

Candidate Information

Position:	Head of Strategic Communications
School/Department:	Strategic Communications
Reference:	23/111347
Closing Date:	Monday 30 October 2023
Salary:	£58,850 - £68,194 per annum
Anticipated Interview Date:	Thursday 30 November 2023

Information on Post

The role of Head of Strategic Communications is crucial to building the external reputation of Queen's University Belfast in the UK, Ireland and internationally.

It is suited to an experienced candidate with ambition and dynamism who is excited by the prospect of working at a senior level to tell engaging and compelling stories that demonstrate the University's global academic and research excellence.

The role will help shape perceptions of the University across all audiences, including higher education and regulatory authorities, with alumni and potential donors, students, researchers, and staff.

The postholder will build positive relationships across the University and work closely with the senior team within the Office of the Vice-President of Strategic Engagement and External Affairs. They will provide timely and insightful advice to the University's leadership, including the Vice-Chancellor, Pro-Vice-Chancellors, Vice-Presidents, Heads of Schools and Professional Services' Directors on big themes and daily issues. Assisting the Director of Strategic Communications, the postholder will play a central role in strategic planning, shaping media strategy on a range of issues, and raising opportunities and risks.

The successful candidate will also require the ability to deal quickly and professionally with incoming media. They will have experience in crisis communications and working to tight deadlines on often sensitive issues. Accuracy and integrity are paramount. Strong interpersonal skills are required. This person will lead and motivate the media team, driving proactivity and providing encouragement and direction. They will lead by example. The successful candidate will possess digital skills and a strong understanding of digital tools, experience in writing for social media channels and an understanding of media evaluation.

Major Duties

Develop and implement a proactive news and media relations strategy to promote Queen's University Belfast and its achievements.

1. Lead a responsive communications approach and drive delivery via clear articulation of objectives and targets, and ensure effective monitoring of performance against Plan, taking corrective action as required. Provide advice to senior leadership on issues of reputation management.
2. Oversee and manage a team of news and media professionals, fostering a collaborative and high-performance environment.
3. Build and maintain strong relationships with key media contacts, journalists, and influencers to enhance the university's media presence.
4. Proactively identify newsworthy stories and opportunities to promote the university's people, events, initiatives, and achievements.
5. Crafts messages and statements around complex and/or problematic issues in a timely manner to clearly communicate the University's position. Broker consensus among senior university members on institutional positions on issues.
6. Collaborate with internal stakeholders, including academics, senior leadership, and other departments, to gather and promote news stories across a range of disciplines.
7. Ensure the team monitors media coverage and public sentiment related to the university, providing timely advice and guidance to senior management.
8. Maintain crisis communication plans and protocols to manage potential reputational risks effectively.

9. Stay up to date with current trends and best practices in media relations, public relations, and journalism to ensure the university's communications strategies remain innovative and effective.
10. Manage Strategic Communications budget and give reports and recommendations to Director of Strategic Communications as required.
11. Work with senior leadership team in the University Alumni Engagement and Philanthropy Directorate to ensure strategy and materials complement and enhance alumni engagement and development objectives.
12. Build and maintain effective, trust-based working relationships across the university and Colleges, particularly with the College communicators.
13. Support and stand in for the Director of Strategic Communications when required.
14. Other duties as determined by the Director of Strategic Communications
15. Member of the Vice-President's Management Group, contributing to the overall institutional strategic engagement and external affairs strategy.

ESSENTIAL CRITERIA

1. Educated to degree level (or equivalent) OR extensive strategic communications management and leadership experience.
2. Significant recent relevant leadership experience working at a senior level in public relations or news for a large, complex organisation.
3. Track record of managing complex stakeholder relationships.
4. Extensive relevant experience working with and influencing senior management.
5. Demonstrable experience of managing a significant budget
6. Extensive relevant experience managing diverse, high-performing team(s).
7. Demonstrable ability to win the trust of a wide range of colleagues and external stakeholders, operating through persuasion and influence.
8. Demonstrable excellent writing for a range of audiences.
9. A proven eye for a story.
10. Strong strategic thinking/problem-solving skills informed by an appreciation of internal and external factors and the ability to identify and leverage synergies.
11. Well-developed relationships with national and local media.
12. Outstanding communications skills.
13. Effective interpersonal skills including motivating, negotiating and influencing.
14. Understanding of social media tools and media monitoring tools.
15. Highly self-aware and understands personal impact; role models the right behaviours.
16. Calm, open, honest, with absolute integrity and a 'no surprises approach.
17. Comfortable with ambiguity both in structures and in situations.
18. Values are driven, leading diverse teams by example.
19. Ability to analyse and distil complex situations to reach straightforward, effective solutions.
20. Available to work out of hours as required in accordance with needs of the post.

DESIRABLE CRITERIA

1. Extensive relevant experience successfully using a wide range of communication channels, including social media, to deliver campaigns.
2. Significant and demonstrable experience of managing crisis communications situations.
3. Project and Programme Leadership experience of leading and delivering large-scale communications projects and programmes. Managing projects throughout the project cycle on time and on budget, resulting in measurable impact.
4. Demonstrable ability to use data and evidence to make decisions and influence – experience of analysing complex problems and interpreting complex data to create and present evidence-based insight and communications.
5. Demonstrable experience of social media development and management within a large complex organisation (300 + employees).