Corporate Communications
Crisis Communications: Guidance

Last updated: Miles Banbery 28 Jan 2016

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1. Introduction

Crisis Communications is a key element in effective crisis management. Its role is to ensure continued operational effectiveness during and after an incident or an identified crisis or when there is a severe risk to reputation.

The following provides guidance on two types of crisis:

- Reputation management: advice on communications activity when something has occurred which threatens the reputation of a unit or organisation

- Major incidents (eg fire, explosion, security threat): action required to prepare for an incident, advise on and carry-out communications activity during an incident.

It should be noted that during either, Corporate Communications (CC) may request a school, department and the switchboard for all press calls to be routed to the Press Office. Likewise, CC may request to take over usage of the University Facebook and main Twitter account as social media is an increasing source of information for students and staff. CC may also request support from other social media professionals at this time.

2. Contacting the team

- During office hours and during an ongoing incident, Corporate Communications will hope to always be contactable by phone on 01227 824343 or 01227 822985 and on email at communications@kent.ac.uk and pressoffice@kent.ac.uk.
- Campus Security have the mobile and home numbers of key Corporate Communication staff should we need to be contacted outside of usual hours.

3. Reputation Management

A crisis can be purely reputational. Information has gone into the public domain which casts a negative light on the University. Those areas of risk arise where there has been wrongdoing by staff or students or corporately or because the incident is likely to attract local, national or international media interest.

 An incident might be

- A negative issue already known to you that had not been public until now.
- A negative issue that only becomes known to you at the point of becoming public, even though it happened some time ago.
- Something that has only just happened and has immediately become public.

Planning for reputation management

- Prepare draft statements and a Q&A framework
- Are key spokespeople media trained?
- Establish who signs off

When an issue breaks

- Act fast
- The Press Office will take all media calls and issue statements/responses
- The Comms Office will issue statements etc to staff and students

- Online news coverage has capacity for comment – as above, Press Office needs to monitor, correct, and feedback
- CC needs to know the full truth, including background information, to develop an appropriate and accurate response strategy
- Apologise if the University is in the wrong

Always have a review after the incident

4. Major incident

Planning

Planning is fundamental to the success of effective crisis management. Crisis communications should form part of the business continuity and contingency planning processes. We need to consider:

- Do University management and the wider community know what to do about communications in the event of an emergency?
- Are key people trained to be spokespeople for the University and prepared for TV/radio?
- How to communicate internally and externally if the crisis took IT and phone systems down or made your offices unusable?
    - o Which communication channels would you be able/unable to use, and what's your back-up?
    - o Do all the key people have personal email addresses if the University system fails?
- Is there an alternative office you can use?
    - o What equipment do you need in it?
- Can staff access communications channels from home?
    - o Can they remotely access University email?
    - o Can they remotely access files and shared networks?
- Can those people tasked with issuing communications:
    - o Send mass emails from home/a remote location?
    - o Remotely publish to the website and to the intranet?
    - o Can you operate IT and phone systems outside the University?
- Do all the key people have mobile phones?
    - o Are chargers available in the office?
- Ensure that all contact details, crisis plans and materials are available in multiple places: in mobile phones, on computers, on memory sticks, uploaded securely to the web, and on paper.

Audiences and their information needs
- Those directly affected by an incident (eg staff/students in the building)
- Those indirectly affected (eg people in neighbouring buildings, parents of students)
- Those not affected but aware - they need reassurance and to know whether to react or not (eg members of staff/students who may need to be told to carry on as usual unless told otherwise)
- Other key communications staff around the University who may receive questions or information concerning the incident and need to know how or if to respond.
- The media – the press office needs to manage this link
- University Council – need to be kept informed
- Where/how would they receive messages (online, email, the news media, social media)?
- Online news coverage has capacity for comment – as above, Press Office needs to monitor, correct, and feedback

- What about external audiences who would be interested but not affected, e.g. prospective students and staff, donors, alumni, funding bodies?
- A checklist of who might be considered relevant stakeholders is at the end of this document
- A list of key contacts and their phone/email details is contained in the Corporate Communications battle box and its online versions (SharePoint and Dropbox). This includes:
  - o Corporate Comms staff
  - o University incident response staff
  - o Other key colleagues likely to be involved
  - o Campus and regional partners and their press offices
  - o Regional press contacts

Roles

Senior Incident Team Liaison
Director of Corporate Communications or Communications Manager
Will work with the University senior level team dealing with the incident to advise them and provide contact point for all information flowing between the incident team and the communications team. Will also work with key spokesperson if appointed.

Crisis Comms Team Leader
Communications Manager or Press Relations Manager
Will work directly with the Incident Team Liaison and manage the crisis comms team for the duration of the incident. This will include allocating the roles below to team members and being the single point of sign-off for all outgoing communications.

Secretary
Will be responsible for recording all key facts made known to the team and making them available for all to see. Also for recording all outgoing communication activities of the team.

Estates Liaison
Sole responsibility for communications to and from Campus Security.

