

# ESO Media Poll 2011

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## 1. The ESO Media Poll 2011

The 2011 ESO Media Poll was distributed to people through the ePOD press and the AAS mailing lists, and responses were collected for two weeks between 24 June and 8 July 2011.

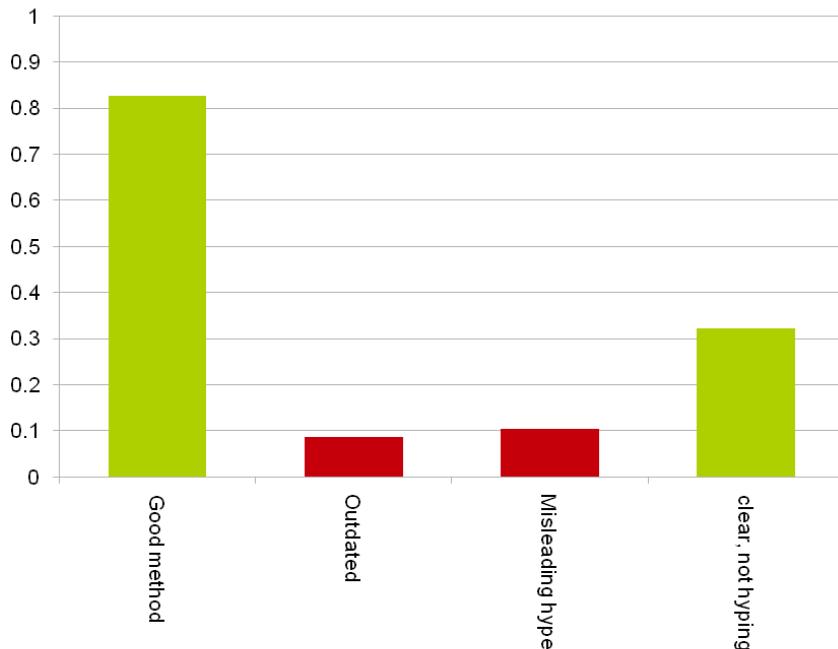
130 anonymous members of the press participated. 16 PIOs (part-time or full-time) were excluded from this analysis so as to focus exclusively on the needs of *bona fide* journalists, leaving 114 as the total number of participants, with an average age of 46. Of these, 36% came from the USA and Germany (in an equal split). The rest of the journalists are spread internationally, with a total of 75% from the ESO Member States.

The report gives a brief summary of the data, and a preliminary analysis, rather than a fully fledged statistical treatment. All questions have been included. All answers have been included, except for free text comments that could indicate the identity of the respondents.

## 2. Advance Notice System

*At ESO we use an Advance Notice System that gives journalists access to all our news items ~48 hours in advance of public release. We call this “under embargo” just because it is a well-established term to mark that the news is not for public consumption yet. You can read more the background [here](#).*

1. Do you find this system to be: (tick all that apply)

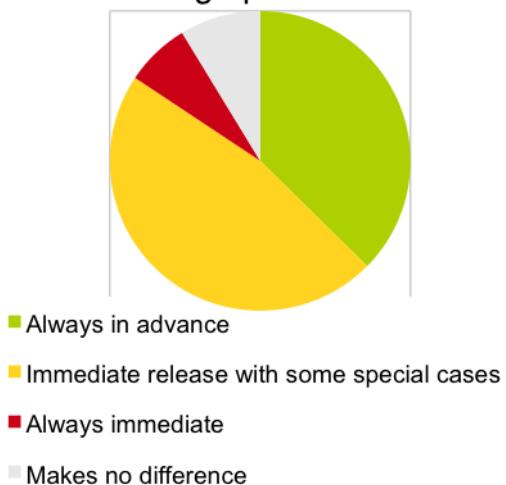


Findings:

- i. 83% find the embargoes a “good method”
- ii. 10% find them “misleading hype”

2. How would you prefer that we issue news items? (tick one)

Embargo preferences

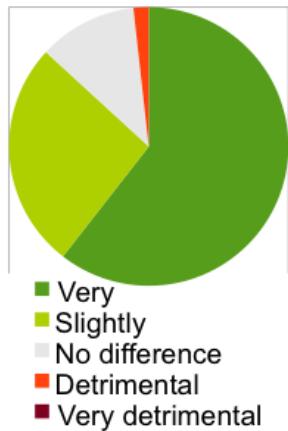


Findings:

- i. 37% favour always receiving the release in advance.
- ii. 54% favour receiving the releases for "immediate release" with embargo for some special cases or no embargo at all.

3. How useful it is for you to receive our news in advance of public release? (tick one)

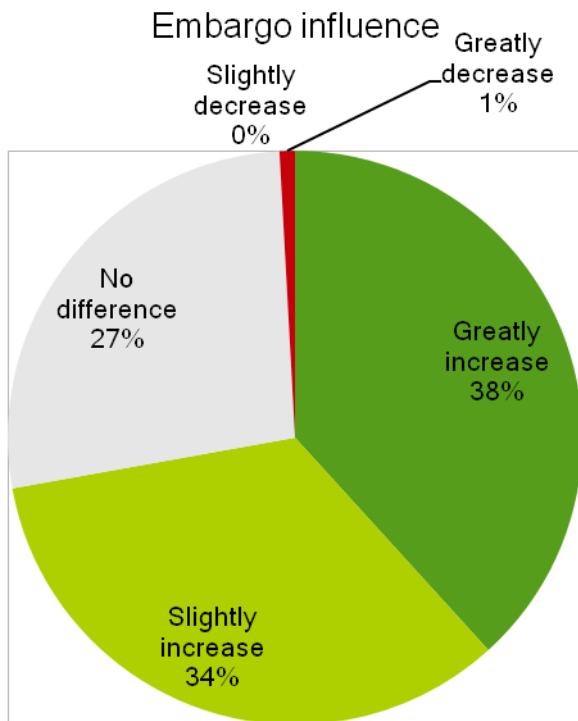
Embargo usefulness



Findings:

- i. 87% find the advance notice system slightly or very useful

4. How does having access to information in advance influence the chance of you covering the topic, provided it is newsworthy? (tick one)



**Findings:**

- i. 72% find that the advance notice system at least slightly increases the chance of covering the news item.
- ii. 1% find that the advance notice system at least slightly decreases the chance of covering the news item.

