



DIVERSify: Designing InnoVative plant teams for Ecosystem Resilience and agricultural Sustainability

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Executive Summary

The Speak Out training resource has been created by LEAF for scientists and young researchers to improve their communication skills. The resource is part of work package one's activities which focuses on tacit knowledge for communication.

The main aim of the resource was to produce an online suite of modern resources to help researchers communicate with different audiences, particularly farmers and other agricultural stakeholders. Communication is a real skill that must be developed but honing expertise in this area is often overlooked. There are still relatively few training opportunities for science professionals to develop these skills, therefore there was opportunity to fill this gap with an online communications training resource providing guidance, advice and support for researchers and others to perfect their communication skills as well as boost confidence. The Speak Out training resource, otherwise known as the Speak Out Toolkit, has been written and developed by leading agricultural communications experts. It is packed with easy-to-use guidance and resources providing step by step support for farmers and researchers helping them think about communication at every stage and providing guidance on best practice. Whether that be on paper, out in the field, through photographs, presentations or on social media. Resources include top tips and support for making work stand out, through posters, written articles, powerful presentations at conferences, TV and radio, organising workshops and interactive events, influencing and making professional use of social media to name but a few.

The development of the Speak Out Toolkit commenced in June 2017 and was launched in April 2019, two years ahead of the deliverable deadline, enabling revisions and improvements to be made based on user comments as well as allowing for resources to be updated or new ones produced based on user feedback.

The Toolkit has gone from strength to strength and is an important free resource to use not only for researchers and academics but a valuable communication tool for all those involved in the agricultural sector to help improve communication. The Toolkit will be part of the DIVERSify project legacy, hosted on the LEAF website and featured as a project result on the European Commission's 'Horizon Results' Platform. Therefore, the Speak Out Toolkit will be maintained and updated past the project end ensuring legacy of communication training outcomes from the DIVERSify project.





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1. Introduction

Efficient and effective communication is essential in all aspects of life to avoid misunderstandings, conflicts or frustration. Good communication is particularly important within research to extend the reach of outcomes and findings, engage others to get involved and ensure knowledge is shared and exchanged. Effective communication is all about informing, motivating, advocating and entertaining to help drive change.

Good communication is also an essential skill to ensure the legacy of research. Despite this, it is a skill that is often overlooked. To help tackle this, an online communication toolkit, called the Speak Out Toolkit, has been created to provide guidance, help, advice and answer any communication questions which researchers and others may have. The Speak Out Toolkit has been designed to help further enhance project dissemination through various communication channels including written articles, conferences, workshops, social media, and TV and radio.

An early version of Speak Out was created in the early 2000's as a communication course, primarily through workshops and a CD rom for farmers to help them communicate their farming story. The Speak Out Toolkit builds on this concept to produce a suite of modern resources to help researchers communicate. New topic areas have been created with particular reference to researchers, such as making the most out of posters, differences in written articles and delivering a powerful presentation at conferences. Social media and the use of videos and photos are also key areas of focus.

The Toolkit is not limited to those within the project, it can also be used by other researchers as well as advisors or farmers who host farm visits or talk with a range of audiences. The Speak Out Toolkit can be used as a stand-alone resource or in conjunction with Speak Out sessions held at each of the DIVERSify annual meetings.

2. Timeline and implementation

The development of the Speak Out Toolkit commenced in June 2017 and was launched in April 2019, two years ahead of the deliverable deadline, enabling revisions and improvements to be made based on user comments. The timeline for key deadlines in the development of the Speak Out Toolkit are as described in Figure 1. Development and creation of the Speak Out Toolkit was undertaken by five members of the LEAF team with the DIVERSify work package leaders consulted as part of milestone nine activities. Project partners were given the opportunity to comment on the Toolkit during the 2019 General Assembly meeting and a trialling period in March 2019. Additional comments were welcomed from project partners, other researchers in partner organisations and others using the Toolkit during the subsequent two years after its launch.