Press Relations
Responsible for all contact with the media. This includes drafting releases to be signed-off by the Team Leader and dealing with incoming phone/email enquiries as required. Will be required to anticipate media demands and advise Team Leader.

Internal Communications
Responsible for handling all enquiries from and communications to University staff and students. This includes drafting text for web, email and social media to be signed-off by the Team Leader and dealing with incoming phone/email enquiries as required. Will be required to anticipate staff and student demands and advise Team Leader.

Social Media
Responsible for issuing all outgoing updates through key University channels as well as bringing questions, comments and gossip to the attention of the secretary and team. Should make sure the schedule is clear during an incident to avoid accidental postings.

Phone/email first response
Responsible for covering communications@kent.ac.uk and pressoffice@kent.ac.uk mailboxes plus internal numbers 4343 and 3985. Calls should be logged and then passed to press or internal comms as required who will inform the secretary where necessary.

Notes on roles

- The roles of Senior Incident Team Liaison and Crisis Comms Team Leader will be taken by Corporate Communications management where possible.
- Other roles will be allocated by the Crisis Comms Team Leader as soon as possible once an incident is perceived/declared.
- All roles will pass information received to the Secretary and inform the Secretary of actions taken.
- Depending on the availability of resource and scale of the incident, more than one role may be allocated to team members or more than one team member may be allocated to a role. It may be necessary to temporarily second colleagues from other departments to the team.
- The role allocation and any changes to it must be clearly communicated to all the team.

Channels

The Corporate Communication battle box and its online versions (SharePoint and Dropbox) contains:

- Content templates and examples will be available for web/email/social media.
- A full list of our online channels/tools and account details

Web - News Centre

The primary location for information about the incident for the public/staff and students will be a news story at http://www.kent.ac.uk/news/. This page will be advertised via email and social media and will be updated regularly with timed updates.

This story can be surfaced easily not only on the News Centre, but also on:

- Homepage – http://www.kent.ac.uk/
- Campus Online for staff – http://www.kent.ac.uk/staff/
- Student Guide for students – http://www.kent.ac.uk/student/

In the event of the University web services not being available, the following University social media channels will assume primacy until such time as an alternative web publishing platform can be provided:

- http://www.facebook.com/universityofkent/
- http://twitter.com/unikent

Email

Emails to the media from the crisis comms team during the incident will be sent from the pressoffice@kent.ac.uk mailbox where possible

Emails to staff and students from the crisis comms team during the incident will be sent from the communications@kent.ac.uk mailbox where possible.

As early as possible, staff and students will be informed that there is an incident, where the updates will be (point to News Centre) and what they are currently expected to do. The main lists we will use according to the situation are:

- all-staff@kent.ac.uk
- all-students@kent.ac.uk
- all-canterbury-students@kent.ac.uk

- all-medway-students@kent.ac.uk
- ukm-staff@kent.ac.uk

In addition, the Team Leader will contact a list of key communications staff in other departments plus Kent Union and Medway partners where appropriate. They will be given a 'heads up' and asked to refer any issues to the Crisis Comms Team.

The Team Leader will also select a list of relevant members of Managers' Forum to be contacted to let them know that the Crisis Comms Team is in place and then to be updated as necessary.

Social media

The following social media channels will be used to issue key announcements:

- http://www.facebook.com/universityofkent/
- http://twitter.com/unikent

Others may be used where appropriate or shut down with a holding statement referring to the main channels above.

- http://twitter.com/ukcstudent
- http://twtter.com/ukmstudent

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Yik Yak, YouTube and Flickr will be monitored for comments and questions concerning the incident and replied to where appropriate.

Offline communications

There may be a situation in which a number of people no longer have access to digital media (eg due to evacuation) for which a written briefing should be prepared, printed and handed out or delivered verbally. Thought must also be given to the large number of staff in Estates and Hospitality who aren't yet users of University systems.

Messages
- What are the key messages that you would want to convey in any crisis?
- Key facts
    - What has happened?
    - Who is affected?
    - What geographical area is affected?
    - What is our statement of priorities?
    - What have we already done?
    - What are we doing now?
    - Who are we working with to manage the situation [emergency services]?
    - What should people do (including those directly involved and those not yet involved)?
- Communications should
    - Accurately inform
    - Safeguard
    - Reassure
    - Correct misinformation
    - Be timely and regularly updated
- Content templates and examples will be available for web/email/social media in the Corporate Communications battle box its online versions (SharePoint and Dropbox).

Communications during a major incident

- Getting communications right in the first few hours, especially with the media, is critical.
- All incoming information and outgoing communications should be logged.
- Maintain a 'single source of the truth' – a document containing key facts and messages. Use this as the basis for all your communications.
- Correct misinformation and scotch rumours – as long as you are sure of your facts.
- Act proportionately – you need to contain the situation, not inflame it.
- Where information is not yet available, tell your audiences this rather than saying nothing. If possible, tell them when you expect it to be available.
- Reassure and update your audiences.