5. Other comments about our advance notice system (free text):

- Would like to see it at 72 hrs
- For my news-oriented blog it is very convenient with advance info.
- Please maintain it, it takes time to have the ok from big newspaper....
- It does take some time to get an article together so the embargo period helps give you some time
- Happy with it as it stands
- 48 h is not enough if I want publish the information in my print magazine. 5 days would be better
- Consider pitching selected stories to specific media?
- You should note clearly that this news is under embargo as all of your news are - otherwise it generates this hype-thing which would lead us to not covering the story.
- Advance is important because I scout for a popular tv programme
- As a reporter for a non-English news media, I find the embargo system extremely useful (one reason for that among many - i simply have more time to come up with all the correct translations and equivalents)
- It would be much better to use, when there are news that require some research to write on, When the releases are mostly centered on the pretty pictures, it is a menace
- I work at a television station, and I have received your embargoed press releases for many years. Having the lead time to prepare the story has resulted in MANY more of

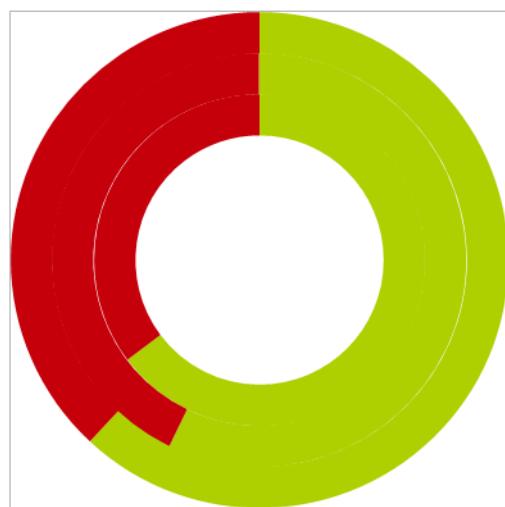
your stories being done on my channel than if I received the press release with no advance notice. Please do not change the embargoed release protocol.

- I don't like embargoed press releases because I can't create a story right away. And because I can't create a story right away, I put the press release aside -- and then forget about it.
- I think you need better targeting. Sometimes the releases are only exciting to a subset of your news list, and hence with the right filtering, you could make it more effective.
- Advance Notice helps me to prepare an article when I have time - not when it arrives.
- It is one of the best system.
- I'd probably prefer the entire press release to be contained within the email, rather than having to log in with a password to read it, simply because when scanning through all the press releases that arrive in my inbox it is easier to decide which ones are worth covering when I can clearly see what they are all about.
- Thanks for asking our feedback!
- Hard to maintain if results are already available online elsewhere

### 3. Type of ESO releases

- 6. *Have you ever noticed that we have Science Releases, Photo Releases and Organisation Releases as 3 types of releases? (tick one)*

Know types of releases  
Sc.J / Gen.J. / FreeL (out->in)



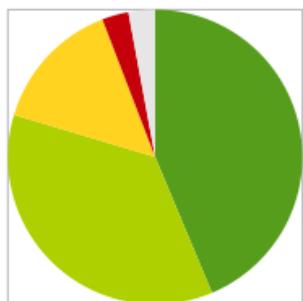
■ Yes      ■ No

#### Findings:

- i. 64% have noticed the different release types

7. *Photo Releases present a new image, not necessarily connected with a scientific discovery. Would you consider publishing such a photo and a short explanation? (tick one)*

### Would publish Photo



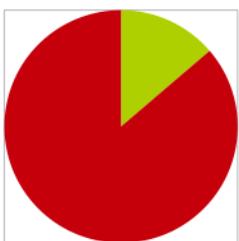
■ Yes  
■ Maybe  
■ Probably not  
■ No

### Findings:

- i. 80% would maybe or definitely consider publishing a photo release.

8. *Are you subscribed to our [Announcements RSS feed](#)? (tick one)*

### Subscribed to RSS



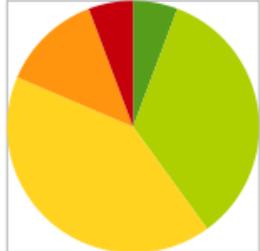
■ Yes ■ No

### Findings:

- i. 14% subscribe to RSS feeds

9. If you read our Announcements (as opposed to our Press Releases), do you find them newsworthy? (tick one)

### Announcement newsworthy



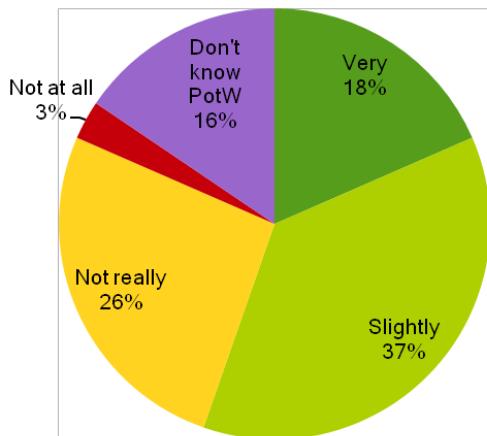
- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

Findings:

- i. 81% at least sometimes find the Announcements newsworthy.

10. Every Monday, we release a *Picture of the Week*. Is this newsworthy in your opinion? (tick one)

### PotW newsworthy



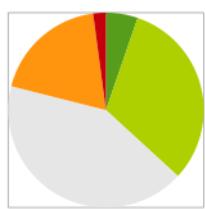
Findings:

- i. 55% find the PotWs at least slightly newsworthy.

