

**Intro:** Welcome back to a new episode of Engage, a podcast from the CIPR. In conjunction with the CIPR's 75th-anniversary celebrations, today's panellists explore the challenges that they've experienced throughout their careers and how they compare to those entering the PR and Comms industry today. Discussing the challenges of the evolution of technology and increasing diversity and inclusion and how these, along with many others, are still key areas of focus.

**Calhan:** Hi, everyone. My name is Calhan Behrendt and I'm an Account Manager at Outwrite PR. We are here today to have a lovely chat about, I guess, the development of the PR industry over the last few decades and where the industry is headed. I'm joined today by an absolutely incredible panel and I'm going to briefly hand over to each of them to introduce themselves. Eva, would you mind going first?

**Eva:** Not at all. My name is Eva Maclaine. I specialise in Reputation Management and Issues Management and Stakeholder Management as well. I've worked in the UK, but also internationally, luckily enough. I've been a CIPR member for more years than I care to remember. I've been fairly active in it certainly since 2012, I think it was. I've been on the board several times on a coordinating committee with Maria, which we're still on at the moment, and very active in the international group, which I actually relaunched and is now going very well indeed.

**Calhan:** Thank you very much for that. I'll pass over to Maria.

**Maria:** I'm Maria Chanmugam. I'm Director of Clevercoms, which is a management consultancy in the telecoms and tech sector. I do PR work for clients, which is mainly Marketing Communications or Reputation Management and overseeing staff for them. But it's not as much as I used to a long time ago. My involvement with the CIPR, I've been a member for... oh, I saw my certificate today just to remind me. Associate member since 1990 and full member since 1991.

**Calhan:** Tony, thank you for joining us as well.

**Tony:** Hi, thanks, Calhan. I'm Tony Bradley. I think of myself as a grizzled old veteran of the PR industry. I've been a CIPR member for about 36 years now and a volunteer. Throughout that time I've been Regional Chair, I've been Honorary Treasurer, I was National President back in 2006 or 2007, I think it was. My most recent appointment was as Chair of Iprovision, the CIPR Benevolent Fund. I stepped down from that at Christmas because I'd done two four-year terms, which was the maximum that was permitted. I think I'm in the autumn of my career now. I still have clients, I'm at my desk most of the working day. In the past, I've worked in-house as an IT consultant, like David, and a lot of international work for the likes of Ernest & Young, S&E, IBM, Ford, Ray-Ban, so I've been around the block once or twice anyway.

**Calhan:** Fantastic. I just like to say it's absolutely fantastic being in this room with all this experience because as someone who began my career as a journalist and relatively recently, even more so coming over to the UK from Australia in the last few years, it's just great having this experience available to us. I'd like to start, Tony, probably with you. How did you initially get into PR?

**Tony:** Well, like you, I was a journalist originally. I went to college, did the one-year pre-entry course in journalism and then a two-and-a half year indentures, which I always think of as more like an apprenticeship, really. Passed my journalism qualifications and, to be honest, I quickly got bored. I was working in regional newspapers, I found that I was doing the same old stories every year. Every Christmas, we do a Christmas story. Every summer, we do a summer story. And I thought there has to be more to it than this.

And we were going back 40-something years now, and there was this new career, public relations, which had only just really started to gain traction outside of central London anyway. And I thought, "this sounds interesting", dealing with journalists but not being a journalist. And I applied for and got my first job in public relations with the Automobile Association, which involved me moving down to London. And it was

everything I thought it would be. I was working with journalists, going out and drinking with journalists and doing a bit of writing and doing a bit of travel. And I have to say the money was far better.

I remember my exit interview at the Shields Gazette, which was the evening newspaper where I served most of my journalistic career. The editor called me in for the exit interview and said, "can I just ask you, public relations - don't know much about it, how much do you get paid?". And I remember at the time I said, "I think I get a £2,000 joining fee or joining bonus and £7,500 a year". He said, "I can see why you're leaving the Gazette now. That's actually more than I get paid". So, he shook my hand and wished me well and the rest is history, as they say.

