

CIPR Public Relations and Communication Foundation

Syllabus

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1.0 Introduction:

The CIPR Public Relations and Communication Foundation is designed for anyone looking to start or develop a career in public relations (PR) and communication.

Whether you are a school or college leaver, changing careers, or already supporting PR activity in your role, this qualification will help you build the knowledge, practical skills, and confidence to work effectively in the profession.

You'll explore the role of PR and communication, the differences between various communication disciplines, what it means to be an ethical practitioner, and how modern practitioners operate in PR agencies and organisations.

This qualification is the entry point to the CIPR's professional qualifications and is taught and assessed at a level equivalent to A-Level standard. On successful completion of the qualification, you can progress to the CIPR Public Relations and Communication Management Certificate.

This qualification offers a supportive and flexible learning experience by combining approximately 15-20 hours of guided learning with self-directed study.

2.0 Who is the qualification suitable for?

If you are a school or college leaver, changing career direction, or working in a public relations or communication support role, this qualification will give you an understanding of what a career in the profession involves, and the knowledge and skills to take your first steps with confidence. You will need a minimum of a Grade 5 at GCSE English or Functional Skills English Level 2 before enrolling on this qualification. Please check with your chosen Accredited Teaching Centre for more details about enrolment criteria.

3.0 Qualification outcomes:

The Foundation focuses on the role of public relations in organisations and on identifying and engaging audiences through a range of channels and tactics. On successful completion of the qualification, you will be able to:

1. Explain how public relations and communication help to support different organisational objectives, and how it works with related disciplines such as marketing communications and advertising.
2. Identify and prioritise different stakeholder/audience groups, messaging and channels, and justify those choices in the context of building relationships between an organisation and its stakeholders/audiences.
3. Create content for written and audio/visual/digital platforms that will engage stakeholders/audiences.

You will be able to demonstrate knowledge of:

1. The role of public relations and communication within an organisation, and how the profession manages internal and external suppliers to enhance reputation.
2. The similarities and differences between communication disciplines including but not limited to public relations, advertising, internal communications, marketing communications, publicity and an understanding of the involvement of lobbying, fundraising and other related disciplines.
3. The ethical/legal responsibilities of a practitioner in understanding and applying the CIPR Code of Conduct, and key ethical principles including confidentiality and transparency, tackling misinformation and fake news, and equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI).
4. The different stakeholders/audiences an organisation might want to engage with, and the intended organisational outcome(s).
5. How new technology, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), can be used to support the everyday work of PR and communication teams.

You will be able to demonstrate the following skills:

1. Identifying opportunities that deliver PR and communication objectives. Producing and adapting content for external or internal channels for a specified stakeholder/audience group.
2. Identifying and explaining the role of influencers and endorsers including journalists, citizen journalists, experts, celebrities and online content creators in ensuring the stakeholder/audience receives the right message via the most appropriate channel.
3. Describing the key principles of a news story, then using storytelling and creating a narrative to support reputation management.
4. Monitoring references to an organisation in all media, whether they are positive or negative, and how organisational reputation and risk should be considered.
5. Using new technologies, including AI, to carry out practical, everyday tasks.

4.0 Assessment:

Candidates who successfully complete both components will be awarded the CIPR Public Relations and Communication Foundation.

Assessment philosophy**1. Purpose of the assessment approach**

The assessment of the CIPR Public Relations and Communication Foundation is designed to reflect the professional standards and expectations of contemporary

public relations and communication practice. The assessment emphasises applied knowledge, ethical judgement, and real-world competence. Candidates demonstrate their skills through authentic organisational tasks, ensuring relevance to the workplace and enabling the development of practical capabilities that support professional growth.

2. Maintaining assessment integrity

Assessment integrity is central to the credibility of a professional qualification. To maintain fairness and authenticity:

- Candidates are expected to base their submission on their own employer, client, or an organisation they work with or know well. This is a real-world assessment and should draw on genuine organisational context.
- Anonymisation should only be used in exceptional circumstances where confidentiality requirements make it unavoidable. In such cases, candidates must anonymise the organisation sufficiently to prevent identification of the organisation, individuals, or commercially sensitive information.
- Submissions must represent the candidate's own analysis, decision-making and interpretation.
- A short AI Ethical Use Statement must be included to ensure transparency about tool usage and protect against inappropriate automation.
- Tutors may conduct brief authenticity checks (e.g., short viva-style conversations or clarifying questions) where needed.
- Markers are trained to identify indicators of inauthentic work, including overly generic text, inconsistent tone, or inaccurate organisational references.
- Confidentiality must be respected. Candidates must not include confidential or proprietary data (such as internal financials, unpublished performance metrics, or client lists) unless they have the permission of their employer, client or organisation, as appropriate. Publicly available data, published benchmarks, or aggregated internal data may be used.