## 4. Content of ESO Releases

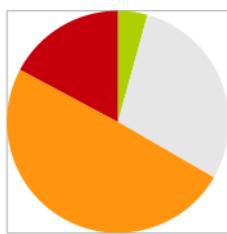
11. Do you find ESO releases:

ESO Releases  
Technical



- Always
- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

ESO Releases  
Superficial



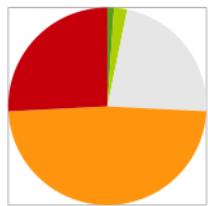
- Always
- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

ESO Releases  
Balanced  
Science/  
Accessibility



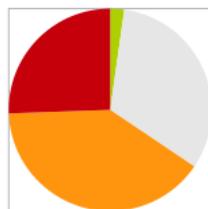
- Always
- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Rarely

ESO Releases  
Sensationalist



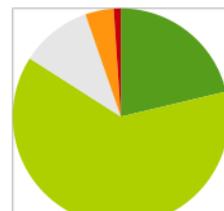
- Always
- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

ESO Releases  
Dull



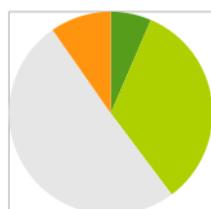
- Always
- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Rarely

ESO Releases  
Fact-based



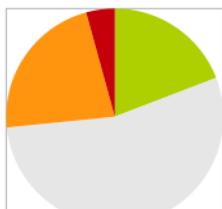
- Always
- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

### ESO Releases Exciting



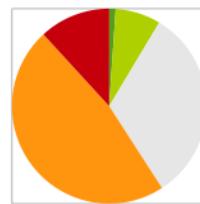
- Always
- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Rarely

### ESO Releases Similar one to another



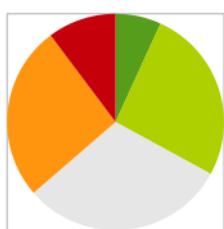
- Always
- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

### ESO Releases Long



- Always
- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Rarely

### ESO Releases Frequent

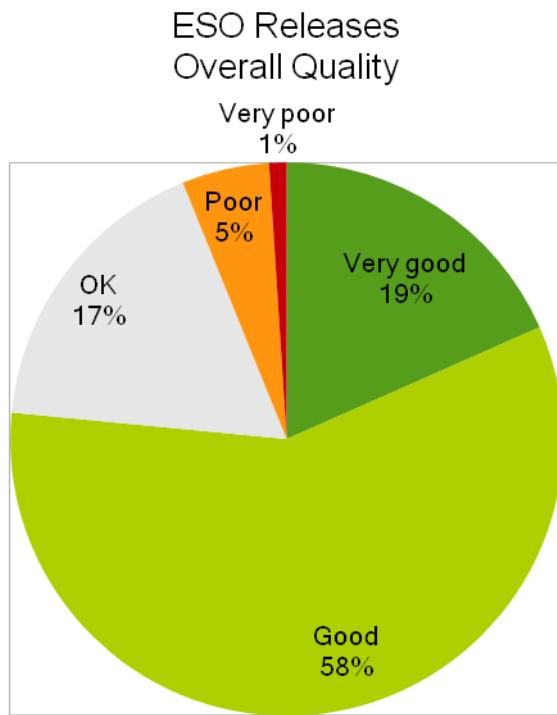


- Always
- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

#### Findings:

- i. 81% at least sometimes find the ESO releases technical
- ii. 33% at least sometimes find the ESO releases superficial
- iii. 99% at least sometimes find the ESO releases to be balanced scientifically vs. accessibility for the non-scientific public
- iv. 26% at least sometimes find the ESO releases sensationalist
- v. 34% at least sometimes find the ESO releases dull
- vi. 95% at least sometimes find the ESO releases fact-based
- vii. 90% at least sometimes find the ESO releases exciting
- viii. 73% at least sometimes find the ESO releases similar to each other
- ix. 41% at least sometimes find the ESO releases long
- x. 64% at least sometimes find the ESO releases too frequent

12. Please give an overall grade to our press releases, on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is very poor and 5 is very good (tick one)



#### Findings:

- i. 77% find the ESO releases at least "good"
- ii. 6% find them "poor" or "very poor"
- iii. The average mark is **3.88/5**

- Comment (free text):

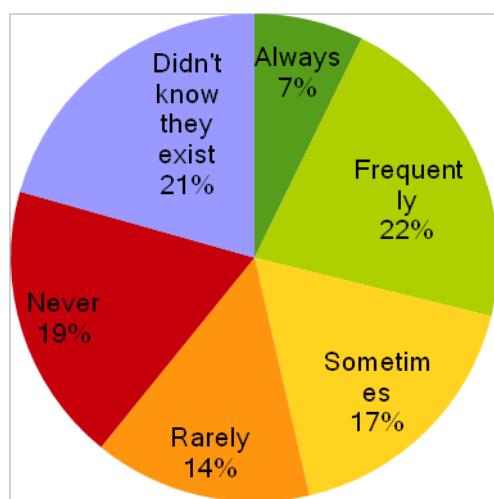
- For a TV journalist it would be great to have more of these excellent 3D animations!
- Some interest me more than others but all are a very high standard
- I know it is supposed to be "good media" to include quotes from authors, but I would prefer just the facts and details.
- Not enough technical, as it was some years ago
- Lack of VLT news, hardly any VLT pictures
- Quality varies greatly. Some texts are good and snappy, others are overly long and stuffed with too many quotations. Identify who writes the short and snappy ones, and let them do all the writing!
- That is a thing I would never do!
- I would prefer more technical information - but well explained, less personal comment.
- Introductory information is important, but it is helpful to have the scientific or technical detail as well - this often makes more sense than the 'mediaspeak' explanations.
- More pictures and less drawings
- Always good sober talk! But to reach public interest it needs a catchy intriguing headline (Most often you use word-plays)
- There is no such thing as too much information. We journalists use what we need. One suggestion: provide English pronunciation for any names (both of the astronomical object and the scientists mentioned in the release). You can just do this at the top or bottom of the release...just include a little "pronunciation guide".
- Although I continue my point. Have a rating system for the value of the news and offer that for press releases

- Focus on big news
- Style has improved greatly in the past 25 years, giving more credit to similar/previous work by others - with honesty in this respect, everything stands or falls!
- You often bury the important stuff. I have to dig to see what the story is really about, even though THAT was the reason YOU issued the press release in the first place.
- The best way to spread space science awareness has been adopted by you, no words to express the feelings.

