



Programme Specification

Queen Margaret University

EDINBURGH

Where appropriate outcome statements have be referenced to the appropriate Benchmarking Statement (**BS**)

1	Awarding Institution	Queen Margaret University
2	Teaching Institution	Queen Margaret University
3	Professional body accreditation	Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) Partner Institution with Public Relations and Communication Association (PRCA)
4	Final Award	MSc Strategic Communication and Public Relations
	Subsidiary exit awards	PG Cert/PG Cert Strategic Communication and Public Relations/PG Diploma Strategic Communication and Public Relations/CDP in individual modules
5	Programme Title	MSc Strategic Communication and Public Relations
6	UCAS code	N/A
7	SCQF Level	11
8	Mode of delivery and duration	Full Time (FT)/ Part Time (PT) Minimum and maximum time periods for completion. MSc: FT: max 4 years; min 1 year. PT: max 7 years; min 2.5 years. PgDip: FT: max 3 years; min 1 year. PT: max 5 years; min 2 years. PgCert: FT: max 2 years; min 1 year. PT: 4 years; min 1 year.
9	Date of validation/review	15 May 2018

10. Educational Aims of the programme

In the twenty-first century, communication plays an increasingly important role in virtually every aspect of social, cultural, political or economic life. The communication challenges faced by those wishing to participate in organizational or societal life are complex and diverse. Current concerns focus on such issues as fake news, the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in stakeholder communication, the manipulation of big data and debates around ethical communication on social media. At the same time communication, particularly that which is based on digital platforms, provides opportunities for disempowered and unheard communities - those who are normally viewed as the silent receivers of communication - to make their voice heard, become engaged and be active forces in changing society and influencing decisions. The MSc Strategic Communication and Public Relations programme is driven by the need to support the development of a body of academics and professional practitioners who are able to engage with contemporary debates, rise to the challenges posed, mobilize the opportunities offered and influence progress towards improving the life of global citizens in a range of contexts including societal, cultural, organizational, economic and political.

We aim to provide development for future Communication/ PR career, as well as those wanting to further knowledge through research and professionals seeking to enhance their practice. While we aim to enable our graduates to find a place in the world of practice, we also recognize our wider social responsibility in our teaching and research. We therefore also aim to ensure that our students can operate as autonomous and critical professionals, equipped with the skills, knowledge and abilities to challenge and shape the organizations in which they work. We help them to do this through giving them the knowledge and skills necessary to identify and analyse the important issues they face as professionals, employees and citizens in order that they can act ethically and responsibly at all times.

Furthermore, as part of QMU's suite of taught postgraduate courses, the MSc Strategic Communication and Public Relations adheres to a number of generic aims and outcomes that articulate with the characteristic outcomes described in the Level 11 descriptors of the SCQ Framework. The shared aims of all programmes are to enable learners to:

- Develop a deeper understanding of the relevant body of knowledge and their personal and professional skills in order to contribute to the development of a subject area, field or profession;
- Engage in critical reflection on practice and independent study for life-long learning.

Upon successful completion of the programme, graduates will be able to:

- Demonstrate, through practice, knowledge of how strategies for research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the subject area, field or profession;
- Systematically and critically evaluate the practices, research and scholarship in a particular subject area, field or profession;
- Critically evaluate, interrelate and apply knowledge and processes relevant to a subject area, field or profession, much of which may be at, or informed by, the forefront of developments;
- Exercise responsibility, initiative and self-direction to support and further independent study and professional development;
- Contribute to a development of a given subject area, field or profession;
- Critically reflect on practice to develop skills of self-appraisal and insight;
- Identify, critically analyse and respond creatively to complex problems;
- Communicate effectively to diverse audiences through media appropriate for the subject area, field or professional practice;
- Take an interdisciplinary approach to study;
- Demonstrate originality in the application of knowledge and/or practice.

