Professional PR Diploma Syllabus

The new CIPR Professional PR Diploma syllabus is based on professional practice underpinned by core PR principles, models and concepts.

The aims of the CIPR Professional PR Diploma syllabus are to enable you:

- deepen your knowledge and understanding of professional PR practice, tactics and strategy in a range of contexts and for a range of audiences and purposes;

- develop a framework for strategic and critical thinking that will enable you to make an effective, ethical and responsible contribution to your organisation;

- draw upon PR principles, models and concepts to create, implement and evaluate effective communication and management strategies;

- critically analyse current issues relevant to the field of public relations to produce insightful contributions to debate.

The syllabus incorporates three separate units.

- Unit 1 PR Strategy and Planning is focused on the PR strategy and planning process, with an emphasis on research that establishes robust communication objectives, related to the organisation's goals.

- Unit 2 PR Content, Communications and Engagement is focused on communication and engagement, with an emphasis on content, which reflects employers' views that management of content across the organisation is an essential competence.

- Unit 3 PR Management, Measurement and Evaluation is focused on leadership of PR activities, with an emphasis on management of projects, campaigns and resources; internal stakeholders, the PR team and key suppliers; and on measurement and evaluation.

Students who successfully complete all three units will be awarded a *CIPR Professional PR Diploma* .

The learning outcomes for each unit and the unit content are detailed below.

One assignment task at the end of each unit which assesses the student's ability to apply knowledge to a workplace context completes the programme.

Assignments

The purpose of the assignments is to enable candidates to demonstrate knowledge and application of core areas/concepts listed under each unit using critical thinking and problem solving skills (which are core management competencies and employer requirements in published studies).

They are intended to be of value in professional practice – i.e. to reflect real world issues and activities, as well as meeting robust assessment criteria and reflecting the types of outputs that are acceptable at this level of study within a postgraduate environment.

The style of the assignment 'output' reflects types of document required from PR managers in the workplace and will require high standards of written communication in a range of styles.

Each assignment requires research skills enabling a variety of methods to be learned and demonstrated across the course, which again is a strategic professional competency.

Students will be encouraged to develop work related projects for assignments to maintain the close relationship with professional practice, to enable them to make better connections between concepts and their current roles, and to offer evidence to employers of the practical relevance of the course.

Assessment and grading

The assignments are evidence of achievement of a professional standard. Together, success in all three assignments will demonstrate that the student has achieved an understanding of the processes and concepts needed to operate at a strategic level in the profession and can demonstrate this in the workplace.

The award of the CIPR Professional PR Diploma is based upon achievement of the Pass standard, which is comparable to postgraduate level.

Unit 1: PR Strategy and Planning

Scope

This Unit situates public relations within a strategic management framework, enabling critical and ethical examination of the role and responsibilities of the function, and senior practitioners, within a contemporary context. It considers practical challenges and conceptual underpinnings relating to public relations strategy and planning in a variety of situations and types of organisation. The importance of organisational and functional objectives is emphasised with a focus on research and analysis to support problem identification, stakeholder mapping and objective setting.

An analytical perspective is applied to encourage a reflexive approach in examining candidates' own experience alongside case studies of organisations and scenarios.

Unit Objectives

At the end of this Unit, candidates will be able to:

- Examine the strategic importance of organisational branding and reputation
- Assess how different PR disciplines work effectively together
- Understand the interface between public relations and other organisational functions
- Assess the relationship between corporate and PR objectives
- Use secondary research methods for situation analysis, environment monitoring and issues identification, including risk assessment.
- Analyse and apply PR planning models
- Develop creative approaches to problem identification
- Analyse data to generate insights to inform PR planning
- Undertake stakeholder identification and mapping
- Set PR objectives
- Produce an evidence-based situation analysis summary
- Produce an executive report

Unit 1 Assessment: Executive report (and summary situation analysis)

Aim: To enable students to demonstrate competence in undertaking an analysis of a case study situation to inform specific PR objectives and strategy.

Topic of inquiry: Students will be required to evidence professional judgement in identifying a suitable case study as their chosen topic of inquiry. This could be based on the student's own organisation, a client, another organisation of the student's choice or a broader societal situation that can be associated with public relations activities.

Submission: The assignment will comprise:

1. 2,000-word (+/- 10%) executive report comprising:

- A clear and concise statement defining the case study situation, justifying its relevance as a problem or opportunity facing a specific organisation and/or sector, and verifying that it can be addressed by strategic public relations.

- Overview of the secondary research methodology and analytical approach used to collect evidence of the situation and provide insight into its current or potential impact on the organisation and/or sector and its stakeholders.

- Discussion and substantiation of the key findings and outcome of the research and analysis

- Identification and explanation of PR objectives (derived from the research and analysis)

2. Supporting summary analysis of secondary research findings (maximum of 2,000 additional words).

Completion of the assignment involves the following activities:

- Reflection – students are required to use problem identification concepts and approaches to identify a relevant topic of inquiry. This will be a current concern or opportunity for a specific organisation and/or sector, and may relate to the candidate's own experience.

- Fact finding – students are required to undertake data collection using a range of secondary research methods (literature, archives, published surveys, reports, etc.) to examine the chosen the chosen topic of inquiry.

- Insight – students are required to use a range of appropriate models, tools and methods to analysis the external and internal environment, the organisation or societal issue and stakeholder groups.

- Communication – students are required to review and structure their analysis of a situation in the form of an executive report.

Unit focus: Situation analysis

Topic examples:

- Changing attitudes towards female employment in the construction sector

- Increasing public participation in local elections

- Applying a PESO communications strategy within a specific organisation

Unit 2: PR Content, Communications and Engagement

Scope

This Unit focuses on PR strategies involving content, communications and engagement. It investigates the contemporary media landscape (including digital and ICT developments) and helps candidates to develop creative solutions, create and curate multimedia content and apply communications concepts to a variety of situations facing a range of organisations.