## 5. Accompanying materials (artist's impressions, short videos)

13. How often have you used the translated press releases that ESO provides?  
(tick one)

Use the translations

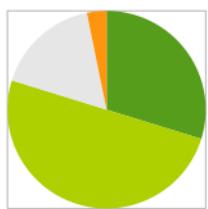


Findings:

- i. 21% did not know translations existed
- ii. 46% at least sometimes use the translations

14. How do you find ESO's illustrations/artist impressions?

Illustrations &  
artist  
impressions  
Useful



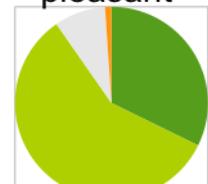
- Always
- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

Illustrations &  
artist  
impressions  
Scientifically  
correct



- Always
- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

Illustrations &  
artist  
impressions  
Visually  
pleasant



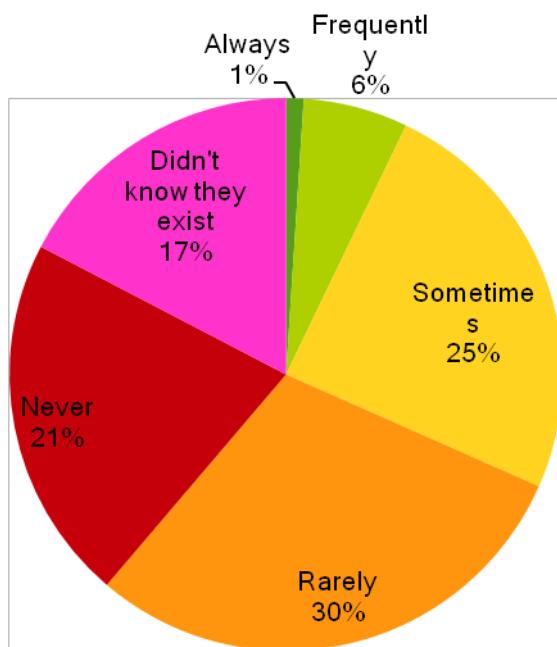
- Always
- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

Findings:

- i. 97% at least sometimes find the illustrations useful
- ii. 89% at least sometimes find the illustrations scientifically correct
- iii. 90% at least sometimes find the illustrations visually pleasant

15. How often do you use our panoramic videos? (Eg. [Pan](#))

Use pan videos

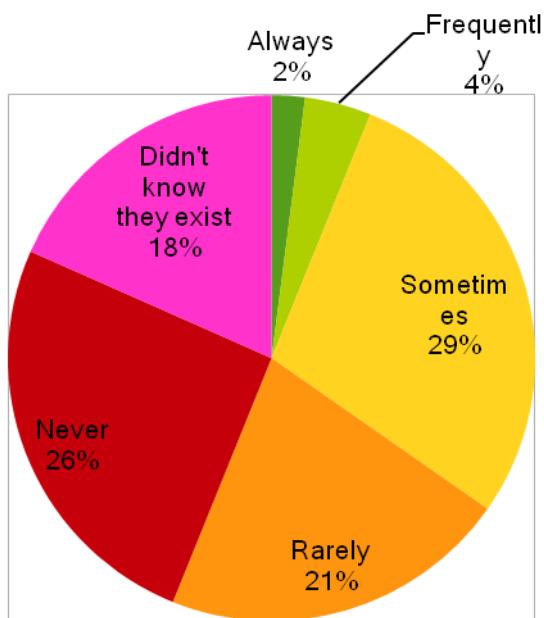


Findings:

- i. 32% at least sometimes use the pan videos

16. How often do you use our short zoom in videos? (Eg. [Zoom](#))

### Use zoom videos

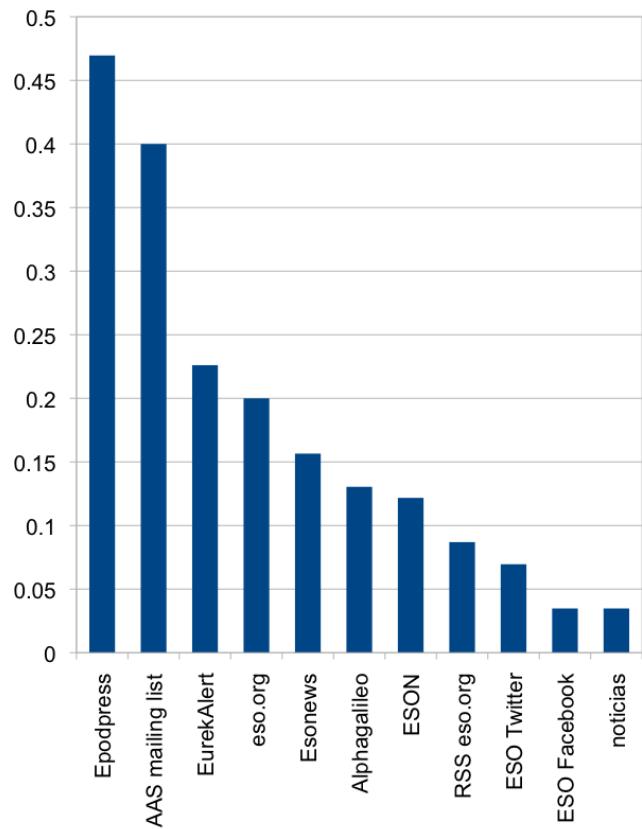


#### Findings:

- i. 35% at least sometimes use the zoom videos

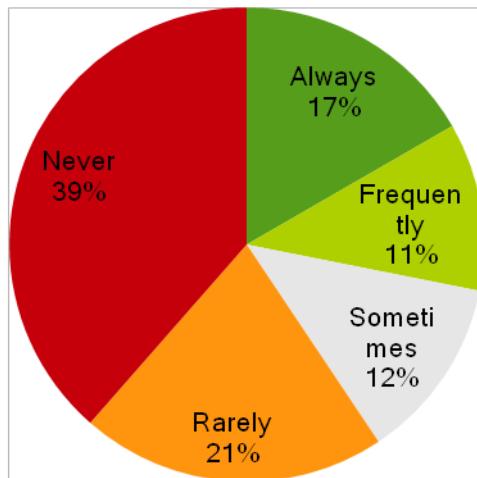
## 6. Channels

17. From where do you receive ESO press releases? (tick all that apply)



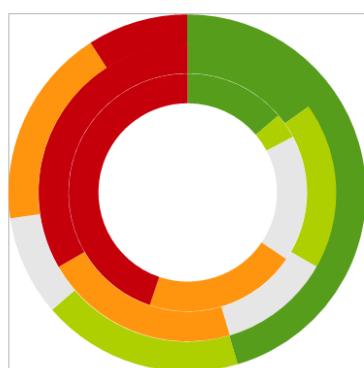
18. Do you follow social media outlets such as Twitter to find interesting news?

Use social media  
to find news



(tick one)

Use social media to find news  
Age: ...-34 / 35-44 / 45-... (out -> in)



■ Always ■ Frequently ■ Sometimes ■ Rarely ■ Never

Use social media to find news  
Sc.J / Gen.J / FreeL (out->in)



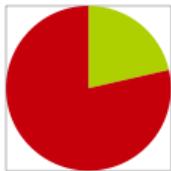
■ Always ■ Frequently ■ Sometimes  
■ Rarely ■ Never

Findings:

- ii. 40% at least sometimes use social media to find the news
- i. This strongly anti-correlates with age (the older you are the less likely you are to find news via Twitter & Facebook)

19. Do you follow ESO's Twitter feed? (@ESO\_Observatory) (tick one)

## Follow ESO's twitter



■ Yes ■ No

Findings:

- i. 21% follow ESO's twitter feed

## 7. 20. How else could ESO improve in its communication? (free text)

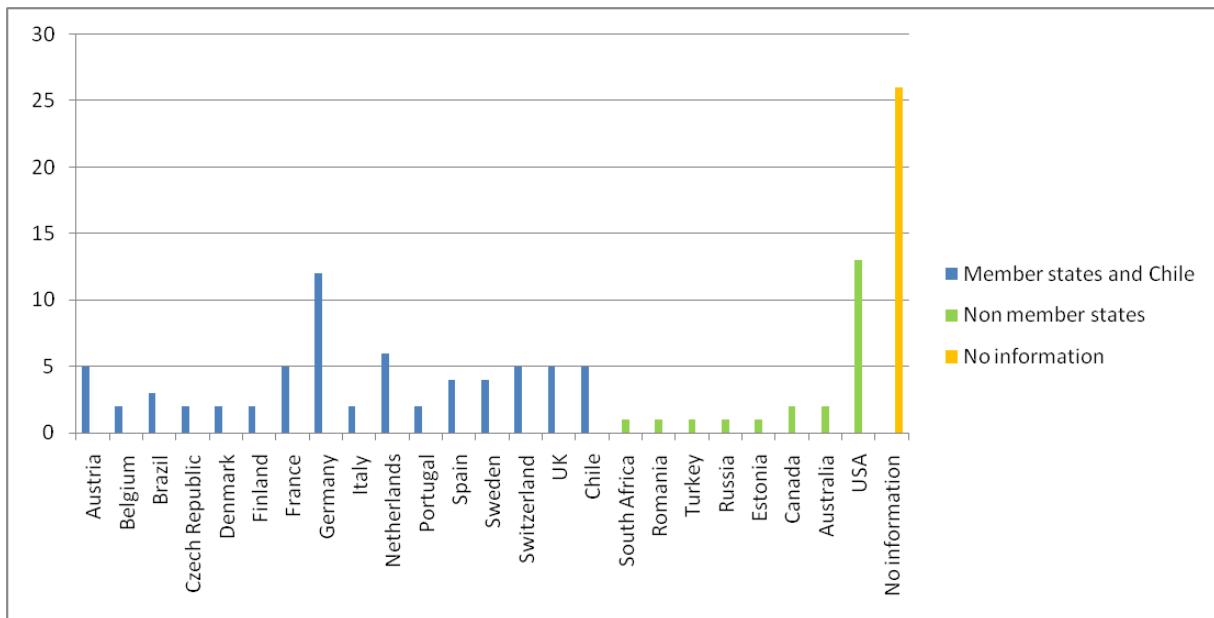
- Bring forward the science in a less biased manner
- Again, 72 hrs on embargoed material.
- No complaints here, you are doing a fine job.
- For me, that's great as it is.
- It is fine as it is
- More science news from VLT
- Press releases are, by definition, for journalists. That means: clarity before style (e.g.: if repetition will take away from the elegance, but help with ambiguity, use it!). Don't try to do our work for us by pretending you're a newspaper writer. Write a text we can use, and let us do the cute headlines and the puns (if we so choose).
- Exhibitions, events
- Emails could be a little bit more frequent
- Public domain access to all images and videos
- Perhaps some 'background' information about instruments in a media section of the site?
- Educate and assist local outreach groups, especially in the recently admitted EU countries
- Pretty pictures are great, but from a scientific source like ESO, they need a science-value and news-worth
- Introduce a feature that sorts all video material by the time it was released - the video website is near-total chaos.
- Try to shorten some news, you may put illustrative images when you found it will serve the purpose.
- I'd like to see more online press conferences.
- Brevity and if something is actually newsworthy, broadcast it.
- Yearly media workshops (preferably connected to press conference with interesting news) on broader topics, like exoplanets, E-ELT progress, early universe, etc.

