

CIPR

CHARTERED INSTITUTE  
OF PUBLIC RELATIONS



# RECRUITING FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS ROLES

In association with

**reuben  
sinclair**



PROFESSIONAL  
STANDARDS  
[cipr.co.uk](http://cipr.co.uk)



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# Introduction



This guide is designed to provide information and practical assistance to individuals and businesses seeking public relations (PR) support.

It is intended for a variety of readers.

- If you are an HR professional or an SME with little experience in public relations, it will give you an understanding of basics, help you define the role you're recruiting for and identify the qualities and attributes you need from the right candidate.
- If you are a PR professional or small PR agency unfamiliar with recruitment, it will help you establish a robust process to ensure you hire the best possible candidate.

Founded in 1948, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) is the Royal Chartered professional body for public relations practitioners in the UK and overseas.

For more information visit [www.cipr.co.uk](http://www.cipr.co.uk)

## Independent advice from the CIPR

The CIPR will provide a Client Advisor for a fixed fee, who can assist you in your recruitment processes by:

- helping you develop a suitable job description and person spec;
- helping you shortlist from a pool of candidates (not confined to CIPR members);
- joining your interview panel as an independent member; and
- giving you feedback on your recruitment process for future reference.

For more information about this service please visit [cipr.co.uk/content/client-services](http://cipr.co.uk/content/client-services). If you would like us to match you with a Client Advisor please contact Mazeda Begum at [MazedaB@cipr.co.uk](mailto:MazedaB@cipr.co.uk)

# STEP 01

## Creating a Job Description



The recruitment process is an opportunity to think afresh about what your organisation needs, and make sure you are getting the best possible value from your public relations function. Even if you have employed someone in a similar role before, it's a good idea to write a fresh job description each time you recruit. You may find that you can secure better value from your new recruit by defining their job more broadly.

Public relations (PR) helps organisations to effectively engage in two way communicative relationships with important audiences – both externally and internally. A trained PR practitioner will provide an important service as part of an organisation's strategic management team by identifying and managing reputational risks that could affect customers, revenue and business value.

PR professionals offer a wide range of services across 10 core areas:

- 1 Strategic planning
- 2 Project management
- 3 Media relations
- 4 Social media relations
- 5 Internal or employee communication
- 6 Special events, conferences and meetings
- 7 Community relations
- 8 Reputation management
- 9 Government relations and public affairs
- 10 Issues and crisis management

Not all of these will be relevant to the role you need to fill, but a new recruit may bring a new skills mix into your organisation. Be ambitious – avoid just re-recruiting for the job that has fallen vacant. A CIPR Client Advisor can help you think through a fresh job description.

For complex and sensitive briefs, it may be wise to consult a recruitment specialist such as **Reuben Sinclair**.

# STEP 1 Creating a Job Description



**Certain areas of activity are regulated or otherwise governed by law.** In the UK these include lobbying, corporate reporting, advertising and fundraising. If a position will include any of these, the employer or client must satisfy themselves that the practitioner understands how to act within the law.

If a position involves communicating with Ministers, MPs, Assembly Members or senior civil servants in Westminster or Edinburgh (currently not Cardiff or Belfast), the employer must satisfy themselves that the practitioner is registered with the **Office of the Regulator of Consultant Lobbyists** (London) or the **Scottish Lobbying Register** or that they understand the need for registration once they begin advocacy work. In addition to this statutory registration, any CIPR member involved in lobbying must be on the CIPR managed **UK Lobbying Register**, which has a higher degree of disclosure.

**The following job titles are commonly used in PR roles:**

**Senior:**

Head/Director of Communications, Head/Director of Public Relations, Head/Director of Internal Communications, Head/Director of Public Affairs, Account Director, Associate Director

**Mid-level:**

Communications Manager/Officer, PR Manager/Officer, Internal Communications Manager/Officer, Public Affairs Manager/Officer, Account Manager/Officer

**Junior:**

Account Executive, PR Assistant, PR Executive, Communications Executive

# STEP 1 Creating a Job Description



## Salary

It is important to establish your salary range at this early stage and be prepared for any salary negotiations which may arise during or after interview. The charts below here are from CIPR's 2018 State of the Profession survey and can be used as a general guide or reference tool when considering salaries by role and experience. There may be salary variances between industries, particularly those which require a level of sectoral knowledge or fall within high demand areas (such as healthcare).