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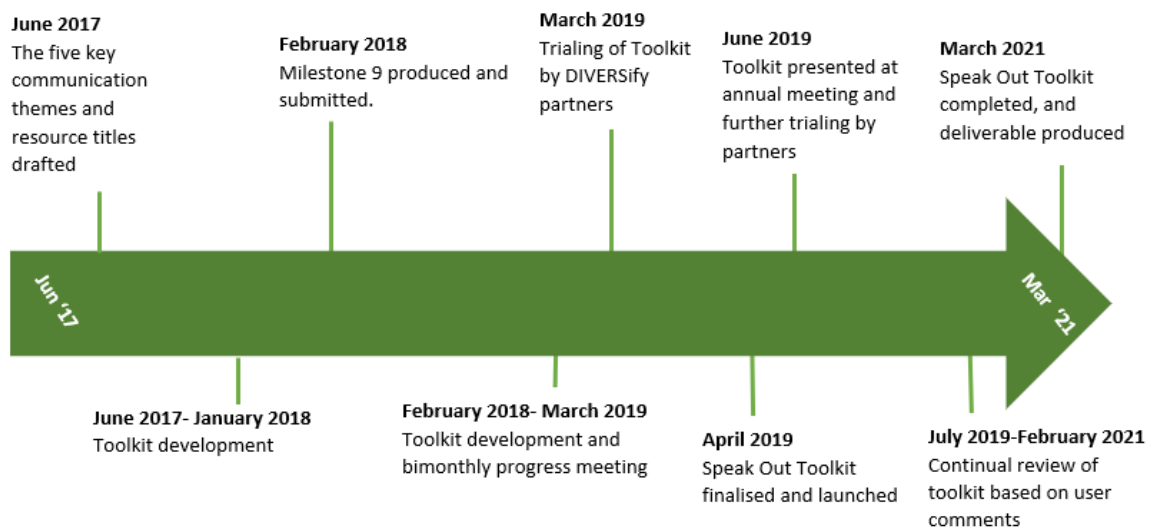


Figure 1. Key activities and deadlines during the creation of the Speak Out Toolkit.

3. Speak Out Toolkit sections

The Speak Out Toolkit is hosted on the LEAF website (www.leafuk.org/speakout) (Figure 2) and links on the DIVERSify project website to the Toolkit have been made available. The Toolkit covers six core areas of communication for young researchers (as well as other researchers, advisors and farmers) which are: 'Presenting', 'Writing', 'Increasing Interaction', 'Media Skills', 'Using Social Media' and the most recent addition 'Online events'.

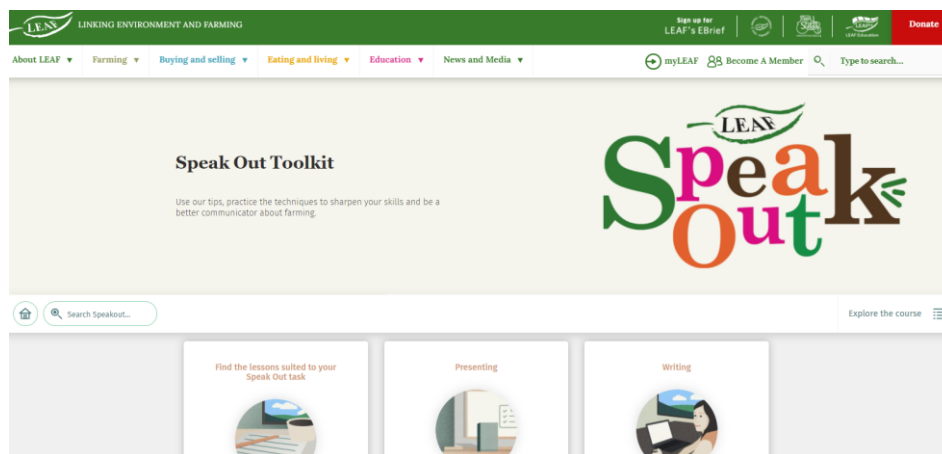


Figure 2. The Speak Out Toolkit landing page on the LEAF website Source: (LEAF Website, 2021)





