

# Working with the media

Academies Communications Toolkit



# Contents

<b>Building and managing relationships with the media</b>	<b>04</b>
– Do you have a choice about whether you work with journalists?	06
– Your opinion of journalists	06
– Understanding how journalists work	06
– What you want from journalists	07
– What journalists want from you	08
<b>Putting a protocol in place</b>	<b>09</b>
– Infrastructure	09
– Plan of action	10
<b>Do you have the skills it takes?</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Making contact</b>	<b>13</b>
– Pro and anti journalists – know who’s who	14
– On and off the record	14
<b>Being interviewed</b>	<b>15</b>
– A quick quote	15
– A more formal press interview	17
– Being filmed or recorded	17
– Children	18
<b>Keep the relationship going</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Getting the journalists interested in your news</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>What is news?</b>	<b>22</b>
– What makes a good news story?	22
– What makes a news feature?	23
<b>Press releases</b>	<b>24</b>
– What they should contain	24
– How to write them	24
– Editor’s notes	25
– How to send them	25
– Embargo	25
– Some examples	26

## Contents (contd.)

<b>You the publisher</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Your responsibilities</b>	<b>34</b>
– Defamation	34
– Contempt of court	34
– Copyright	35
– If you host information	35
<b>Social networking sites</b>	<b>36</b>
– <b>The risks</b>	<b>36</b>
– <b>The benefits</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Crisis communications management</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Introduction – when crisis hits</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Predicting crisis</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>What to do when the going gets tough</b>	<b>43</b>
– When shouldn't you speak?	43
– Who should speak?	43
– Everyone on message	43
– Buying time	44
– What to do if there's a camera pointing at you	44
– Protecting the Academy's reputation	46
– Where to get help	46
<b>Dealing with inaccurate reporting</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Crisis scenarios</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Crisis management – dos and don'ts</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Useful contacts</b>	<b>58</b>

# Building and managing relationships with the media

**Schools always generate media coverage. They're places that people can feel very emotionally connected to, and places that everyone has an opinion about.**

In addition, Academies remain high profile for many sectors of the media, and will continue to generate large amounts of coverage as the programme progresses.

Dealing with the media can seem daunting, but you will find it hard to build a solid presence in your community unless you develop strategies to work with journalists.

Throughout feasibility and consultation, sponsors and local authorities need to not only be open and transparent with the media, but also use it to get a fair and balanced story of the Academy out there.

During implementation, the principal and his or her team can also use the media as one way of reaching parents of prospective students.

This guide explains how the media works, what journalists want from you, and crucially, how you can work with them so that the relationship is very much a two-way affair.



# Building and managing relationships with the media

## Do you have a choice about whether you work with journalists?

In a word, no.

In the words of Dean Blake, Business and Communications Manager at John Cabot Academy in Bristol: "Journalists only contact you because they believe they have a story. If you hide away, pretend they're not there, or say 'no comment' it's going to look bad. You will either look like you've got something to hide, or that you don't care."

It's also important to remember that local journalists especially can be a valuable channel for keeping your community informed and up to date about what you're doing.

Working with journalists is a necessary and important part of your role.

## Your opinion of journalists

The chances are, you have one. Most people have fixed ideas about journalists, the way they operate and the risk they represent.

But don't assume that all journalists are out to get you. Establishing good relations with reporters from press and broadcast outlets will more than likely be helpful in establishing your Academy at the heart of your community.

That said, it is good to exercise a healthy amount of caution, and to understand what journalists want from you.

"Journalists are never your friends, make that mistake at your peril." Academy principal

It is not a journalist's job to turn a blind eye – even out of friendship – when something newsworthy is happening.

It's also a mistake to think there's such a thing as a 'pet' journalist, who will trot out stories about your Academy whenever you pick up the phone.

"I really enjoy working with journalists. They're generally hard-working, dynamic and interesting people. Once you understand how they need to operate, you can form extremely beneficial relationships with them." Academy business and communications manager

## Understanding how journalists work

If you've never had contact with a journalist before, your ideas about how they work and operate may come from film and TV.

These can give the impression that journalists have days and days to dig into the background of a story – that they go on 'special assignments' to 'investigate' and unearth scandals and sensation.

You might also believe journalists to be loose cannons who will swipe confidential materials when we're not looking, sneak into the playground to drum up stories and hang around hoping to overhear scandal that will be printed before the day is out.

While some of this activity might go on at national tabloid and TV level, the picture is very different in local and regional newsrooms.

The prosaic reality is that in relation to other skilled graduates, journalists are relatively low paid and desk bound. A newly qualified journalist will almost certainly earn significantly less than a newly qualified teacher and may work a 60 hour week as a minimum.

They have to churn out several stories a day, and will probably take most of these from press releases or from syndicated services such as the Press Association. They will localise these stories, or make them 'theirs' by conducting telephone interviews from their desks.

The undercover, investigative journalism we see in films does not happen on local newspapers. They're money-making operations, and there is no money in dedicating significant resources to unearthing conspiracies and cover-ups, and then risking mind-boggling sums to defend them in court.

(In the very rare instances where investigative reporting does happen on local newspapers, radio or TV stations, it tends to be because a journalist has been prepared to spend hours, days and weeks of their own time pouring through documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act.)

So journalists churn information and have to assimilate and reinterpret large amounts of it in a day. This is useful to bear in mind when we want a journalist to cover our news in a balanced way, and to write or broadcast from a more informed basis.

When you're building a relationship with a journalist, try, whenever possible, to make their lives easier by giving them information that is quick and easy to read and understand.

## What you want from journalists

Fundamentally, you want journalists to portray your Academy in a fair, balanced and – whenever possible – positive light.

In addition to this, you'll probably want them to help raise the profile of your Academy and its achievements by keeping your community informed of the things you do.

If you're at consultation, or pre-consultation stage, you may also want local journalists to help spread the message of what Academies are, and how the schools are working in other parts of the country.

It's a good idea to send the standard description of Academies, included in this pack, out to all journalists you have contact with, and maybe some of the case studies in this pack too. It is more than possible that the journalists on your patch may not have a full grasp of what the Academies programme is, or how or why Academies are different to maintained schools.

## Building and managing relationships with the media (cont.)

“One of the biggest problems is that many journalists just don’t understand Academies.”  
Academy sponsor

You also need to understand that having a relationship with a journalist does not mean that you will have any control over the edit, print or broadcast of a story.

“Be astute when working with journalists. Find out as much as you can about them and their views first, including their level of understanding on Academies, and then bring them up to speed.” Academy principal

### What journalists want from you

News journalists work to extremely tight deadlines. Newspapers – even local papers – can have several edition deadlines throughout the day, as can radio and TV news outlets. In addition, online news services often have rolling deadlines, with news being broadcast and published on an as-fast-as-you-can-update-it basis.

And because the UK favours a ‘human interest’ approach to news reporting, journalists will often be looking for quotes and case studies to use alongside their story.

### These are the key things that journalists want from you:

#### Accessibility

They need to be able to contact you as soon as a story has broken. Their deadlines mean that if they can’t speak to you, they will try to find someone else, which could mean them grabbing a quote from a parent, or even a neighbour of your school.

“I give my mobile phone number to journalists and tell them they can contact me any time, day or night. I would much rather they contacted me the minute they have a story, because it means I can find out what has happened and get a response out as soon as possible.” Academy principal

#### Responsiveness

Don’t be tempted to hide from the media, or to refuse to speak to them. If they’ve contacted you about a story, it means they intend to run with it. “No comment” or “unavailable for comment” could make you sound aloof and uncaring – or worse, like you’ve got something to hide.

“You need to understand that the worst possible thing you can say to a member of the media is ‘no comment’. It makes it look like you’re hiding something.” Academy business and communications manager

#### Deadline awareness

Deadlines, deadlines. Journalists need to meet them. They don’t have time to email or fax you a list of questions for you to consider at length. They can’t wait two days – or even sometimes two hours – for your response. What they need is for you to give them quotes that they can run with. This doesn’t mean that you should feel pressured into saying something that you feel unprepared for or uncomfortable with – but you do need to be able to say something, if only that you are obviously concerned about the allegations, and will be looking into them.

## Putting a protocol in place

**So – you know how journalists work, and what they want from you. Now you need to establish how you are going to work with them on a day-to-day basis. Having a protocol for dealing with the press will take a lot of pressure off you, because it will mean that everyone on your side will know who is supposed to be speaking to the press, and what they’re supposed to be saying.**

An effective protocol has two aspects – the infrastructure (roles and responsibilities on your side) and a plan of action (how you all behave when a story breaks).

