

AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN **PUBLIC RELATIONS** **2021**



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In-House PR Team of the Year

1 to 5 Employees



Natalie McEvoy, PhD candidate and Clinical Research Nurse at RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences harnessed her skills to get clinical research studies on critically ill patients started promptly in response to the pandemic



RCSI

UNIVERSITY
OF MEDICINE
AND HEALTH
SCIENCES

Organisation

RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences

Citation

The winner was selected as a team that delivered an: –

“... extremely hard working, resilient and resourceful campaign that succeeded in integrating very effective internal communications activities and demonstrated a clear understanding of their multiple audiences. They achieved impressive results including international reach during an incredibly busy and stressful time.”

Brief description of the organisation and its objectives in the relevant period

Founded as the national training body for surgery in Ireland, RCSI has been at the forefront of healthcare education since its establishment in 1784. Today, we are a world-leading international health sciences university.

2020 marked the mid-way point for RCSI's Strategic Plan 2018-2022. Significant progress had been made and there was great energy within the institution to continue with that progress.

Then, on 12 March 2020, the Government announced the closure of all education settings as part of the national response to the emerging threat of a novel coronavirus.

In the year that followed, our staff worked tirelessly in the face of incredible challenges. We brought our students one year closer to graduation, continued with critical healthcare research, supported the national response to the pandemic and used our knowledge to inform the public discourse.

Brief overview of the team's objectives and strategy

The university's strategic communications objectives were to:

Objectives:

1. Deepen our relationships with key stakeholders through regular and meaningful engagement which demonstrates the leadership role taken by the university during the pandemic.
2. Leverage our expertise to bring critical healthcare information to the public and inform the public debate.
3. Deliver a programme of student engagement which ensures students have up-to-date information about the pandemic and how it impacts them and which keeps them connected with the university.
4. Maintain confidence by communicating new initiatives and by continuing to deliver a campaign in support of the university's objective of building its global reputation as a leading health sciences university.
5. Keep staff engaged and connected while working remotely.

Analysis of team performance/delivery against those objectives

RCSI has responded to the pandemic with great agility. That too has been reflected in the approach taken by the communications team.

Without any additional resources, and within budget, we succeeded achieving against each of our objectives. Many of the initiatives launched during the period will continue long past the pandemic, demonstrating their impact.

Summary of outstanding achievements in the relevant period

We established new channels for external stakeholder engagement: We launched two new stakeholder newsletters, aimed at clinical stakeholders and at politicians and decision-makers. We set out to communicate that our students are at the heart of our response, that we are deeply committed to advancing knowledge, and that we are supporting the national response to COVID.

Through our clinician newsletter we also wanted to demonstrate our support for our frontline clinical colleagues. We shared advice on resilience and wellbeing from our experts in positive psychology as well as information on COVID guidelines.

The response to these new newsletters has been overwhelmingly positive and, to help further strengthen these relationships, a decision has been made that they will continue after the pandemic.

We secured outstanding media coverage for our COVID-19 experts: A long-standing objective of RCSI is to bring expert-driven healthcare information to the public through the media. In March 2020, we developed a list of our COVID-19 experts, featuring Professor Sam McConkey, Professor Ruairi Brugha, Dr Annie Curtis and Dr Fidelma Fitzpatrick among others. This list is frequently shared with key national and international journalists and producers.

We respond immediately to information-gathering requests from the media as well as requests for interviews or opinion pieces. This responsiveness has resulted in the university often being the first port of call for journalists who are seeking guidance on particular issues related to the pandemic.

We secured 7,097 national media items in 2020 versus 2,789 in 2019. Our overall positive coverage was up from 76% to 94% and our prime positive coverage increased from 23% to 36% (RuePoint Media).

We also achieved 1,005 items of pro-active international media coverage during the period, including pieces in The New York Times and The Guardian.

We took responsibility for student engagement for the first time: In consultation with the Student Union, we led on a programme of student engagement involving newsletters, social media, bi-weekly video messages from the CEO and information guides. We impressed on them their responsibility as future healthcare leaders to follow the public health guidelines and dealt with particular concerns or worries that arose.

Our students have been exemplary in their adherence to the guidelines.

This work will continue until the pandemic is over and will lead to longer-term changes in the way the university engages with students.

We demonstrated RCSI's capacity and drive to continue with its strategic goals during the pandemic: A monthly presentation from the communications team to senior management provided a forum for making decisions about the opportunities that would communicate to stakeholders that RCSI's commitment to its strategic growth held firm.

One early decision was to continue with our *RCSI Discover* campaign to build our global reputation as a leading health sciences university and we delivered a number of high-impact digital campaigns throughout the period.

These campaigns reached a total of 1.4 million people during the period.

A number of high-profile appointments were made during the year and communications plans were delivered to announce these appointments nationally and internationally. Professor Mark Shrimme's appointment as O'Brien Chair of Global Surgery reached almost 150,000 across our own social channels. We launched the world's first academic centre focused on positive psychology and health, reaching more than 323,000 people on social media.

We completed the university's website transformation project during the period and there has also been a continued focus on disseminating important research findings. For example, news of an allergy study of lockdown babies achieved 177 national and international articles. National highlights include an interview on RTE Radio 1 Drivetime and international coverage included BBC Science Focus and thetimes.co.uk.

We kept staff connected and engaged while working remotely: In February 2020, an emergency Townhall meeting was convened, during which senior management addressed staff about the preparatory work that had been undertaken in case the campus closed.

That townhall set the tone for the staff engagement that followed. Right up until 12 March and in the weeks that followed, daily emails were sent from the CEO to staff until a rhythm of remote working developed. Since then, monthly virtual townhalls have been held and weekly emails are sent to staff from the CEO.

Under the theme *RCSIttogether*, our internal engagement platform has been used to keep staff connected through baking competitions and activity challenges, for example. A weekly Coffee Roulette matches groups of four together for a remote Friday morning coffee. In repeated surveys, 96% of staff think RCSI's communications is effective.

PARAGON



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