

CIPR Professional PR Certificate

Syllabus

The aim of the CIPR Professional PR Certificate is to introduce the candidate to the context, concepts and practical tools of public relations (PR) that will enhance their understanding of their chosen profession and enable them to develop the skills and abilities necessary to progress in their career.

Candidates are expected to have some experience of public relations activities, in consultancy or in-house, or they might have experience in a related discipline such as marketing or journalism and wish to enter the PR profession.

The CIPR Professional PR Certificate considers the context of the role of PR in organisations, how it can contribute to the better functioning of society, and what is expected of an ethical practitioner in the digital age.

Candidates will: research and develop PR plans; create content that helps an organisation to tell a story, change attitudes and influence behaviours, and/or market products and services; and measure the impact of communication activities.

The syllabus comprises three units, which broadly follow the stages above and incorporate study of the concepts that underpin the tools and processes considered to be good PR practice.

The Professional PR Certificate is delivered by CIPR-accredited teaching centres, via 48 hours of face to face, online or blended learning, and a further 4 - 6 hours of self-directed study per week*, guided reading and research and/ or 'homework' tasks. Each CIPR-accredited teaching centre will establish the detailed content, lesson plans and resources provided to candidates.

*Self-directed study hours are provided for guidance only and will vary from one individual to another.

Candidates would be awarded the CIPR Professional PR Certificate after successfully completing all three units.

Syllabus

The term public relations is used to include all areas of practice within the discipline.

Assessment

Candidates need to identify a topic that will be the basis of their submissions for all three Unit assessments. Ideally the topic should relate to the candidate's work role or to an organisation that they are familiar with.

Before candidates start work on the first assignment, tutors should discuss and agree topics with individual candidates to ensure that the organisation provides a suitable basis for the three assignments: establishing a plan, developing and managing content, and evaluating outcomes. Centres should seek guidance from CIPR if the candidate finds the selected organisation is an unsuitable choice for the Unit 2 or Unit 3 assignments.

It is strongly recommended that the assignments are completed in Unit order.

Example topics

A launch activity

A conference, for example a media conference or an internal conference

An event

A local community initiative

An exhibition

Unit 1: PR in Context: Research and Planning

Unit 1 positions public relations in the economic, social and political contexts in which it functions and considers areas of PR practice. It examines where PR sits within organisations and how it adds value. It considers practical challenges and introduces conceptual underpinnings relating to PR planning within a framework of organisational strategy, vision and goals, developing capabilities in PR, and communications research and planning.

An analytical perspective is applied to encourage candidates to reflect on their own experience alongside case studies of organisations and scenarios.

Unit Objectives

At the end of Unit 1 candidates will be able to:

- Explain how PR is positioned in a societal context;
- Explain the organisational context of PR (internal relationships, types of PR, contribution to objectives);
- Explain, and distinguish between, areas of practice within corporate communications, internal communication, investor relations, public affairs, and marketing communications;
- Identify the goals of the organization and describe how PR can support those goals;
- Identify issues and, if appropriate, suggest how they might be managed
- Carry out research to inform and apply PR management plans;
- Describe and differentiate stakeholders, influencers, publics and communities;
- Select and apply appropriate PR planning models and practical tools (project planning, campaigning, budgets and resources);
- Set communication objectives, measurement targets, outcomes and other performance metrics (for example SMART objective setting).

Unit 1 Assessment: PR Plan and statement of reflection

Aim: To enable candidates to demonstrate competence in developing a PR plan to meet organisational objectives, and to reflect on the concepts and processes involved.

Topic of inquiry: Candidates will be required to identify a suitable topic or issue for the PR plan and its execution. The plan should be related to the candidate's own organisation, a client or another organisation. It will typically be for a small-scale project, campaign or issue which can be resourced and costed appropriately.

The organisation and project topic will be the basis for all three unit assessments.

Submission: The assignment will comprise:

1. A 2000-word (+/- 10%) PR plan, to include:
 - Research undertaken to inform a specific plan of action, demonstrating insight into the situation and setting out the organisational, or project, objectives that the plan will support.
 - The detailed plan including important stakeholder groups and influencers, how objectives link to broader organisational goals, high level activities (including links to other communications disciplines), timeframe, and a brief statement of required resources and budget.
2. Supporting 500-word (maximum) statement of reflection on own learning relating to planning theory, concepts and models.

Completion of the assignment involves the following activities:

- Research – candidates are required to undertake data collection using secondary research methods (for example literature, archives, published surveys, reports) to examine the chosen topic of inquiry.
- Insight – candidates are required to use problem identification concepts and approaches to identify a relevant topic of inquiry.
- Communication – candidates are required to present a PR plan in a suitable style and format.
- Reflection – candidates produce a statement of reflection demonstrating critical consideration of PR planning concepts and own learning.

Unit 2: Content, Media and Engagement

Unit 2 considers: how to create and manage communication that works; how individuals and groups react and respond to PR activities; and how PR can affect that response. It examines concepts and theories related to PR practice. The ways in which developments in technology have affected the balance between organisations, stakeholders and publics are discussed. The key concepts and related methods underpin the study of media and social media channels, the creation of ethical and compelling content, storytelling, content curation, and interpreting, and using data. Candidates are encouraged to draw on their own experience alongside case study examples of campaigns and professional practice.