**Calhan:** Maria, was it a similar set of circumstances for you?

**Maria:** No, I didn't really know anything about PR when I was in university. I had thought I'd quite like to work in news production or something like that. I suppose now we use the words 'creating content', but that wasn't a term we used back then. But that was what interested me.

I was told by somebody in the ethnic minority unit at the BBC that because I wasn't Oxbridge, I didn't have a hope. So, I had to think about what else I could interest me. I'd been away for about six months, came back, took the first job I could, which was PA to the Managing Director of a company. And there I met somebody who started talking about PR. But I didn't know how you got in. And the journey was quite painful because you see things in newspapers, you go to interviews with agencies or even recruitment consultants.

The first one of the earlier interviews I had, the person was quite surprised to see me as the person on the other end of the phone. And it wasn't very pleasant. But I went for an interview with a small PR consultancy because I saw that they were looking for a PA for the MD, and she said, "I'm not going to take you on, you'll be bored to tears. When I

have the money to train somebody, I will call you if that's all right". And six months later, she did, and that was absolutely amazing. And I was jolly lucky to have her as my mentor. So, it was an accident, I suppose, learning about what PR was, and it was just finding somebody who had the confidence to take me on.

**Calhan:** Absolutely, no, I think that's a really key point is getting that foot in the door, isn't it, a lot of the time, and just getting that opportunity to make those steps into the industry. Eva, was it a similar situation for you?

**Eva:** Slightly, but not completely - I think my story is slightly different as well. I went to university, and I studied languages and philosophy, which was not terribly useful; I didn't want to do translation. But while at university, I acted an awful lot. I ended up deciding I wanted to act. I went out, I got my Equity card, toured with a children's theatre, all sorts of things - Soho Fringe Theatre, that thing. Then met my husband and decided I didn't really want to be away. I auditioned for some work which was being away for months and months, so I decided I was going to change tack and I had no idea what to do.

I also hadn't heard of PR. I didn't know what it was, but I started looking around. I was interested in broadcasting, television, journalism, so I thought, PR, when I did look into it, I saw that PR actually covered a lot of those areas. So, I decided I'd find a PR diploma, which you could do, so that's exactly what I did. I did that for a year and then applied for jobs.

I had a really lovely Professor there who was really helpful. I think he pointed out the job in the paper for me and I applied, and I got it, and I was incredibly lucky because it was a fantastic consultancy in Bruton Place, actually, and it really gave me the most fabulous grounding, fabulous mentoring, teaching, without any official things, but great stuff, great mentors. So yes, that was my entry into PR.

**Calhan:** I think that's another key point is this touching back on those mentors and those first people to help you guide you through the industry, especially one that has changed significantly over the last, not even just few years, but a few decades.

Maria, in terms of when you first began in the industry, do you feel that the requirements for becoming a PR or Commerce Practitioner has changed significantly, or is it still very much what it was when you started?

**Maria:** I think the basics are still the same because what I was told was important qualities were ability to write and appreciation of research, how important that is. I had a degree in Economics, so that was second nature to me and the curiosity, those things you need today, very much so. Because without that, I don't think you could be a PR person. But yes, there are other skills you do need today, but the basics, as far as I'm concerned, are still very much the same.

**Calhan:** Tony, is that something that you agree with? The basics are still the big foundations that people need to build up.

**Tony:** To an extent. I think, as Maria said before, a lot of what we do nowadays is about content, whereas we used to call it writing, but it's essentially the same thing. But I do think the fundamentals have shifted slightly in that I remember when I first got into public relations, as I said, I had been a journalist, and so writing came naturally to me. And for a long time, I used to subscribe to this idea that to be a good PR person, you had to be a former journalist. And to be honest, as happened quite a lot in the days when I was young, careers developed very rapidly. I mean, if you got into PR when I did, if you were good, you would quickly go up the promotion ladder, and I was Managing Director of a sizable PR company at the age of 33, which was ridiculous. I mean, I knew nothing about anything other than PR – I couldn't read a spreadsheet, couldn't read a balance sheet, had no idea about recruitment or HR or whatever. So, it was a ridiculous situation. But in fact, looking around the industry, there's an awful lot of people like myself who are in exactly the same position.