### Protocol – infrastructure

Very early on you need to make some important decisions about roles and responsibilities around talking to the press.

Even if you hire a PR company to take most of this work on, you will need to define contractually with them the extent of their involvement, and what you would expect them to take care of and in what timeframes.

Your protocols will have to adapt as the status of your school moves on, but as a minimum, you will need to decide:

- Who is going to be the main person (or people) on your side who deal with the press?
- How much time are they going to need to do this effectively and usefully?
- How accessible are they going to be? (During office hours only? Or would it help you to raise your profile if journalists had this person’s mobile and home number?)
- Who should not speak to the press? (Architect? Suppliers?)
- Who else needs to know when a story is breaking? (Lead Academy sponsor? Local authority? DCSF?)

From implementation onwards, your protocol will have to take account of the increasing numbers of people involved in the school. For example, does the receptionist know who to put calls from the press through to?

## Putting a protocol in place (cont.)

It's also a good idea to keep a record of any conversations you've had with journalists, and to have a reporting mechanism in place for them. This could be on an electronic diary, or on a spreadsheet. It should say who the journalist was (name and who they work for), who spoke to them, on what day and at what time. It should also say very briefly what was asked and what response was given.

Keeping a record is indispensable if you ever need to complain about a journalist, or even go to court about something they've written.

You also need to decide how you're going to handle obtaining consent for your students to be photographed or filmed after the Academy has opened. Many existing Academies operate an 'opt out' system where, at the beginning of the school year, parents are offered the chance to refuse permission. If a child's parents haven't refused, then it is presumed their consent has been given.

For this to work well, everyone involved needs to know the answers to all of these questions. It's also a very good idea to share this information with the press officer at the local authority so that they know exactly how you intend to deal with the press.

**NB:** While the form of consent described here will be sufficient for all media outlets, the DCSF requires an 'opt in' form to be signed by the parents of all under 16-year-olds who are filmed or photographed for its own publications. If you agree to collaborate with the DCSF on a publication or film, be aware that your own consent system will probably not suffice.

### Protocol – plan of action

Once everyone knows what their role in dealing with the media is, you'll also need to let them know how to act when a story emerges.

A traffic lights system can be quite helpful.

Green	Amber	Red
<p>The story is good news or uncontroversial. It can be dealt with by your nominated press person easily and without support.</p> <p>Example: A student has won an international championship, and you are being asked for a quote about how proud you are of her.</p>	<p>The story or situation could be tricky. It should be flagged up to the lead Academy sponsor, and possibly the DCSF press office.</p> <p>Example: Parents are organising a Rock Against the Academy event, which may be attended by a celebrity.</p>	<p>The story has the potential to seriously damage the reputation of the school and/or Academy sponsor. You may need to liaise with the DCSF press office too.</p> <p>Example: One of your governors has voiced contentious beliefs.</p>
Action needed		
<p>Press spokesperson for the school comments on the story, then makes a note for your school's records of what was said.</p>	<p>Buy time. When you're asked to comment be very polite, but say you need time to put your thoughts in order and will call the journalist back in 20 minutes.</p> <p>Decide – with all the relevant people on your side – what your line is going to be. "We believe this has been organised and funded primarily by people who do not live in this area, and have no interest in its regeneration. It's a shame these people are only concerned with politics, not improving opportunities for young people in this area."</p> <p>Share – make sure you're all singing from the same hymn sheet. You need to present a united front.</p>	<p>Take the measures outlined in the crisis communications management chapter of this guide.</p>

## Do you have the skills it takes?

**If you are the person who is going to be managing media contact with your school, it is worth investing in media training – especially if you are new to this kind of role.**

Being able to practise dealing with aggressive questioning, or sitting in front of a camera, could give you the confidence and the edge at the time when you most need it.

As a person, you need to be calm, extremely organised, and able to work under pressure. You also need to be able to react quickly,

and to sometimes work outside of office hours. You also need to be able to come across as collected, professional and confident in some difficult situations.

If this doesn't describe you, perhaps you should hire a professional PR agency, or ask someone else on your team to deal with the media.

"Exude confidence about the transformation you can make, unless you have conviction nobody will believe you." Academy principal

## Making contact

**Make a list of all your local news outlets. Don't forget TV stations, radio (including community radio), free newspapers and any relevant websites.**

Contact the editors or news editors of these outlets, and ask for a meeting to introduce yourself to explain what your Academy is all about. Do this even if they've already published stories about the Academy – even negative ones.

Keep a contacts list of all the journalists who could help you communicate with your local community.

When you meet, be aware that there is no such thing as 'off the record'. Be prepared. Know what you are going to say about Academies generally, and your Academy specifically.

"Take the time to involve the press and update journalists on a regular basis. Keep in regular contact with them." Academy sponsor

"In the early days the most vocal critics or those who expressed concern were those who were wary of or who feared change. Therefore, we needed to communicate what that change meant, why it was necessary and what things would be like in the future. People thought they were losing a school, so you need to let them know that there will still be a school for them.

"Pro-active and early engagement with the press was really important, as were providing updates on the project on a regular basis." Academy principal

"We always try to build up a relationship with the local press early on. They can be pretty supportive if you take the time to get them on side." Project manager



## Making contact (cont.)

### Pro and anti journalists – know who's who

Some newspapers have a strong anti Academy agenda and will be more likely to give you a hard time.

Although many open Academies have had productive dealings with the national press, they tend to find contact with local newspapers more useful – because they're generally read and trusted by the families of their students.

"We tended not to take much notice of the national press, but the local press was different. People trust their local paper." Project manager

"People are over-concerned with the national press. There is only a very narrow group of ultra-middle class parents who give two hoots what the *Guardian* says. People generally trust local press much more, so we need to have a relationship with the local press." Academy sponsor

### On and off the record

When you describe something as being 'on the record' it means that you're happy to be named as a source of information that's being broadcast or published.

'Off the record' means that although you're divulging information, you don't want the journalist to say they got it from you.

### But beware – 'off the record' is not legally binding.

Even if a journalist coaxes you to speak 'off the record' you must do so in the full knowledge that if they choose to, they can legally go ahead and print exactly what you said, word for word, and attribute it to you.

Whether you trust a journalist enough to provide off the record information will depend on your experience and the relationship you have with them.

It's not uncommon for journalists to go to a trusted contact to ask for context or background to a subject they don't fully understand. For example, if a journalist didn't understand fair banding, or aspects of funding, they may contact you and say: "I just need some background, this is off the record."

You may decide that you trust the person enough to help them out. But don't be surprised if an article appears which quotes you in full. If there's no problem with this, then fine. But you need to decide before you talk to the journalist whether your quotes, if printed, would step on toes, upset sensitive situations, or paint you or the school in a bad light.

Again, your relationship with the journalist is two-way. While 'off the record' is not legally binding, neither are you obliged to meekly take it on the chin if a reporter breaks a promise to you. You could phone and complain to the editor or, you could refuse to speak to the reporter again. Either way, it might be easier just never to say anything to a journalist that you would be upset to see in print.

## Being interviewed

**Many people are nervous about being interviewed by journalists. And many are understandably wary of being misquoted or misrepresented. Some politicians take tape recorders to interviews, place them on the table and make a point that they are going to have a permanent record of the interview too.**

There are of course different circumstances in which you'll be interviewed, and your technique may have to adapt to each one.

### Being interviewed – a quick quote

The majority of the time, journalists are just going to call you for a quick statement or reaction to a story.

Journalism is highly formulaic – it needs to be to allow stories to be compiled and published or broadcast quickly. What this means in practice is that the journalist will have the 'meat' of a story in front of them, and will be contacting you for a 'for' or 'against' comment.

## Being interviewed (cont.)

Meat of story	Against	For
A leading councillor has today said that he will fight new plans for a controversial Academy in Marshford "with every ounce of strength he has".	He told the <i>Marshford Chronicle</i> today: "I urge all mums and dads in Marshford to stand up against this monstrosity of an idea.	Barry Goodman, a spokesman for the project management team behind the proposed new school said: "There are Academies all over the country that are opening up amazing opportunities for our young people.
He branded the "super school" as "selective" and "undemocratic".	"Why should education be run by business people with an agenda for our young people?  "Don't let this happen to your children."	"The proposal is not for a selective school. And the sponsor's only motive is to improve chances for kids in an area where she herself grew up.  "What we would say to parents is come and find out what the plans for the school are, what they will mean for your kids, and make your own decision."