You may wish to include the salary or salary range in your job advertisement although this is not a requirement. Please refer to the survey for a further breakdown on average pay by UK region, professional qualification and gender.

## Salary by role

Role	Average income
Intern/trainee	£21,667
Assistant/executive	£23,844
Officer	£31,232
Manager	£43,498
Head of Communications / Associate Director	£63,139
Director/ Partner / Managing Director	£79,244

## Salary by experience

Years in PR	Average income
0 to 4	£31,201
5 to 8	£41,537
9 to 12	£51,458
13 to 16	£55,773
17 to 20	£65,872
21+	£76,522

# STEP 02

## Creating the person specification



The 2018 State of the Profession report revealed the competencies most valued by managers when hiring PR professionals.

It may be appropriate to the role you wish to fill to require specific experience in particular industries or sectors. In addition there are generally-recognised areas of specialism in PR which are not related to specific sectors. These include public affairs, internal communications, crisis communications and marketing communications.

### Most valued by the hiring manager for mid-senior level roles

#### Skills

- Management of people and resources
- Strategic planning
- Crisis, issues management

#### Attributes

- Strategic thinking
- Problem solving
- Emotional intelligence

#### Knowledge

- Research, planning, implementation and evaluation
- Business acumen
- Crisis communications management

### Most valued by the hiring manager for entry-junior level roles

#### Skills

- Copy writing and editing
- Social media relations
- Media relations

#### Attributes

- Attention to detail
- Writing ability
- Creativity

#### Knowledge

- Media and social channels, use of technology
- Research, planning, implementation, evaluation
- Business acumen

# STEP 02 Creating the person specification



Professional bodies in PR around the world have agreed a unified framework of knowledge and skills, called the Global Body of Knowledge.

This section summarises key elements of the framework that should be considered throughout the recruitment process. Employers may not require candidates to possess all of the following attributes and skills for their specific role; however this framework provides a summary you may wish to draw on when listing essential and desirable characteristics.

## Entry Level / junior roles

### Personal Attributes:

- Critical listening skills
- Global awareness
- Capacity for critical thinking, problem solving and negotiation
- Ability to apply contextual, cross-cultural and diversity considerations

Knowledge (many candidates will not have this knowledge when they apply for an entry-level position, but the employer should support them in acquiring it as it will be necessary in order for them to progress to a mid-career role later on):

- Measurement and evaluation approaches
- Uses of research and forecasting
- Proactive and reactive communications approaches
- Stakeholder analysis
- Planning and implementation techniques
- Best practices in PR
- Ethical behaviour, transparency and professionalism
- Identification and evolution of a crisis and its distinct stages

### Skills and Abilities :

- Informative and persuasive writing
- Mastery of written and oral communication
- Sensitive interpersonal communication
- Public speaking and presentation
- Digital and visual literacy
- Communication approaches and need for constant and immediate communication
- Communication models and public relations theories
- Communication and persuasion concepts and strategies
- Relationships and relationship-building techniques
- Marketing and finance
- Organisational issues, including business drivers for clients and employees
- Media needs and requirements

# STEP 02 Creating the person specification



## Mid-Career Roles

### Demonstrable mastery of the following:

- Informative and persuasive writing. Ability to write for diverse applications and platforms
- Mastery of written and oral communication and preferably second language skills
- Sensitive interpersonal communication, emotional intelligence
- Persuasive, clear and articulate public speaking and presentation skills
- Critical listening skills
- Global awareness and tracks global news and issues
- Management of information
- Contextual awareness
- Leadership qualities, innovation and flexibility
- Problem-solving, critical thinking and adaptability
- Strategic management of communication
- Technological and visual literacy
- Applying cross-cultural and diversity considerations
- Meeting facilitation

Knowledge (most candidates will not have all of this knowledge when they apply for a mid-career position. The employer should use the recruitment process to understand where the strengths and weaknesses in the candidate's knowledge lie):

- Research, planning, implementation and evaluation
- Measurement and evaluation approaches
- Uses of research and forecasting
- Research methods and concepts
- Proactive and reactive communications approaches
- Stakeholder analysis
- Cultural preferences of audiences
- Planning and implementation techniques
- Codes of practice, legal requirements and issues
- Ethical behaviour, transparency, professionalism and governance
- Identification and evolution of a crisis and its distinct stages
- Communication models and public relations theories
- Communications and persuasion concepts and strategies
- Relationships and relationship-building techniques
- Societal trends and trends in modern engagement tools
- Multi-cultural and global issues
- Related and specialist disciplines such as advertising, marketing, public affairs, lobbying, investor relations, influencer relations and branding
- Finance
- The business case for diversity
- Organisational change and development
- Management concepts and theories
- Business drivers for clients and employees
- Knowledge of distribution channels and audience preferences

# STEP 02 Creating the person specification



## Senior roles – Leading the Public Relations Function

**Integrity and accountability:** Conducts professional activities in a lawful and principled manner. Adheres to commonly accepted standards of professional behaviour and upholds codes of ethics of professional bodies. Takes responsibility for own actions and those of employees under them.