As I say, because I was the boss, I was in charge of recruitment. And it was only one time I looked around the office and realised that everybody in the office was like a clone of me: they were all men, they were all dark-haired with a moustache, married with kids, and a former journalist. We got our heads together and said, “this can't really be right, I think we need to perhaps broaden the base of our business”.

It was at that time that PR started to become much more of a female profession and universities were starting courses and whatever. And suddenly there's this whole new world of young, often female people with Comms degrees and PR degrees and whatever, Event Management experience, whatever. And it was a totally different world to us. I think that's when we shifted from really being a Media Relations company to being a PR company, and it's when we broadened our recruitment base.

**Calhan:** I'd like to touch on a point that you made there, Tony, in terms of the changing demographical base that the PR industry has seen, especially over the last couple of decades, as it was key in the 22 State of Profession report done by the CIPR, a key challenge has been a lack of diversity amongst PR and commerce professionals in leadership roles.

Maria, is this working towards that next step? Is this something that needs to be done more? What has changed recently, do you think, in the industry?

**Maria:** I think, recently, bodies like the CIPR have become more aware of the lack of diversity across the board because diversity isn't just about women, it's about so much more. Often people say, “oh, yes, we have a few women there, so okay, we're really good. We're really good”. But diversity is a lot more than that.

I think the CIPR has been very recently, in the last five years or so, been working very hard towards it. And yes, in recent years, I have seen significant improvement, which is why I am more engaged. And the reason I wasn't engaged was because I remember

being a young member and going with one of my directors to... We belong to the Property and Construction Industry group at the CIPR, and we were the only two women in the room, and there wasn't anyone else who was a person of colour. And it was very uncomfortable to be a young person. And the whole attitude was quite patronising because we were different. Well, I was very different. And it put me off.

I would go for training because that was important. I then belonged to the Marketing Communication group several years later, which was absolutely fantastic. And that was really good people, but then that was predominantly women on the committee, in my recollection, but that kept me engaged – that and the training.

And it was only when I also felt nobody reached out to you. So, nobody understood why you weren't participating because it was almost like, “yeah, we're taking your money, that's fine. And yes, we give you some training and you must be happy if you're carrying on paying”. But it's only in recent years that there has been more understanding that they need to deliver a service, they need to understand the needs of their members, and they're working jolly hard.

It is testament to the team in-house of how much things have evolved. Yes, there's work to be done, but they're on the right track – in my experience anyway.

**Eva:** That's certainly true from what I can see that CIPR has made huge changes in that respect recently, and it's still working hard on it. There's lots of things that are going on which people don't really know about yet, which are aiming towards much better diversity and inclusion.

Of course, when I started, there was very little diversity. I mean, there's still extremely little, but it wasn't just diversity in terms of ethnicity, but also in terms of background. The company that I joined was exclusively public school and terribly well connected. Goodness, if you pronounced a word wrong then you were frowned upon and laughed at.

Although it was a great company, there were certain things which were definitely not right. Women, I think the attitude towards women has changed tremendously as well, because when I started, I got put onto a perfume account and a fashion account. I love dressing up nicely, I love fashion, but I do not want to work in fashion. So, I spotted an engineering account which I really wanted; it was the largest account in the company. I went to the director on the account. I said, "look, can I learn with you? Can I work with you?". He said, "oh, really? Yeah. Okay. Go and ask the MD". I asked the MD, and the MD could not have been more surprised and astonished and dumbfounded. He said, "why do you want to work on that? You're working on this and that and the other. I said, "that's what I want to do". The attitude towards women then was that you simply didn't work in anything like engineering or construction or property. That was jobs for the boys. Thank goodness that's all changed a lot.

**Maria:** My experience at work was very different because I was working for an all-woman consultancy in the Property and Construction sector. And yes, we were a novelty when we went into meetings with our clients. But the fact was my two Directors had come from a very large construction company, from the marketing department of a large construction company, so they were well-known in the industry. People trusted them and so people began to trust the rest of us.