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3.1. Presenting

The ability to present effectively within a limited time is key for engaging and enthusing attendees. Tools such as PowerPoint, making the most of your surroundings and props help ensure key messages are taken away and used. This section covers important aspects of presenting including:

- Introductions
 - How to make a good first impression
 - How to avoid common presenting bad habits
 - Ensuring pace of speech isn't too fast or too slow to ensure all can follow and stay engaged
 - The art to good body language
 - How to be positive, for example not starting a presentation with a negative or apology
 - How to make introductions personal to the group a person is presenting to
- Preparing for hosting or talking at an event
 - Knowing audience number and their interests
 - What props to use to help get key points across and allocated time in order to tailor a presentation. In DIVERSify this will help with speaking at academic conferences or stakeholder workshops where audiences will vary as well as the location
- Presenting outdoors versus indoors
 - Location of a presentation, in particular outdoors versus indoors
 - Different types of outdoor events
 - Event type - the pros and cons
 - Knowing the location and space of an indoor presentation will influence a presentation or talk and should be adapted accordingly
- Using PowerPoint powerfully
 - The top tips and rules which should be followed to ensure a PowerPoint presentation emphasises key messages and adds to an overall presentation or talk

3.2. Writing

Effective articles, blogs and posters are key to sharing project research outside of a consortium. Language used needs to suit intended audience and showcase the areas of research which are of interest to them. This is vital in DIVERSify to help share practical recommendations and advice. This could be to farmers and advisors for implementing plant teams, policy recommendations, trial and lab outcomes for researchers and societal benefits to citizens. The writing section provides help and guidance with writing to a range of written resources. Guidance includes:

- Avoiding jargon





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- Knowing the intended audience, their interests and background in a subject and adapting the language and terms used in order to fit the 'story' to suit their needs
- Preparation for writing written resources
 - The key to preparing a written resource
 - Taking some time to think over the intended audience, their background and key interests will help to highlight the three key messages to convey
 - How to utilise photos and graphs to further explain key points and make them more memorable
- Tips for different written resource types
 - Each written resource requires different word limits, photos and graphs and how personal the text can be, giving an example of a few differences between written resources

3.3. Increasing Interaction

Having the ability to facilitate discussions within groups ensures discussions stay targeted and helps to deal with tricky situations and make sure all opinions are heard. These skills are vital within research for both sharing project results and outcomes but also to gather the thoughts, experiences and opinions of different stakeholders. This section covers:

- Using questions effectively
 - Open questions cannot be answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no' and can be used to drive discussion and help gather the opinions of others
 - Closed questions are 'yes/no' questions and can be used to gather a group opinion on a topic either verbally or physically, for example through 'a show of hands'
- Steering discussion and keeping to time
 - Why discussion aims need to be shared at the commencement of a meeting
 - Making sure all attendees have the opportunity to voice their opinions
 - How to keep discussions on-topic
 - How to effectively summarising key points, outcomes and main actions at the end of a meeting
- Handling heated situations
 - How to facilitate or chair of a discussion or meeting - the ability to handle and diffuse heated situations is key. Situations include equipment or IT failures, speaker absence, lack of audience engagement and clashes of opinion





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3.4. Media Skills

TV and radio are great outlets to present current research and outcomes to a wide range of audiences. Media only allows a short time slot in order to get messages across. It is therefore vital that speakers are concise, well prepared and ready for questions, in particular for tricky or awkward questions. This section provides skills and guidance for:

- Preparing, undertaking and reviewing a television or radio interview
 - Tips for preparation prior to a television or radio interview including knowing where it will take place, if it is live or pre-recorded and having some examples in the bank to provide context to the topic under discussion
 - Other tips include things to think about mid-interview and how to review performance and promote/ share the interview to extend reach
- Handling tricky questions
 - There are a number of tips to help when answering tricky questions such as welcoming tough questions, deflecting questions to those with more expertise, preparing answers to questions likely to be asked prior to an interview and recycling good responses
- Breaking bad news
 - Whilst the likelihood of bad news needing to be given within DIVERSify is low, researchers should understand the techniques that can help news be revealed sensitively with care and empathy
 - How to ensure tone is not flippant or over dramatic, showing concern and empathy is key and signposting to where an audience can get more information

