



Government  
Communication  
Service

# Effective media relations

20 April 2022

**11.00 - 11.05**    **Welcome and introductions**

**11.05 - 11.45**    **Introduction to media relations**

- What is media relations
- Reactive versus proactive media activity
- Drafting lines to take
- Writing an effective press statement
- Defining key messages

**11.45 - 11.55**    **Coffee break**

**11.55 - 12.25**    **Dealing with journalists**

- The ABC technique
- Managing mis/ disinformation
- When to let sleeping dogs lie (when not to do anything)

**12:25 – 12:30**    **Conclusions and wrap-up**



**James Aldworth** - background as press officer in UK gov't, including with COP26. Former UN comms specialist with experience in humanitarian emergencies

**Joe Dibben** - former press secretary to the Minister for Investment (UK Dep for International Trade, former press officer for the Lord Mayor of London and Policy Chair of the City of London Corporation



Media relations is the process of working with media journalists. Media can be a powerful tool for influencing and changing behaviour. Unlike direct forms of communication like advertising, communicating through journalists provides greater credibility.



# Why is media relations important?



News consumption is an important part of our lives - many of us spend up to an hour a day or more consuming content about global issues



The media are a vital partner to create public understanding of the aims of government and build the trust that the public places in government services



The media have a duty to hold government to account and media teams need to promote, explain and justify policies accurately

# Who are the main media outlets in your country?



Delfi



LIETUVOS  
rytas





70% of people have access to the internet in the home. Two out of three people now receive their news through social media



Smartphones are the most popular internet connected device. 80% of mobile consumption is now video.



Online-only platforms are on the rise and traditional print media outlets are also turning to online-only content.

- **Proactive** - Actively seeking out opportunities to promote your message to your target audiences.
- **Reactive** - Preparing how to respond to negative reports, media enquiries and counteract bad press.

## 1 - Reactive

- British government model usually has a specialist reactive team (a newsdesk).
- Role: handle incoming calls. “Playing defence.”
- Objective is to minimise negative coverage.

## 2 - Proactive

- Key responsibility is to promote positive coverage.
- Tend to be specialists.
- Objective is to maximise positive coverage.





Government  
Communication  
Service

# Proactive media activity

- Is it new?
- Is it important?
- Is it controversial?
- Who wins and loses?
- What's different?



When planning an announcement use the OASIS template as a guide for your thinking on how to prepare effectively. This means you should have considered the:

- **Objective** of the announcement
- **Audience insight** - what the audience already knows and what the differing viewpoints of public opinion are
- **Strategy** - what points should the announcement cover
- **Implementation** - how should it be portrayed to the audience
- **Scoring/evaluation** - what is the outcome and impact of the announcement

- I have placed the lines to take slide in this section to introduce them, however, they could also sit under reactive media activity.
- These are the ‘bread and butter’ of a press team’s work.
- Line to take are developed between policy officials and the press team and basically state a department’s position on an issue.
- They can be developed in advance of an issue arising (a pre-emptive attempt to prepare for an issue or to deflect attention). They can also be developed in direct response to a media query.
- Either way, they should be agreed with policy and senior management before release.

## What is a press release?

A press release is a short, compelling news story sent to targeted members of the media to try to get them interested.

## Three key challenges:

- To get your press release seen
- To get journalists past the first sentence of your notice, and ideally past the first two paras
- To make it as easy as possible for the journalist to write the story

**How long should a press release be?** The ideal length of a press release is about an A4 side or about 300 to 400 words. That's just three or four short paragraphs and a couple of of quotes. **Current UKG style has the press notice opening with two/three summary bullets.**

Include all the information required for a journalist to write the story. Make sure you include:

- **what** are you announcing?
- **who** is announcing it (and who will be affected)?
- **why** are you announcing it? (**this tends to be in detail from 3rd para onwards**)
- **where** is the announcement taking place (and where will be affected)?
- **when** i) was the announcement, ii) will any change come into force/ effect?