When you are called for this kind of comment, it does no harm to say that you hope you will get at least as many column inches as the 'anti' quotes.

### Being interviewed – a more formal press interview

If an interview is more formal, and a journalist is visiting your school, you need to be prepared.

#### Looking good

Your school should look good and every detail should give the right impression. Don't let a journalist go away with a story about how scruffy your school looks, or the fact that you had half of your lunch on your tie.

#### Know what you're going to say

Have a line prepared, and be clear in your head about what you want to say. If any questions come as a surprise, take your time to answer them. If you can't answer them, say that you will look into the matter and get back to the journalist.

#### Relax

Have a glass of water to hand, take deep breaths and don't feel pressured. The journalist is on your turf, and if you want a couple of seconds to gather your thoughts, then you take them.

#### Ask questions

Know why you're being interviewed – what is the piece about? Where will it be published? When? Ask who else the journalist is going to be speaking to.

#### Avoid jargon

What you say will be of much more use to the journalist if you cut right back on jargon. Neither they, nor their readers, will necessarily understand teaching expressions.

#### Tip

While it might be tempting to try to 'camouflage' any uncomfortable statements with jargon and waffle, the journalist may simply decide that your quote is unusable, and you won't have a say in the story.

"Try to find out what the aim of the story is. Be aware that you can give a quote in one context and it can be twisted and fitted entirely into a different context.

"Always be prepared. If you are going to be interviewed, know what you are going to be interviewed about." Academy principal

### Being interviewed – being filmed or recorded

Very few people are entirely at ease on camera or when their voice is being recorded. Media training can be extremely useful in giving you practice at this.

Remember that broadcast journalists need your comments to work in very small slots of time, so they need you to come up with soundbite 'power statements' that will make their story punchy and impactful.

You will be much more useful to them if your speech is free of jargon, and you deliver your statements in easy to understand bites.

## Being interviewed (cont.)

### Looking right

You should make sure your appearance says everything you want it to about your Academy. Your school should look impeccable too, with children neatly turned out and behaving well.

“If a camera crew positions a child against a wall where the posters have been allowed to get a bit scruffy, that does not convey a positive image of the school – so we make sure that everything looks right.”  
Academy principal

### Sounding right

If you know a film crew is coming, you could practise talking out loud in front of a mirror. Bear in mind that when we're nervous our voices can get higher, and our breath shallower. To avoid squeaking on camera, clear your throat (quietly if needs be!) before you start. It will lower your voice and make you sound more authoritative.

Again, you should not feel rushed or pressured. It's better to pause briefly and thoughtfully than to gabble something inappropriate.

### Don't fidget

If you are part of a panel on a TV programme, keep still and look interested in and alert to what is being said.

### If you're not happy

If you're not being broadcast live, and you're not happy with something that you've said, or how you sound, say so and try to stop the interview. Try not to pause before you say you're not happy and want to start again, otherwise you'll make it easy for your 'wrong' bit to be edited and used anyway.

### Accompany film crews

Make sure that film crews can't just wander off and get footage of your students misbehaving. Make sure that the route you take them through the school looks pristine.

### Being interviewed – children

If a reporter wants to talk to children, select students you think will be polite and cooperative and show the school in a good light.

Make sure the child knows how important it is that they look smart (even if their picture isn't being taken) and be prepared to get them to straighten their tie/brush hair/tuck in shirt, before they're introduced to the reporter.

For child protection reasons, the reporter should not be left on their own with the child. It's also good for the school to have a press person present so that if a journalist asks an inappropriate question, the interview can be brought to a halt or re-directed.

## Keeping the relationship going

### After you've weathered consultation and implementation, you may be tempted to distance yourself from your press contacts and enjoy the calm after the storm.

But in many ways, that would be a waste of contacts that you've fought hard to make.

For the rest of its life, your Academy is going to need to market itself in the community, keeping its profile high and its places sought after.

So even when there isn't controversy – especially when there isn't controversy – it's good to get your school regularly mentioned by local news.

“It's about creating a 'feel-good' attitude to the school.” Academy principal

“Every opportunity to communicate should be taken because every communication is a marketing opportunity.” Project manager

### Set yourself targets, build a schedule

Decide how much coverage you would like to see of your Academy in local news, and build a schedule that will help you to achieve this.

If you have set yourself the target of seeing two positive news stories a week on your Academy, that will force you to root out possible stories and send press releases about them.

And if you work in a consistent and professional way, allowing photographers and film crews from local news into your school, it will help to cement relationships with local reporters, who should then be less inclined to gratuitously 'bash' your school.

### Monitor coverage

Keep a folder of all your press cuttings, so that parents and visitors can see them – and if possible, link to them or re-publish them on your website.

“We take every opportunity to be interviewed, because our parents love to see their children on the TV, or the school mentioned on the TV.”  
Academy principal

# Getting the journalists interested in your news

**Journalists are always looking for stories. Local news outlets – particularly newspapers – are particularly keen to carry stories from schools. This is because their readers are very interested in them, and whole families will buy copies if a child is mentioned or pictured.**

**This section gives you some ideas to get journalists to pick up your positive Academy news, and to run with it.**

**Tip**

Local news journalists regard schools as reliable sources of stories during 'silly season' – the time during the summer when the courts and Government shut down, and news generally slows up. If you have any summer activities planned, let your local newspaper know about them so that they can send a photographer. This could also be a good time to get pictures of the progress of a building, for example, into the local press.



# What is news?

**This may seem obvious, but journalists get all sorts of calls and communications from people who want themselves, their event, or their grievances, to be covered – and often, there is no news in them.**

An event that happens every week – for example, a sports club or Young Enterprise meeting is not news.

It is only news if something new and interesting happens.

## What makes a good news story?

A perfect news story has a viral quality – it should be easily transmitted from person to person. It has to be something that once read, people want to tell each other about – “Ooh, have you read about...?”.

Fortunately (this is the cup-half-full section) almost everything that happens in the early days of an Academy is both new and interesting.

It’s good practice to make a habit of routinely rooting out your Academy’s good news stories, and letting your local media know about them.

In a local newspaper, a news story is most likely to be about 250 words long (a third to a half of a tabloid size page) – more if it’s on the front page, significantly less if it’s just a picture caption.

## Did you know?

Most local newspapers are owned by national news groups – which means that many national newspapers ‘pick up’ stories from their local sibling papers. The same goes for national broadcasters like ITN and the BBC. So a quirky story about your Academy in the local paper may well become national news within days.

## What makes a news feature?

A feature is a slightly different beast to a news story. Features are usually news-related, or news relevant, but they are longer, and give more flavour and background to a subject.

Features can give context to stories, and are often used to localise national news. For example, if the Government announces a new healthy eating initiative, your local newspaper may want to highlight local organisations who already have healthy eating policies – including your school.

Features can also be a vehicle for ‘softer’ news items, like the activities of local groups, or biographies of local people.

They usually take a full page towards the middle of the newspaper, are illustrated with photographs, and can be anything from 600 – 1,000 words long.

It is useful to make contact with the features editor of your local newspaper (if it has one) to find out what kind of things he or she likes to cover, and how you might be able to help one another.

“You need to know what makes a story, and how to put together a good press release.” PA to Academy principal

## Case study

The Q3 Academy has generated a lot of positive media coverage because it has let the press know interesting and quirky details about its approach. This has included coverage of the school’s grey pinstripe business suit uniform and their Big Brother Diary Room. The press has also highlighted the school’s use of business language – the school’s subject areas are split into ‘companies’, teachers are known as ‘learning consultants’, and heads of subject areas are ‘strategic directors’.

Low news value – unlikely to interest a reporter	More news value – more likely to interest a reporter	High news value – would definitely interest a reporter
<b>Netball practice every Friday!</b> Why not come along and meet our teams?	<b>Academy netballers trial high tech outfits</b> Students at Marshfield Academy have teamed up with technologists to trial kit that could be used by the Olympic team...	<b>Kate Winslet to play netball at Academy</b> Superstar Kate Winslet is set to play in a charity netball match with students at Marshfield Academy...

## Press releases

### Press releases – what they should contain

A press release is the way you let journalists know about stories that are happening at your school. It should be headed PRESS RELEASE so that journalists know what it is straight away.

