Media Contact Protocols

Section 1 - Purpose

(1) The Media Contact Protocols provide guidelines on responsibilities for media liaison on University Of Canberra (University) matters. Information is provided on such matters as media releases, crisis communication and media interviews.

Section 2 - Scope

(2) News gathering and dissemination is a high pressure and competitive industry. Journalists for radio, television and print are often required to produce daily a considerable amount of material to fill their newspapers, journals, radio or television programs.

(3) For universities and other institutions, the high volume of daily news accessible for consumers allows both opportunities and challenges. Publicly funded institutions such as universities are attractive targets for disgruntled stakeholders and politicians, however journalists are also keen to receive media releases to reduce their daily workload.

(4) Media liaison and public relations are an important part of the University communication strategies. They must be coordinated, to avoid providing misleading or inconsistent information.

(5) In the contemporary environment, when tertiary education is very much to the forefront of public debate, it is essential the University follows established protocols and builds an effective skills base within the organisation so as to properly deal with the media.

(6) The following Protocols, together with media training will ensure the University has a professional approach to such dealings.

Section 3 - Procedure

Proactive and Reactive Media

(7) Interface with the media is generally proactive or reactive in nature.

(8) Proactive media may be defined as media attention resulting from the University taking the initiative and informing the media of either a good news story or a contentious issue.

(9) Reactive media may be defined as media attention resulting from the media approaching the University for comment on an issue.

(10) Proactive media is easier to manage. The University provides the content to the media and a spokesperson is generally briefed and available for public comment.

(11) Reactive media may be harder to manage as the issue may be unexpected, or the timing may be such that it is

inappropriate to make a public comment. There may also be issues around privacy. It is generally better to get a story out without waiting for the media to come to you, however, there will be occasions when this does not happen.

Public Comment

(12) The University's Charter of Conduct and Values refers to public comment as:

a. In making written or oral comments which purport to represent the views or authority of the University and which might reasonably be expected to become public, employees have a responsibility to ensure that they hold proper authority to make such public comments, and that such authority has been given to them by a person holding actual authority on behalf of the University. In this context there are very few people who are authorised to speak on behalf of the University or to give delegation. The Vice-Chancellor and the Chancellor, only, are authorised to speak on behalf of the Council. The Vice-Chancellor, VCAC, and Associate Director, Media and Communication only, in relation to the University. Everyone else requires delegation.
b. Where the matter of a media statement or letter relates directly to the academic or other specialised subject area of an employee's appointment, an employee may use the University's name and address and give the title of his or her University appointment in order to establish his or her credentials.
c. All employees have the right to express their views publicly on any matter of public interest provided they make clear the fact that such views are those they hold as private citizens.

Types of Media

(13) There are three main forms of media – radio, television and print.

(14) Each has different deadlines. Radio is 'immediate', television predicated on the times of evening bulletins, and print on a first edition deadline of approximately midnight.

(15) Media organisations require advance notice of events or positive stories. Three to five days is customary.

(16) It is important to note that there is no obligation for the University to make an immediate public comment on an issue. Even when dealing with a journalist requiring a specialist professional comment, it is appropriate to ask for time to think through the issue.

General Media Procedures

(17) Staff receiving enquiries from the media and who are not specifically authorised to engage in media contact by the Vice-Chancellor, should refer media representatives either to a Pro Vice-Chancellor or the Associate Director, Media and Communication.

(18) In the event members of Media & Communications are unavailable, the following details should be supplied by either email or voicemail:

a. Name
b. Media organisation
c. Telephone number
d. Date and time of request
e. Deadline, and
f. Planned use of the information.

(19) Voicemail messages from journalists should always be returned.

Media Contact

(20) Media & Communications is in constant contact with local, regional, national and international media, either though a program of media releases and other story leads or when responding to incoming requests from journalists.

(21) Media & Communications, which reports directly to the Executive Director and Vice President (Development and International) and works closely with the Vice-Chancellor and the University Executive facilitates media contact with the Executive and staff designated by the University as expert commentators.

(22) Media & Communications provides advice and training on how to deal with the media.

Media Releases

(23) Official University media releases are issued only by Media & Communications. This ensures that:

a. the release is professionally written in journalistic style
b. it is unlikely to clash with another University story issued on the same day, and
c. the University is aware of what stories are released, and the need for particular spokespersons to be available to the media.

(24) Releases issued to the media are uploaded to the UC News and Events website on the University home page.

Out-of-hours Contact

(25) Members of Media & Communications are available to the media seven days a week. They also retain the 'after hours' numbers of all key University personnel.