**Values and character:** Understands the role that PR plays at the strategic level. Provides advice and counsel to management. Helps to shape the organisation's values and character.

**Leadership skills:** Influences others to achieve desired goals. Motivates and inspires others, builds coalitions and communicates vision. Demonstrates influence in organisational policy, procedures, staffing and structure.

**Business literacy:** Understands and explains how employer's and clients' operations are conducted. Identifies relevant business drivers and their impact. Understands how the PR function contributes to the financial success of the organisation and its 'licence to operate'.

**Resource management:** Takes into account human, financial and organisational resources. Prepares, justifies and controls budgets for departments, programs, clients or agencies. Understands what information needs to be collected, evaluated, disseminated, and retained. Is able to obtain information using innovative methods and appropriately store it, so that it can be retrieved easily for future use.

**Organisational structure and resources:** Knows how organisations are horizontally and vertically structured. Understands and accommodates organisational governance imperatives. Recognises the relationships among PR, legal, marketing, finance and IT, etc., as essential management functions.

**Problem solving and decision-making:** Distinguishes between relevant and irrelevant information. Devises appropriate courses of action based on context and facts. Makes sound, well-informed and objective decisions in a timely manner. Assesses the implications of these decisions.

**Strategic thinking and analytical skills:** Ability to filter and process large amount of data and to extract valuable information for decision-making. Strategic thinking and management: Synthesises relevant information to determine what is needed to position the client, organisation, or issue appropriately in its market/environment, especially with regard to changing business, political, or cultural climates.

**Planning:** Sets goals and objectives based on research findings. Distinguishes among goals, objectives, strategies and tactics. Aligns project goals with organisational mission and goals. Identifies specific desired PR outcomes. Establishes budget and strategic direction for communication in relation to organisational goals. Establishes communication metrics to evaluate success. Establishes rollout sequence.

# STEP 02 Creating the person specification



## Senior roles – Leading the Public Relations Function

**Audience Identification:** Assesses interests of influential institutions, groups and individuals. Understands conflicting aims and areas of mutual interest of individual constituent groups (e.g., investors, governmental agencies, unions, consumers) with the organisation.

**Diversity:** Identifies and respects a range of differences among target audiences. Researches and addresses the cultural preferences and/or needs and barriers to communication of target audiences. Develops culturally and linguistically appropriate strategies and tactics. Works to be inclusive.

**Implementation:** Understands sequence of events and communication actions. Develops timelines and budget. Assigns responsibilities. Executes planned strategies and tactics. Demonstrates project management skills.

**Evaluation and measurement:** Judges the extent to which the results or outcomes of public relations programs are supporting organisational goals.

**Ethical behaviour:** Recognises ethical dilemmas. Identifies solutions to ethical dilemmas and demonstrates ethical conduct.

**Privacy issues:** Understands prevailing laws regarding privacy identity protection, ethical implications and digital record keeping. Effectively advises organisation on the strategic adoption and effective use of technology for listening to, communicating with and engaging priority publics.

**Issues and risk management:** Identifies potential or emerging issues that may impact and effect on the organisation. Analyses probability and potential impact of risk. Ensures organisation develops appropriate legal, ethical and reputational response plans. Designs, and leads response to crisis.

**Crisis management:** Understands the roles and responsibilities of PR at the pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis phases. Communicates the implications of each of these phases and understands the messaging needs of each. Looks beyond current organisational mindset and explores solutions.

**Counsel to management:** Understands the importance of providing counsel to the rest of the management team or client regarding issues, risks and crises. Looks beyond the current mindset and explores solutions. Considers and accommodates all views on an issue or crisis. Factors views into communication strategy.

**The CIPR offers a range of training courses** and free materials designed to provide those working in PR, whatever their level of seniority, with the necessary skills and knowledge required for their role.