First response

- Roles
  - CC Managers will take up positions as Incident Team Liaison and Crisis Comms Team Leader
  - Team Leader will brief colleagues and allocate roles across the available members of staff
- Location
  - The Team will be based in 155 Registry. If that building is not available, the Team will be based in Rothford or Estates.
  - Team members not currently in or near Canterbury may work from Medway, home or wherever they can gain sufficient access to University communications systems/channels as quickly as possible. Telephone and email contact with the rest of the team must be established asap.
- Establish IT parameters quickly. Can we:
  - Use Kent email and mailing lists?
  - Publish to the News Centre?
  - Access departmental file server/SharePoint?
  - Use University HootSuite account?
  - Access necessary social media sites directly?
- Battle box
  Where possible, the Crisis Communications Battle Box should be available or taken to any alternative destination – there is list of contents at the end of this document.
- Online battle box
  In addition, incident response information will be available on the departmental filestore, SharePoint and Dropbox. The latest copies will also be emailed around the team in case. A printed version will be in the battle box.

Initial communications

- In a major incident, it is likely that all staff and students on the relevant campus should be emailed to say
  - We are aware of an incident
  - The incident is being dealt with/will be soon
  - That updates will be available online http://www.kent.ac.uk/news
  - What action is required at present – even if that is no action.
- If we don't tell them – they may hear through social media and think the worst

- Key departments/services most closely affected will need to know that all communications surrounding the incident are now begin dealt with by the Crisis Comms Team
- Key communications staff outside of the Crisis Comms Team should be emailed with specific instructions on how to respond to the incident. That may only be to monitor comms and inform the Team where appropriate. This list should include the Telephone Exchange, EMS, International recruitment, International strategy, Development, KIE and Commercial Services. If necessary, widen to also include the staff-comms and student-comms mailing lists.
- Key partners such as Kent Union, CCCU, University of Greenwich, Historic Dockyard, Liberty Living should be informed where appropriate
- Focus all outgoing communications on the incident – cancel or postpone all other scheduled announcements, stories or social media posts. This may require other main University news providers to also cease publishing (eg EMS, International, Development)
- Template guides for initial communications will be available

Taking control

- Keep each other informed. If possible, get all the key people touching base for ten minutes in each hour, ideally face to face.
- As the situation unfolds, review people's needs and revise communications accordingly.
- Remember to communicate what welfare and support is available to those affected physical or emotionally as well as how the incident itself is progressing and what action you need people to take.
- Provide regular and timely updates to key audiences – rumour will fill an information vacuum.
- Decide if a key spokeperson for radio/TV should be appointed
- Work closely with your key spokesperson – make sure they are fully briefed and have the latest information.
- The incident may be live or in progress for a lengthy period and/or involve very difficult and tiring circumstance. Consideration should be given to the needs of the Team such as water, food, breaks, a shift pattern or other kinds of support.

Closure

- Close the communications by announcing the crisis is over – if possible, provide photographic evidence.
- That closure should be issued through all the channels you used to announce the start of the incident and to all addresses that you emailed.
- Remove tweets and online updates that suggest the crisis is still live and that might be easily retweeted or misunderstood.
- CC will monitor (and correct errors as necessary), assess, and archive coverage of the situation.
- It is likely that a major incident will be emotionally draining and present challenging or harrowing aspects. Counselling should be considered for members of the team.

Review

- Within a week of the crisis, the CC crisis team should convene to debrief.

Stakeholder checklist

Students

Staff incl.

- Campus communications staff incl
    - Commercial Services (Gulbenkian, Hospitality, Sport)
    - Development Office
    - Enrolment Management Services
    - International Partnerships
    - International Recruitment
- Senior staff / Managers' Forum

University management/governance

- EG
- Manager's Forum
- Council

On-campus partners

- Canterbury
    - Canterbury Innovation Centre
    - Chaucer College
    - Franciscan Study Centre
    - Oaks Nursery
    - Waterstones/NatWest/Santander
    - Giles Lane residents
- Medway
    - CCCU
    - Greenwich
    - Historic Dockyard, Chatham
    - Liberty Living
    - MidKent College

Visitors to the campus

- General
- Event visitors
- Stall holders and itinerant sales
- Suppliers/contractors

Parents and friends of

- Students
- Staff
- Visitors

Neighbours

- Local residents
- Local resident associations
- Employers in the immediate vicinity (schools, businesses etc)

Wider friends and supporters

- Alumni
- Former staff
- Hon grads
- Donors/benefactors

Regional business networks

- Canterbury Chamber of Commerce
- Invicta Chamber of Commerce
- Canterbury BID
- Kent Business Networks (chambers of commerce etc)
- KIE contacts
- Regional agencies (LEP)

Education / prospective students
- Kent educational institutions
- Partner schools & colleges
- Brompton Academy
- HEI partners – international/EU

Government
- Canterbury City Council
- Medway Council
- Kent County Council
- Canterbury and Medway MPs & MEPs