3.5. Using Social Media

Social media has become a major outlet to communicate messages. Social media is also useful for instant interaction with interested parties. Social media such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube have become great ways to share results and project activities in small bite size chunks to an audience. Online activity is not restricted by geography, helping to extend the reach of messages. The rise of social media has also led to the rise of 'fake news', trolls and other pitfalls which users need to identify, avoid and mitigate. This section will help to overcome these by explaining:

- How to optimise social media functions such as hashtags, photos and tags
 - Taking advantage of the various functions in social media platforms will help extend the reach of statuses, posts and project activities/ outcomes
 - How to increase reach - visual aspects of posts such as video clips and photos often have a bigger reach on followers than traditional text posts
 - How interact with others online - hashtags help posts appear in searches and tags allow accounts to interact with others, all helping to extend reach





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- How to measure reach and account impact
 - How to utilise functions within social media platforms to measure the views, likes and impressions of posts
 - Help identify where more work is needed to extend the reach (followers, impressions and likes) of project outcomes and activities on social media
- How to deal with online negativity
 - Being able to deal with users who aim to annoy, spread false information or provoke responses, in an effective and professional manner is key when using social media.
 - Ways to deal with trolls include ignoring them, correcting false information or reporting them to the social media platform

3.6. Online Events

Considering the feedback received from the external users and from project partners, LEAF is continually looking at what resources will be needed in the future and changing needs and priorities. In the past year, there has been a move to online events as result of Coronavirus pandemic. The toolkit has adapted to this now key priority with the latest resource which focuses on three key areas of online events:

- Making the best of online events
 - Practice with technology. With colleagues, event speakers, friends or even family members
 - Familiarisation with tools such as sharing screens, running a poll, reading the live chat. All helps to engage others effectively
- How to deal with equipment or internet failure
- Looking less than your best
 - Dressing professionally
 - Positioning of camera and background noise

3.7. Find the lessons suited to your Speak Out task

In addition to the five core sections of the Speak Out Toolkit there is an additional section which collates resources from across the sections into tailored lessons. This was created to help users find targeted resources in relation to their specific communication challenge.

An example of this is 'How to organise a farm walk' lesson (Figure 3) which, when entered, collates the relevant resources from across the Toolkit to cover the key aspects of hosting a farm walk. Additional lessons have been created based on feedback from project partners on their communication. These include:

- Running an on-farm demonstration event
- Hosting a workshop





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- How to prepare as a speaker at a conference
- How to prepare for attending an industry day
- How to influence policy

The screenshot shows the LEAF website's 'Farm Walks' page. The navigation bar includes 'LINKING ENVIRONMENT AND FARMING', 'Sign up for LEAF's E-Brief', and 'Donate'. The main content area is titled 'Farm Walks' and contains the following text: 'A farm walk can be a very engaging and interactive way to demonstrate to your audience the work being done on farm. We have pulled together a group of lessons all based around hosting a farm walk.' Below this is a link '> How to organise a farm walk'. The page also features a large image of a group of people on a farm walk. Three resource cards are displayed below the image, each with a 'View Lesson' button: 'Get propped up' (with a tractor icon), 'Introducing yourself' (with a handshake icon), and 'Know your audience' (with a person icon).

Figure 3. The 'How to organise a farm walk' lesson in the 'Find the lessons suited to you' Speak Out task section of the Speak Out Toolkit and the resources included in the lesson for across the six core Speak Out sections. Source: (LEAF Website, 2021).

3.8. Speak Out case studies

A suite of case studies is also included within the Speak Out Toolkit to share testimonials of those using Speak Out and how skills learnt have been used in practice. These include researchers, farmers and advisors who have previously used the Speak Out Toolkit or attended in person training. Examples of success stories can be found in Annex 9.1.

4. Resources types

A variety of resource types (Table 1) were created and used within the Toolkit to ensure the main learning styles were covered. These include audio and video clips for auditory learners, photos and annotated examples for visual learners, PDF documents, summary cards and written resources for reading/ writing learners and finally checklists, templates, quizzes and 'try this' activities for kinaesthetic learners.