What was amusing was that I tended to get a lot of the Professional Services clients because a firm of Solicitors, of specialised city Solicitors, and not any... they were quite tough nuts. They asked for me because I had a serious degree. Everybody else in the company either didn't have a degree or had a degree in English, and I had a degree in Economics, so they thought I was the right person for them and so did the Quantity Surveyors. So, I got to work on some really tough accounts and I loved it.

**Calhan:** It raises another good point about the wider backgrounds that we all have when we're entering the industry. I know with our agency ourselves; we've got a nice diverse split of people who used to be journalists. We've got people who have been to

university to study Public Relations now, and then it's just developing that wider skill set because everyone has different opinions or different ideas that come to the fore.

Eva. what is the importance, do you think, of having that wide skillset at an agency or a consultancy?

**Eva:** It's hugely important. But, I mean, PR, don't forget, can be so many different things. I mean, if you are working in fashion, for example, your day will be completely different from somebody who's working in property and construction, clearly. But you do need specific skillsets, definitely. You need to keep up with them and develop them. I think that's hugely important, which again is something the CIPR is very good at. You can do a diploma chartership and all sorts of things. It's very, very important that you actually develop those skillsets and they're varied depending on the work you do.

But I did like Maria's comment about curiosity because I think that is just essential for any good PR person. You've got to be curious. You've got to really want to understand the client, not at a superficial level, but to really delve into the industry that they're in and the problems which they face because, to me, PR is all about solving great, hairy problems. That's what we do and finding the solutions.

**Calhan:** I really like that. I do think it's absolutely vital, isn't it? Having that sense of curiosity to understand what's going on and figure out the key issues of clients or individual practices. I'd like to slightly go on a tangent towards that as well and ask Tony, in terms of continuing professional development, while curiosity may not be something you can necessarily train overnight, what do you do to approach continual development of your own skillset?

**Tony:** I'm probably the wrong person to ask this question about because for a long time I thought, "well, I haven't really got much more to learn". But no, I've been, joking apart, I do subscribe to this idea of lifelong learning.

I've been lucky enough to actually always spend a lot of time with people much younger than myself. I've been heavily involved in PR degree courses in one university in the North East, in particular, so spent a lot of time with bright young students, and they all thought I was teaching them things. And in fact, often than not the reverse was the case. And a really good example of this is just as I was about to become CIPR President, as I say, that's what best part of 15, 20 years ago, I was approached by one of the students that asked me how I was looking to make my mark on the CIPR. He said, "you should really look hard at engaging with the membership", he said, "because I've only been in this PR game for a year and a bit", he said, "but I just think the CIPR is not engaging, but certainly not with us as students". And he said, "when I talked to other people around the Northeast," he said "the CIPR is still seen as being very London-centric and isn't really engaging with them." And he said, "I've got an idea for you – you should start blogging". And at the time, I mean, going back a few years now, blogging wasn't something that everybody did as a matter of course. And he said, "social media is going to be a big thing in our industry".

And I listened to what he said. And I thought, "A: I'm not sure I understand what he's saying to me, but B: I'm not sure I agree with it anyway". But I give a lot of thought to it, and this young chap, he kept pushing at it. And when I became President, I had my first meeting down at headquarters and said, "I want to start a President's blog as a way of engaging with our membership". And everybody pooh-poohed it. And I remember the Webmaster said, "oh no, we can't do that". And I thought, "okay, this is it. I either make a play for this or not. And sure enough, it happened, and it was immensely successful".

We got so many plaudits from bloggers around the world who said, "this is an amazing thing to be doing". It turns out the CIPR was the first institute in the Public Relations industry to engage its membership via social media and blogs. And we look back now and think, "well, that can't be right. Surely everybody was doing it". But the fact is, they weren't. I think back to the student question, who went on to work a very good career himself in the social media scene and PR industry. I think, "well, had I not been so keen to learn and thirsty to learn new things in spite of my advancing years, I wouldn't have

had that conversation with Steven”. I think we'd have missed a trick, and I think we'd all have been a lot poorer for that.