It is a concise explanation of your story, and lets journalists know the who, what, where, when, why and how of your story.

It should also contain at least one printable quotation, and at least one contact telephone number. You must make sure that you, or the person who deals with press inquiries, can be contacted on this number. If they can only be contacted between certain hours, make that clear on the press release.

If you have print quality photographs, either send a link to the website they can be downloaded from, or send them by post on a CD, as a print or transparency.

**Proofread thoroughly. In your hurry to get responses out, don't unintentionally give journalists a story about how the Academy represents declining standards in English.**

#### Content checklist

- Who, what, where, when, why, how – are all of these covered?
- Have you included a quotation from someone involved in the story?
- Have you included the contact details of the person who deals with media inquiries?

### Press releases – how to write them

Now more than ever before, journalists have a lot of space to fill, and very little time to fill it. If you can help them by producing press releases that can almost be copy pasted into a slot, you are more likely to get your news into print.

It is valuable, therefore, to be able to write your press releases in a journalistic style.

This does not mean sensationalising, or creating pun-tastic headlines. Rather, it means writing in a simple, jargon-free style that is instantly understandable and tangible.

You should keep your writing straight. Don't try to be 'clever' with headlines, puns or double entendres. A press release should do just what it says on the tin.

#### A quick guide to writing like a journalist:

- Keep sentences short – a maximum of 25 words.
- Only use one sentence per paragraph.
- Keep it short – one side of A4 should be plenty.
- Use simple language. Would someone outside of education know what you mean?

### Editor's notes

You may want to add background notes that will help a journalist to understand the context of your news.

#### Tip

It might be helpful to send an explanation of what Academies are to the reporter you're contacting. You can copy and paste the standard description contained in this pack onto a separate sheet and send it with your press release.

### Press releases – how to send them

Press releases can be sent in the post, emailed or faxed. If you are sending a hard copy, use official headed paper so that the journalists know where the press release is from (if you are pre-implementation, use the headed paper of the project management company, Academy sponsor, local authority, or whoever is looking after working with the media).

#### Know who you are sending your press release to

You should know the names of the education correspondent, news editor and feature editor on your local paper, and of the editors and producers of your local broadcasters. Make sure your press release is addressed to them.

### Know deadlines

You should also know the deadlines for all your local news outlets. If the local weekly paper is published on Friday, you're unlikely to get anything in the same week if you send your press release after Wednesday morning.

### Following up

It's always a good idea to telephone the journalist you have sent the press release to make sure they have received it, and that they know they can phone you for further comment.

### Embargo

An embargo is a date before which you do not want your news to be published. It is not legally binding and you should not assume that it will be adhered to.

Journalists will not respect an embargo if a story has high news value.

However, on a more day-to-day story, an embargo acts as a signal about when it would suit you for the story to be printed. If a journalist breaks your embargo, you can always decide not to send them any more press releases – or to complain to their editor.

While breaking embargos isn't illegal, it's not cricket either.

## Press releases (cont.)

### Some examples

#### Scenario

The Marshford Eco Academy's new principal has been appointed.

#### Reality check

This is important news for the Academy and for the community – but their local news outlets won't necessarily be overly excited by it. They may need to do some following up and gentle badgering – as well as informing their community through other channels.

#### Strategy

They're being creative – they have also contacted the business editor of their local newspaper and sent him the press release for publication in his executive appointments column. They could also try the features editor and angle it as a more in-depth piece about this important person in their community. They should include a high resolution head and shoulders shot of the new principal. They need to make sure that the picture shows the principal to be smiling and very smartly dressed.

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#### PRESS RELEASE

To: Dave Deadline, Education Correspondent

Embargo: for immediate release

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#### The Marshford Eco Academy appoints award-winning principal

The Marshford Eco Academy is delighted to announce the appointment of Mrs Rebecca Lyndal as principal.

Mrs Lyndal joins us from the Stanmore School in Liverpool, where she and her team won several awards for raising standards, and getting more than 80% of students to achieve more than five good GCSE results, including maths and English.

Mrs Lyndal has been a teacher for 17 years and a headteacher for the past eight years. She is the author of three books on raising standards in secondary education, and sits on two Government advisory panels.

She will be holding drop-in sessions twice a week at the site of the old Moorgate school, so that students, parents, and anyone from the community can pop in and say hello, and find out about her plans for the Academy.

She said: "I am thrilled to be taking up this post, and I cannot wait to meet the students and their parents.

"I know there have been concerns about the new Academy in Marshford, and I fully understand. I am a parent too, and I know that everyone wants the best for their children.

"I believe The Marshford Eco Academy will open up some truly exciting opportunities for all of our students, and I am honoured to be a part of it."

#### Contact

Mrs Lyndal can be contacted on:

Tel: 000 000000

Mob: 00000 000000

Email: r.lyndal@tmea.org.uk

**Editor's notes:** Please find attached a copy of Mrs Lyndal's biography and a CD containing a high resolution image of her.

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## Press releases (cont.)

### Scenario

Work on The Marshford Eco Academy buildings has been underway for nine months, and the first phase is complete. The designs are highly energy efficient, and have many environmentally-friendly features. The Academy principal and project team would like to generate a couple of pages of coverage.

### Reality check

This isn't necessarily huge news, but it's the kind of thing a newspaper might put together and keep for a rainy day. It will help if the Academy has really nice, high resolution images they can give to the newspaper (who then won't have to use their own photographer's time).

### Strategy

The Academy has picked out quirky elements of the story – like their bat shelter, and flooring that converts the kinetic energy of footsteps to power their lighting. This gives their story some instantly tangible, "Ooh, have you read about that?" elements.

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### PRESS RELEASE

To: Sally Bloggs, Features Editor

Embargo: for immediate release

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#### The Marshford Eco Academy: Energy efficient school of the future

The first phase of The Marshford Eco Academy's high tech building is now complete and our futuristic environmental features are really taking shape.

#### The Marshford Eco Academy will feature:

- kinetic flooring that converts footsteps into energy for lighting
- technology building with a grass roof
- a state-of-the-art bat shelter, with RSPCA-approved, bat-friendly viewing platforms.

In addition, our water will all be heated by solar panels, and a wind turbine at the far end of our sports field will produce enough electricity to heat our dance studios and theatre.

**Architect Bill Builder said:** "The Marshford Eco Academy is a wonderful example of a building that does not harm or damage its environment.

"It has a very low carbon footprint, and uses the very latest technologies to ensure that energy is drawn from as many non-polluting sources as possible.

"This has been very important to the principal and the chair of governors from the very start of the project, as it is integral to the Academy's ethos of action and responsibility.

"The design of the building will also help to reduce bullying, and improve concentration and learning."

We would love to show you around, and can arrange for you to interview our architect and environmental consultants.

#### Contact

Please call XXXXX for more details, or to arrange a site visit.

Tel: 000 000000

Mob: 00000 000000

Email: XXXXXXXX

**Please note:** You will be required to wear a hard hat and high visibility vest on site visits. We will provide you with these and a pair of wellies with steel toe caps. You may want to wear a pair of jeans if it's wet and muddy.

**Editor's notes:** Please find attached high res images of the The Marshford Eco Academy buildings to date, as well as architect drawings and CGIs.

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## Press releases (cont.)

### Scenario

Kate Winslet has agreed to take part in a charity netball match at The Marshford Eco Academy.

### Reality check

The star has agreed, on the condition that she is not swamped by paparazzi. The Academy doesn't want lots of press around their students either, but feel it would be a great opportunity for them. They are cooperating with the star's PR people on all press communications.

### Strategy

They send a strictly embargoed press release to two trusted local newspapers (being fully aware that any news outlets they don't send it to will be exceedingly unhappy). The school stipulates that they cannot divulge the contents of the press release to anyone or the event will be cancelled. They don't fax this press release. They send it directly to the news editor, having first phoned to explain the situation.

**NB:** This is an extreme example. If you strictly embargo an upcoming news event, there has to be a really good reason – or you'll look foolish and news outlets will think all your press releases are silly.

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### PRESS RELEASE

To: Henry Smith, News Editor

**STRICT EMBARGO. PRIOR COVERAGE OF EVENT WILL LEAD TO CANCELLATION**

**KNOWLEDGE OF THIS EVENT IS HIGHLY CONFIDENTIAL AND IS ONLY FOR NEWSPAPER STAFF WHO NEED TO KNOW**

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### Kate Winslet to play netball at The Marshford Eco Academy

Oscar-winning actress Kate Winslet has thrilled staff and students at The Marshford Eco Academy by agreeing to take part in a charity netball match on Thursday March 28.