- All the vital information should be included in the first paragraph
- Avoid jargon
- Keep it short
- Check the accuracy
- Seek approval

## Steps for pitching a news story

- **Research:** Make sure what you're going to pitch is relevant, unique and will be of interest to your journalist
- **Prepare:** Make sure you have answers to likely follow-up questions ready to hand
- **Call:** Make a quick phone call
- **Email:** Email to follow up
- **Wait:** Wait for a response and chase up as required



A short phone call to the journalist should be made in the first instance to explain:

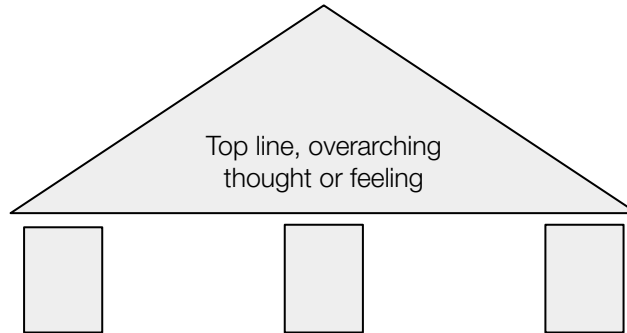
- **Who** you are (on behalf of which minister or ministry are you calling)
- **What** you are calling about (eg, an interview, an op-ed, access to an opening)
- **Why** the journalist should care (reference why it is newsworthy, have they previously written on the subject, why will their readers care, what makes this unique)
- **When** you are looking to do this

Key messages are the main point of your argument – the things you want your audience to hear, remember and, in some cases act on. If the person listening to you only remembers one thing, what would you want it to be? That is your key message.

***“There’s a simple rule: You say it again, and you say it again, and you say it again, and you say it again, and you say it again, and then again and again and again and again, and about the time that you’re absolutely sick of saying it is about the time that your target audience has heard it for the first time.”***

— Frank Luntz, American political commentator and pollster

- **Clear** — Free of jargon, devoid of technical language, and relevant. Would a 14 year old understand?
- **Concise** — You should be able to deliver key messages in no more than 30 seconds/25 words. They need to be easy to remember and it allows you to control the message.
- **Consistent** — Key messages need to complement each other and remember they must be repeated if they are to sink in.



### **Key message 1**

Should support the umbrella message, but should also comply with all the rules on key messages. It should be short, memorable and simple.

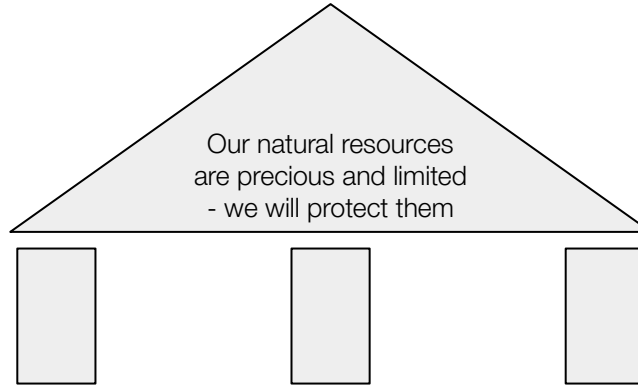
### **Key message 2**

Our key messages are the most important things we want our audience to know.

### **Key message 3**

Make them about the improvements the organisation is bringing to citizens. Think about the impact of policies not the process. Tell the story.

These are the foundations on which your message is built. Here you can include facts, more statistics, details of strategies etc. But try to keep all statements in the public as simple as possible, and always bring it back to the key messages above.



Protecting our environment is vital for tourism and our economy; we are committed to managing our natural resources in a sustainable way

Our forests are a natural resource every citizens - and future generations - should be able to enjoy.