**Calhan:** I find that really fascinating considering there's even a lot of clients these days would go, “oh, well, a blog or web news is such a second nature thing to have”. It's almost not even a consideration at this point. But drawing it to those lines 10, 15 years ago, it is something that just shows that PR is an ever -changing landscape.

Eva, what typical challenges or priorities did you have to deal with in your role throughout the industry, even over the last 10, 20 years? And do you feel that many of them are still consistent challenges that you have to overcome in the industry today?

**Eva:** Certainly in terms of technological innovation, that's something which I've quite enjoyed getting to grips with. I'm not as good as some people are, but on the other hand, when I think about it, I was a very early adopter of, for example, of emails.

I remember talking to two of my journalist friends at a party conference, and I very excitedly said, “I've actually just got an email address”. They said, “God, what on earth for? It's absolutely useless”. I said, “you wait, you'll see it's actually going to be very, very important to all of us”. That was just email.

I think AI and technological innovation, I think that's a huge challenge for everybody now. That's where we need to really try and understand much better where we're going to be going. But in the past years, there is one challenge which I've particularly experienced. That's been when PR isn't involved early enough, we're very often brought in to either firefight, “we've had a crisis, help!, what do I do about it?”, or they've got a problem with their reputation suddenly. But we need to be brought in right from the start. It's to do with having a seat at the boardroom table to some extent, but it's actually just to be treated with seriousness and as a real management necessity. It's not just a benefit, it's a necessity. We have to be there from the beginning and be able to help shape the company's future, if you like.

**Calhan:** That's absolutely understandable. I do think you touched on a good point there in terms of the development of social media and the technological innovations has been a consistent thing that a lot of people are obviously focusing on, and now with the rise of AI, it's another key area where people are going to look to see how they can develop their skillset with that.

It's clear that technology and the introduction of social media have been two major introductions that have shaped the outputs of PR and Comms. Maria, what's been your experience of the changing landscape of outputs in PR and Comms?

**Maria:** The challenge comes... the challenge, as I would say, in that thing is client-specific, the sectors that they work in, the businesses they'd have. It's sometimes knowing that you have to engage on social media. But how is it going to be appropriate for that particular organisation? Quite a lot of the work I do is very.... there are a lot of confidentiality issues because coming from it from a Management Consultancy point of view, I work on due diligence and there are things that you just cannot talk about. The client, I specifically work on PR for... overseeing their PR. It's knowing how because there's an awful lot of.... because they're in the tech sector, there's an awful lot of things that are very confidential in what they're dealing with, how their service products evolve, the technologies involved. It's understanding how to get them to engage with social media and giving them the confidence that it's actually, there are areas that they can talk about and educating them in those areas rather than having them think that, "no, no, my whole world has to be about out there. I've got to tell the whole world and I can't do that. It's going to take somebody 24 hours a day to work on this because they've got to be on social media all the time".

It's just helping educating. That's been the challenge that given the clients that I work with, how do I educate them to have confidence in the way things are evolving? Now, they understand AI, it's what they do. But it's the more public side of Public Relations that I need to educate them on. And I think, yeah, that's where challenges arise.

**Eva:** So I think maybe when I said there weren't any challenges I think that actually has been a constant challenge for me.

**Calhan:** Tony, is that something that you've also experienced?

**Tony:** Yes, but in fact, what I'm more interested in just talking about immediately is, what I thought was interesting was when you start talking about challenges and whatever, people immediately jumped on the technology as being a challenge. I would sort of take the opposite view. I think technology isn't a challenge, I think technology has really unlocked the power of the PR industry.

Like Eva, with her being the first person she knew that had an email address. I mean, I remember going back, must be 40 years now, I was working at a consultancy in London and the boss was an early adopter like Eva is. We walked in the office one day and there was this huge machine in the corner and we all said, "what's that?", and he said, "it's an electronic mail machine, telecom gold". And it was something that BT was selling and to anyone foolish enough to buy one. And it cost an arm and a leg, I think it cost as much as a company car would have cost. And it sat in the corner, I remember the guy who came into train us on it, and it was an email machine basically. And he was saying, "oh, this is fantastic, it's state of the art", whatever. And he said, "oh, it has a directory of users, and he left that with us". And we looked at the directory, and the only people that were in anything like our sector was the Daily Telegraph news desk and they were the only user of this in the entire media world.