11. Benchmark statements/professional and statutory body requirements covered by the programme

A number of key external reference points were used to inform the philosophy, rationale and development of this programme and to ensure compliance and quality. These reference points are:

- QMU's Vision, Mission and Values statement¹
- QMU's 150 Strategy (our long term strategic planning exercise, focused on 2025, at which point it will be 150 years since the institution that is now Queen Margaret University was established).
- QMU's Student Experience Strategy
- Commission on Public Relations Education report (2006): the professional bond: PR education for the 21st century²
- The European Communication Professionals Skills and Innovation Programme (ECOPSI)³
- Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) recognition criteria

- SCQF⁴ Level Descriptors and QAA⁵ Subject Benchmark Statements QAA Scotland Enhancement Themes Framework⁶
- QMU Taught Postgraduate Attributes⁷
- Professional Association research reports (CIPR and PRCA)

CIPR accreditation criteria are as follows:

Courses seeking full recognition must cover the following five areas:

- **PR practice** which might include its role and scope; writing; commissioning design and photography; media relations; campaigns; research; planning; social media/digital communication; CSR; relationship, issues, crisis and reputation management; ethics; sponsorship; pressure groups and activism; current debates and trends
- **Communication knowledge and theory** which might include the background and development of PR; systems theory; propaganda; persuasion; power; publics; coorientation; critical perspectives on PR; Excellence theory; organisational, political and social culture; change and complexity theories; rhetoric; social psychology including motivation and influence; ethical theories; how PR impacts upon society politically, socially, economically and morally
- **Business skills and knowledge** which might include IT skills; financial and budget awareness; time management; staff management; business planning; marketing; advertising
- **Professionalism** which might include codes of conduct; regulation; legal considerations; standards
- **Specialisms** which might include sector specialisations such as financial, consumer, b2b, health, environmental, leisure etc.; role specialisations such as public affairs, investor relations, media relations, internal communication, crisis management, marketing communication, etc.

¹ <https://www.qmu.ac.uk/about-the-university/vision-mission-and-values/>

² http://apps.prsa.org/SearchResults/view/61-2006/0/The_Professional_Bond_Public_Relations_Education_#.WrKTDJq7LZ4

³ <https://www.eacd-online.eu/publications/studies/european-communication-professionals-skills-innovation-programme-ecopsi>

⁴ <http://scqf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/SCQF-Level-Descriptors-WEB-Aug-2015.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements>

⁶ <http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/>

⁷ <https://www.qmu.ac.uk/media/4009/taught-postgraduate-framework.pdf>

12. Learning Outcomes of the Programme

The MSc Strategic Communication and Public Relations programme provides the opportunity for students to develop and demonstrate knowledge and understanding, skills, qualities and other attributes in the following areas. These learning outcomes articulate with the characteristic outcomes described in the Level 11 descriptors of the SCQ Framework that requires students to seek to develop a deeper understanding of both the relevant body of knowledge and their personal and professional skills in order to contribute to the development of a subject area or field.

- ✓ Knowledge and understanding of ...
 - The shape and character of the public relations industry and its environment.
 - A critical understanding of the impacts of public relations and communications on economic, social, political and cultural life in the UK, Europe and internationally
 - Have an informed, critical and analytical understanding of theoretical issues, concepts and paradigms relating to communications and public relations in a contemporary environment
 - Critical and analytical understanding of communication and public relations practice which takes account of issues of culture, ethics, social responsibility and professionalism.
 - Methodologies used for the professional and academically robust communication and public relations research
 - Critical and evaluative theoretical and empirical knowledge required for planning, research and design of professional communication and public relations activity
 - Relevant regulatory, legislative and ethical frameworks
 - Issues surrounding internal communication and culture
 - The critical evaluation of the use of quantitative and qualitative research methods in academic and professionally related research

- ✓ Intellectual (thinking) skills in order to...
 - Critically engage with major thinkers, debates, intellectual paradigms, theories and principles relevant to communication and public relations
 - Reflect critically on the relationship between theory and practice
 - Learn independently through sustained enquiry and reflection and through the critical selection of appropriate sources and frameworks to guide progress
 - Adopt approaches to problem-solving which are built on a critical understanding and analysis of appropriate knowledge, methodologies and theories
 - Apply critical analysis to formulate appropriate research questions and employ appropriate qualitative and quantitative methods for exploring those questions.
 - Adopt a critical and informed perspective to the selection, analysis, summary and synthesis of evidence drawing on appropriate sources and conceptual frameworks
 - Critically analyse options in communication and public relations practice balancing practical, ethical and theoretical issues
 - Exercise individual judgement and practice within a framework of academic and vocational accountability