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Table 1. The resource types and brief description included within the Speak Out Toolkit

Resource type	Description
Click & Reveal	Grids composed of photos or key words that once clicked show a quote, tip, explanation or good and bad example.
Photo carousel	A selection of photographs illustrating good or bad examples of a topic. Photos can be expanded and contain a legend giving a brief explanation of the photo.
Summary cards	Short summaries or tips on the key points of a resource. Summaries can be viewed on the Toolkit but also emailed, saved and printed off.
Quiz	There are two types of quizzes in the Toolkit. One tests knowledge on a subject and another is similar to an online checklist where users can assess if they are thoroughly prepared in a topic and highlight anything they have missed.
Checklists	This is a downloadable and printable checklist which allows users to check whether they have thought of/ prepared everything in a particular topic, for example hosting an event. They can also be used to assess how successful a user is in a particular subject such as identifying their good or bad habits when presenting.
Templates	This is a downloadable and printable document that users can use as a starting point/ inspiration for a particular area. An example of this is the 'Give aways' resource where a template handout can be downloaded and used to help users with creating their own handouts.
PDF top tips	Downloadable and printable top tips on a particular subject which can be shared with colleagues or students.
Try this	Short activities which are undertaken by users, for example practicing a presentation with a colleague and the colleague reviewing their presentation to highlight areas of improvement/ what is done well.
Audio	Short conversational clips explaining a particular subject with the Toolkit. These are accompanied with transcripts.
Video	Short 3-5 minute videos introducing, explaining and illustrating (seeing in action) a particular subject.





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5. Trialling and consultation

Prior to the launch of the Speak Out Toolkit there was a limited trial period in February and April 2019 where The James Hutton Institute and Københavns Universitet along with the LEAF team (not involved in the Toolkit creation) trialled the Toolkit. This trial period was to ensure usability of the Toolkit and to highlight any errors in text, broken links and ideas for additional resource ideas for future revisions to the Toolkit.

Another period of trialling and feedback collation was undertaken with project partners as part of the DIVERSify General Assembly meeting in Copenhagen (June 2019). The Toolkit was presented, and project partners had the opportunity to go through and provide feedback as well as tailored lessons and resource ideas. Furthermore, a Speak Out roadshow, composed of several one-day workshops, was hosted in the UK during April 2019 where the Toolkit was also presented, and feedback collected from attendees.

In 2020, as part of LEAF'S annual survey, LEAF members were asked if they were aware of the Speak Out Toolkit of which 42% were aware.

Outside these trialling periods, comments from users were welcomed at any time through LEAF'S enquiry email or telephone number. The opportunity to continually gather user feedback allowed the Toolkit to be continually improved and adapted to user needs. This has been a key benefit to launching the Toolkit two years ahead of the planned deadline in the DIVERSify work plan.

5.1. Revisions

After the initial trialling period and 2019 General assembly meeting Speak Out session, a number of revisions to the Speak Out Toolkit was made based on user feedback. These can be grouped into three categories: new lessons, new resources and design/grammatical.

New lessons which were added to the Toolkit based on feedback include:

- How to organise a workshop
- How to prepare for attending an industry day
- How to influence policy
- Speaking at conferences

A range of new resources were also identified by users and added to the Toolkit which include:

- Ice-breaker activities
- Using videos in social media
- Tips for filming
- Online events (as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic)

Lastly, small design or grammatical errors or usability issues were identified by some and updated/changed by LEAF. This included making the sign-up page easier to use and amending spelling/





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grammatical mistakes. Subsequent revisions and additions based are based on user comments for the continual development of the toolkit.

6. Analytics

In the past 12-month period (March 2020-February 2021) the Speak Out Toolkit has been accessed 1852 times. 77% of the visitors of the toolkit are from the UK with the remaining 23% spread out across European countries as well as the USA and Australia. LEAF continues to assess analytics on the toolkit to see the popularity month on month. It also helps in deciding when new resources are needed to encourage users to come back as well as expanding to new audiences not only in the UK but also further afield.