These measures ensure that assessed work reflects real professional practice while safeguarding organisational confidentiality where necessary.

3. Importance of reflective and applied practice

At Level 3, candidates are expected to demonstrate the ability to:

- Understand the strategic value of PR and communication, and know the difference between other disciplines like marketing or advertising.
- Analyse real organisational contexts.
- Apply relevant frameworks and models to practice.

- Justify communication decisions using evidence.
- Reflect critically on their own approach using professional judgement.

This aligns assessment with professional standards of continuous learning, self-awareness and accountability.

4. Ethical use of AI

AI can support professional communication when used ethically and transparently.

Candidates are expected to:

- Use AI tools only to support their work, not replace their own analysis, writing or judgement.
- Verify all AI-generated outputs using credible sources.
- Ensure fabricated data, case details or stakeholder insights are excluded.
- Protect organisational confidentiality at all times.
- Submit an AI Ethical Use Statement that clearly explains how (or whether) AI assisted the process.

Improper or undisclosed use of AI undermines assessment integrity and may result in a fail result and/or an investigation under the CIPR Academic Malpractice Policy.

5. Ensuring global parity and fairness

This CIPR qualification is delivered to candidates working in diverse organisations across the world. To maintain fairness:

- Assessments focus on universally applicable PR principles rather than country-specific practices. Tasks require the use of local organisational contexts, ensuring all candidates can access relevant data.
- Content can draw on local languages or cultural settings, but submitted work must include clear, accurate translation into English and explanation.
- Marking criteria emphasise the application of principles, not geographic media knowledge.
- Candidates may draw on any industry recognised published framework that can be referenced.

This ensures every candidate – regardless of country, sector, or scale of organisation – can meet the requirements on equal terms.

6. Assessors' expectations

The expectations are:

- Clear, accurate and relevant analysis.
- Evidence informed decision-making.
- Use of appropriate PR and communication frameworks.
- Realistic and feasible recommendations.
- Ethical awareness, including around AI.
- Coherent structure and professional presentation.
- Demonstration of learning through the candidate's own organisational context.

The CIPR Public Relations and Communication Foundation is assessed in two components.

Component 1: Candidates produce a discussion paper showing how the portfolio of content will help deliver the objectives of the PR team in that organisation. Component 1 focuses on the role of public relations and communication within an organisation. It looks at the contribution public relations practitioners make to the organisation's key objectives, the way they interact with other disciplines, and their responsibility to operate ethically and to keep their skills and knowledge up to date through continuing professional development.

Component 2: Candidates produce a portfolio of written and audio/visual/digital content to build and support a positive reputation for an organisation. This component considers the types of content PR practitioners produce and how to target content for particular stakeholders/audiences and channels. It also develops practical content creation skills.

The two component assessments must be based around a single organisation. This can be:

- A real organisation identified by the teaching centre, or
- The candidate's own client, employer or another organisation known to the candidate (e.g., an organisation where they are involved in a voluntary capacity) subject to the teaching centre approving the candidate's choice.

Word count

Component 1: 1,000 words (+/-10%)

Component 2: 1,000 words (+/-10%)

The word count for each task, and the total word count, must be recorded on the cover sheet and at the end of the relevant text in the main documents.

Bibliographies and footnotes are not included in the word count but should include references to any internal and external documents used. Footnotes must not contain appendices or be used to include additional text that should have been in the main body of the work.

Candidates are allowed a +/-10% leeway on the total word count for the assignment and must ensure they DO NOT exceed the +10% tolerance. Anything above this allowance will have a detrimental effect on the grade awarded. No grading reduction will be implemented if the assignment is below the -10% word tolerance but doing so could result in a fail if tasks have not been adequately addressed.

Component 1 Assessment: discussion paper

Candidates should:

- Introduce the chosen organisation and any particular challenges or opportunities it faces (approximately 200 words) in terms of reputation management.
- Identify the stakeholders/audiences who are being targeted with the portfolio content and the desired organisational outcome.
- Identify which particular channels are being chosen to reach the stakeholders/audiences and justify this choice.
- Explain and justify the use of AI, where relevant.
- Address any potential ethical or other risks in terms of the organisation's reputation.
- Show how this PR activity will sit alongside other disciplines in the organisation, for example marketing communications or advertising.
- Conclude with a statement of how the portfolio of content will help the organisation to meet the challenges or opportunities outlined at the start (approximately 200 words).