So we looked at this and thought, "well, this is fantastic – we now have a direct line under the Daily Telegraph News desk". And so just like us, they were new-fangled with us, so every time we sat down and sent a press release, they would use it because they were so excited at the idea of getting this press release via this new email thing.

But I do think technology, it certainly transformed the way I worked, and I think I would say the same principles apply. And I remember a long time ago, I was at a conference and I had a phone call from a client who said, "I've got a major issue, we're being criticised for X, Y, and Z, can you knock us out a quick press release?", and I said, "yeah, no problem, I'll email it across to you later". So I rattled out a press release, sent it across. It was just what he needed. We used it, sort of nipped a potential issue in the bud.

He rang me up the next day and said, "Tony, just thanks for yesterday," he said, "because you're not in the office," he said, "I'm really grateful that you were able to get that sorted". And he said, "do you fancy a beer?" I said, "well, if you've got time to jump on a plane", he said, "why? Where are you?", I said, "I'm in Croatia at a conference". And he said, "but what about the press release you wrote yesterday?", "I wrote it on my BlackBerry on the beach". And he was just totally blown away by this idea that I was sitting on a beach in Croatia with a BlackBerry, if you're old enough to remember them, writing press releases.

It was only after that, I started to realise that, you know, this is the future: we don't need to be chained to a desk. I like to think of myself as one of the original road warriors, you know. Give me a laptop and I'll work from anywhere. And that was the way I developed my business. In fact, I'm currently running, it's a cloud-based business. When I set it up 12 years ago, people said, "what do you mean it's a cloud-based business?", I said, "well, I've actually sold my business, I've taken a couple of clients, I'm working from the back bedroom at home". But that sounds a bit naff, so I'm describing it as a cloud-based PR company, and I was the first in the UK.

That sort of did me well for a few years because I got a lot of bits of business on the back of people who were just intrigued as to what it was all about. But as I say, this idea that technology is something to be worried about, I think it's a total non-starter. I think you should look the other way, and I think the same thing applies to all of these new technologies that are coming along. And it's encouraging to see that, you know, some

PR companies are latching on to the likes of TikTok and whatever and using it to promote their clients rather than saying, "I don't like the look of this, this isn't what we need". I think it's all part of this changing skillset, isn't it? I think if the industry is going to move along, I think that's the way we need to be doing it.

**Maria:** It's about educating the client, isn't it. About how it can work for them. So don't be afraid of it. It can work for you in some way.

**Calhan:** Absolutely. I'd just like to, I think, touch on the last bit of your point there as well, Tony, in terms of the fact that it's helping make strides towards the growth and the development of the industry to adapt with modern times.

Eva, with the CIPR celebrating its 75th anniversary this year, what do you think have been some of the real strides of the profession over those last, kind of, few decades, in your opinion?

**Eva:** It's been unrecognisable. It's changed so much, I think, the CIPR itself. I think in terms of the profession, it has become far more professional. I think that that's really a huge advance. I mean, you know, we used to get trained by various people, and as I say in my case, it really was very good and I ended up writing semi decently. But now, I think that accent on training is far, far greater than the understanding. There's far more academic books being written about PR, there's more understanding of PR. Certainly, the emphasis on ethical behaviour, I think, is very important – so that's a huge change, I think.

And, again, I think it separates us as CIPR practitioners and PR practitioners. If we're CIPR members, we're not the same as everybody else, we do have a code of conduct and we do have to step up to the mark, so I think that's very different. The chartership as well, because that in our profession is very important, I think it's what differentiates us from any other PR practitioners and from any other body as well. And by doing the

chartership, you are saying that you actually have achieved a certain standard, and it concentrates, for those who don't know, on strategy, ethics, and leadership.

