

## CIPR Specialist Diploma (Crisis Communication)

### Syllabus

The aim of the CIPR Specialist Diploma (Crisis Communication) is to enable the candidate to develop specialist knowledge and expertise in the contexts, concepts and practical tools of crisis response public relations. It is designed for both generalist public relations practitioners wishing to enhance their understanding of best practice preparation for crisis communication or for those looking to specialise in crisis communication as a career.

The CIPR Specialist Diploma (Crisis Communication) will be of interest to practitioners who have experience or responsibility for crisis planning, in consultancy or in-house, or in a related discipline within the strategic management framework. This qualification will equip the candidate with the knowledge and tools to contribute effectively to the organisation's risk assessment, crisis preparations and management, while meeting what is expected of an ethical practitioner in complex situations.

Candidates will research and develop ethical crisis response strategies and plans that assist organisations to avoid or reduce the impact of crisis situations.

Candidates would be awarded the CIPR Specialist Diploma (Crisis Communication) on successful completion of the assessment.

### Syllabus

The CIPR Specialist Diploma (Crisis Communication) introduces the theories and knowledge required to analyse the causes, and weigh the likelihood, of unexpected circumstances that demand urgent responses or that might lead to the need for crisis communication. It considers the skills and knowledge needed for auditing, planning and managing public relations when the pressure mounts for an urgent response or during a crisis. An analytical perspective is applied to encourage candidates to take a reflective approach in examining their own experience alongside case studies of organisations and scenarios.

The Specialist Diploma (Crisis Communications) is delivered by CIPR-accredited teaching centres, via 20 hours of face to face, online or blended learning, and a further 10 - 12 hours of self-directed study per week\*, guided reading and research and/ or 'homework' tasks. Each CIPR-accredited teaching centre will establish the detailed content, lesson plans and resources provided to candidates.

\*Self-directed study hours are provided for guidance only and will vary from one individual to another.

### Qualification objectives:

Successful candidates will be able to:

- 1 Apply key concepts in crisis response:
  - The societal, economic and media crisis context;
  - Relevant public relations theories and concepts;
  - The roots of reputation;
  - The risks to, and the role and value of, reputation in a crisis;

- Winning trust and the withdrawal of society's permission to operate;
  - The difference between emergency communications and a crisis;
  - The crisis and issues lifecycle;
  - Identifying and managing key stakeholders in a crisis;
  - The influence of social media, groupthink and the active citizen.
- 2 Apply best practice models including:
- Assessing public risk (particularly for public bodies including the precautionary principle);
  - Analysing and defining types of crisis;
  - Analysing trends in management practice, organisations and their working environments to predict when a crisis might arise;
  - The role of the professional practitioner in crisis management and their place in the crisis management team;
  - Researching and producing analysis of a crisis communication-related issue or development;
  - Managing media and social media in a crisis.
- 3 Prepare and critically evaluate crisis response, including:
- Establishing a crisis-ready organisation;
  - Testing methods and scenarios for crisis plans;
  - Strategic and tactical messaging in a crisis;
  - Learning from the crisis, and post-crisis reputation repair.

**Assessment:** Executive report and summary situation analysis

**Aim:** To enable students to demonstrate competence in undertaking an analysis of a case study situation/issue to inform crisis response preparation and strategies.

**Topic of inquiry:** Candidates will be required to evidence professional judgement in identifying a suitable crisis communication case study as their chosen topic of inquiry. This could be based on the candidate's own organisation, a client or another organisation of the candidate's choice.

Before candidates start work on the assignment, tutors should discuss and agree topics. Some topics may involve matters that are strategically or commercially sensitive for the organisation concerned, in which case it is the responsibility of the candidate to obtain their agreement. It is acceptable to resolve confidentiality issues by using a fictitious name for a genuine organisation, so long as the tutor's approval has been gained before work on the assignments begins.

**Submission:** The assignment will comprise two elements:

1. A 3,000-word (+/- 10%) executive report comprising:
  - a) A clear and concise statement including:
    - a description of the case study situation
    - justification of the identified issue(s) as a past or potential threat to the organisation (and/or sector) and its strategy; and
    - an explanation of how the issue(s) led, or could lead, to the need for crisis communication;

- b) Description of the analytical approach used to collect evidence of the issue and provide insight into its previous, current or potential impact on the organisation and/or sector and stakeholders;
  - c) Discussion and substantiation of the key findings and outcome of the research and analysis which advise the need for response, or an evaluation of a past crisis communication response;
  - d) Identification and explanation of crisis communication objectives (derived from the research and analysis) or conclusions and recommendations based on the examination of the past issue that led to the need for crisis communication.
2. Supporting 2,000-word (+/- 10%) summary analysis of secondary research findings, including:
- Overview of secondary research undertaken;
  - Relevant research methodology;
  - Frameworks and models used to inform recommendations;
  - Overview of ethical challenges encountered in the process

**Example topics:**

- Failure of a new financial accounting IT system
- Hacking of a consumer records database (ransom)
- Potential regulatory action over the organisation's diversity policy
- Imposition of special measures on a school or other regulated public sector body
- Product recall caused by rogue employee sabotage.

**Completion of the assignment** involves the following activities:

- Reflection – candidates are required to use problem identification concepts and approaches to identify a relevant topic of inquiry. This will be a current or recent issue of concern for a specific organisation and/or sector, and may relate to the candidate's own experience.
- Fact finding – candidates are required to undertake data collection using a range of secondary research methods (literature, archives, published surveys, reports, etc.) to examine the chosen topic of inquiry.
- Insight – candidates are required to use a range of appropriate models, tools and methods to analyse the external and internal environment, the organisational issue and relevant stakeholder groups.
- Communication – candidates are required to review and structure their analysis of a situation in the form of an executive report.

**Word count**

A substantive response to both Components is necessary to meet the requirements for a Pass.

The word count for each task, and the total word count, must be recorded in the appropriate spaces provided on the cover sheet and at the end of the relevant text in the main documents.

Bibliographies and footnotes, if any, are not included in the word count. Footnotes must not contain appendices or be used to include additional text that should have been in the main body of the work.

Candidates are allowed a +/- 10% leeway on the **total** word count for the assignment and must ensure they **DO NOT** exceed the +10% tolerance. Anything above this allowance will result in the indicative mark being reduced by one grade. No grading reduction will be implemented if they are below the -10% word tolerance but remember that it is very likely that the paper will fail because the tasks will not have been adequately addressed.

### **Referencing**

Teaching centres must provide guidance to candidates on appropriate methods of referencing that are suitable for a business document.

### **Further information**

CIPR Course Regulations

CIPR Specialist Qualifications Student Handbook