Kate is taking a break from her hectic movie schedule to visit friends of her family in nearby Market Marsham, one of whom is a trustee at the school.

The actress has promised there will be no tears when she plays in Goal Attack position.

**She said:** "Some of the girls are very talented, and play in the England squad. I hope I don't let them down. I'm really looking forward to it, I think it will be a great laugh."

The match is being held in aid of the Njombe High School For Girls and Boys in Tanzania, which is twinned with The Marshford Eco Academy.

The match starts at 2.30pm, and Kate will pose for photographs with the teams at 2pm sharp.

**Principal Mrs Rebecca Lyndal said:** "We are delighted and honoured that Kate has agreed to support us in this way, she is a great sport and a huge talent. We encourage all of our children to do the very best that they can do, and Kate is a great role model for all of our students."

### Contact

Please call Mrs Lyndal for more details.

Tel: 000 000000

Mob: 00000 000000

Email: r.lyndal@tmea.org.uk

**Please note:** The match will take place on our all-weather outdoor court. If weather is extremely bad, it will take place in one of our purpose-built indoor sports halls.

**Editor's notes:** Three members of the The Marshford Eco Academy's netball A team are also members of the England national under-16 squad.

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# You the publisher



**We live in the age of the ‘citizen journalist’ and ‘user generated content’. Almost everyone can publish their views online – and many Academies boast state-of-the-art IT, recording and broadcast facilities. Many have their own newsletters, and some have their own community radio stations.**

While blogs, social network sites, community radio stations, websites and newsletters can be a hugely valuable way of keeping your community informed, and the profile of your Academy high, there are risks and responsibilities involved in publishing or broadcasting them.

This section of the guide is not about how to publish or broadcast – it is about understanding and limiting the risks they contain.

## Your responsibilities

**There are three main areas of law that concern anyone who publishes or broadcasts. The following is a very brief overview.**

### Defamation

The defamation law exists to protect the reputation of individuals, companies and organisations. To be defamatory, the information has to be untrue and have the potential to damage reputation. When this information is written down it is called libel. When it is spoken, it is slander.

### Mitigating risk

If your Academy allows staff and students to publish material on the internet (including social networking sites, blogs and forums) or in print, you must be absolutely sure that everything is factually correct. Authors are allowed to have opinions – “I hate Razorlight’s new album – it’s rubbish!” is OK. Untruths – or even truths that cannot categorically be proven – are not.

The fact that you are a school will not protect you from prosecution. In fact, by allowing staff and students to publish information, you effectively become a publisher in the eyes of the law. In the worst case scenario, this could make you personally liable for substantial fines.

### Contempt of court

News outlets are very aware of this area of law. It is in place to prevent juries being unduly influenced by the media. If a publication or broadcaster comments on an active court case – its witnesses, the accused or members of the judiciary – it is a criminal offence which can result in prison. A court case is active from when a person is charged until they have received a verdict or the case has been dismissed.

### Mitigating risk

If your staff and students publish/broadcast from school, they should be trained not to comment on active court cases. This may arise if students have friends who are facing trial (an online campaign, for example, protesting the innocence of a fellow student would almost certainly be in contempt of court).

### Copyright

Images, animations, pieces of music and writing belong to the person who created them. If you reproduce them without permission you may well incur charges from the creator or the business that owns the copyright.

### Mitigating risk

Make sure you have permission to publish or broadcast these kinds of elements. Also, when you commission imagery (for example, from a photographer), make sure you buy the rights to use it in all the ways you want to (on your prospectus, online, in local newspapers, etc).

### If you host information

If you offer online services, such as forums or blogs, you are responsible for the content that is published there.

Saying that it wasn’t you that wrote a defamatory statement, or that you didn’t know about it, will be no defence against prosecution. It’s also not a defence to say that users agreed not to post defamatory or offensive information.

### Mitigating risk

If you host blogs, forums or social networks, you will need to moderate them. This means that you regularly check what’s posted, and remove anything that’s likely to cause trouble. You should also include a reporting mechanism, so that people can report undesirable posts to you. You also need to be able to remove offensive posts very quickly.

## Social networking sites

### Social networking sites – the risks

Many journalists now consider it a part of their job to scan social networking sites for stories. So if you have a personal profile on a social networking site yourself, think about how it could be perceived by a journalist and by your community.

It is not prudent for you or your staff to publish information and photos about some elements of your private life. Things meant only for your friends' eyes have a way of wriggling out into the public domain when they are published on social networking sites.

If you still feel that you want to use them, think carefully about adapting settings so that not everyone can see what you publish. Pictures of 'Sir' on a stag night with his friends may not inspire respect or confidence.

Remember that anything about your private life that you publish carelessly could become a flashpoint for the Academy.

Your staff should be aware that bringing the school into disrepute through inappropriate publications on social networking sites could result in disciplinary action being taken.

However, used thoughtfully, social networking sites can have a positive impact on your community. Maybe you could write a blog about setting up the Academy – what it involves day-to-day, as well as interviews with the Academy sponsor, or articles about how you go about designing new uniforms. But always, always consider that a journalist will probably be watching what you write.

### Social networking sites – the benefits

Social networking sites are clearly not without their risks. However, used wisely and with careful consideration, they can convey important information about your Academy.

They're generally free to use and publish information on, and can be an important channel to reach younger and more internet-savvy audiences.

If you do decide to use a social networking group as a means of communicating about your Academy, these are the golden rules:

- Proofread thoroughly.
- Remember, a blog is not a personal diary. Use the same amount of care and attention as you would if you were writing a leaflet or brochure. For tips on writing, read *Building your Academy's brand*.

These are some ideas you may want to consider.

#### Blogging

There are many free blogging sites, such as [www.wordpress.org](http://www.wordpress.org) and [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com). You could use one to tell the story of the creation of your Academy. You could upload CGIs of what the Academy will look like... as well as profiles of the people involved in its creation, including the Academy sponsor, architect, local authority, etc.

#### YouTube

If you have videos of school events, or even addresses from key players like the Chairman of Governors, you could upload them to [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com). Any clips you upload should present a positive image of your Academy – so make sure more than one person views them before you make them live. This will help you to identify any potential downsides to the video – such as someone's flies being undone, or a turn of phrase that could be understood in a negative light.

When Essex County Council went to consultation over plans for a new Academy, students were seen as a key audience. The chief executive of the council recorded a clip explaining the case for the Academy and uploaded it on YouTube.

#### Social networking groups

Anti Academies groups have made great use of social network groups on sites like [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) and [www.beebo.com](http://www.beebo.com). You could set up a group for your Academy to let people know when events and meetings are going to be.

#### Wikipedia

Wikipedia is a free, online, user-generated encyclopedia. You could create an entry for your Academy, updating it whenever you have new OFSTED results or exam results – a number of Academies already do this.

# Crisis communications management



**The unexpected, unplanned-for and unwelcome can happen in any school. Children misbehave. Occasionally, so do staff. Accidents occur, accusations are made, things happen. Indeed, Academies often start life as a controversial news story in themselves.**

When a crisis happens, handling the media is all important. Do it well, and you could turn negatives into shining positives. Do it badly, and the crisis could spiral out of control and damage your school's reputation badly.

There are many situations that have the potential to generate negative media coverage and turn public opinion against you. If you are going through consultation, the consequences of this could be that the proposed Academy does not open at all. And if your Academy is already open, unmanaged negative press coverage could impact on people's perceptions.

The general public can be quite accepting that accidents or mistakes can happen. Often what they will judge you on will not necessarily be the incident itself, but the way you handle it and talk to them about it.

This guide gives advice and tips about how to manage communications during a crisis.

"Whenever anything happens, you have to think about what the press would think if they got hold of the story. Because they are going to get hold of it – so it's better if it comes from you. You need to have a statement prepared, and you need to be prepared for what you're going to say if you're going to be interviewed. You cannot hide bad news. If you try to hide it, it makes it worse."