We have introduced the highest international standards of environmental protection, we are reviewing how commissions are granted and any allegations of illegal activity will be fully investigated



- Thinking about your organisation/department, what would be the three key messages that you would want to convey through your media activity?
- What do you think makes a story newsworthy? How does your organisation/department use this knowledge to promote its interests?





Government  
Communication  
Service

# Coffee break



Government  
Communication  
Service

# Reactive



**Acknowledge** That's an interesting/tough/ question...  
I can't comment on that specifically, but...

**Bridge** But I am the Minister for X, and I'm here today to announce Y...  
Let's not forget that...  
The point is...

**Communicate** which is important to the people of Northlandia because ....  
Key message 1, 2, 3.

So, for example, "What is the greatest threat facing Northlandia?"

**Acknowledge** That's a tough question. Like all countries, we face many challenges

**Bridge** But I am the Minister for Sport and I am focussed on the challenge of getting more young people into sport, and living healthier lifestyles...

**Communicate** Key message 1, 2, 3.

Responding to media queries is the bulk of the work of any press office. It is important you follow the below process to ensure that any response that you give has been approved by the appropriate people and fits in with the overall story the organisation is trying to tell.

Principles for handling media enquiries

**All contacts with the media should be authorised in advance by the relevant official** unless a specific dispensation has been agreed – for example for Press Officers.

**Every time a journalist calls, the media officer must fill in a call log sheet.** If they are requesting a broadcast interview with an official, the media officer must fill in a broadcast interview form.

Media call log forms require that you collect the following information:

- Date and time
- Journalist contact details
- Deadline
- Broadcast interview?
- Question
- Further information
- Answer given
- Policy official contact details
- Media officer responsible
- Date/time response issued

\*In addition, in busy press offices, you may wish to use something like a Trello Board to triage queries as they come in and effectively assign them to different people.

Deadlines are critical. The media no longer work to one daily deadline. Stories are published online as soon as they are ready - making the job of governments harder. We have to respond more quickly.

Queries will be forwarded to the relevant policy official / subject matter expert on a media query form, with an indication given as to when the request is high, medium or low urgency.

- **High urgency** queries should be afforded immediate priority and answered within **2 hours**.
- **Medium urgency** queries should be answered within **4 hours**.
- **Low urgency** queries should be responded to within **8 working hours**.

When you engage with journalists, be:

- Helpful
- Polite
- Informative
- Expert
- Reliable
- Honest
- Authoritative
- Credible

Be clear as to when you are talking on or off the record, however, always assume you are ‘on the record’, so be cautious with what you say. If you are briefing a journalist and you don’t want either yourself or government to be directly quoted, say this is for ‘background only’ (off the record).

**Disinformation** refers to verifiably false information that is shared with an intent to deceive and mislead

**Misinformation** refers to verifiably false information that is shared without an intent to mislead

**Malinformation** deliberately misleads by twisting the meaning of truthful information

The UK gov't uses a framework called RESIST II to address the issue of mis and disinformation. The framework is extensive and is a whole training in itself, however, the first step to 'recognise' provides for a useful way to spot misleading news alerts and information.

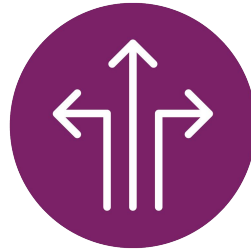
- Fabrication
- Identity
- Rhetoric
- Symbolism
- Technology



**R**ecognise



**E**arly  
Warning



**S**ituational  
Insight



**I**mpact  
Analysis



**S**trategic  
Communica-  
tions



**T**racking  
Effectiveness



# When to let sleeping dogs lie (when not to do anything)

Consider when it is best not respond to particular media queries or to engage journalists on a subject:

- When to do so would invite unwanted attention and may lead to further, deeper questions
- When to do so would create national security issues or inflame a volatile situation
- Where the situation or issue is not directly handled by us and would be better answered by the responsible party



Government  
Communication  
Service

# Any questions?