Unit Objectives

At the end of Unit 2 candidates will be able to:

- Apply key concepts and related methods: raising awareness, persuasion, influencing, dialogue and listening, the power of relationships, relationship building and managing reputation;
- Apply knowledge of media relations; channels and channel management;
- Explain the dynamic role of social media in public relations;
- Demonstrate sensitivity to contextual, cross-cultural and diversity issues in content curation;
- Generate new, creative and fresh ideas for content;
- Understand the value of the power and relevance of storytelling;
- Demonstrate capabilities in writing strategies and in repackaging content for different channels;

- Demonstrate capabilities in content curation; social media campaign methodologies; and search engine optimisation;
- In the context of online and social media activity, interpret data to inform tactics.

Unit 2 Assessment: Content curation report, written content and statement of reflection

Aim: To enable candidates to demonstrate competence in creating and managing content across a range of media, targeting publics and stakeholders outlined in the Unit 1 plan, and to reflect on the concepts and processes involved.

Topic of inquiry: This assessment builds on the PR plan developed in Unit 1. Candidates will be required to evidence understanding of media selection and the creative process.

Submission: The assignment will comprise:

1. Based on the plan developed in Unit 1, a 1000 word (+/-10%) content curation report, detailing processes, tools and channel selection used to curate (identify, evaluate, annotate and re-publish) written and multimedia content that supports the plan.
2. A 1000 word (+/-10%) piece of original written content, on the chosen topic, that draws on material within the curated content report, and develops messages into a coherent narrative around the objectives of the plan.
The piece of content could be a single article for an online or offline publication, a speech, an employee briefing, a blog/ series of blogs, a collection of social media posts linked to a website article, a script for a webcast/podcast, etc.
3. Supporting 500-word (maximum) statement of reflection on own learning relating to communication techniques and concepts employed in the content management tasks, both content curation and content creation.

Completion of the assignment involves the following activities:

- Research – candidates are required to use secondary research methods (for example literature, archives, published surveys, reports) to determine media, channels and appropriate content.
- Insight – candidates are required to use relevant concepts to inform media selection and creative output.
- Communication – candidates are required to produce a content curation report and original content to inform, to persuade or to strengthen relationships.
- Reflection – candidates produce a statement of reflection demonstrating critical consideration of relevant communication techniques and concepts.

Unit 3: Measurement, evaluation and professional ethics

Unit 3 focuses on the delivery of communication and PR activities; and how they are managed, monitored and measured, including the contrasting roles of consultancy and in-house professionals. Current best practice on evaluation (AMEC guidelines) is introduced to equip the candidate with practical tools to use in the workplace. The links between objective setting (Unit 1) and content development (Unit 2) and their impact on the organisation's strategic goals are explored.

The Unit also considers the professional status of the discipline, and introduces key legal and regulatory concepts. The ethical dimension within which public relations operates, including the CIPR Code of Conduct, is examined.

Unit Objectives

At the end of Unit 3 learners will be able to:

- Select best practice tools to manage PR activities;
- Describe the consultancy/client relationship;
- Apply best practice in monitoring, risk assessment and measurement of PR and communication activities;
- Determine how far PR goals and objectives are met and the extent to which results and outcomes have been achieved;
- Assess the impact of communication objectives on organisational goals;
- Discuss professionalism in a public relations context;
- Apply key ethical principles for decision-making and identify barriers to ethical practice in public relations;
- Explain relevant legal and regulatory requirements that impact on PR practice (copyright, privacy and contract), and follow organisational governance policies and procedures;
- Explain the implications of the CIPR Code of Conduct for professional practice;
- Reflect on own professional practice and personal development.

Unit 3 Assessment: Executive report, statement of reflection and discussion of ethical issues

Aim: To enable candidates to: demonstrate competence in assessing the performance of a communications plan; reflect on the concepts and processes involved; and consider the ethical challenges a PR practitioner faces during the planning, writing and evaluation processes.

Topic of inquiry: This assessment builds on the plan developed in Unit 1 and the report and piece of writing developed in Unit 2. Candidates will be required to demonstrate an understanding of the evaluation concepts and tools available to the PR practitioner, and the ethical challenges faced in professional practice.

Submission: The assignment will comprise:

1. A 1500-word (+/-10%) executive report on, or proposal to monitor, progress of the plan, and to measure and evaluate the plan against communication and corporate objectives, drawing on different measurement frameworks and methods.
2. Supporting 500-word (maximum) statement of reflection on own learning relating to concepts and practicalities of measurement and evaluation considered in the report/ proposal.
3. A 500-word (maximum) discussion of the ethical and legal decisions involved in planning, developing, writing, executing and evaluating the project covered in the three unit assignments.

Completion of the assignment involves the following:

- Research – candidates are required to use secondary research methods (for example literature, archives, published surveys, reports) to inform recommendations.
- Insight – candidates are required to make recommendations for monitoring and evaluation of the plan against objectives.
- Communication – candidates are required to produce a report or proposal for monitoring and evaluating progress of the plan.
- Reflection – candidates are required to produce a statement of reflection on own learning and discuss ethical implications.

Word count

A substantive response is necessary to meet the requirements for a Pass.

The word count must be recorded in the appropriate space provided on the cover sheet and at the end of the text in the main document.

Bibliographies and footnotes are not included in the word count. 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 word count. Anything outside this allowance will be penalised and may result in the assessment being graded Fail.

Referencing

Teaching Centres must provide adequate guidance to candidates on appropriate methods of referencing, for example the Harvard referencing system.

Further information

CIPR Professional PR Certificate Course Regulations

CIPR Professional PR Certificate Student handbook

CIPR website