A professional approach emphasises the importance of ethical practice, maintaining trust, reputation management, and informed judgement. Candidates are encouraged to draw on their own experience alongside case study examples of campaigns and strategic practice.

Unit Objectives

At the end of this Unit, candidates will be able to:

- Communicate authoritatively and persuasively to a target audience through the medium of a thought-leadership article
- Critically evaluate the impact of the contemporary media landscape on organisational stakeholder engagement
- Develop key messages, strategic narratives and apply storytelling techniques
- Apply issues management principles
- Use participant observation and content analysis research methods
- Apply appropriate models of reflection in reflecting critically on own professional practice.

Unit 2 Assessment: Thought leadership article (and statement of reflection)

Aim: To enable students to demonstrate competence in strategic communication and stakeholder engagement through production of a thought leadership article

Topic of inquiry: Students will be required to evidence professional judgement in identifying a suitable campaign, communication activity or other aspect of strategic practice as their chosen topic of inquiry. This could be based on the student's own experience or broader public relations practice.

Submission: The assignment will comprise:

1. 1,000 – 2,000-word thought leadership article (maximum 2,000 words) that is:

- Suitable for publication by a reputable business title such as Harvard Business Review.
- Structured and written in a professional style with points and arguments supported by reference to the chosen campaign, communication activity or aspect of strategy practice.
- Effective in communicating an expert perspective on the chosen topic with reference to relevant concepts, models or theories.

   Note: This is not an essay or journal article and does not require formal academic references

2. Supporting statement of personal reflection (maximum of 2,000 additional words) which:

- includes your rationale for the chosen topic of the thought leadership article, the target magazine and the article content;
- applies one or more models of reflection relevant to PR practice.

Completion of the assignment involves the following activities:

- Rationale for selecting the chosen topic of inquiry and featured concepts, models or theories, learning derived from examining the example and how the thought leadership article will inform the student's future practice.
- Self-reflection – students are required to identify a relevant topic of inquiry, which may be a current campaign, communication activity or other aspect of strategic practice for a specific organisation and/or sector, and may relate to the candidate's own experience.
- Fact finding – data collection using a range of secondary research methods (literature, archives, published surveys, reports, etc.) to examine the chosen topic of inquiry and relevant concepts, models or theories.
- Insight – statement of reflection demonstrating critical consideration of the data collected, concepts from theory and practice, personal learning and future application.
- Communication – construction of an evidence-based thought leadership article that seeks to transfer knowledge through a narrative assessment of the chosen topic of inquiry, supported by the statement of reflection.

Unit focus: Professional practice

Topic examples:

- Building a Facebook community
- Engaging stakeholders in a centenary campaign
- Developing a listening culture

Unit 3: PR Management, Measurement and Evaluation

Scope

This Unit concentrates on performance improvement in respect of the management, measurement and evaluation of professional PR practice. It offers critical examination of the effectiveness of public relations strategies, campaigns and programmes.

Principles relating to accountability, socio-cultural considerations, ethical practice and continuous professional development will be applied. Candidates will be able to examine their own processes and practices alongside case study examples.

Unit Objectives

At the end of this Unit, candidates will be able to:

- Advise and coach senior managers
- Critically evaluate integrated campaign management
- Apply project management techniques
- Assess approaches to budget and resource management
- Apply principles of ethical practice
- Undertake project risk assessment and management
- Review approaches and competencies for team management
- Examine processes underpinning effective agency and client relationships and management
- Understand how to appraise data to monitor the efficiency and effectiveness of PR activities
- Measure and evaluate outputs and outcomes
- Use qualitative research methods to obtain feedback on public relations management
- Produce management reports outlining recommendations for performance improvement

Unit 3 Assessment: Management proposal outlining recommendations for performance improvement

Aim: To enable students to demonstrate competence in evaluating the ethics and effectiveness of professional practice.

Topic of inquiry: Students will be required to evidence professional judgement in identifying a suitable campaign, communication activity or other aspect of strategic practice as their chosen topic of inquiry. This could be based on the student's own organisation, a client, another organisation of the student's choice or a broader area of professional public relations practice. It should normally build upon the topic of inquiry that was the basis of the Unit 1 assignment.

Submission: The assignment will comprise:

1. 2,000-word (+/- 10%) management proposal comprising:

- Identification and justification of the chosen topic of inquiry

- Critical evaluation of the campaign, activity or other aspect of practice with reference to its management and measurement, with specific focus on questions regarding ethics and effectiveness.
- Recommendations for improvement drawing on data analysis and performance indicators

2. Supporting review of proposal for change (maximum of 2,000 additional words) including:

- Overview of secondary data research undertaken.
- Feedback on recommendations proposed in the report obtained from qualitative research (such as 1-2 brief interviews with practitioners or line managers)

Completion of the assignment involves the following activities:

- Self-reflection – students are required to identify a relevant topic of inquiry. This will be a recent campaign, communication activity or other aspect of strategic practice for a specific organisation and/or sector, and may relate to the candidate's own experience
- Fact finding – students are required to undertake secondary research (using literature, archives, published surveys, reports, etc.) to inform recommendations.
- Insight – students are required to determine recommendations for performance improvements and review these through feedback (qualitative input) of proposals for change.
- Communication – present performance improvement recommendations for the topic of inquiry in the form of a professional management proposal (with supporting evidence).

Unit focus: Evaluation

Topic examples:

- Examining the workflow for the production of an annual report
- Improving the return on investment of international car launches
- Reviewing the strategic objectives of the public relations function

Word count

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

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. 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.

Where stated in the assessment task, 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.