Component 2 Assessment: portfolio of content

The content should:

- Showcase a story about the designated organisation.
- Include four separate pieces of content about that story that are ready for use by a journalist or online audience/influencer, or ready to be published directly on the organisation's own channel(s).
- Include both written content and audio/visual/digital content, choosing any four items from the list below (in accordance with guidance on acceptable submission methods given by individual teaching centres*):
 - Media release of 250 words

- Blog post of 250 words
- Series of 5 social media messages (identifying the channel that is being used)
- Video storyboard of 6 – 12 frames
- Video of no more than 2 minutes (note: a video counts as two pieces of content and is the equivalent of 500 words)
- Podcast script outline of 200 – 500 words
- Podcast of no more than 5 minutes
- Infographic

* Individual teaching centres can choose which of the above items they will accept and candidates should check this with them before starting work.

Candidates must identify the targeted channel for each piece of content. For example, ‘content A is for the organisation’s website; content B is for local radio; content C is for the organisation’s X platform social media feed’.

Marking criteria

Fail: insufficient analysis, weak understanding, poor consideration of ethical issues, lack of originality in the content.

Pass: competent, accurate, professional content, clear application of theoretical models and organisational information, ethical thinking.

Excellent Pass: insightful, strategic, analytically strong, excellent professional and ethical judgement, highly creative content.

CRITERIA	FAIL (below pass standard)	PASS (meets the standard)	EXCELLENT PASS (exceeds the standard)
1	Describes the role of PR and communication in reputation management, without critical insight. There may be gaps and mistakes in the description of the PR and communications.	Critically explains the strategic role of PR and communication, and how the profession plays an important role in reputation management.	Provides a sophisticated critical account of the strategic role of PR and communications. The argument is clearly related back to the organisation’s reputation management.
2	Demonstrates little or no understanding of	Critically explains how the PR and communication activity	Provides a sophisticated and mature understanding

	PR and communication. Confuses PR and communication tactics with other disciplines like advertising or marketing.	will sit alongside other disciplines in the organisation, for example marketing communications or advertising.	of the strategic role of PR and communication in relation to other disciplines in the organisation, for example marketing communications or advertising.
3	Provides inaccurate, incomplete or generic organisational context, and does not fully explain how the story meets the needs of the organisation.	Shows critical insight into the organisation and how the story will help the organisation to meet its challenges or opportunities.	Provides nuanced, insightful organisational analysis demonstrating a persuasive justification of how the story will help the organisation to meet its challenges or opportunities.
4	The description of audiences is incorrect or superficial. Key stakeholders may have been forgotten.	Identifies the audiences who are being targeted with the portfolio of content and the desired organisational outcome.	Produces a robust, well-prioritised discussion of audiences with clear justification for the approach that has been taken.
5	Information on the channels being chosen is weakly justified or missing.	Identifies which particular channels are being chosen to reach audiences/stakeholders and justifies this choice.	Demonstrates creativity and strategic alignment across channels, with a persuasive justification for the choices that were made.
6	Professional content is missing or does not meet the word count requirements. The content is not clearly related to the organisation's strategic priorities and is not suitable for publication. Storytelling/narrative principles have not been applied.	Produces four pieces of professional content that align with the organisation's strategic priorities, use storytelling/narrative principles, and are ready for publication.	Produces highly compelling, well-crafted strategic content informed by storytelling theory.
7	Demonstrates	Demonstrates an	Applies ethical, legal

	little or no understanding of ethical/legal considerations.	understanding of ethical/legal issues and can review this in terms of the organisation's reputation.	and governance frameworks with maturity.
8	Shows evidence of fabricated content, unverifiable claims or improper AI use.	Explains and critically justifies the use of AI, (where relevant).	Demonstrates advanced reflection on ethical, responsible AI use.
9	The argument is difficult to follow and the structure of the components is weak or unclear.	Clear and well written, with a logical structure across both components.	An engaging, persuasive argument, with a very logical structure across both components.
10	Applies theoretical literature inappropriately or not at all.	Uses theoretical literature and the organisation's own internally published material as an evidence base.	An excellent range of theoretical and organisational information is used to justify the argument.
11	A referencing style is not used appropriately, and references may be missing.	Professional referencing using an appropriate academic style (e.g., Harvard/APA).	A very professional approach to references with no/ minimal mistakes made.

Not all criteria are weighted equally.

To secure a pass mark, students should show a pass level in the key assessment components of: "critical understanding of audiences and their organisation", "recognise the strategic value of PR", and "produce professional communications content that is ready for publication". Poor performance in one area can be compensated for by good performance elsewhere, as long as the student performs at a pass level for the key assessment components outlined above.

To achieve an EXCELLENT PASS, at least 9/11 criteria must be scored within the 'excellent pass' banding.

5.0 Referencing:

Teaching centres must provide guidance to candidates on appropriate methods of referencing that are suitable for a business document.

As CIPR members, candidates are referred to the [CIPR's member guidance on integrity](#), especially in relation to transparency and confidentiality when using AI tools.

6.0 Further information:

CIPR Course Regulations

CIPR Public Relations and Communication Foundation Candidate Handbook