- ✓ Professional and practical skills to enable students to
 - Plan, design, execute and evaluate practical activities using appropriate techniques and procedures which are informed and contextualised by a critical understanding of relevant theory and debates including issues of ethics, professionalism, accountability and responsibility.
 - Determine, through the application of critical knowledge, and produce creative, innovative and relevant materials suitable for a variety of audiences in a variety of forms.
 - Undertake research which is ethically robust and built on a sound assessment of risk.
 - Demonstrate professional competency in a work environment.
 - Exercise professional judgement in undertaking communication and public relations practice
 - Examine and evaluate the present and future role of the communication professional within organizations

- Make appropriate use of technology to support and enhance professional practice
- ✓ Transferable skills that enable the student to ...
 - Retrieve and analyse information and ideas from a range of print and electronic resources
 - Communicate and present information and ideas in appropriate forms for diverse audiences
 - Apply information skills critically, accurately and effectively, identifying appropriate sources and apply scientific methods
 - Successfully interact with others and work as a team showing abilities at different times to listen, contribute and lead effectively
 - Be confident and creative problem-solvers who can bring together skills of enquiry, research, evidence and critical analysis to investigate complex problems and determine and propose solutions
 - Take innovative approaches and adapt to changing circumstances
 - Work and learn independently, exercising initiative, taking personal responsibility and demonstrating confidence and self-reliance.
 - Reflect on practice demonstrating a commitment to life long learning
 - Manage time and resources to meet deadlines and goals
 - Develop a critical appreciation of sustainability in terms of practice and outcomes

13. Teaching and learning methods and strategies

We adopt a range of specific teaching and learning approaches; these include:

- Blended learning.

Teaching involves a range of forms including lecture, seminar, workshop, group working, production and student-led sessions. It is delivered face-to-face and online and involves engagement with, for example, theory, case study, client work and primary and secondary research.

- Combined learning

MSc Strategic Communication and Public Relations students study alongside students taking a range of other programmes, primarily QMU teaching of the CIPR Professional Diploma, CIPR Specialist Diploma (Internal Communications), CIPR Specialist Diploma (Public Affairs). Our experience suggests that this provides a rich learning experience for all participants with practitioners supporting straight-from-first-degree student understanding of practical application while the latter challenge the assumptions and ways of thinking of practitioner students.

- Self-directed

Students are encouraged to be enquiring, critical and innovative. Emphasis is placed on analytical, divergent ways of thinking. Students are supported in their self-directed learning through guided readings on the QMU virtual learning environment (HUB) and through on-line discussion forums. Students lead tutorial activity and initiate and lead individual tutorials with members of staff particularly in relation to their Project. QMU is also committed to providing resources for personal development planning through the use of ePortfolio (PebblePad+): <http://www.qmu.ac.uk/eportfolio/pdp.htm>

- Problem-based learning

Most of the core modules adopt a problem-based approach to learning. Lectures support their learning through signposting key concepts and theories. Group working activity is used to support the application of this knowledge to a practical context. The aim is to encourage students to develop flexible knowledge, effective problem-solving skills, self-directed learning, effective collaboration skills and intrinsic motivation.

- Visiting lecturers and speakers

Industry professionals are used to contribute to modules across our undergraduate and postgraduate and their input enriches discussion around concepts that have been introduced by the teaching team. We draw on our extensive network of industry contacts to bring in a range of guest speakers. Many of these talks are open to students at all levels from our discipline, division, school and beyond. Visiting Public Relations scholars and PhD students also give guest lectures and postgraduate students are invited to the division's research seminars and doctoral events.

