



UCL School of Life and Medical Sciences (SLMS)

Communications Strategy

1. Context

It is accepted that the School of Life and Medical Sciences (SLMS) “punches below its weight” in terms of profile. Our aim is to be, and to be widely acknowledged as, the best university for biomedicine – from bench to bedside – in Europe.

In order to be perceived as outstanding, rather than excellent, we need to significantly improve our branding; overhaul our communications; enhance our profile and to ensure that all staff are ‘ambassadors’ for the School at every available opportunity.

This strategy document provides a framework for action to enable the School to:

- To communicate its corporate vision & strategic direction, portraying the School as a cohesive and coherent entity
- To increase the School’s positive public profile amongst key audiences
- To enhance UCL’s profile as a world-leading university
- To provide our key audiences with information they need that is tailored to their requirements.

The detail of our Strategy, and an accompanying Action Plan, is outlined in a number of appendices.

2. Audiences

A significant problem has been that we have not always been rigorous in the identification of our key target audiences. Rather, communications channels, such as newsletters; websites and so on, have often been used as a generic vehicle for a range of purposes rather than tailored with specific goals in mind. As a result, for example, some of our websites are an uncomfortable mixture of information for both internal and external users whose needs and approaches differ significantly.

Key internal audiences have been identified as:

- (i) *Within Divisions/Institutes*: academics; researchers; research support staff; administrative staff; research students; taught Masters students; undergraduate students
- (ii) *Within the wider UCL*: Collaborators in other research groups across UCL; other UCL staff.

It is clear that an individual’s primary allegiance is often to the smallest unit (for example, the research group). This is important to bear in mind as our organisational framework expands from Department to Division; and from Faculty to School. Our organisational structure is complicated and has undergone significant change that needs to be communicated to, and understood by, all internal audiences to achieve buy-in from staff; to maximise our profile within UCL and to ensure that communications are efficient. This is not currently the case. For example, researchers, particularly in our merged institutions, may not fully understand the organisational structure and as a consequence UCL is not always acknowledged in publications, which has a negative impact on our ratings in key citation

indexes. Similarly, communications from Central Support Services regularly reflect historic structures resulting in duplication of emails and hard copy correspondence.

Clarifying structures, including the myriad of roles (such as clinical academic; joint appointments; interdisciplinary institutes etc.) will therefore result in greater efficiency through appropriately targeted communications within the School and across UCL, and enhanced understanding for staff and students alike.

As we focus increasingly on interdisciplinary working, our activities – in all areas of academic and clinical life – should be clearly discernible to facilitate new collaborations across the School and the wider UCL community. Our publications, grant successes and other achievements must be celebrated and clearly visible in order to facilitate the promotion of a competitive environment. The School, and UCL more widely, offers an unrivalled arena for academic debate. The School should be at the forefront by identifying and facilitating opportunities for debating forums, colloquia etc. for our internal audiences and with our external stakeholders.

Key external audiences broadly include:

- (i) Sponsors (research councils; charities & foundations; business & commercial entities etc.)
- (ii) Academic collaborators (at both an individual and organisational level)
- (iii) Clinical collaborators and partner Trusts, PCT's etc.
- (iv) Prospective students
- (v) Prospective staff
- (vi) Schools
- (vii) Wider academic community, both domestic and international
- (viii) Professional bodies
- (ix) Opinion formers such as government and the media
- (x) Alumni

It is paramount to our future that we increase our profile as a world class hub for biomedicine through enhanced online presence; increased media coverage and a quality events programme. Our external presence influences our ability to attract first-rate staff and students, particularly internationally, and our institutional reputation affects funding decisions across the board.

The requirements of external audiences are often different to internal needs. Our organisational structure is irrelevant to many external audiences and navigating around a website as currently organised is cumbersome, frustrating, and actually masks our size and breadth of expertise in many areas. Again, as collaborative and interdisciplinary working relationships flourish, a radical rethink of the way that we present ourselves to the outside world is required.

We need to ensure that we present a strong and coherent corporate identity through a consistent visual presence and a strong, targeted suite of publications. Whilst consistent corporate branding is essential, the requirements of our partner Trusts must also be borne in mind to ensure that both needs are satisfied.

3. Messages

Five 'big picture' messages have been identified:

- we are a world leader in biomedical research;
- we offer outstanding training opportunities for research students;
- the School is a great place to be taught student;
- the symbiotic relationship between the School and its partner Trusts is unrivalled and
- the School is pivotal in exciting strategic initiatives (such as the UK CRMI; Academic Health Sciences Centre etc.).

Within these overarching messages it is important to tease out and to articulate our specific targeted messages (*see Appendix 1*), drawing on quantitative and qualitative evidence to substantiate our claims.