## 8. 21. Any other comments (free text)

- You really do a great job!
- Always supply (as you do) the highest resolution images possible Keep providing the amazing videos and illustrations
- more videos with only music background
- It's a pleasure to work with ESO.
- I am an astronomer who also does a lot of communication with the media and the public through lectures and talks using PPT. One frustration is that sometime I really want to use a movie/video clip but cannot import it into my PPT - is it possible to make these clips available in more than one format and include mpeg files. Many thanks in anticipation!
- In the past, ESO PR were at the same time "popular" and "technic", it was nearly perfect. Today, I think the "technic" part is sometimes forgotten.
- Great service, has tremendously improved over the past year however: still too few VLT news, hardly any VLT pictures.
- Brief bios of the lead scientists would be helpful. Even as a serious science journalist, you cannot ignore the human angle of the story. Knowing some of the protagonist's background helps.
- Can be difficult to find out how an instrument or technique works. The releases tend to simplify and refer to research papers. Something in between would be helpful for my work, but may not be generally helpful.
- Many thanks to ESO for being a great source of astronomy news. I hope Russia will eventually join ESO and we will have even more reasons to write about it!
- Just to say again, the embargoed releases are vital because they give us lead time to produce our stories and have them ready to use the day the embargo is lifted. Receiving the release without advance notice diminishes the chance that your information will be reported (especially on television channels).
- I could not find a "living" facebook page of ESO, only this one which does not seem to provide any news: [https://www.facebook.com/pages/European-Southern-Observatory/106068476092155](https://www.facebook.com/pages/European-Southern-Observatory/106068476092155?ref=ts&sk=info#!/pages/European-Southern-Observatory/106068476092155)
- Better quotes from scientists earlier in the release, more on the implications
- Twitter is useful for finding the best papers at meetings but not for finding the best news on a given day. I think RSS is better for press releases as it hangs around a lot longer than twitter news does.
- I found the press office very useful and they usually get back to me in an efficient and professional manner. Well done, guys!
- With original astronomical images it would help to have them available in different processing steps, from reduced raw all the way to fancy colour composite with labels - STScI does this quite well, and \*all\* astronomical institutions should follow that example!
- My best wishes for your great work, you do not know but your continuous impact helps to make a new era of youth with broader thoughts & vision of space science.

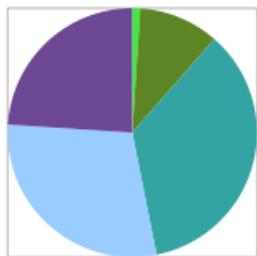
## 9. Demographics

### 22. Country



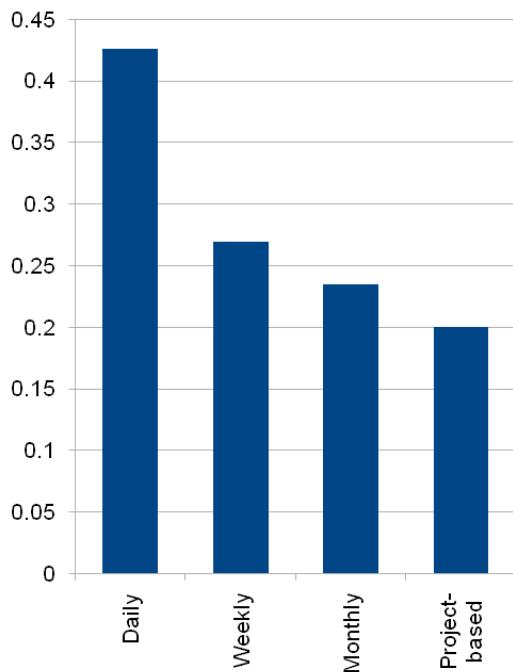
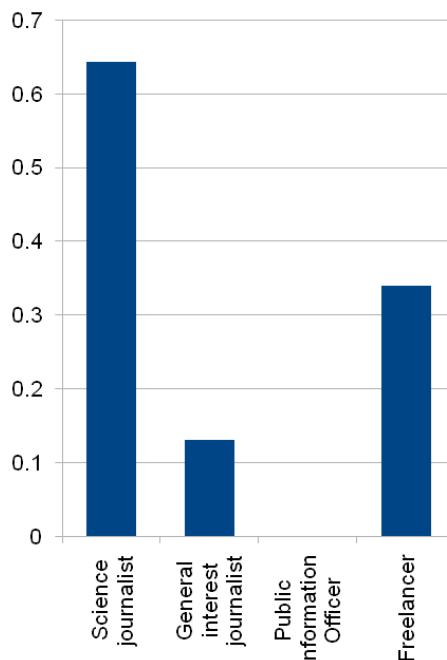
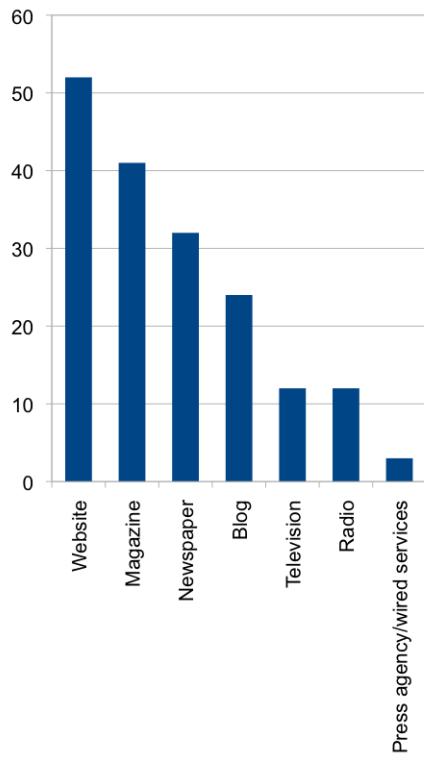
### 23. Age (tick one)

#### Age distribution



- 18-21 ■ 22-34
- 35-44 ■ 45-54
- 55+

*24. Media outlet that you report for:*



**Findings:**

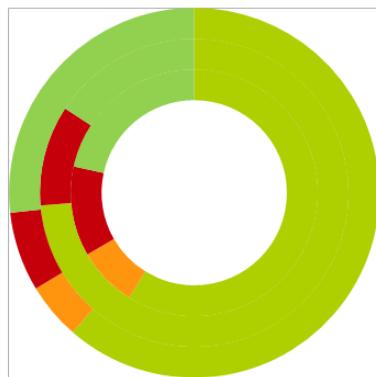
- At least 64% of the journalists are specialised science journalists
- The majority (57%) of the journalists belong to traditional media (magazine, newspaper, TV, radio, news agencies)

## 10. Correlations

Here follows some further correlations of the data presented above.