- Working with live clients

Students work on real client projects in some modules (eg Strategic Communication Planning and Digital Practice and Strategic Internal Communication in a Digitized World). Students also work on case studies and prepare reflective assignments. They are also provided with opportunities to participate in industry events and networking opportunities as part of their studies.

14. Assessment strategies

Assessment on the programme is designed to evaluate how well students have achieved the learning outcomes of the module and of the programme. Assessment is located within individual modules, but the learning outcomes of each module, clearly identified in each descriptor, are aligned with those at programme level.

The programme uses a mixture of formative and summative assessment and a variety of coursework assessment approaches. The assessment for each module is outlined in the module descriptor. A written schedule of assessments indicating the nature and timing of assessments and marking criteria used is given to students at the start of each module. Assessment approaches are as follows:

<u>Module</u>	<u>Credits</u>	<u>Assessment</u>
Semester 1		
IM194 Media Theory and Campaigning	20	Case study: Media campaign analysis 2,500 words (50%) Essay 2,500 words (50%)
IM218 Digital Communications	20	Report (100%): 3,000 words Case Study Analysis and Digital Communications Strategy + 2,000 words Critical Evaluation.
Semester 2		
IM197 Strategic Communication and Digital Practice	20	Coursework (100%) consisting of: Strategic communication proposal (Report 3,000 words), campaign materials (for example a website, blogsite, short film, social media materials) plus a theoretical and conceptual rationale underpinning the decisions (1,500 words).
IM198 Public Affairs	20	Case study analysis report 2,000 words (40%) Policy brief 1,500 words (30%) Essay 1,500 words (30%): Occupational issues/theory

IM201 Masters Communication Project	60	Project (100%): a portfolio of evidence + production of communication material + 5,000 words critical literature review and reflection
OR		
IM200 Masters Communication Dissertation	60	Dissertation 12,000 words (100%)

The forms of assessment identified above have been chosen to maximise students' high cognitive level activity. As exams are not particularly effective at assessing students' 'deep learning', they are not used on the programme. All assignment specifications are peer reviewed by the programme teams before distribution to students.

15. Programme structures and features, curriculum units (modules), credits and award requirements (including any periods of placement)

There are a number of potential routes that students are likely to take through the programme, specifically these are:

- ✓ Full-time September start
- ✓ Full-time January start
- ✓ Part-time September start
- ✓ Part-time January start
- ✓ PG Certificate in Strategic Communication and Public Relations
- ✓ PG Diploma in Strategic Communication and Public Relations
- ✓ Agreed pathways

Each module you study earns you a certain amount of credits (in multiples of 20). To gain the award of MSc you must gain 180 credits, a Postgraduate Diploma (PGDip) is 120 credits and a Postgraduate Certificate (PGCert) is 60 credits. Students will be expected to complete with the maximum periods of registration set by QMU. These are:

Programme		Maximum period for completion	Minimum period for completion
Masters	FT	4 calendar years	1 calendar year
	NFT	7 calendar years	2 ½ calendar years
PgDip	FT	3 calendar years	1 calendar year
	NFT	5 calendar years	2 calendar years
PGCert	FT	2 calendar years	1 semester
	NFT	4 calendar years	1 calendar year

Standard full and part time routes

To gain an MSc Strategic Communication and Public Relations award you need to obtain 180 credits. Full-time students will normally complete the programme within either 12 months (Sept start) or 18 months (January start).

Full-time Jan start students would begin with the semester 2 modules, then semester 1 before moving on to their final project in Jan to April of the following year. Part-time students may start in either September or January and may take three 20 credit modules in each academic year.