# STEP 03

## Advertising the role



According to CIPR's annual **State of the Profession** the "Diversity Gap" is widening. While 65% of respondents agree that PR is more effective if practiced by ethnically and socially diverse teams, fewer than one in ten professionals are from Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds. There are ways to address this within the recruitment process including tactics such as name-blind recruitment. For further information and resources visit the CIPR [Diversity and Inclusion Forum pages online](#).

Data shows the language used in job adverts influences the demographic of prospective candidates. Avoid words like 'dynamic' and 'fast-moving'. Employ inclusive diction and ensure your words encourage those from all backgrounds to apply. Be cautious of creating job descriptions that carry implicit biases towards a particular gender or demographic. By being too rigid about experience or qualifications, you may miss out on talented candidates with the potential to deliver considerable value for your team.

When drafting your job advertisement, this should differ from the job description and focus more on what makes the role and company exciting. You should draw on your person specification to provide further detail on what you are looking for, so that you encourage the right kind of candidate to apply. You should also say something about why working for your organisation is good for the candidate, whether you support professional development, and what they will gain from working with you.

It is good practice to state the salary or salary range in your job advertisement. If you do not, you may put off well-qualified candidates and are certain of attracting large number of applications from people whose applications will waste your time.

Once your advertisement is written, you need to decide where to place it. Popular jobs boards are run by **PRWeek** and **Gorkana (Cision)** and increasingly, websites such as LinkedIn are being used to advertise, search and apply for roles. For Public Affairs roles consider using more specialist sites such as **Public Affairs Networking**.

# STEP 03 Advertising the role



The CIPR recommends that you include the following statements in your job advertisements

## Senior roles

### Required

- Evidence of commitment to professional standards and self-development for themselves and their team

### Desirable

- Chartered PR Practitioner
- Member of a relevant professional body and accountable to an appropriate code of conduct
- CIPR Professional Diploma

## Mid-level roles

### Required

- Evidence of commitment to professional standards and self-development for themselves and their team

### Desirable

- Accredited PR Practitioner
- Member of a relevant professional body and accountable to an appropriate code of conduct
- In possession of (or working towards) a PR qualification

## Junior roles

### Required

- Evidence of commitment to professional standards and self-development

### Desirable

- Member of a relevant professional body, (e.g. CIPR or equivalent) and accountable to an appropriate code of conduct

# STEP 04 Shortlisting



The shortlisting process involves reviewing candidates' CVs and cover letters to assess whether, on paper, you can match the candidates' skillsets and experience with the job description and person specification. Personal attributes and attitudes can be assessed in the interview stage.

## From the CV you should look for:

- The right knowledge and skills for the role you are seeking to fill (based upon the person specification created in Step 2);
- Any professional designations or PR qualifications including commitment to a code of conduct which is backed up by a disciplinary process (to which all CIPR members are bound);
- Any gaps in a CV or short periods of employment. Whilst there may be legitimate reasons, multiple short stints or gaps could be a red flag;
- Career progression – has the candidate stagnated in their career. Again there may be a legitimate reason for this, but if they've been at a company for a long time and never been promoted, this could be another red flag;
- Highlights and key achievements from the candidate's employment;
- Information about the employer. Candidates might not have this on their CV, so this could mean some extra research if you have not come across the company previously;
- Spelling and grammar – attention to detail on a CV, especially within PR, is paramount.

# STEP 4 Shortlisting



It is recommended that you request interviews with candidates as soon as you have had the chance to read through the CV, rather than waiting for a cut off date. This is to avoid strong candidates finding another job before getting the opportunity to interview with you.

## What to look out for

### Professional designations

- Chartered PR Practitioner (has passed a professional assessment in ethics, leadership and strategy)
- Accredited PR Practitioner (has completed at least 2 years of the CIPR's continuing professional development (CPD))

## PR qualifications

### Mid-Level

CIPR Professional Diploma (strategic planning, linking to wider business objectives)

### Junior:

CIPR Professional PR Certificate (formerly Advanced Certificate) (competent autonomous professional)

### Entry-Level:

CIPR Foundation Certificate (has a basic understanding of the PR industry)

### Specialist:

CIPR Internal Communications Diploma, CIPR Public Affairs Diploma, CIPR Crisis Communications Diploma

There are also a number of **CIPR recognised university courses** in PR.

# 05 STEP

## The interview



It is generally best to plan a two-stage interview process. This allows you to focus primarily on the candidate's attitude and behaviour in the first stage, and examine their experience, skill and knowledge, as well as ethical dilemmas they have faced in the second.

