



U21 Strategic Communications and Engagement Manager

Full time, ongoing position.

- Salary: Full time starting salary is normally in the range of £42,149 to £50,296 (dependent on experience), with potential progression once in post to £56,587 a year.
- Reports to: Director of Operations on a day-to-day basis, also works closely with the Provost (currently based in New Zealand) and all members of the Secretariat team who are based at the University of Birmingham.
- Responsible for: The strategic direction, operational delivery and continual refinement of U21's communications and member engagement strategy.

About the organisation - Universitas 21

Universitas 21 (U21) is a global network of world leading, research-intensive universities. Our member-led initiatives and programmes are designed to inform and assist the development of our staff and students. We empower our members to collaborate, exchange knowledge and enhance their ability to work in partnership with their wider communities. By connecting people across borders and cultures, U21 enables our members to achieve more together.

Whilst U21 is based at the University of Birmingham, we support flexible working and all team members are currently working in a hybrid way, spending time both remotely and in the office. This role will report into the Director of Operations and form an integral part of U21's hub but will also work closely on a day-to-day basis with U21's Provost based in New Zealand.

About the role

The landscape of international Higher Education (H.E) has changed irreversibly due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Virtually overnight, universities across the world had to change almost everything, from the way they taught and assessed their students, to the way in which they conducted their research and supported their staff and student communities. Yet with change comes opportunity and this shared, if not uniform, challenge offered an unprecedented opportunity for U21's member universities to work together, exchange knowledge and share their own experiences for the greater good.

As a network we are now considering how we transition into a post-pandemic world and communicate our value and relevance within an environment that continues to evolve. Although U21 has operated almost exclusively digitally during 2020 / 2021, we are now looking at the value of bringing back face-to-face engagement and developing a more sustainable hybrid model of operation. The role of the Strategic Communications and Engagement Manager will be central to this. They will own and champion U21's communications, marketing and engagement portfolio and will be fully responsible for understanding and meeting our members' needs while simultaneously raising the profile of the network both online and offline.

Tenacious and creative with demonstrable experience within H.E., they will have sophisticated digital marketing skills and a genuine passion for relationship building. The successful candidate will constantly stay abreast of emerging trends in higher education and will take a 'digital first' approach to develop an impactful and sustainable communications and member engagement strategy, which addresses these issues and opportunities. Working as an integral part of a small, agile and high performing team, they will be comfortable operating at both a strategic and operational level, utilising key data and qualitative feedback to ensure U21 continually meets and exceeds members' expectations. Practically, with support from the team, they will be expected to write compelling copy, design and develop digital assets, manage and optimise U21's website and social media channels, develop mutually beneficial relationships with members and suppliers, and take responsibility for raising U21's external profile through the design and execution of relevant PR activity.

Main duties:

Communications	Main responsibilities to include:
<p>Responsible for the strategic direction, operational delivery and continual improvement of all external and internal network communications, publications, marketing and engagement activity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design, development and execution of U21 communications strategy, objectives, KPIs and associated annual schedule / plan (external and internal), which meets the needs of key stakeholders, drives engagement from multiple audiences, focuses on demonstrating impact and relevance of the network and emphasises a clear return on investment for our members. • Monitoring and sharing of relevant trends and content from the international Higher Education media and adapting U21's communications and engagement strategy and plans as appropriate. • Retaining oversight and co-ordination of all communications and digitally delivered events and activities from the Secretariat to U21 members, offering guidance, advice, and direct support from an expert communications perspective. • Taking a 'digital first' approach, full production of regular and 'one off' publications from inception to completion (generating copy, editing, designing, publishing, proof reading and distributing) e.g. U21 Connect, Annual Impact Report, special publications for 'new' members etc. • Drafting and distribution of regular communications sent on behalf of the Provost, Director of Operations and Chair e.g. Provost's update, Presidents' Peer-to-Peer Newsletter etc. • Regular review and reporting of the impact and effectiveness of network communications through the setting of targets, evaluation of analytics and collation of qualitative feedback from key stakeholders / audiences.
<p>Ownership of U21's digital strategy, events and full online presence including the development of a new social media strategy for U21.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act as the guardian of U21's website with full responsibility for the architecture / structure, design, direction, content, SEO and web optimisation ensuring it is accurate, fit for purpose and an effective communication tool. Technical development is delivered in partnership with an external web development company. • Develop creative approaches to sharing and highlighting U21 and member content, which may include but not be limited to, video, social media and digital campaigns, including the development of a social media strategy, guidelines and content plan / calendar of proposed activity. • Monitor, report and act on metrics and analytics, benchmark against other relevant organisations, examine user behaviour and learn from best practice to refine U21's approach and inform future developments. • Leadership on the organisation and promotion of network-wide digital events, activities, projects, and the provision of expert guidance to U21 colleagues on specialist digital activities. • Provide specialist guidance and training to other U21 staff, focused on enhancing their own ability (skills, access to communication tools, targeted internal CPD) to produce content, which effectively promotes U21's activities and enhances events, especially when delivered digitally.