<u>Semester 1</u>	<u>Semester 2</u>	<u>Semester 3</u>
IM194 Media Theory and Campaigning	IM197 Strategic Communication Planning and Digital Practice	IM201 Masters Communication Project OR IM200 Masters Communication Dissertation
IM218 Digital Communications	IM198 Public Affairs	
TM186 Designing Qualitative Research (if Research Methods (online) not taken in semester 2) OR IM219 Industry-based Learning and Professional Development OR Option (from a selection from ASSAM optional module list)	BM104 Research Methods (online) (if 20 credit Designing Qualitative Research not taken in semester 1) OR IM219 Industry-based Learning and Professional Development OR Option (from a selection from ASSAM optional module list)	

PG Diploma, Certificate and other pathways

To gain a PGDip in Strategic Communication and Public Relations, students must gain 120 credits in the following modules:

<u>Semester 1</u>	<u>Semester 2</u>
IM194 Media Theory and Campaigning	IM197 Strategic Communication Planning and Digital Practice
IM218 Digital Communications	IM198 Public Affairs
TM186 Designing Qualitative Research (if Research Methods (online) not taken in semester 2) OR IM219 Industry-based Learning and Professional Development OR Option (from a selection from ASSAM optional module list)	BM104 Research Methods (online) (if 20 credit Designing Qualitative Research not taken in semester 1) OR IM219 Industry-based Learning and Professional Development OR Option (from a selection from ASSAM optional module list)

To gain a PGCert in Strategic Communication and Public Relations, students must gain 60 credits in three of the following modules:

<u>Semester 1</u>	<u>Semester 2</u>
IM194 Media Theory and Campaigning	IM197 Strategic Communication Planning and Digital Practice
IM218 Digital Communications	IM198 Public Affairs

Mohawk College, Hamilton, Ontario Pathway

40 credits of advanced standing would be granted on the basis of applicants having completed Mohawk College's Graduate Certificate in Public Relations and hold a relevant UG degree. The route for these students through the MSc Strategic Communication and Public Relations programme is as follows:

<u>Semester 1</u>	<u>Semester 2</u>	<u>Semester 3</u>
IM194 Media Theory and Campaigning		IM201 Masters Communication Project OR IM200 Masters Communication Dissertation
IM218 Digital Communications	IM198 Public Affairs	
Student chooses one of the following:		
TM186 Designing Qualitative Research (if Research Methods (online) not taken in semester 2) OR Option (from a selection from ASSAM optional module list)	BM104 Research Methods (online) (if 20 credit Designing Qualitative Research not taken in semester 1) OR Option (from a selection from ASSAM optional module list)	

Humber College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning, Toronto Pathway

40 credits of advanced standing would be granted on the basis of applicants having completed Humber's Public Relations Ontario Graduate Certificate and hold a relevant UG degree. The route for these students through the MSc Strategic Communication and Public Relations programme is as follows:

<u>Semester 1</u>	<u>Semester 2</u>	<u>Semester 3</u>
IM194 Media Theory and Campaigning		IM201 Masters Communication Project OR IM200 Masters Communication Dissertation
IM218 Digital Communications	IM198 Public Affairs	
Student chooses one of the following:		
Option (from a selection from ASSAM optional module list)	Option (from a selection from ASSAM optional module list)	

Buckinghamshire New University Pathway

60 credits of advanced standing would be granted on the basis of applicants having completed Buckinghamshire New University's Postgraduate Certificate in Health Communication and hold a relevant UG degree. The route for these students through the MSc Strategic Communication and Public Relations programme is therefore as follows:

<u>Semester 1</u>	<u>Semester 2</u>	<u>Semester 3</u>
IM194 Media Theory and Campaigning	IM198 Public Affairs	IM201 Masters Communication Project OR IM200 Masters Communication Dissertation
Student chooses one of the following:		
TM186 Designing Qualitative Research (if Research Methods (online) not taken in semester 2) OR IM219 Industry-based Learning and Professional Development OR Option (from a selection from ASSAM optional module list)	BM104 Research Methods (online) (if 20 credit Designing Qualitative Research not taken in semester 1) OR IM219 Industry-based Learning and Professional Development IM199 Masters Communication Placement) OR Option (from a selection from ASSAM optional module list)	

CIPR Professional Diploma graduates

Graduates of CIPR Professional Diploma are awarded 60 credits of advanced standing if they progress to the MSc Strategic Communication and Public Relations. The following table indicates these students' progress through the programme.