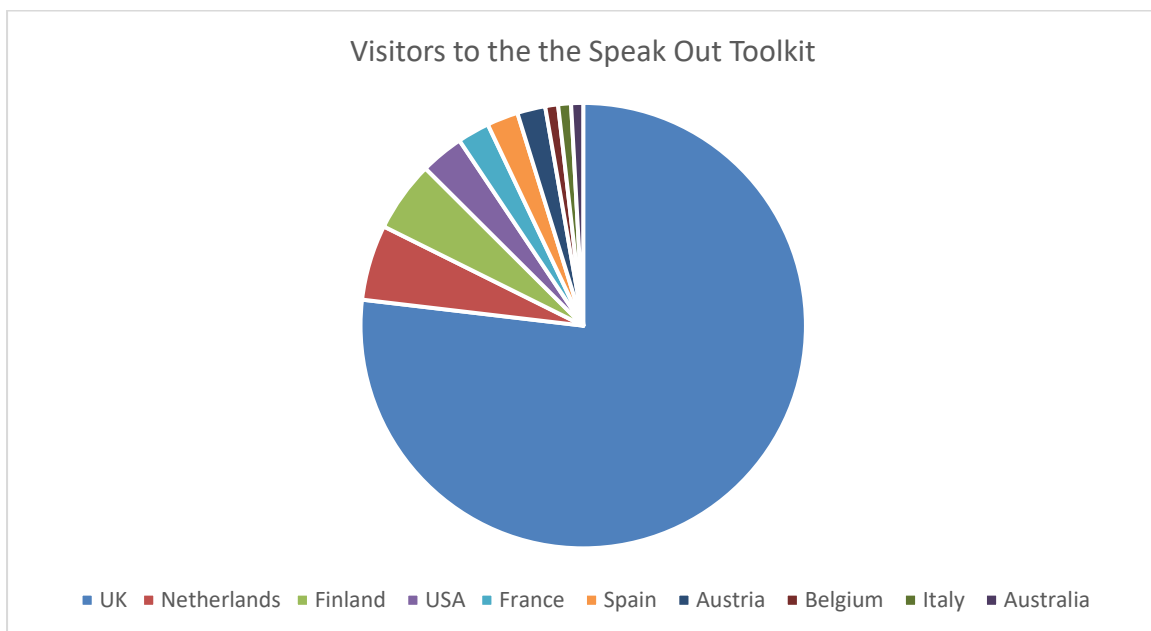


Figure 4: Analytics of the user country of origin (Authors own, 2021)

7. Promotion

Since the implementation of the Toolkit in April 2019, LEAF has continued to the promote the Toolkit regularly through a range of engagement streams:

Twitter – Sharing regular Speak Out updates to an audience of 22.8k on the LEAF Twitter account. Posts are planned weekly to focus on specific areas of Toolkit as well as giving project updates. Twitter has also helped to highlight the Toolkit to audiences away from the project and allows organisations to share the Toolkit to their audiences too. Examples of ‘Retweets and Likes include’:





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Bayer Crop Science UK liked your Tweet

! Our #speakout Toolkit is FREE !

Farmers! Researchers! Use our tips, practice the techniques to sharpen your skills and be a better communicator about farming. @PlantTeams #H2020



leafuk.org/farming/speako... pic.twitter.com/KySDufV3dV

Figure 4. Speak Out Toolkit Tweet, 'Liked' by Bayer Crop Science UK (13k followers) Source: (LEAF Twitter, 2021)



Figure 5. Speak Out Toolkit Retweet from Foundation for Common Land (1K followers) Source: (LEAF Twitter, 2021)

Podcast - The Speak Out Toolkit has featured as an episode in LEAF's podcast series – LEAFcast in January 2021. The episode focuses on how the Speak Out Toolkit is helping to inspire, inform and reignite farmers' and researchers' communications expertise. It also tells the story of how it was developed through the DIVERSify project and the legacy it leaves. To date the episode has been downloaded 42 times. The link to episode can be found here:

<https://leafuk.org/news-and-media/podcasts/speaking-out-for-sustainable-farming>





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Blog posts - A blog post was created in August 2020 for the DIVERSify project blog page focussing on effective communication for better research. The blog post has been viewed 72 times as of? and the blog can be found within the blog and news item archive on the DIVERSify legacy website: plant-teams.org.

