



Category: Outstanding Young Communicator

Entrant name: Polly Foster MCIPR

Company: Office for Students

Demonstrate your commitment to professional development and your career growth:

As a graduate of the Google Squared certificate in digital marketing programme I was eligible to enter the Google Squared Awards for digital communications. I beat over 100 entrants to win top prize - Digital Champion of the Year - for excellent use of data to inform the 'Higher education in England 2016' web and social campaign, which aims to share information about higher education. The prize was a trip to the Digital Marketing Forum in Amsterdam.

Following this success, I completed a master's degree in corporate communications. Despite being the most junior communications professional on the course I graduated ranked top in the class, studying at evenings and weekends as well as working full time. I shared my learning with colleagues through a series of presentations and was consequently promoted to Digital Engagement Coordinator.

I have taken courses on video editing, social media management, web writing and crisis communications, and I have passed the Google Analytics Individual Qualification exam.

But professional development is more than training and exams. To really grow I had to push myself out of my comfort zone, getting out of the classroom and attending networking events, including volunteering as Social Media Coordinator for the CIPR South West committee. I also spent several months volunteering as a presenter on hospital radio, to gain experience creating different kinds of content.

This learning has been just as valuable to my development as any qualification. The confidence I have gained has empowered me to take on a more strategic role, driving the social media agenda and positioning myself as a leader.

Outline your work-related achievements over the last two years and how they contribute to the wider industry:

Graduated top of the class with MSc Corporate Communications.

- Currently in talks to publish my work in an academic journal, making original contributions to the field.
- Wrote several blog posts for PR blog 'Behind the Spin', sharing my tips with students on how to excel in a communications degree.

As Social Media Officer of the CIPR South West Committee I planned and implemented a campaign to promote entries to CIPR's PRide Awards.

- Wrote case studies and a blog post, and hosted a Twitter chat on the benefits of the PRide awards.
- Increased entries by 21% from 2016, achieving 115% of our annual target and receiving praise from CIPR HQ.

Won the Google Squared Digital Champion of the Year award for leading on the 'Higher education in England 2016' social media campaign.

- Managed colleagues to create visualisations of the data to share on social media.
- Increased webpage views by 200% from the previous year's campaign, from 8,500 to 25,000, achieving 150% of target.
- Coached the Communications Apprentice to lead the campaign for 2017. Mentored her through the social media modules of her apprenticeship, which she passed with flying colours.

Managed a crisis when pages of nonsensical filler text accidentally went live on the website.

- Briefed managers on the issue and advised them that this was an opportunity for the organisation to appear more human and approachable.
- Diffused stakeholder anger by using social media to acknowledge the mistake in a humorous manner
- My response was featured in a BBC News article: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-43962473>.

Volunteered for one morning a week for ten weeks with the charity Envision, leading teams of teenagers in social marketing projects.

Outline the biggest work-related challenge you've faced in the past two years, including details of what happened, how you overcame it and what you learnt from it:

The biggest challenge has been to champion social media amongst the communications team and the wider organisation.

Initially, social media was not used strategically. It was used to broadcast messages in an ad hoc manner, instead of as a means of achieving organisational objectives.

Attending the Digital Marketing Forum armed me with the evidence and confidence to be an expert and make a change.

I may be a one-woman social media team, but I learned I cannot work in isolation. I had to be more assertive, challenging and influencing to ensure social media was considered during communications planning.

I developed social media processes and policies, making sure the team agreed them. This protects the organisation's reputation if I ever have to hand over social media responsibility to other staff. This is an ethical imperative, as 'ensuring competence in others' is a key part of the CIPR Code of Conduct.

I also manage a team of over 30 'digital champions' from across the organisation to ensure their areas are represented on social media. This is based on a survey I ran that identified high levels of demand for social media. 18 per cent of staff wanted to use Twitter at work, but felt there were barriers in place.

Addressing these barriers through training has empowered staff to use social media to establish themselves, and the organisation, as authorities. 19 per cent of staff now use Twitter for work purposes, despite not being members of the communications team.

A summary of a campaign you are particularly proud of, including details of the brief, objectives, strategy, tactics, outputs, outcomes and budget:

The most significant campaign I have worked on was to promote the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), a new and controversial ranking of teaching in higher education.

The social media objectives were to inform the sector about the TEF, drive traffic to the website, reach new audiences and counteract any criticism.

I liaised with managers and designers to create social media content.

The social media outputs consisted of 24 tweets, resulting in:

- 68k impressions (14 times higher than average)
- 144 likes (29 times higher than average)
- 203 retweets (29 times higher than average)
- 1100 link clicks (19 times higher than average)
- 2.7% engagement rate (average is 0.7%)
- 70% were new users to the HEFCE site - the campaign achieved its goal of reaching new audiences.
- Web traffic increased by 700% with social media driving three times more traffic than average.

I agreed 'lines to take' with senior managers beforehand in case of criticism, and deployed them effectively.

This campaign was delivered in a context of uncertainty and controversy as many academics and students were not in favour of the TEF.

This was all achieved on no budget except staff time.