<p>Active management of the U21 brand including the proactive sourcing of PR opportunities to enhance U21's public profile.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversight and guardianship of the U21 brand across all territories, cultures, and relevant stakeholders and audiences. • Constant horizon scanning to identify and respond to contemporary trends in international higher education. • Targeted promotion of key network activity with a focus on continually demonstrating impact e.g. U21 Global Student initiatives, project funding outcomes etc. • Gathering of relevant and compelling stories, case studies and creative content from the across the membership and regularly and consistently developing it into meaningful, effective, and impactful communications. • Development of materials / promotional collateral required to effectively promote the network to those both familiar with and new to the network e.g. new member collateral, items in members' own publications etc. • Proactive identification of external profile-raising campaigns through which the impact of the network can be effectively marketed to a broader external audience e.g., production of U21 thought leadership pieces, development of timely news articles / press releases, conference papers, targeted media outreach.
<p>Engagement</p>	<p>Main responsibilities to include:</p>
<p>Responsible for the cultivation and development of mutually beneficial relationships with key U21 stakeholders and relevant contractors / suppliers to implement U21's communications strategy and campaigns.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification, collation, and promotion of interesting and contemporary perspectives on H.E. through direct and professional liaison with senior internal and external contacts within and beyond U21 including Vice-Chancellors, Professors, Executive Offices, Pro-Vice Chancellors. • Proactive development of relationships with stakeholder groups within U21 member institutions to identify shared opportunities for coverage and encourage their engagement in U21 communications e.g. internal press teams, student communications professionals, international officers, active student groups / societies etc. • Proactive identification and relationship building with key external organisations that would help to enhance U21's external profile and positioning e.g. The THE, PIE, PwC, Common Purpose, University World News, key international publications etc.
<p>Working with the Director of Operations / Provost, develop, implement, and evaluate measures of member engagement utilising relevant management information.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the development of U21's customer relationship management (CRM) database – Blackbaud CRM and define what communications information should be recorded so that it can be analysed, interpreted, and used to influence future relationship management activity with U21 members. • Define and track relevant analytics and create and respond to reports detailing performance of specific campaigns and initiatives. • Evaluate data from CRM, social and web engagement, email statistics, event attendance, competition participation etc. to evidence varied member engagement and produce suitable recommendations to address this.
<p>Any other duties, as deemed appropriate, by the Provost / Director of Operations.</p>	

Person specification:

Essential Knowledge, Skills, Qualifications, Experience:

- Educated to degree level and / or with significant communications experience gained within a HEI.
- Direct experience within the higher education sector with an evidenced commitment to the value and importance of international education.
- Strong appreciation and awareness of the current issues and trends faced within international education and other economic, social and environmental forces that intersect with it.
- Demonstrable evidence of strategic thinking and application of this to enhance communications and engagement plans, activities and measures of success.
- Excellent organisational skills with experience of managing a complex workload with multiple stakeholders and concurrent projects.
- Evidence of designing campaigns, initiatives and programmes, as well as the individual confidence to deliver these via contemporary digital platforms and tools from inception to completion.
- Knowledgeable in the use of the best & most effective practices across social media, especially when considering international audiences and cultural differences.
- Personal confidence, independence, and determination to succeed as an individual and as part of team.

Strategic thinking and perspective

- The ability to think strategically, formulate operational plans and deliver against agreed objectives.
- An analytical mind with proven and creative approach to problem solving and decision making.
- Ability to analyse data, management information, and qualitative feedback to influence strategy and operations.
- Appreciation of the importance of measuring impact and direct experience of setting and delivering against targets.
- Ability to identify patterns and gaps and acts on opportunities to improve their own area and the organisation.

Communication

- Excellent writer with experience of developing engaging and accurate copy for both online and print publications.
- Excellent interpersonal skills, persuasiveness, and ability to build relationships quickly, promote collaborative working and gain commitment to a change, or course of action.
- Effective, confident communicator with a wide range of styles appropriate to people at all levels (written and verbal), including face-to-face interaction both in person and especially, virtually.
- Confidence to interact on a regular basis with leaders, senior university staff and students from across the world, with a full appreciation of the impact of differences in culture etc.
- Listens to and responds constructively to others, demonstrates understanding of own impact and perspectives of others and modifies behaviour accordingly.

Working Collaboratively

- Constantly adopts a collaborative approach and works effectively within remote and disparate teams and with colleagues at all levels.
- Fosters co-operation and partnership working to achieve common goals and ultimately deliver the network's objectives.

- Contributes significantly to the building of understanding, consensus and commitment in coalitions and working groups.
- Ability to delegate and manage colleague contributions via a matrix management approach when delivering communications and engagement initiatives.

Other

- Methodical and meticulous with a high level of attention to detail and deadlines.
- Passionate about offering an exceptional communications experience for our members with a full appreciation of the challenges of our international scope and focus.
- Proactive, creative with the flexibility and agility to respond to changing needs / requirements.
- Ability to work under pressure on own initiative and effectively prioritise a varied and diverse workload often on a remote basis.
- Good all-round IT skills including an ability to learn new software packages quickly. Should be able to demonstrate competence across all aspects of Office 365 including Microsoft Teams, Content Management Systems (CMS), and social media.
- The flexibility to work outside standard hours (evenings and weekends) when required and undertake overseas travel (scope of which to be agreed in advance with the Provost / Director of Operations).

Desirable

- Experience of using relationship management databases e.g. Blackbaud CRM to record and manipulate management information.
- Knowledge and personal confidence in video creation and the use of digital editing software.
- Professional qualification in communications / marketing.