# Predicting crisis

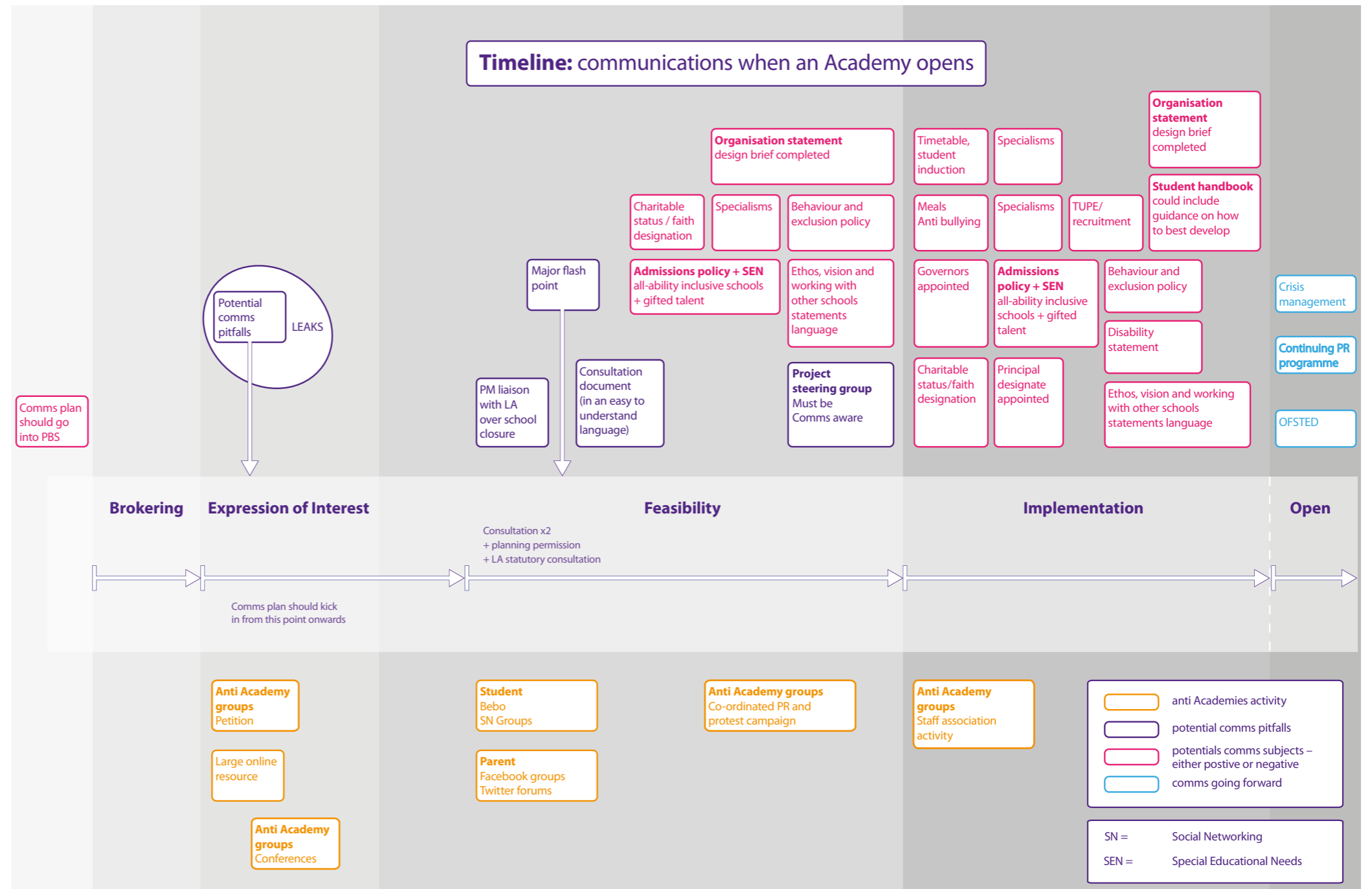
## Before an Academy opens

Even when an Academy is still only an idea, there are several areas where negative press coverage could potentially flare up.

We know from the experience of the Academies that are already up and running that there are key times when the media (national and/or local) can become very interested – and which could certainly attract comment or action from anti Academies groups. You will need to be prepared for media activity to flare up at these points.

This diagram shows where those flashpoints can be plotted against the Product Breakdown Structure (PBS), and the notes describe what action you can take to offset adverse media interest.

Please refer to the PBS for more detailed information.



## Predicting a crisis (cont.)

### After an Academy opens

Crisis flashpoints after an Academy has opened are largely the same as for any other school – with the exception of any news story surrounding an Academy sponsor. Crime, death, accidents and scandals can, and do, happen in the best of schools. While they are unpredictable, you can develop an approach to dealing with them that will convey a professional, united and in-control front to your community via the media.

“Don’t underestimate what could become a positive story. We had to transport pupils to a new school at the beginning of term using 14 buses. That could be a logistical nightmare and a negative reporters dream. So, instead we asked for support from community police officers and created a positive story about ‘working in partnership’ to ensure children’s safety.”  
Academy principal

## What to do when the going gets tough

**Crises come in different shapes and forms, and each one will need you to approach it with a cool, professional head. Your role in handling the media is to be guardian of your Academy’s (or proposed Academy’s) reputation.**

You are the guardian of your Academy’s reputation.

You need to decide quickly if it is appropriate for you to speak to the press (there are sometimes legal constraints which prevent this), who is the best person to speak on behalf of the school, and what they should say.

You need to consider any damage that the crisis could do to your Academy’s reputation, what the media could do with the story, and how your responses will make you and the Academy appear.

### When shouldn’t you speak?

If the crisis involves legal procedures and/or child protection issues, there will almost certainly be a legal limit to what can be published or broadcast by the media.

In these circumstances, it is usually sensible to prepare a very simple statement, and not to deviate from it.

### Who should speak?

It’s helpful to have a nominated person who regularly deals with press enquiries. However, if the crisis involves a death or accident, this person may be too upset to answer the phone to journalists, or be

interviewed. It could even be that the crisis concerns your regular press contact, which makes them an inappropriate person to speak. So you need to have a Plan B. Nominate someone else to speak.

“The most important thing is to get everybody to agree a protocol for dealing with the press, and then to stick to it, no matter what the pressure. Even if you have parents picketing outside the gates or journalists making deadline demands.” Project manager

### Everyone on message

What you finally decide to say depends entirely on the circumstances. You will, however, want to make sure that everyone on your team is briefed on the messages you want to convey. That way you won’t be contradicting one another.

Journalists look for conflict – because therein lie stories. If you make sure everyone is singing from the same hymn sheet, you’ll avoid unnecessary spats in the press.

Also – make sure that you let people and organisations know that you’ve spoken about them before it appears in print. This is especially important during consultation when sensitivities are running high.

“Whenever you say anything about the predecessor school to the press, make sure you tell the school and let them know the context of your comments. ‘Surprises’ aren’t good in an already tense and fragile situation.” Academy principal

## What to do when the going gets tough (cont.)

### Buying time

To give yourself the opportunity to communicate with your team and make sure everyone knows what your line is, you may want to buy yourself some time.

Don't lie. Don't get flustered. Don't say, "No comment."

If you're called unawares, it's perfectly fine to ask the journalist to repeat what they're saying. Make notes – but don't give a reaction. Then say, "I'm afraid I'm going to have to call you back in 20 minutes." Collect your thoughts, call whoever you need to call (chair of governors, the local authority, your lawyer) – and call back when you said you would.

Again, it's more than acceptable to only tell the journalist, "I will look into these allegations, and will release a more meaningful statement when I know more."

If the journalist presses you, just calmly repeat, "I will look into these allegations, and will release a more meaningful statement when I know more. I have to go into a meeting now. Thank you. Bye for now."

It's much better to keep in contact with the journalist (rather than refusing to take calls) because you will be seen to be cooperating, and you will be kept informed of any developments in the story. However, you don't actually have to say anything of any substance straight away.

"Even if they [the press] become annoying keep on smiling. It's hard for them to be difficult if you are being nothing but cooperative and pleasant."  
Academy sponsor

### What to do if there's a camera pointing at you

The Press Complaints Commission's code of conduct is very clear about how journalists should operate around children.

#### Press Complaints Commission's Code of Conduct with regard to children

- i) Young people should be free to complete their time at school without unnecessary intrusion.
- ii) A child under 16 must not be interviewed or photographed on issues involving their own or another child's welfare unless a custodial parent or similarly responsible adult consents.
- iii) Pupils must not be approached or photographed at school without the permission of the school authorities.
- iv) Minors must not be paid for material involving children's welfare, nor parents or guardians for material about their children or wards, unless it is clearly in the child's interest.
- v) Editors must not use the fame, notoriety or position of a parent or guardian as sole justification for publishing details of a child's private life.

