

# **PR, MEDIA HANDLING AND COMMUNICATIONS HANDBOOK AND TOOLKIT**

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## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 The PR, Media Handling and Communications Handbook and supporting toolkit is designed to support all BDAT staff and volunteers, including central Trust staff, Trustees and governors in the Academies to deal with the media and will cover both proactive and planned press activity and reactive media in response to an incident or emergency.
- 1.2 In the case of an incident or emergency this handbook should be read alongside the relevant Trust or Academy business continuity plan.
- 1.3 In the event that an Academy appears in the media without the knowledge or consent of the Trust, this should be reported immediately by the Headteacher to the Trust CEO and Chair of the LGB.

## **2.0 Aims**

- 2.1 To ensure that clear lines of communication and accountability are observed between the Trust, Academies and media when dealing with an incident or emergency.
- 2.2 To ensure that requests for information from the media are handled properly and professionally.
- 2.3 To ensure that the principles of data protection and confidentiality are observed.
- 2.4 To ensure families whose students are on the 'no publicity list' have their privacy protected.
- 2.5 To ensure that only those who have the Trust's permission to speak to the media do so.
- 2.6 To ensure all Academies are supported in handling the media and gain maximum publicity for positive news coverage.
- 2.7 To ensure the Trust and school brands, reputation and ethos are consistently communicated and protected.

## **PART A – Positive PR**

### **What is Positive PR?**

Positive PR is a great way for an academy to promote the good things that are going on within the school to its local community. Writing press releases for the local media is a simple way to keep the local community, including parents and carers, MP, prospective parents and carers and local

organisations up to date with what is happening and promotes the academy in a positive light. This will all importantly support the academy's reputation and impact positively on pupil numbers, staff recruitment and help achieve objectives.

### **What makes a good story?**

Journalists are inundated with stories every day. So, what will make yours stand out?

- News – it must be new and timely, not something that happened a month ago.
- Unusual – there may be something unusual, interesting, or unexpected about the story that will grab the journalist's attention – for example:
  - ✚ Personal – stories should involve people and talk about how events have affected them.
  - ✚ Pictures – sending good pictures with a story can make the difference between a piece being published or not.

Stories do not necessarily have to be about things that have happened at school, although this is preferable. For example, if a pupil is on a TV show, or a pupil is going to compete in a leading sports event, these are not only great 'feel good' stories but are a great reason to celebrate the academy.

Examples of positive stories would include:

- Great exam results
- A good Ofsted report
- The opening of a new building with state-of-the-art facilities
- Sport team victories and sporting successes and events
- An interesting event
- Pupil trips
- Pupil or staff achievements
- Community initiatives
- Charity fundraising
- A new principal/key member of staff joining

A picture will usually be well received by local press with a short narrative to support this.

### **Steps to take when planning a positive press release**

- 3.0 At times the Trust or Academy may wish to proactively seek media coverage to advertise or promote an Academy opportunity, success or event. This is very much encouraged.

- 3.1 Positive press stories may be drafted by the Academy staff or central Trust staff, however all press releases or adverts must be approved by firstly the Academy Head Teacher/Principal and if significant or non-routine by the BDAT CEO prior to release. All press releases should be drafted using the BDAT Press release template and should be joint branded with the Academy and Trust as appropriate. (See appendix A for a good practice example and guidance on drafting a release).
- 3.2 Non routine or significant press released for example school re-organisations / structural change or SLT change should be sent to the CEO for approval prior to sending out.
- 3.3 If an Academy is aware of a positive news opportunity and would like support drafting press or engaging with the media, please contact the BDAT CEO.
- 3.4 For a copy of the BDAT Press Release please see appendix A. **DO NOT CHANGE THE FORMAT OF THIS.**

## **Part B – Planning for a Negative Media Response**

There may be occasions when we know that there is going to potentially be a negative media response required for example if a school has received a poor Ofsted result or about a significant restructure. You will need to be aware of this and plan a response.

## **PART C - What is Reactive Media Handling?**

Reactive media handling approaches is a response to something which has appeared in the media or news and was probably not planned by the school or Trust. It is important that if a negative or controversial media enquiry comes in, we act quickly and appropriately, following the below actions.

### **What is reactive media or crisis management?**

Reactive media handling or crisis management is when, in the event of an incident or emergency, the Trust are able to advise and support on a plan of action.

When you are contacted by the media, it's important to remember that the word 'crisis' does not mean a state of panic. It is simply a phrase to describe a situation that needs to be handled promptly and executed carefully in a calm manner.