*Correlate the evaluation of the embargo (Q1) with the type of journalists (Q22):*

Embargo perception  
Sc.J / Gen.J / FreeL (out->in)



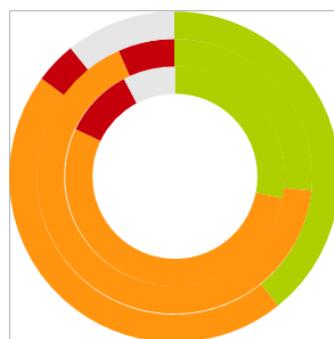
- Good method
- Misleading hype
- Outdated method
- Clearly explained, not hyping

Findings:

- i. General journalists are more in favour of the advance notice system than the other types of journalists

*Correlate the preference for receiving news (Q2), with the type of journalists (Q22):*

Embargo preference  
Sc.J / Gen.J / FreeL  
(out->in)



- Always in advance
- Immediate release with some special cases
- Always immediate
- Makes no difference

Findings:

- i. However, science journalists need the advance notice more

*Correlate the usefulness of the embargo (Q3) with the type of journalists (Q22):*

Embargo usefulness  
Sc.J / Gen.J / FreeL  
(out->in)



■ Very useful      ■ Slightly useful  
■ No difference    ■ Detrimental  
■ Very detrimental

**Findings:**

- i. General journalists find the advance notice more useful

*Correlate the coverage (Q4) with the type of journalists (Q22):*

Embargo influence  
Sc.J / Gen.J / FreeL  
(out->in)



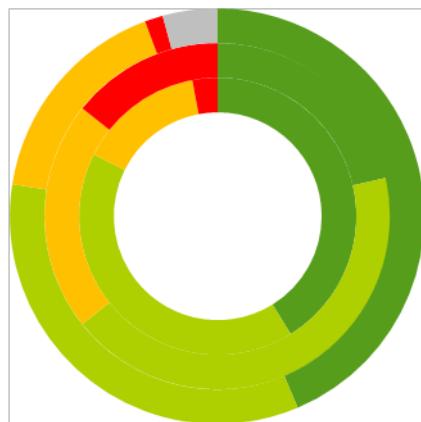
■ Greatly increase      ■ Slightly increase  
■ No difference          ■ Slightly decrease  
■ Greatly decrease

**Findings:**

- i. The advance notice increases the chance of coverage for general journalists slightly more

*Correlate the chance of publishing a photo (Q7) with the types of journalists (Q22):*

Would publish Photo  
Sc.J / Gen.J / FreeL  
(out->in)



■ Yes ■ Maybe ■ Probably not ■ No ■ Don't know

**Findings:**

- i. General journalists are less likely to publish photo releases than science journalists and freelancers

*Correlate the chance of publishing an announcement (Q9) with the types of journalists (Q22):*

Announcements are newsworthy  
Sc.J / Gen.J / FreeL  
(out->in)



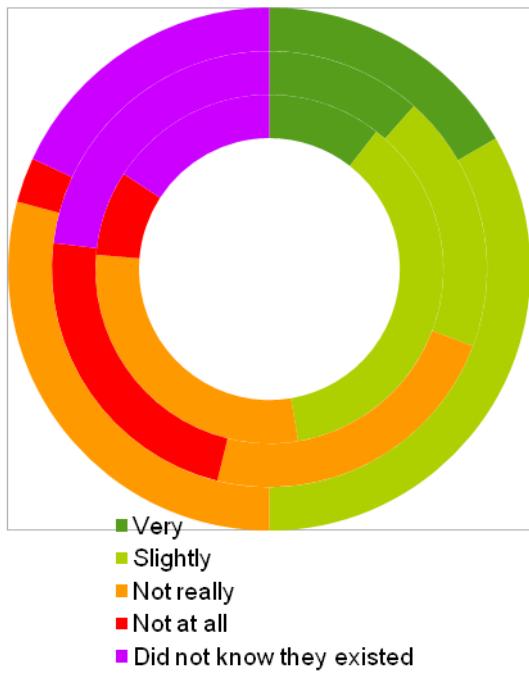
■ Always ■ Sometimes ■ Never ■ Most of the time ■ Rarely

**Findings:**

- i. Science journalists are more likely to cover an announcement

*Correlate the chance of publishing a PotW (Q10) with the types of journalists (Q22):*