A second interview can identify the skills and training needs of a candidate, and can include a task. For more junior roles this is commonly some kind of writing test, such as drafting a press release. For more senior roles it might involve giving them a case study to comment on, or asking them to develop an outline strategy to deal with a particular issue. A second/final interview stage could also include the opportunity to meet the team they will be working with.

Create a welcoming interview atmosphere for prospective candidates as this will encourage them to give fuller, and more honest, answers. You should encourage this while maintaining a healthy scepticism about any big claims made by candidates.

Look for a commitment to professional development in your shortlisted candidates and offer this as an incentive or benefit to prospective candidates. Promote the value of training and encourage learning all the time. A CIPR Client Advisor can help you interview your shortlisted candidates thoroughly.

### Interview questions

For suggested interview questions please see [30 Public Relations Interview Questions](#) by CIPR's talent partners, Reuben Sinclair.

### Interview checklist

- The right attitude;
- Sound professional judgement and a commitment to ethical practice (to which all CIPR members are committed);
- Management skills if they are going to have responsibility for a team — good practitioners are not always good managers;
- Business literacy and thought leadership, if you are going to expect them to contribute to the wider growth and development of your organisation;
- The right knowledge, skills and attributes for the role you are seeking to fill.

# 06 STEP

## Making an offer



**Delivering the offer.** Within the PR industry there are often a limited number of experienced candidates actively looking for jobs, which means the likelihood is the candidate you're interviewing has other interviews and job opportunities on the go. It is therefore vital to get the interview process and delivery of an offer right to ensure that they accept your offer over another company.

During the interview process ensure that the candidate has multiple opportunities to ask any questions they might have, and that you give full and well thought out answers. A candidate is unlikely to accept a role if they still have questions left unanswered.

Throughout the interview process it is wise to ask the candidate whether they have any other interviews so you can manage your timescales accordingly. At the end of the process, if you would like to offer the job but you're unsure whether they have fully bought into your company, you could invite them to meet with other members of the team more informally. This will give them an opportunity to see

the culture of your organisation first hand and get to know individuals personally.

Finally, when making an offer, try to make it as personal as possible. Calling the candidate, rather than emailing them, is best, so you can talk through the offer fully and answer any immediate questions. The candidate is likely to appreciate the personal touch. Try to reference the reasons you think they, personally, are the right candidate for the role.

**References.** During the recruitment process you should be clear with the candidate about the types of references required and the procedure for how these will be used. Where possible, a reference should ask for confirmation that the details provided by the candidate are correct and that they are professionally suitable for the role. It is good practice to give a 'provisional offer' to a candidate you wish to employ, which is dependent on following up on the references provided.

**Salary.** There is evidence to show that part of the gender pay gap in PR arises during salary negotiations. A man is more likely than a woman to ask for the higher end of the salary range, and hiring managers

are much more likely to pay a man what they ask for. You can avoid this by discussing salary expectations throughout the recruitment process. If at any point the candidate's expectations are not aligned with yours, bring this up sooner rather than later.

**Probation periods.** Probation periods allow for the employer to ensure the employee is able to perform at a suitable standard as well as for the employee to establish whether the role is for them. Set clear objectives for the new member of staff to achieve by the end of their probation with regular meetings along the way to monitor progress. Typical probation periods would be 3 months for a junior role and 6 months for a mid-career or senior one.

A probation period should also be used to introduce a practitioner to all relevant elements of the business which should be done through a series of inductions.

# STEP 06 Making an offer



## Struggling to find a suitable candidate?

### Finding the right candidate for a role is crucial.

It may be that the first round of recruitment does not prove successful and will need to be repeated. In this case you may want to consider flexible working options to accommodate a wider talent pool. If you find the right person for the business but who lacks the necessary experience, consider investing in them through the CIPR's range of **training courses**.

Alternatively, you could consider using a contractor for a period rather than continuing the recruitment process. The CIPR's **PR Finder** service is free, and allows you to search for an independent practitioner (freelancer) or consultant based on their location, specialism and availability for short term / maternity cover.

If you are a CIPR member, you can make use of the CIPR's **legal and business support helpline** if you need advice on any employment matters.

Using a specialist PR recruiter, like the CIPR's talent partner **Reuben Sinclair**, can save you a lot of time as they are able to do the majority of the recruitment process for you, including advertising, screening, shortlisting and offer negotiation, leaving you to focus on the things you know best.