Unfortunately, media are drawn to bad news stories, and you only need to look at the front pages of both national and local newspapers to see examples of this. Therefore, when a crisis presents itself, it is essential that this is handled professionally to help minimise the impact this can have on the reputation of an individual, the school, and the Trust.

Examples of crisis scenarios include:

- A student is hurt or injured at school
- A fire or accident at the school
- Safeguarding issues
- A disappointing set of results
- A poor Ofsted report is published
- Staff restructures and departures

In any crisis, the media might get in contact in several ways. Sometimes, the journalists will already have a pre-established relationship with the press office so the Trust would be the first point of call for any enquiries. However, they may also phone the reception of the school, contact the headteacher directly, speak to members of staff, or even reach out to parents and carers and the wider school community.

The first step is to always stay calm and stay in control. Inform the senior team at your academy if you become aware of a potential crisis as well as the relevant senior team at BDAT's central team. Outside of this select group of people, try to minimise the number of people that know about the crisis to reduce any gossip or miscommunications which might make crisis management more complicated.

If a journalist rings the school directly, remember to ask their specific contact details. It might also be worth asking the journalist to email [hayley.budge@bdac-academies.org](mailto:hayley.budge@bdac-academies.org) so that the enquiry is forwarded directly to us, and we can begin to support you with the communications.

This is what you need to do when you speak to a journalist:

- Do not comment
- Ask the caller where they are calling from
- Ask the reason for the call
- Take their contact details (telephone number and email)
- Inform Headteacher / SLT Immediately
- **Do not get drawn into commenting.** If the journalist continues to press you for answers, make them aware that you are not the right person to speak to about the incident.

### **Steps to take when dealing with reactive media**

***All media enquiries should be directed to the Trust Chief Executive Officer.***

3.5 In the event of an incident or emergency all press enquiries should be managed through

the BDAT Chief Executive Officer (CEO) who will manage the media response in conjunction with the appropriate Head Teacher/Principal, in consultation with the Chair of Governors. Expert advice will be sought by the Trust as required.

- 3.6 Any staff member or volunteer who receives an enquiry from the media should report the enquiry to their Academy Head Teacher/Principal who will in turn notify the BDAT CEO. Staff or volunteers receiving the initial communication should say they are not the right person to speak to however if they can take down the details, they will be able to direct the enquiry accordingly, then take a note of the date, time and contact details of the media enquirer, a summary of the query and any information on timing for a response. Staff and volunteers should not comment on individual media enquiries or promise a response - however do not say 'no comment' as this can then be quoted and used to make it sound like a lack of interest or empathy in the situation. Instead, reiterate they are not the right person to speak to however they can refer their query accordingly.
- 3.7 The BDAT CEO will then decide whether a response to the media is appropriate. Responses may include a media statement, to be party to an interview or no response. The decision on whether to seek legal or professional advice will also be determined by the BDAT CEO and Chair and will be coordinated by the Trust.
- 3.8 It will be at the BDAT CEO's discretion who should be involved in the response, but routinely the Chair of the Trust, or other Trustees will be informed as appropriate. In the case of an Academy level query all responses will be agreed and coordinated in consultation with the Head Teacher/Principal and Chair of Governors as appropriate.
- 3.9 All other staff, volunteers and governors should not enter into discussion with the media and should refer the media to the Head Teacher/Principal. Failure to comply appropriately with this guidance may be a disciplinary offence for staff and volunteers. Governors and Trustees should refer to the BDAT Governor Code of Conduct.
- 3.10 All statements/interviews regarding events or activities related to the Academy should only proceed once the permission of the BDAT CEO is obtained. If permission is granted details of students/staff addresses and other personal details should not be released to the media. However, the full name of the student and their age can be released, providing the student does not appear on the 'no publicity list' held in the Academy office and only with the explicit consent of the child's parent/carer. The member of staff dealing with the media enquiry must ensure that no student on the list is included in a media photograph, video or in any form of communication with the media.

#### **Reactive media handling in response to an Academy closure**

In the event of the closure of the Academy e.g. in case of snow, lack of heating, the Head Teacher/Principal should follow the Local Authority process through Bradford Schools Online (BSO) and follow the local Academy procedure for informing parents (text and phone trees etc). The Academy website will be the main first point of reference. The BDAT CEO should be notified of a decision to close and the reason. Any press contact regarding this would need to be passed to the BDAT CEO.