Crisis Communication

(26) When a critical incident occurs, many people, internally and externally, including media, seek timely information and an official response. The University has a comprehensive Crisis Management Plan. In summary, the Plan provides for:

a. the assembling of a crisis management team to establish circumstances and decide upon action, including communication
b. the appointment of a single spokesperson to handle media enquiries, usually the Vice-Chancellor in collaboration with Media & Communications, and
c. the issuing of (a) media statement(s) for issue as appropriate, with the official spokesperson available at all times to respond, 'live' or by telephone, to all enquiries.

Media Spokespersons

(27) The principal spokesperson for the University on governance, policy, financial, legal and other corporate issues is the Vice-Chancellor, who may delegate this role according to the issue at hand. However, the first point of media contact is usually Media & Communications which directs media to the appropriate personnel.

Expert Comment and Academic Freedom

(28) Academic staff are encouraged to share their expertise with media and to liaise directly with the media on matters within their area of expertise. They are also encouraged to add their names to the University's web-based expertise list. This expertise list is an important strategy for the University to improve accessibility of academic staff to the media and to promote and raise the profile of the work of academics. Media & Communications staff rely upon this list when there are media enquiries. Media & Communications staff are also happy to provide promotional advice and

help gain media attention for research projects.

Public Comment

(29) University staff are free to engage in public debate, and party political, professional, interest group and charitable activities, provided such participation does not impede the staff member's University duties. When a University staff member does comment publicly on such matters, it should be made clear that such comment is made as an individual, or on behalf of the organisation involved other than the University, and not in the staff member's capacity as a representative of the University.

Letters to the Editor

(30) Staff are encouraged to write letters to newspapers on issues which are clearly within the range of their professional expertise. In such instances, it is appropriate for the staff member's position at the University to be mentioned. However, staff writing on political, religious or social issues and having expertise no greater than that of a member of the general public should use a private address and not indicate any association with the University. It is also desirable that procedures be adopted that make it clear the views expressed are those of the individual and not of the University.

Press Articles

(31) The guidelines that apply to letters to the press also apply to those preparing a press article.

Media Interviews

(32) General and academic staff undertaking media interviews regarding their area of expertise are advised to:

a. provide factual information on the topic and not comment on University governance, policy, financial, legal or other corporate issues and matters related to the privacy of staff and students
b. treat everything as "on the record", and
c. ask when the article/interview will be printed/aired so Media & Communications can monitor it.

(33) In summary, they should be:

a. accessible
b. timely
c. accurate, and
d. consistent.

(34) At the conclusion of interviews, staff should inform Media & Communications immediately by telephone, email or fax, and keep a file or diary note.

Media Release Drafting

(35) It is often difficult to view the work that we do as unique, special or newsworthy. Universities though, by the nature of their research and teaching work are often in a position to release information that will be interesting to the public or will help them in their daily life.

(36) Information on course developments or student matters is of great interest to parents of potential students and the potential students themselves. This may be limited to the Canberra region, or it may be a matter that deserves wider coverage.

(37) Staff are encouraged to inform Media & Communications of media profile opportunities and to submit draft media

releases. These can be edited by the Unit into journalistic ‘style’. Ideally, the Unit requires two weeks’ notice of a perceived media ‘event’, although if this advance notice is not possible, staff are still encouraged to contact Media & Communications. Those drafting releases should ensure they provide a contact name and number and that the person is available on the day the release is to be distributed. Media & Communications will email the edited release to the writer for final approval. Once the edited version is approved and returned to PR it is released based on the target date and area.

(38) Media releases are distributed not only to target media but other stakeholders.

Media Monitoring

(39) Media & Communications receives daily advice of all media coverage of the University at all target levels. Stories relating to University are kept on file in Media & Communications and these files may be accessed by contacting the Unit.

(40) Tapes and /or transcripts of interviews/programs can be obtained from the monitoring service, with costs passed on to the client area.

Communication Strategies

(41) Media & Communications is able to assist in the development of more comprehensive communication exercises. These might include speeches, major announcements and commensurate event management (e.g. media conferences). Those developing such programs should consult Media & Communications early in the process about the level of likely involvement in any initiative.

Status and Details

Status	Historic
Effective Date	18th April 2023
Review Date	18th April 2023
Approval Authority	Vice-Chancellor
Approval Date	18th April 2023
Expiry Date	9th July 2025
Custodian	Andrea Visser Associate Director, Media and Communication
Responsible Manager	Renee Murphy Director, Student Recruitment & Marketing
Author	Brittany Champness Associate Director, Web and Digital
Enquiries Contact	Nick Markesinis Policy Manager Policy