

Communications departments



II. STRATEGY

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In institutions such as universities and research centres, science communication in all its facets is a continuous process. To communicate effectively in a field as complex as science, research institutions typically organise themselves by establishing a dedicated communications department. The role of such a department can vary greatly depending on the research institutions' needs, resources, staff and even the commitment of C-level management to openness and transparency in research. In some cases, the communications department can take on a major role and become a key pillar of the overall corporate strategy.

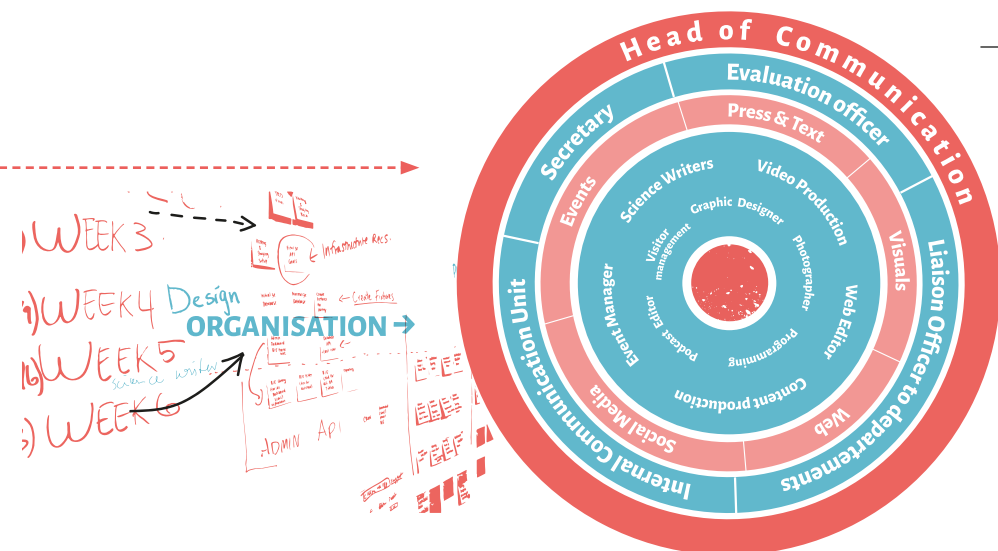
A successful communications department, and this is the focus of this chapter, requires a well-structured organisation with a well-defined departmental strategy that is ideally aligned with the corporate vision. Assessing the needs of the institution in relation to those of the communications department and setting common goals to position the department close to the core activities of the institution is crucial to supporting the full implementation of the corporate strategy and building its long-term reputation.

In addition to an experienced senior communications professional (e.g. communications director) who can advise the senior management, influence decisions and contribute to the overall strategy of the institution, it is necessary to have a team that covers a variety of skills and areas of expertise: science communicators with a scientific background, digital marketing specialists, public relations professionals, web editors, social media community managers, creative profiles such as graphic designers, event managers, etc.

A professional, competent and well-structured communications team should act as the main point of contact for all communication support requests. It can also act as a proactive advisor to researchers, helping them to choose the most appropriate

communication channels and tools to maximise the impact and visibility of their work and to create lasting and meaningful collaborations with external partners.

Positioning the communications department as a trusted and valuable contributor to senior management, scientists and their research projects is essential for adding value to their research activities and output (i.e. scientific publications). In large institutions, this requires the definition of a service catalogue that clearly outlines what the communications department can do for internal clients, the application of a project management approach, and the development and implementation of efficient processes and procedures. In some institutions, these services may even be outsourced to external service providers such as communications agencies and consultants.



Recommended reads:

- ♦ Rödger S. (2020), *Organisation matters: towards an organisational sociology of science communication*, Journal of Communication Management 24:169-188. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCOM-06-2019-0093>
- ♦ Ojeda-Romano et al. (2022), *Organisational forms of science communication: the UK and Spanish European higher education systems as paradigms*. High Educ 84: 801–825. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-021-00801-9>