Interacting with the project consortium - Updates of the Speak Out Toolkit are given to the project lead on regular basis and shared around the consortium.

8. Legacy

The Speak Out Toolkit features on the European Commission's 'Horizon Results' Platform, where policy makers, investors, entrepreneurs, researchers, innovators or any interested citizen can discover the research results from EU funded projects. This enables legacy of not only the Speak Out Toolkit but also the DIVERSify project as well, enabling new connections to be made with other organisations interested in the published work. A link to the Speak Out Toolkit on the Horizon Results platform can be found here - [Speak Out Toolkit - Funding & tenders \(europa.eu\)](http://europa.eu)

By being hosted on the LEAF website, the Speak Out Toolkit will be maintained and updated past the project end ensuring legacy of communication training outcomes from the DIVERSify project. This means researchers, students, farmers, advisors and others will be able to access the Toolkit past the project end and continue to use it to help build up their communication skills and knowledge.

9. Conclusions

Good communication is essential to share, promote and extend the reach of DIVERSify findings and results, but is often a skill that is overlooked. The Speak Out Toolkit, in conjunction with the Speak Out workshops at the DIVERSify annual meetings for project partners, has provided communication training to researchers in order to give them the skills and confidence to communicate to a range of audiences using presentations, written resources, social media, TV and radio, and the art of good facilitation.

The Toolkit has been continually amended with new resources and lessons added based on user feedback and ideas. The Toolkit has received positive feedback from farmers, to researchers and industry representatives, and these testimonials can be found in Annex 9.1. The Toolkit will continue to be hosted past the end of the DIVERSify project to ensure the legacy of good communication by researchers will continue, as well to allow other users such as advisors and farmers to use the Toolkit to help them communicate their farming stories.





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10. Annex

10.1. Speak Out Toolkit Testimonials

‘With filming for a Channel 4 broadcast looming I visited the Speak Out Website for help. The site was concise and easy to navigate around. It holds all information I needed on how to approach and handle such a task. After visiting the relevant sections and accessing the wealth of information on the site I felt much more equipped and confident to deal with a presenter and production crew. I found information on how to prepare, how to present and how to get the message I wanted across, which was invaluable on the day. All the techniques, skills and tips I gathered from the Speak Out site made the whole experience more enjoyable’.

Fay Johnson, Rectory Farm, Leicestershire

‘The website has a great Toolkit area that provides a useful resource for top tips and reference materials for all of the areas covered in the training- it’s impossible to remember everything! I circulated the web link to the whole of BBRO, so the value of the information was shared wider than just those that attended the training’.

Vicky Foster, Head, British Beet Research

Organisation

‘We receive hundreds of visitors to the farms every year. So, I am used to speaking groups large and small. Nevertheless, you are never too old to learn, especially when encourages to see ourselves as other see and hear us! I therefore found the two Speak Out Training days I attended invaluable. They not only helped improve how we present our work to the many different audiences we engage with at the Innovation Centre. But I also found the hints and tips o great use when it came to filming a story for BBC Countryfile and contributing to a number of Radio 4 Farming Today pieces in recent years’.

Davy McCracken, SRUC Kirton & Auchtertye Farms and LEAF Innovation Centre, Crianlarich

‘What we learned from Speak Out was the importance of pauses, helping you to talk with people, instead of at them! We take lots of pauses and allow people the space to ask the questions they want to ask, rather than answering questions nobody asked. Our experience is that the public are not usually bothered about seeing fancy power washed tractors and drills, they’re more interested in how good a lamb’s life is or what the tags are in their ears are for. Speak Out helped us with engaging with the public on the importance of British meat and knowing how to share the right kind of information with the public. Now we like to share three messages, three times, in three different ways, using stories and anecdotes that keep people interested in the truth about farming and what we’re trying to get across’.

John Renner LEAF Demonstration Farmer in Northumberland