We need to get these messages to our external audiences by building a strong profile for the activities of the School within the context of the wider strengths of UCL, and develop mechanisms to promote a clearer understanding of what the School represents. Our key messages should be based on the substantial evidence that we can draw on that properly reflects our successes and achievements to the relevant audiences.

Our messages should emphasise collaboration and opportunities for cross-disciplinary involvement across UCL, and we need to actively engage with partners and stakeholders to maximise communications opportunities. For example, we must work closely with the Corporate Communications Office in order to deliver a planned approach to communications and to exploit opportunities for UCL academics to contribute to medical and ethical debates in the wider community.

It is critical that internal audiences buy-in to the key messages and understand the role that they have in achieving our goals. We need to raise awareness of structures (Faculty, School, UCL and the inter-relationships with our partner Trusts) and clarify how staff and students fit in to this structure.

We currently have considerable strengths across the board and we must celebrate achievement – in grants, papers, awards, knowledge transfer, public engagement – and seize every opportunity to enhance our profile. However, we cannot be complacent. Understanding, and striving to meet, our goals and high expectations are critical if we are to raise our game and achieve recognition as a School of world class reputation. It is also important that we recognise the roles of our excellent support staff in achieving success.

4. Channels

The School needs a coherent and comprehensive on-line presence; a strong suite of publications; a range of stimulating events and to foster a culture in which all School members consider themselves to be 'ambassadors' to effectively channel our key messages to our audiences.

We need to move away from generic publications that are used for a variety of purposes. All communications channels should be designed with a target audience and specific messages in mind. In order to minimise the additional burden that this will place on staff, a coherent content management system and customised high quality image library must be available (and supported in the future) across the School. The former will permit, where appropriate, material to be managed in the most efficient way and affords a simple, yet effective, quality assurance system.

Channels for **internal communications** include:

School Booklet

We will produce, and maintain, a brief glossy booklet to communicate the School's corporate vision & strategic direction and to clarify the organisational structures and the inter-relationships between, the two constituent Faculties. The audience is all existing and new staff members to enhance understanding of the framework in which we operate.

Informative leaflets or flyers

Having clarified our organisational structures, all staff must understand the importance the 'brand'. This ranges from using the correct stationery or email signatures, to the critical importance of including UCL on all publications submitted. A range of brief flyers, tailored to the School, Faculty or Division/Institute as appropriate and distributed to all staff would be an effective way of communicating the importance of coherent 'branding' and the implications of failing to apply this across the board.

Intranet

We need to differentiate between our external web presence and information for internal consumption only. Internal audiences need to be clear about our organisational structure; policies and procedures; internal events etc. but much of this information should be hidden from public view. Therefore, constituent parts of the School require an intranet that is fit for purpose.

Newsletters

The Provost's newsletter is a simple yet effective mechanism for keeping staff abreast of a wide range of issues that may otherwise pass them by and of enhancing a sense of enfranchisement. Newsletters or bulletins that promote achievements and keep all staff and students up to date with important changes and developments should be adopted at a School, Faculty and Division/Institute level, with the channels selected according to the size and resource base of the particular unit. Exemplars already exist in some areas and we should strive to adopt this good practice throughout the School.

Collaboration

Much work has already been done to enhance opportunities for collaborative working across the School. Cross cutting initiatives and adjustments to UCL's Resource Allocation Model are resulting in a breakdown of historic organisational barriers but in addition we should, for example, run School research speed dating sessions and ensure that staff web pages include metadata to facilitate searches by research area to further encourage interactions.

Email & distribution lists

Many staff complain of email overload. We are all inundated with (often lengthy and sometimes duplicated) emails. We need to work with the Corporate Support Services to develop a repository of email lists that are regularly updated and reflect their intended

audiences. Not only would this reduce the number of emails sent to an inappropriate recipient but should reduce the need for us all to maintain a plethora of distribution lists. Staff at all levels in Corporate Support Services should be clear about our organisational structures and roles, and we should work with them to develop a pathway for communicating changes at all levels.

As a School we should strive to ensure that our email communications are clear, concise, targeted and appropriate.

Channels for **external communications** include:

Website

A top level School website is required to provide a focus; central access point and repository for School level information and resources. Below that should hang a strong and consistently branded hierarchy of websites that present material to our external audiences in a coherent manner. Our public face should hide our organisational structures and instead organise our activities around agreed research strengths and over-arching cross cutting themes.

We should be imaginative in the way that we present other key information, such as taught postgraduate courses, ensuring that navigation is clear and the information presented is up-to-date and consistent.