We've got far more people chartered now than we had even when I was on the board, which was 2015, I think. We've grown exponentially and I think it's really good. And this year I know that Iprovision, I think it was, that they offered 75 charterships at £75, which is a brilliant move. I think they've sold out already, unfortunately, but it's a really, really good move. I think all of that has meant such positive benefits to us as practitioners, but also to the industries as a whole.

**Calhan:** Tony, just going down that link with Eva's mention of Iprovision there and the work that the CIPR has done in terms of increasing access to chartership and more professional development. Is there anything you personally hope to see more of in the future in terms of the industry itself?

**Tony:** I think diversity is something I've given a lot of attention to and put a lot of effort in over the course of the last few years. One of the things that was very apparent to me when I joined Iprovision initially and became Chair of four years ago was just how badly the Iprovision board reflected the membership. And a couple of us got our heads together and said, "we've got to change this, this is ridiculous". We were so much of the stereotype of 'pale, male and stale' that it was almost a joke. And so we've put an awful lot of effort over the last two or three years in diversifying our board and trying to make it look more like our membership, and I think we've achieved that.

It wasn't easy because I think for the reasons that Maria outlined earlier, a lot of people who were underrepresented weren't keen to put themselves forward. What I'd like to see, or certainly what I'd like to see Iprovision doing, is moving forward on the whole social inclusion agenda. And this is something that my successor, Kevin Taylor, is leading on and Steve Jefferson Smith is very involved as well.

So I think between the two of them, if they can't crack it this year, we'll never achieve it. The idea is that Iprovision is creating a new fund setting aside £75,000 to be spent on improving social inclusion and making it easier for people to get into Public Relations. I'm not just talking about ethnicity we're talking about the white working-class man from the north of England who never dreamt he could work in PR. It's just reaching out to those sorts of people and saying, "what are the barriers to you getting a job in PR? Let's dip into the fund and see how we can help".

And it's very much a primary exercise. What we're looking to do is to work with consultancies who say, "well, actually, we are interested in taking on an underrepresented minority and perhaps helping them into a career". If we give them a job, we can get CIPR to waive the membership fees, we can get free training for them, we can pay some of their transport costs, perhaps in getting from one side of town to a job at the other side of town. I think this year there seems to be a real will in broadening the influx of underrepresented minorities into the PR profession. I think if we achieve that, I'd be a very happy man.

**Calhan:** Absolutely. Just to finish up, Maria, is that a statement of the future that you agree with?

**Maria:** Yes, I do, I think it is very important. It was quite sad when I looked at the recent research that CIPR did that we've actually taken a few steps backwards, both in terms of social inclusion and ethnicity. And so I think that's important if we are to serve the industries, to serve the world, to serve society and our client bases, you have to have diverse thinking. And hopefully, it will also help for people to take us more seriously because I know the CIPR is working very hard, but being a member, being qualified, is still not being taken seriously or is not considered important in many sectors.

And just this week, I was amazed that somebody I was talking to, well, not I was talking to, somebody who worked for me, who didn't know what chartered PR was. And it came about because one of our past Presidents is a speaker at my next dinner. And he

actually thought that that was a hyphenated name. And this is a very senior person, a very senior person, and I had to explain, and I come across this all the time. So I think there's a lot more to be done for PR to be taken seriously, for us to be seen as a profession.

We're the same as a Solicitor, as a Surveyor, as an Accountant. And so if we... and we have, as Eva said, we need to be consulted very early on, we need to be at the top table. But for that, they need to understand what we're about and that how important education is. And I think that's what I would like to see in the future, the diversity and inclusion, but also the fact that those of us who are members, we are members because we take our profession seriously and we educate ourselves and we're constantly learning and our skills are evolving.

**Calhan:** Absolutely. I think that's a perfect note to end on. In that case, thank you all so much for joining me today on the panel and thank you again for sharing your insight with our listeners. Thanks again.

**Maria:** Thank you.

**Outro:** Thanks for tuning in to this episode of Engage. We'll feature links to resources about Chartership, diplomas, and other training in the episode show notes, but remember, don't let the conversation stop there. If you have any tips or guidance for other practitioners, or have any comments about this episode, share them on Twitter using the hashtag #Engage.