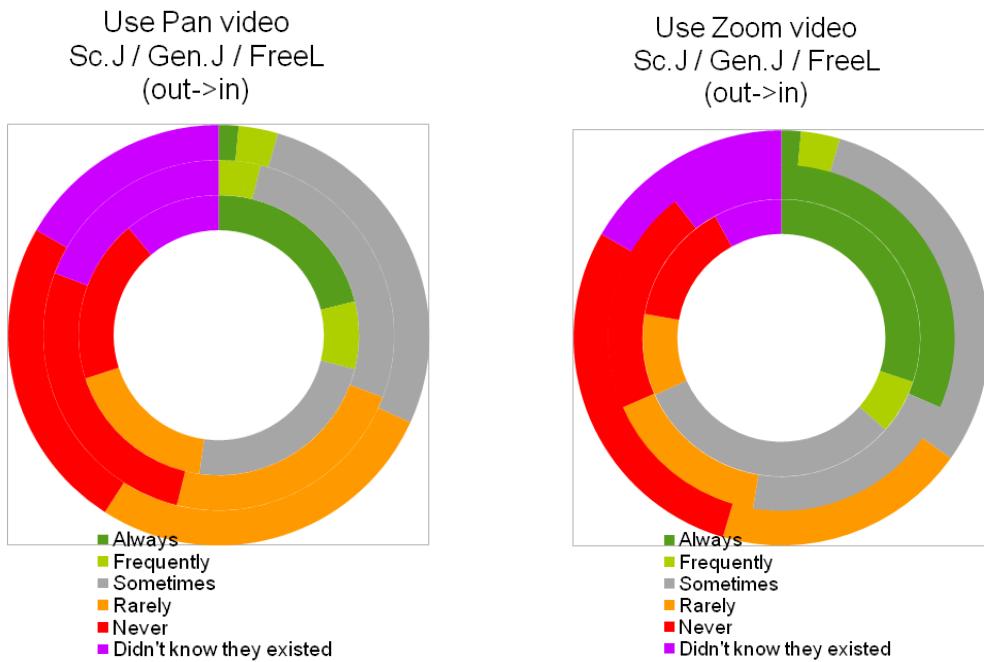
PotW are newsworthy  
Sc.J / Gen.J / FreeL  
(out->in)



Findings:

- i. General journalists find PotWs less newsworthy

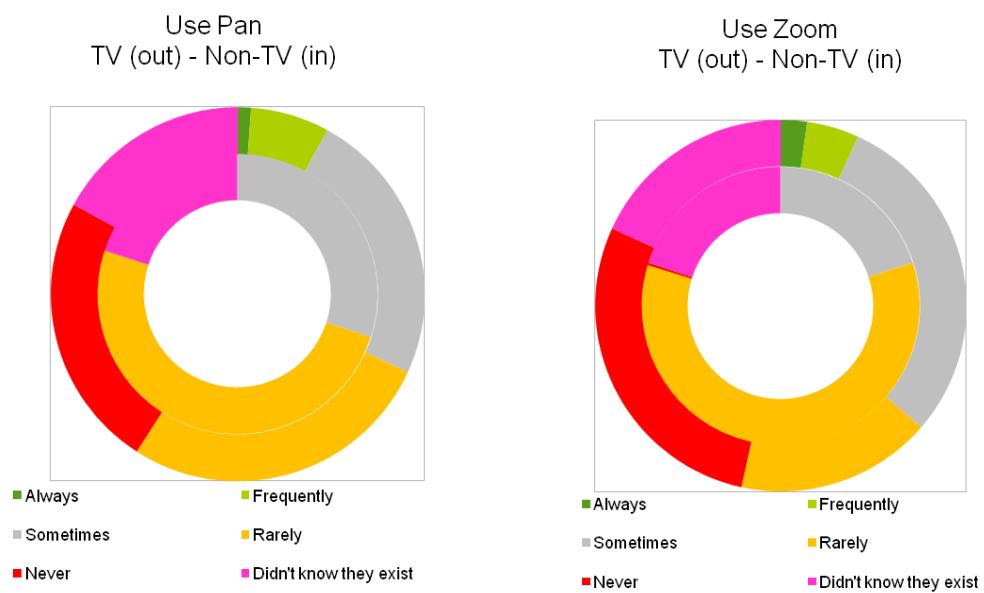
*Correlate use of pan videos (Q15) and zoom videos (Q16) with the types of journalists (Q22):*



**Findings:**

- i. Science journalists find pans and zooms less useful. Freelancers find them more useful.

*Correlate use of pan videos (Q15) and zoom videos (Q16) with type of media outlet (Q24):*



**Findings:**

- i. TV journalists use the zooms more than non-TV journalists, but this is not the case for the pans, i.e. the pans have some, but limited use to "all".
- ii. Around 25% of TV journalists "never" use the pans or zooms, where as 0% of non-TV journalists "never" use them. Presumably these TV journalists create the pans/zooms themselves.

## 11. Conclusions and actions

- With an average mark of 3.88 of 5, there is no evidence that ESO ePOD's media relations are on a wrong footing. The results of this media poll will be published on ESO's Press Room web page.
- The advance notice system seems to be working very well for most journalists, despite some opposition from selected individuals. ePOD will therefore keep it as it is, but we will have a better labelling of the "advance notice", mentioning that this is how we release all our news items, to avoid accusations of "hyping".
- Longer lead times for the advance notice would help, but this conflicts with the weekend, and the Friday before would be too early for ePOD, therefore the advance notice system will be kept at 48 hours.
- Pitching stories would help. ePOD will try to send its announcement to the media as well, but target them only to those who could be interested in the topic.
- More technical information is appreciated, but should not clutter the main text. E.g. technical information about the images, seeing etc. ePOD will try to include more technical information as notes in press releases. Technical information about the images, such as exposure times, should be made visible in the next few months.
- Short concise texts are appreciated by the journalists. ePOD will try to make press releases shorter in the main body. Technical details will be moved to notes.
- More VLT news and images are requested. This is a point that ePOD are already addressing in the form of the recently initiated Gems Programme for acquiring data with the ESO telescopes. We will soon release more VLT images.
- ePOD will expand web pages with more information about the VLT, e.g. the instruments.
- ePOD will provide a better sorting of videos with an advanced search and a chronological search.
- ePOD will look into organising more and better online press conferences.
- ePOD will think of writer's workshops themes that we could organise.
- ePOD will add music to videos.
- ePOD will get better scientist's quotes, preferably emphasising the implications of the results.
- ePOD will include a boilerplate (or Creative Commons logo) in our images/releases so that it is more evident that they are available under the Creative Commons license.
- ePOD will include more links to the archive data
- ESO's official Facebook page is: <https://www.facebook.com/ESOAstronomy>