



Category: Outstanding In-House Public Relations Team

Company: Durham University

Number of staff employed - including executive / support staff - and annual public relations budget, showing areas directly under the control of the in-house team:

8.8 full time equivalent staff (11 staff total; includes part-time roles)

Annual (non-staff) budget: £65k (plus £75k for Strategy launch campaign)

Business objectives and analysis of performance against budget over the past three years:

Durham University (DU) Communications team carries out corporate and research profile raising to promote and safeguard reputation internationally, nationally, regionally and locally and is constantly adapting to new opportunities and challenges.

Expertise spans media relations; digital media; internal communications; stakeholder engagement; reputation management and crisis communications, working across 'owned' and 'earned' channels.

A brief overview of business / team strategy:

In 2015 a new Vice-Chancellor launched a programme to create a new University Strategy in an open and inclusive way – requiring a step change in engagement with staff, students and external stakeholders.

There was an obvious role for communications, and although the team worked to an agreed strategy, we reprioritised to support this project while also maintaining 'business as usual'.

A communications model was proactively proposed to the University Executive, agreed and implemented, assuming greater senior leadership visibility than ever before.

We first signalled change through communications 'quick wins' e.g:

a communications strategy for the Vice-Chancellor's arrival, prioritising winning hearts and minds internally;

regular 'calls to action' from senior leaders to encourage involvement in the Strategy e.g. via 'all staff' meetings, targeted contact with stakeholders;

a dedicated website encouraging staff and students to engage in dialogue with senior leaders;

Launch of a regional engagement campaign, So Much More

Now that the University Strategy has been launched, we are developing a new Marketing and Communications Strategy requiring team restructure and capacity building.

So Much More is being developed into a national / international campaign.

A summary of commitment to CPD and professionalism:

Most of the team, including its leader, is part-time for work-life balance. A collaborative culture ensures seamless handover of projects during and out of office hours (24-7 cover).

Training, linked to the University strategy, is identified in an annual development reviews. Courses completed include crisis communications; legal awareness; diversity. Several CIPR members follow its CPD programme and have 'Accredited Practitioner' status.

Two team members gained internal secondments - promotions from their usual role. Two gained Institute of Leadership and Management qualifications.

Monthly staff meetings enable sharing of skills - cost neutrally.

A summary of recent outstanding achievements, including client list growth / retention:

The Scottish Soldiers Archaeology Project manages stakeholder interest in the remains of 17th Century soldiers unearthed on University land, addressing opposing opinions on reburial and showcasing research expertise.

Results include:

- 3-years global reach e.g. UK national newspapers; national BBC / independent TV news, major US titles (e.g. Boston Globe);
- Multi-media website – 30k+ visitors;
- Social media - 650k+ reach;
- Productive stakeholder relations e.g. Scottish government, American descendants.

The 'stellar profile for Durham cosmology' campaign incorporated the opening of a new £11.5m building; objectives included showing the diversity of research and researchers.

Results include:

- International media coverage (e.g. Newsweek, Sky News, CBC, Scientific American) plus widespread social media reach;
- Cross promotion via relationships with influential networks e.g. European Space Agency and NASA;
- Elle Magazine Malaysia described PhD student Ady Anuar as one of its “Badass Women” - she was congratulated by Malaysia’s Prime Minister. She said: *“I have been receiving lots of...invitation(s) to give lectures and talks to inspire young Malaysians.”*

_Our in-house magazine, Dialogue underwent a radical redesign to widespread positive feedback.

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

Major campaign

The new Vice-Chancellor wanted to build on our reputation as a ‘force for good’ in the region and beyond. So Much More (SMM) was created to lay regional foundations for the University Strategy 2017-2027 launch – the latter would demonstrate the University’s ambitions to a more widespread audience.

Rationale, research and planning

Informed by an independent report on DU’s economic impact plus market research, SMM demonstrated how DU is ‘so much more’ than the sum of its parts.

Strategy and tactics

Multiple owned and earned channels would a) build staff and student pride and b) allow regional stakeholders to discover more about DU.

For example:

- Dedicated multi-media landing page and design device for the regional campaign, similar approach for the University Strategy 2017-2027
- Social media strategy #somuchmore
- Promotional brochure and banners demonstrating regional impact
- Fortnightly branded features in *The Durham Times* (space negotiated for free)

Further multi-media communications were carried out for the University Strategy internally and externally further building on the SMM theme. Engagement activity included events in Durham and London.

Measurement and evaluation

SMM launch:

- Over 50 influential guests – positive feedback
- 3k+ website views
- Six positive regional media reports – fortnightly coverage in the Durham Times
- 235k Twitter impressions, 150.5k Facebook reach

University Strategy communications:

- Almost 1k attendance at consultative staff meetings in run up to launch plus engagement with website
- 120 senior leaders at tailored briefing event
- External events – around 300 international guests
- Web story 11k+ views
- 50k Twitter impressions, Facebook reach 110k
- 5 positive media reports
- Positive client and external feedback

Budget and cost effectiveness

In addition to staff time, the SMM campaign totalled £6k and the University Strategy communications £72.5k. Our success is evidenced by the qualitative and quantitative evidence above and the Vice-Chancellor's (client's) view that the activity achieved our overall objectives

Analysis of team performance against budget

For the past three years our work has consistently delivered to our core mission: to build and protect reputation.

We have a modest budget – but quantitative and qualitative evaluation of all projects repeatedly shows the team continues to punch above its weight – we are 'So Much More'.

We have responded to and represented a new era for Durham – one of ambition but also inclusivity and transparency. We are developing our role and purpose to support a new Strategy, building on previous success.