If the story is big enough, however, this may not prevent them from gathering outside your school, or indeed, your house.

If this happens, having some media training under your belt will be indispensable. For help finding suppliers, call the DCSF on 0870 001 2345.

### If you have cameras pointing at you...

DO	DON'T
Hold your head up and put your shoulders back.	Run away. It looks bad.
Keep calm.	Cover your face. It looks criminal.
Give a short statement, even if all it does is repeat what you've already said, or says that you have no update at this point, but that you will let journalists know when you do.	Swear, or worse, lash out.
Move calmly and deliberately.	Peek out from behind curtains or a door. What would that picture look like under a headline questioning your morals/leadership skills?
Look directly at the person who is interviewing you.	Don't look directly into the camera – it can seem quite confrontational.



## What to do when the going gets tough (cont.)

### Protecting the Academy's reputation

If at all possible, don't let your key stakeholders find out about bad news via the media.

If you know that reporters have been sniffing around an incident, communicate with staff, parents and students about it as soon as you possibly can. You may want to send letters home, send emails, publish a statement on your website, or hold special assemblies. Your reputation matters most to your immediate community – so make sure they have your version of events, and know very clearly what you have done to rectify or deal with the situation.

Then keep your community fully up to date with any developments.

You may also wish to promote celebratory, good news stories about the Academy (if it is already open), or send out case studies of how the schools are succeeding in other areas of the country.

Even if your Academy has not opened yet, it's worth remembering that news outlets don't have to be the only way for you to communicate with your community. If you don't believe you are getting fair coverage, you could consider sending out a regular newsletter to your local community, or publishing your own information online. You could also send out letters and/or leaflets.

### Where to get help

Immediate sources of help may include the Academy sponsor, the local authority, the DCSF or another principal or project manager whose advice you value and trust.

Depending on the nature of the crisis, you may also want to engage a professional public relations (PR) consultancy to deal with the issue. This could be indispensable if, for example, the person or people involved in the crisis have themselves hired professional PR services.

For help finding suppliers, call the DCSF on 0870 001 2345.

"Negative press coverage can be very tough on students, parents and teachers. Having someone who understands PR can take the weight off teachers and the head." Academy principal

## Dealing with inaccurate reporting

"A significant inaccuracy, misleading statement or distortion once recognised must be corrected, promptly and with due prominence, and – where appropriate – an apology published." Press Complaints Commission Code of Conduct

England's defamation laws protect individuals and companies from the publication or broadcast of inaccurate information about them.

If you believe reports about you or the Academy have been inaccurate or misleading, you should immediately contact the editor (of a print or internet publication) or senior producer (of a broadcast outlet) and insist that a prominent apology is made, and a correct, balancing story is published or broadcast – and rapidly.

It is likely that you will be put straight through to either the editor of a small newspaper, or the news editor of a larger regional newspaper.

You should be calm but authoritative. Explain as simply as possible where mistakes have been made, and let them know that you will not let the matter drop. You may be invited to write a 'letter to the editor'. By all means, do this. But do not accept this as a substitute for a public correction of any seriously inaccurate information.

If you call a national newspaper, you will most likely be put through to a duty editor, reporter or editorial assistant. It may be more effective for you (or your lawyers) to write to the editor of a national newspaper to get the ball rolling. Be aware that this letter could be published.

### If you do not get satisfaction

If the news outlet refuses to retract its story, or drags its heels, get your lawyers to contact them. You can also contact the Press Complaints Commission.

### Contact the Press Complaints Commission on:

020 7831 0022  
complaints@pcc.org.uk  
Textphone for deaf or hard of hearing:  
020 7831 0123

### Or you can make a complaint via their website:

[www.pcc.org.uk/complaints/form.html](http://www.pcc.org.uk/complaints/form.html)

# Crisis scenarios

## A few examples

The following scenarios illustrate what to do if your (even unborn) Academy's reputation is threatened.

### Scenario 1

Immediately following publication of the expression of interest in what could become your Academy, anti Academy groups sprang into action.

It has already received a huge amount of local media coverage, and you haven't even gone through consultation yet. At the two meetings you've had so far, representatives of these groups have heckled you and distributed leaflets. They've also been gathering signatures for a petition opposing the Academy.

You feel like all your precious hours are being swallowed up by this huge and unexpected fight you now have on your hands...

This is a worst case scenario when a new Academy is mooted. That said, it is not uncommon. Anti Academies groups are ever-present and do not tire of trying to undermine the whole Academies programme. Expect trouble from them and prepare for it.

## Checklist

<b>Imagine</b>	What could journalists do with this story? What would be the headline?	POLITICS HAS NO PLACE IN EDUCATION, SAY TEACHERS  NO TO ACADEMY SAYS TOWN
<b>Think</b>	Some anti Academy groups have robust campaigns, now you need one too.  If you don't have the time to plan and coordinate this, think seriously about hiring a PR specialist with crisis management experience.	Use all the resources in this pack.  Send the leaflet to all parents in your area. Leave copies in your local library. Send copies to all the media outlets in your area, along with contact details for people they can speak to about the Academy story.  Have copies of the DVD available in local libraries. Request that it is played in community areas such as your leisure centre, community centres and places of worship. Use it to start meetings, as it will help to quieten people down as well as inform.  Make contact with the local press. Let them know who they should contact. Save seats for them at meetings.  Ask people at meetings to introduce themselves – who they are and where they're from. If anti Academy groups have bussed in flying protesters, this will reveal that they're not from the area.  Use the core script and FAQs so that you are armed with responses to the allegations that are normally used by anti Academy groups to knock Academies.

## Crisis scenario 1 (cont.)

### Checklist

	Send case studies from the pack to local media to illustrate how Academies have worked elsewhere in the country.	
	Read the <i>Getting your community on board</i> guide to get ideas about winning hearts and minds, and managing public meetings.	
	Consider inviting staff associations and other members of the community to your meetings.	
<b>Brief</b>	Let everyone in your team who speaks to journalists know exactly how to talk about the situation and respond to questions.	Make it crystal clear to contractors – contractually if necessary – that they are not to speak to the press.
	Decide who is going to be the point of contact for the media.	Agree what you're going to say, and what your rebuttals are going to be.
		Make sure everyone who is going to speak to the press has a copy of the core narrative and FAQs.
<b>Damage limitation</b>	Pre-empt what anti Academies groups will say about you.	Make sure you've had contact with the community – as a minimum with the leaflet and DVD. Read the <i>Getting your community on board</i> guide for more ideas.
	Make sure the community knows who you are, and has been given accurate information about what Academies are.	

### Scenario 2

Principal A's new £35m buildings opened just two weeks ago. His students look fabulous in their new uniforms and morale is high. There has been mixed coverage in the press, but he feels quietly pleased with the way things have turned out.

However, his students have reported seeing rats in the new sports hall changing rooms. A couple of teachers say they have seen them too. He has received a couple of worried phone calls from parents.

What should he do?

### If you know there is a crisis brewing...

Do not assume the story will go away or will remain undetected by the media. Prepare for the phone to ring.

## Crisis scenario 2 (cont.)

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### Checklist

<b>Imagine</b>	What could journalists do with this story? What would be the headline?	PARENTS WITHDRAW KIDS FROM £30M RAT INFESTED SCHOOL
<b>Think</b>	Come up with a plan. What are you going to do to remedy the situation? This needs to be clear in your head because you'll need to be able to tell journalists about it, giving the clear message that despite the setback, you are on top of things.	Act. Contact pest control immediately.  Keep parents informed. They're less likely to go to the local paper if they're being kept in the loop.
<b>Brief</b>	Let everyone in your team who speaks to journalists know exactly how to talk about the situation and respond to questions.  This should include your Academy sponsor, senior leadership team, and anyone else on your staff tasked with talking to journalists.	Everyone should be singing from the same hymn sheet.  Your number one concern is always the safety of your students and staff. The situation has come about because contractors failed to remove food waste from outside the building. This has been rectified and measures have been put in place. Parents have been informed.  Let your receptionist know who to put press enquiries through to.