To minimise both cost and environmental impact, our publications should largely be available as a PDF file to download from an appropriate website. In addition, we need to utilise technologies such as RSS feeds; podcasts of messages from the Deans, Divisional/Institute Directors or theme leaders etc. to ensure that our websites are dynamic, stimulating and up-to-date.

We must make use of the expertise that exists within the School and also work with relevant Central Support Services to ensure that we are able to harness new technologies to enhance our communications and to maintain a fresh, cutting-edge web presence.

Communications Grid

UCL's Corporate Communications Office has developed a communications grid, outlining key activities and providing enhanced visibility. The School should take advantage of this facility, and develop this concept further, wherever appropriate.

Leaflets

A range of high quality, branded leaflets for specific undergraduate, MSc or PhD programmes should be produced. The School should be imaginative in their design to incorporate, for example, wallet sized publications that are easy for staff to carry when on at recruitment events, conferences, collaborative visits etc.

Media presence

All constituent parts of the School should work with the Corporate Communications Office to raise the School's profile through increased media coverage. This encompasses all aspects of our activity, from acknowledging UCL in publications; to ensuring that the UCL logo is clearly visible wherever possible during television interviews; to developing themed

communications (bringing together a range of activity on a defined subject or issue to maximise impact).

Staff as 'ambassadors' of UCL

We want our staff should be proud to be members of the School and we need to develop a culture whereby they act as 'ambassadors' at every available opportunity. In order to do this, all staff need to be kept informed of key issues and developments to equip them with the knowledge to promote the School. We should also strive to provide all staff travelling to conferences or events with a 'crib sheet' highlighting key issues and achievements, as well as easily portable promotional materials such as bookmarks; wallet size 'facts & figures' etc.

Debate

The School should foster further opportunities for academic debate through a School Debating Society, engaging not only with our internal academic community but with our external audiences, in topical or ground-breaking issues.

5. Embracing the London Agenda

The School has an important role to play within UCL's London Communications Strategy.

In particular, many component parts of the School make a significant contribution to improving the health care of the population in the North Thames region and beyond. Our clinical academics and researchers, through their integration with our partner hospitals and Primary Care Trusts, are at the forefront of delivery of clinical excellence and advancement.

Similarly, our basic scientists have a responsibility to work in partnership with local schools and further education providers to rejuvenate interest in the sciences amongst school children in order to develop future generations of talented researchers and medics.

Strategic initiatives such as the UK CRMI and the Academic Health Sciences Centre offer further opportunities for enhancing UCL's profile on the London stage.

6. Risks

There is a very real risk if we do not grasp the nettle and radically improve the way we communicate within the School, across UCL and with our key stakeholders.

The School could rest on its laurels and be content with being a collection of great research groupings. However, our competitors are developing increasingly sophisticated communications. If we do not raise our game then our competitors will overtake us. This will have a profound effect on recruitments and critical funding decisions.

On a positive note, it should be borne in mind that enhanced communications and effective dissemination of information will also result in improved morale amongst existing staff.

7. Measurement and Evaluation

In order to assess the effectiveness of this Strategy it will be necessary to undertake systematic measurement and evaluation.

This should be done in a number of ways:

- (i) We should work with the Corporate Communications Office in their engagement with a market research agency to monitor audience opinions.
- (ii) The brief for our website should include the facility to easily, and routinely, capture data such as the number of hits on pages; most visited pages; how users navigate around the site(s); where visitors have come from etc.
- (iii) We should routinely set, and monitor performance against, targets and KPIs for activities such as the number of promotional events that School staff attend etc.

8. Resources and Responsibilities

Responsibility for communications must be cascaded down from the Deans through the academic leadership hierarchy. We need to secure buy-in from all our staff about the importance of communications: a cultural change is needed to ensure that everyone views communications as both important and their collective corporate responsibility.

The School Communications Strategy Group will need to meet on an ongoing basis to drive the Strategy forward; to monitor progress and to develop opportunities as they arise. Sub-groups will be formed, with experts co-opted, as appropriate.

We need to establish clear lines of responsibility for specific staff or offices to communicate with particular audiences and to act as a conduit for information exchange within, and outside of, UCL.

All staff also need to be supported by, and to work with, the Corporate Communications Office; through an ongoing investment in time and resources at a School level (for example, through Faculty Communications Officers; Web Support etc.) and through the Communications Network.

Looking to the future, we need to proactively work with the Corporate Communications Office to develop and maintain an understanding of key influencers, their perceptions of the School and how they consume information; to be proactive in shaping the agenda wherever possible and quick to react to both threats and opportunities in a rapidly changing arena.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1	Audiences and Message Mapping