacon Causes Cancer! (When Pigs Fly....)'

Notes for Editors:

Rewrite the Headlines – additional details

Experts from the Research the Headlines group and other researchers hosted workshops in participating schools to explore recent examples of research being reported in the media. Schools were also supported in running the workshops themselves. Workshops were hosted in about 100 schools reaching over 5000 pupils.

Prizes were supported by the British Academy, the University of Strathclyde, the School of Chemistry at the University of St. Andrews the University of St. Andrews, the School of Social Work and Social Policy at the University of Strathclyde, the University of Dundee School of Life Sciences, and the Particle Physics Experiment Research Group at the University of Edinburgh, the Social Research Association, the Scottish History Society, and Palgrave Macmillan.

Research the Headlines

Research the Headlines (<http://researchtheheadlines.org>) addresses the way in which research is discussed and portrayed in the media. Posts often take recent media coverage of a piece of research as a starting point, and will allow readers to get to a better understanding of what was really done, and what it might mean for them, from an expert but independent position. The blog is intended to be of interest to those with and without any training in research. Research the Headlines is a working group of the RSE Young Academy of Scotland (<http://www.youngacademyofscotland.org.uk/>).

Dr Sinead Rhodes (University of Strathclyde) and Dr Alan Gow (Heriot-Watt University) are members of the RSE Young Academy of Scotland and Co-chairs of Research the Headlines.

Rewrite the Headlines is an initiative of Research the Headlines, jointly led by Dr Sinead Rhodes (University of Strathclyde) and Dr Alan Gow (Heriot-Watt University).

The Rewrite the Headlines competition is funded by a British Academy Rising Star Engagement Award to Dr Gow with additional funding from the University of Strathclyde to Dr Sinead Rhodes.



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The RSE Young Academy of Scotland fosters interdisciplinary activities among emerging leaders from the disciplines of science and humanities, the professions, the arts, business and civil society. Established by the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 2011, the Young Academy of Scotland provides a platform for able and innovative young entrepreneurs, professionals and academics to develop a coherent and influential voice, and to address the most challenging issues facing society in Scotland and beyond.

For interviews or queries regarding Rewrite the Headlines, contact Alan Gow (A.J.Gow@hw.ac.uk).