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### Checklist

<b>Damage limitation</b>	If this incident generates inaccurate negative coverage, demand a retraction and an apology.	A handful of rats eating food waste isn't great – but it's hardly an infestation. Write a letter to the editor spelling out what happened and what you did, and outlining your disappointment at the way they covered the story.
	If this incident generates accurate negative coverage, seek to place positive stories about your Academy to mitigate its effects.	Invite journalists to your school to cover positive events.

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## Crisis scenarios (cont.)

### Scenario 3

The company project managing the implementation of a new Academy is tipped off that students from the two schools earmarked for closure have started a campaign of abuse towards one another on social networks including Bebo and MySpace.

In addition, a teacher from one of these schools has anonymously posted a petition that makes inaccurate and libellous comments about the sponsor.

#### Don't hide your head in the sand... and don't be tempted to go it alone

When you need expert help, put your hand up and get it straight away. Call your lawyers.

### Checklist

#### Imagine

What could journalists do with this story?  
What would be the headline?

CLASSROOM WARFARE

SPONSOR'S HIDDEN PAST

#### Think

Come up with a plan. What are you going to do to remedy the situation? This needs to be clear in your head because you'll need to be able to tell journalists about it, giving the clear message that despite the setback, you are on top of things.

There are two strands to this story – 1) the students bating one another, 2) the teacher's allegations.

**For 1:** You will probably already have activities planned to bring the children from the two schools together (if not, read the *Communicating with staff, students and parents* guide for ideas). Think of a succinct way to describe these to journalists.

**For 2:** Contact the sponsor/chair of governors, and contact your solicitors.

They will contact the internet service provider to remove the libellous petition – and will initiate moves to track down the teacher and if appropriate, start disciplinary proceedings.

## Crisis scenario 3 (cont.)

### Checklist

<b>Brief</b>	<p>Let everyone in your team who speaks to journalists know exactly how to talk about the situation and respond to questions.</p> <p>This should include your sponsor, senior leadership team, and anyone else on your staff tasked with talking to journalists.</p>	<p><b>For 1:</b> Have an agreed line about the measures you are shortly going to be taking to bring the children from both schools together.</p> <p><b>For 2:</b> Have an agreed line about how sponsors are thoroughly vetted, and you are not aware of the alleged incidents. Tell journalists that you are taking legal action against both the site that published the allegations and the sponsor. NB: News outlets will be highly unlikely to touch a story like this, as being sued costs money and jobs.</p> <p>Let your receptionist know who to put press enquiries through to.</p>
<b>Damage limitation</b>	<p>If this incident generates inaccurate negative coverage, consult your lawyers immediately.</p>	<p>Implement measures to bring children from the predecessor schools together. Invite the press and media.</p> <p>Bolster your own web presence. Use it as an opportunity to tell your community about the positive things you are doing.</p> <p>Scan the social networks yourself to identify children who are opinion formers, and be sure to include them (though maybe not all in one group) in engagement activities.</p>

## Crisis management – dos and don'ts

### DO

- Prepare** – if you know there's a crisis brewing, identify who is going to speak, and what they're going to say. Try to anticipate questions.
- Strongly consider taking media training.** Investing in a day of being shown how to present a good image on camera may save your sanity if and when the world's media descends on your school.
- Make sure your team is briefed** – including the chair of governors.
- Decide who is going to speak** and what they're going to say.
- Be proactive** – get positive, celebratory stories out there too.
- Keep your community informed.** If something bad happens, and you are legally able to speak about it, keep your school community and your wider community up-to-date with what you're doing about it.

### DON'T

- Hope it will all go away.** It won't.
- Refuse to speak to the media.** It just looks bad, and will not help your cause. Even if all you can do is release a statement saying that you have no update at the moment, but will inform the press as soon as you do, then do it.
- Feel pressured** into making statements you might later regret. If a journalist catches you off-guard with a phone call, ask politely if you can call back in a few minutes. Collect your thoughts and call back as promised.
- Lie.** If you're caught out, it will make everything a whole lot worse. And can you live with the stress of it, even if you're not?
- Be lulled into careless conversations.** There is no such thing as 'off the record' if the story is good enough.

# Useful contacts

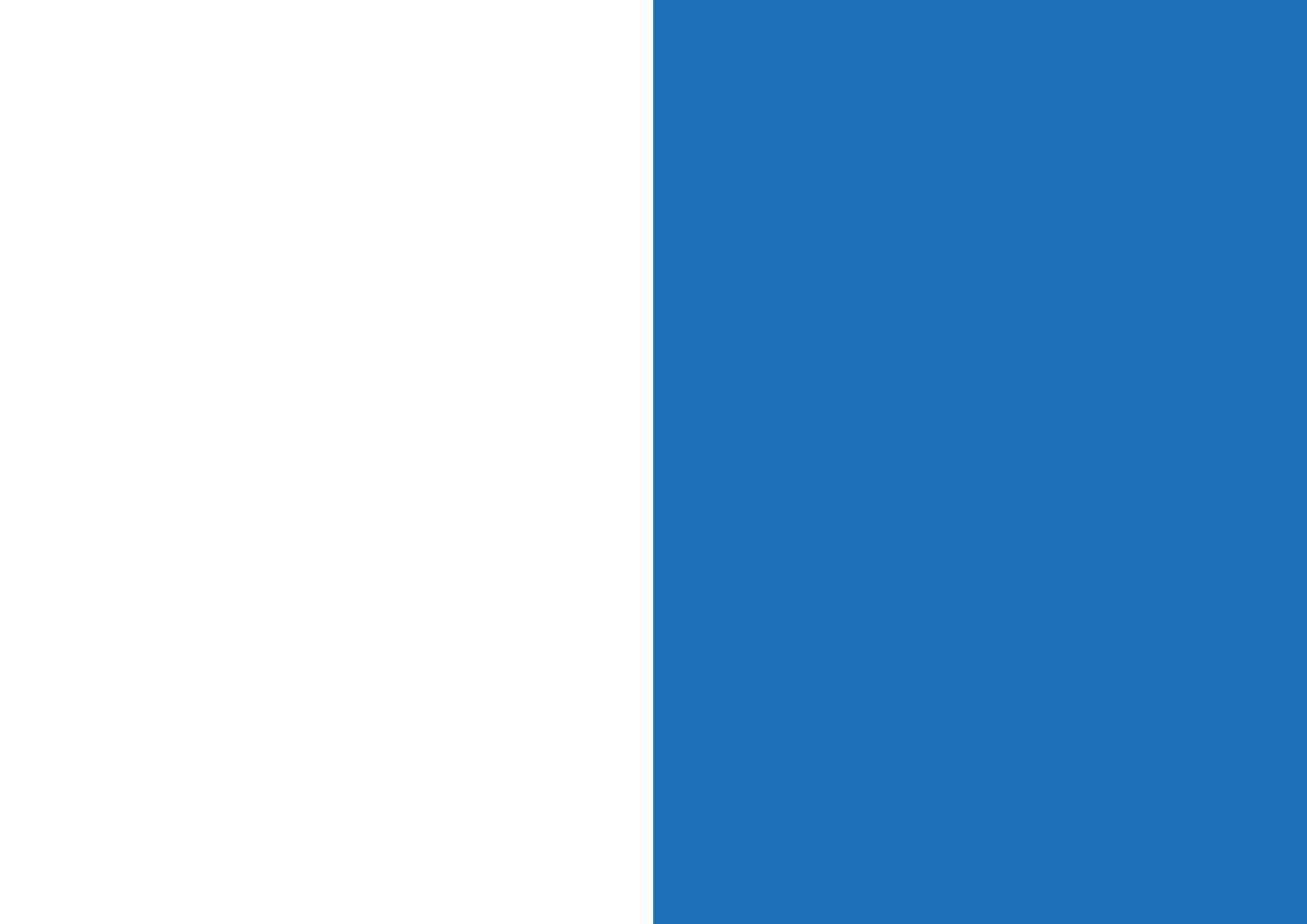
## **Press Complaints Commission**

T: 020 7831 0022  
E: [complaints@pcc.org.uk](mailto:complaints@pcc.org.uk)  
Textphone for deaf or hard of hearing:  
020 7831 0123

## **National Newspaper Society**

(promotes local newspapers, and allows  
you to search for the names of local media)  
8th Floor  
St Andrew's House  
18-20 St Andrew Street  
London  
EC4A 3AY

T: 020 7632 7400  
F: 020 7632 7401  
E: [ns@newspapersoc.org.uk](mailto:ns@newspapersoc.org.uk)  
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