<u>Semester 1</u>	<u>Semester 2</u>	<u>Semester 3</u>
IM218 Digital Communications	IM198 Public Affairs	IM201 Masters Communication Project OR IM200 Masters Communication Dissertation
Student chooses one of the following		
TM186 Designing Qualitative Research (if Research Methods (online) not taken in semester 2) OR Option (from a selection from ASSAM optional module list)	BM104 Research Methods (online) (if 20 credit Designing Qualitative Research not taken in semester 1) OR Option (from a selection from ASSAM optional module list)	

CIPR Specialist Diploma (Digital Communications) graduates

Graduates of the CIPR Specialist Diploma (Digital Communications) are awarded 20 credits of advanced standing if they progress to the MSc Strategic Communication and Public Relations. The following table indicates these students' progress through the programme.

<u>Semester 1</u>	<u>Semester 2</u>	<u>Semester 3</u>
IM194 Media Theory and Campaigning	IM197 Strategic Communication and Digital Practice	IM201 Masters Communication Project OR IM200 Masters Communication Dissertation
	IM198 Public Affairs	
TM186 Designing Qualitative Research (if Research Methods (online) not taken in semester 2) OR IM219 Industry-based Learning and Professional Development OR Option (from a selection from ASSAM optional module list)	BM104 Research Methods (online) (if 20 credit Designing Qualitative Research not taken in semester 1) OR IM219 Industry-based Learning and Professional Development OR Option (from a selection from ASSAM optional module list)	

CIPR Specialist Diploma (Public Affairs) graduates

Graduates of the CIPR Specialist Diploma (Public Affairs) are awarded 20 credits of advanced standing if they progress to the MSc Strategic Communication and Public Relations. The following table indicates these students' progress through the programme.

<u>Semester 1</u>	<u>Semester 2</u>	<u>Semester 3</u>
IM194 Media Theory and Campaigning	IM197 Strategic Communication and Digital Practice	IM201 Masters Communication Project OR IM200 Masters Communication Dissertation
IM218 Digital Communications		
TM186 Designing Qualitative Research (if Research Methods (online) not taken in semester 2) OR IM219 Industry-based Learning and Professional Development OR Option (from a selection from ASSAM optional module list)	BM104 Research Methods (online) (if 20 credit Designing Qualitative Research not taken in semester 1) OR IM219 Industry-based Learning and Professional Development OR Option (from a selection from ASSAM optional module list)	

16. Criteria for admission

Students will normally possess an honours degree or equivalent from a relevant subject area (eg Arts, Humanities or Social Sciences). Students without traditional honours degrees may be admitted (subject to interview) to the programme if they have other relevant qualification and appropriate work experience. Students whose first language is not English or where their honours degree has not been studied in English, are required to take an IELTS test receiving an overall score of 6.5 with no individual component score below 6.0. Students may be subject to an admission interview (face-to-face or mediated) to judge their qualifications and/or experience, motivation and ability to learn independently. University Admissions Regulations apply. These can be found at:

<https://www.qmu.ac.uk/media/3962/admissions-policy-updated-july-2016.pdf>

Disabled students are encouraged to apply; section 12 of the above regulations sets out the conditions of support offered.

Admission to the MSc Strategic Communication and Public Relations with advanced standing is possible for applicants who are able to demonstrate that they have already achieved some of the learning outcomes through previous qualification and/or experience through QMU's Recognition of Prior Learning policy (see <https://www.qmu.ac.uk/about-the-university/quality/quality-a-z-index/>).

17. Support for students and their learning

Students will have access to all of the standard support mechanisms at QMU. These include:

- Personal Academic Tutors
- Personal Development Portfolios
- Student handbooks
- Access to Student Learning Services, Library and IT support
- Access to Student Services: careers, counselling, disability advice
- Representation through Student-Staff Committees

In addition, a longitudinal induction will ensure that study skills are developed at an appropriate time in the programme, relevant to the work students are undertaking.

18. Quality Assurance arrangements

This programme is governed by QMU's quality assurance procedures. See the QMU website for more detail: <http://www.qmu.ac.uk/quality/>