### **Contact details for reactive media**

**All reactive media enquiries should be forwarded immediately to:**

Primary Contact: BDAT Office

Carol Dewhurst, CEO, Bradford Diocesan Academies Trust, 01274 909 120

[carol.dewhurst@bdac-academies.org](mailto:carol.dewhurst@bdac-academies.org)

Hayley Budge, PA to CEO.01274 909 120

[hayley.budge@bdac-academies.org](mailto:hayley.budge@bdac-academies.org)

A message should be left with Trust staff if the CEO is not available.

## **PART D - External communications guidance for academies**

### **Introduction**

External communication covers parents, the local community, professional visitors in academies and so on. In order to create an effective communications strategy and get your key messages across to your academy community it is a good idea to have an Academy Communication Plan.

All external communication should be approved by the Headteacher/Principal before going live. You may also need to consult the Trust in accordance with **PART B** of this policy for media communications.

### **Academy Communications Action Plan**

Writing a communications plan for your academy will assist you in devising a thorough and appropriate strategy to achieve your communication goals. The plan can be useful if you wish to change or improve how you communicate with your academy community or link all your academy's communications together for consistency.

Start by thinking about your academy's goals and targets for the year or the next few years and

then begin to link your communications plan to those by using those key messages throughout your communication. Key messages are the messages you want your audiences to remember, the best messages are short and simple.

Think about your academy's strengths and what you might wish to build on and then consider some Areas for improvement and what needs to be improved. What are the opportunities and what are the threats that the academy faces over the next year/few years? These will form the basis of your communications action plan. Remember that it is important that you try to be proactive with communication.

Connecting with parents is vital to the relationship between the academy and parents and ultimately a child's success. Communication is key and it is important that you consider the following:

- Understand your audience. You should research how your students' parents like to be communicated with and what they want to hear about. Make use of as many distribution methods as possible. For example, send home a written newsletter but also add a copy to your website. You may also choose to use emails and texts to communicate with parents or may be planning to move towards these methods in the future.
- Parents consider good communication as vital to increase trust with the academy. Parents who receive more consistent information about their child's academy performance are likely to have a higher degree of commitment to helping their children improve.
- If parents are satisfied with the level of communication from the academy, they are more likely to get involved with the academy in other ways. Encourage parents to contact the academy and give them the opportunity to get involved. This includes a welcoming reception, helpful office staff being proactive with phone calls to parents and keeping them informed.
- Make sure that you have a communications policy for responding to parents. Many parents contact the academy via phone, email and in writing but it can be challenging for staff to respond promptly. Similarly, if parents do not hear back from the academy, they can become anxious and annoyed.
- Develop a set of guidelines for responding to parents even if this is just to acknowledge their contact and let them know that you are aware of the issue and when it will be dealt with. Once you have confirmed the guidelines, circulate these to parents so that they are clear about what to expect. Please see the following guidelines:

Communication from parents	Suggested response time
Phone Calls	Returned within 24 hours of parent's call

Email	Email reply within 48 hours of receipt (set up an automated 'out of office reply' when you are away)
Written Letter	Acknowledge receipt of letter within 72 hours

## **PART E - Feedback**

Getting Feedback from Parents and Stakeholders is essential in order to create strong relationships with parents and the local community as it helps to ensure that you are listening to suggestions and continually improving the standard of your communication with others. There are different ways to collect feedback from parents and the community and these can be used for different circumstances:

- **Direct (face-to-face).** Whenever you have planned events or meetings such as parents' evenings, academy fetes, drama productions and talent shows it is essential that you take the time to talk to parents and the public and give them the opportunity to comment and express their opinions.
- **Questionnaires and feedback forms.** Questionnaires and feedback forms are a great way of collecting a high quantity of views and opinions that you can analyse and identify key themes and issues that are important to parents. Microsoft Forms provide an easy, and cost-efficient, method of sending out questionnaires and also enables the collation and analysis of responses to be streamlined.
- **Information and answer sessions for specific issues.** Holding information and answer sessions for parents is a great way of keeping them up to date on important issues or changes that are happening in academy and provides parents with the opportunity to ask questions and give feedback.
- **Feedback by telephone, email, or letter.** You may receive feedback in a phone call, letter or email. Feedback should be encouraged and acknowledged where possible. You may want to provide an email address where parents can get in touch and ask questions or make comments about non-urgent issues.
- **Respond to feedback.** Not only is it important that you listen to feedback, but it is vital that you respond to feedback where possible. Although it is never possible to please everyone and some suggestions are just not feasible, it is still important to provide a response and make changes where possible. Develop a set of guidelines for responding to parents even if this is just to acknowledge their contact and let them know that you are aware of the issue.

