



Category: Outstanding Young Communicator

Entrant: Amy Pullan MCIPR

Company: University of Sheffield

Demonstrate your commitment to professional development and your career growth :

On my first day at University my journalism lecturer declared: “Within five years, 90 per cent of you will be in PR.”

“Not likely!” I vowed as an overly-enthusiastic, budding news reporter.

However in 2011, after three years and four months as a reporter for a regional, daily newspaper, I defected to the ‘dark-side’ and joined the University of Sheffield’s Media Team.

In just five years my responsibilities as a Media Relations Officer have grown rapidly. This is a direct reflection of how quickly I've developed my PR skills and expertise and have become an integral part of the University's communications team.

I am responsible for both the Faculties of Medicine, Dentistry and Health and Science. I've recently taken a lead role in changing how the University communicates its research excellence to enhance Sheffield’s reputation as a world-leading Russell Group university. Just three years after starting my first role in PR I successfully completed my CIPR Diploma which has driven me to be an invaluable part of many strategic campaigns.

Outline your work-related achievements over the last two years and how they contribute to the wider industry:

I am passionate about communicating excellent research to the general public. Whether it's the detection of gravitational waves, unearthing one of the UK's biggest plague pits or the accidental discovery of an enzyme responsible for spreading cancer, I believe scientific breakthroughs should be communicated accurately and in a way which is accessible to all.

Over the past two years I've moved away from the overuse of ineffective and formulaic press releases to present powerful research stories in more creative and engaging ways.

I created the University's first digital feature to recognise the research our academics showcased at the United Nations Conference on Climate Change (COP21) in Paris, 2015.

I feel strongly about improving the public's understanding of animal research and have played a leading role in changing how the University now communicates this work.

This year I created new content and coordinated a redesign of the University's animal research pages to promote transparency.

This new resource has helped reduce the time spent dealing with Freedom of Information requests and press enquiries.

I've worked on a number of research stories which, because of my excellent communication skills and knowledge of PR strategy, have helped our academics make a real-world impact.

Examples include:

Effectively communicating research which revealed a significant rise in the number of people diagnosed with a serious heart infection alongside a large fall in prescribing antibiotics to dental patients.

The media coverage secured and recognised by influencers helped to put pressure on the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) to change its guidelines regarding the prescription of antibiotics to before invasive surgery.

These were changed in September 2016 helping to save an estimated 30 lives per month in the UK.

Promoting groundbreaking research regarding the effect Alcohol Minimum Unit Pricing has on drink-related deaths and hospital admissions and managing a number of explainer-opinion editorial pieces on the benefits of the policy.

A decision to pass Alcohol Minimum Unit Pricing has now been granted by the Scottish Courts – the decision is also being deliberated by Governments in Wales and Northern Ireland.

Annie Goss, Head of PR at the University, said: "In the last two years Amy has shown great drive and determination to develop strategies that can demonstrate how PR has led to the impact of scientific and medical research.

"This work is incredibly important - not only in demonstrating the value of science communications, but in leading to positive changes in behaviour, policy, guidance and funding.

"She has also played a key role in changing the way that we communicate about animal research - an area often hidden and misunderstood. This commitment to transparent communications will have positive effects for the sector for years to come."

Outline the biggest work-related challenge you've faced in the past two years, including details of what happened, how you overcame it and what you learnt from it:

I managed an extensive, interdisciplinary campaign to promote our academic presence at COP21.

The amount of varied content needed during the two week event, including: press releases; expert comments; opinion editorials; a digital feature; an expert guide and content for social media, meant I had to develop an effective communications plan which would be a useful resource for any communications officers across the University lending support to the campaign.

Despite a busy news agenda, my news sense meant my unique content offered journalists a variety of angles which could cut through the noise and gain traction.

The extensive coverage I secured included a feature with The Guardian which was shared more than 27,000 times online – evidence I was able to overcome the difficulties of taking on this overwhelming task and achieve some fantastic coverage. Working hard to get our expert's comments into the press felt particularly pertinent at a time when the role of “experts” and “academics” has been questioned by certain high profile figures in the media.

A summary of a campaign you are particularly proud of, including details of the brief, objectives, strategy, tactics, outputs, outcomes and budget:

The Big Knit: 100 hats for 100 babies was a campaign I created and managed on a shoestring budget to help the University successfully engage with the local community.

Objectives were to:

Encourage 50 people from across the region to attend The Big Knit and make 100 hats for 100 premature babies in one day.

Engage with hard-to-reach members of the local community to help them understand the importance and impact of the University’s medical research.

Strategy:

Following pitching to BBC Radio Sheffield, I managed to secure their studio as the location for the event, along with guaranteed coverage throughout the day from 7am-5pm.

This was the first time the University collaborated with a local media partner for an event. The move proved integral to the campaign’s success as it ensured maximum exposure.

- Creating campaign team and objectives
- Identifying, briefing and media training key spokespeople
- Issuing press release detailing importance of hats and previewing event on social media
- Sourcing and issuing material for media (pictures/case studies from parents whose babies have benefited from treatments)
- Offering pre-event media interviews with researchers/clinicians to drip-feed content to the press
- Sharing videos of interviews with knitters, researchers and new parents with media throughout day
- Sharing pictures and content on social media, including live updates of the hat-count to continue building awareness and encourage attendance
- Arranging live press interviews
- Issuing follow-up photo story on success of event

Outcomes:

A total of 308 hats for premature babies were knitted on the day – over three times the objective - and 55 knitters took part. Five clinicians and two parents were interviewed highlighting how the University’s medical research has helped change lives across the region.

Live radio phone-ins meant we recorded instant feedback from the audience.

Budget:

- Taxis: £30
- Photographer + videographer: £120
- Refreshments: £30

Total budget spend - £180
Time spent - 16 hours