## Appendix A.

**SCHOOL LOGO HERE**

### PRESS RELEASE – EXAMPLE GUIDANCE

#### Date:

**Embargo date (if applicable):** *[Note: an embargo date should only be used if sending a press release in advance of time-sensitive information, such as the publication of an Ofsted report or key leadership changes, to ensure information is released at the allowable time – and for instance, so a relevant letter to parents can be sent before the story is read in the local paper.]*

#### TITLE

*This should be a catchy headline to grab the reader's attention.*

*E.g. Woodlands C of E Primary School ranked by the Government as best school in region*

#### Subtitle:

This line should include the name of school and main point of the story.

E.g. Pupils and staff at Woodlands C of E Primary School are today celebrating being ranked the best primary school in the region.

#### First paragraph:

This paragraph should provide further context and include the school's location and an agreed line about the Trust.

E.g. Woodlands C of E Primary School is located on Mill Carr Hill Road and part of the successful Bradford Diocesan Academies Trust which leads a family of thirteen primaries and four secondaries across the region to deliver high quality education within the context of Christian belief and practice.

#### Subsequent paragraphs:

There should be no more than three subsequent paragraphs to provide further information and ensure you have covered off the 5 W's— who, what, when where and why.

In this example, it would cover off background on the school, what best practice it has achieved to win this award, noting the team who lead on it.

E.g. New Government tables show that 11-year-olds at Woodlands C of E Primary School in Bradford achieved top marks in their reading, writing and maths tests this year – and were the best in the Yorkshire region.

The academy is rated Good by Ofsted and its Key Stage 2 test results placed it as “above average” by the Department for Education in all three subjects. The results also place it in the top 200 primary schools in England, at 166th equal (top two per cent).

The academy is passionate about its reading, writing and maths provisions and over the last few years has introduced a range of initiatives including X Y and Z led by X which has seen a huge transformation in its results.

**SCHOOL LOGO HERE**

### **Quotes**

The quotes should provide an emotive element and highlight the great work of the academy and its staff, pupils and community as well as weave throughout the key messaging from the academy's ethos and principals in a conversational way.

Usually you will have a quote from the headteacher or other relevant staff member from the academy and one from the CEO of the Trust.

To format this, the name and title of the person should be in bold and the quote itself should be in italics. This helps it stand out and be easily identifiable to the reporter. See format below.

**Miss Hargreaves, Executive Head Teacher at Woodlands C of E Primary School, said:**

*"We are thrilled for our pupils, staff and our whole school community. Everyone worked tirelessly to achieve these results and they can all feel incredibly proud of themselves."*

*"We are now focusing on helping the current cohort of Year 6 pupils achieve just as well, so that they can start secondary school strong in the subjects that underpin all education".*

**Carol Dewhurst OBE, Chief Executive Officer at Bradford Diocesan Academies Trust, added:**

*"The success of today's results highlights the fantastic work of every staff member and pupil at Woodlands C of E Primary School. All our academies strive to provide high quality education and embed high aspirations in our pupils so that every child can fulfil their academic potential and accomplish their individual goals. To see that reflected in this achievement today is outstanding."*

*"BDAT is a forward-thinking, professional learning community that is dedicated to the development of excellence in learning, both for our pupils and for the adults who serve and teach them."*

**ENDS**

### **Notes to Editors**

**photo credit** - A great photo will increase likelihood of coverage.

**Bradford Diocesan Academies Trust (BDAT)** was set up to support and sponsor Church of England and non- Church of England Academies in Bradford on behalf of the Diocese Leeds.

We work with our Academies to provide a network of support and challenge to achieve our vision of improved outcomes and results for all our children and young people. BDAT is a charity and company limited by guarantee, governed by a board of Trustees who are responsible for, and oversee the management of the company.

As of September 2021, the BDAT family of schools consists of 17 schools: thirteen primaries and four secondaries.

Originally established in 2012, the Trust believes all children only have one chance to receive a good education and has a mission to “provide high quality education within the context of Christian beliefs and practice”.

**For further information or media queries please contact:** Hayley Budge, PA to CEO, Bradford Diocesan Academies Trust, 01274 909 120, [hayley.budge@bdac-academies.org](mailto:hayley.budge@bdac-academies.org)

For more information on BDAT visit [www.bdat-academies.org](http://www.bdat-academies.org)