



OxLEP communications and engagement strategy 2019/2020

1. Introduction:

This strategy outlines a communications and engagement approach for the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP) during the 2019/2020 financial year.

This strategy aims to align all in-house and outsourced PR and communications activity with the following strategies, plans and workstreams/emerging workstreams:

- The emerging 2019/20 OxLEP business plan
- The Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy
- The Oxfordshire Transformative Technologies' Science and Innovation Audit
- The Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal
- The emerging 'Oxford-Cambridge Arc'
- The updated Strategic Economic Plan
- Cluster communications group (science and innovation)

This strategy also aims to ensure that there is a joined-up and comprehensive approach to communications across all of OxLEP's 'functions' – whether this is OxLEP as a corporate entity, OxLEP Skills or OxLEP Business.

In addition – this strategy consolidates the need for ALL communications work to fit within our three identified priorities of:

- Productivity
- Place-making
- Connectivity

Please note:

This strategy doesn't provide a detailed plan of activity 'per se'. This will be developed alongside a signed-off version of this strategy – however, it provides an agreed framework to allow specific activity to take place.

2. Context:

As one of 37 LEPs operating across England, the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP) is responsible for championing and – working with key partners – developing the Oxfordshire economy for the benefit of:

- A) Our communities (both business and the ‘general public’)
- B) The wider UK economy

Strong, key partners are reflected in the make-up of our Board of non-executive directors and sub-groups, with representation across many sectors – including business and enterprise, education and local authorities.

Through this non-executive director support and knowledge, we aim to be an informed, independent advocate for those driving innovation and growth across the county.

As a county, we have many globally-significant assets – we aim to be ambitious with our approach to communications and wish to ensure Oxfordshire is seen as an economy that can drive forward ‘UK PLC’.

It is therefore crucial that the communications strategy reflects this aspiration.

3. OxLEP vision, organisational priorities and key messaging:

Vision:

Our vision for the Oxfordshire economy is for it to be a:

‘Vibrant, sustainable, inclusive, world-leading economy, driven by innovation, enterprise and research excellence.’

From a communications perspective – it is critical that our vision continues to form our key messaging, given its ambition.

Organisational priorities:

As outlined in section one (Introduction), all communications-related activity should sit directly alongside our three organisational priority areas of: **Productivity, place-making and connectivity.**

The strategy suggests that we adopt the below ‘descriptions’ on each of three priorities to help tailor our messaging:

Place-making

Provide a quality environment and choice of homes needed to support growth and capitalise upon the exceptional quality of life, vibrant economy and the dynamic urban and rural communities of our county.

Productivity

Deliver and attract specialist and flexible skills at all levels, across all sectors, as required by our businesses, with full, inclusive employment and fulfilling jobs. To encourage innovation led growth, underpinned by Oxfordshire's strengths in University research and development, business collaboration and supply chain potential.

Connectivity

Allow people to move freely, connect easily and provide the services, environment and facilities needed by a dynamic, growing and dispersed economy.

Key messaging:

Through all PR and communications activity, we aim to ensure that we are consistently communicating key messages – whether that's 'corporate' key messaging (both OxLEP-related and Oxfordshire economy-related) or project-based messaging.

Project-based messaging will be created and implemented on a 'project by project' basis – this strategy suggests the following 'corporate' key messaging to be implemented as follows:

- Oxfordshire is a key driver behind an ever-increasing, globally-facing UK economy
- Working with key partners across the private, public and education sectors; it is OxLEP's role to champion the world-class Oxfordshire economy and our key assets
- Together with our partners, we have secured over £600 million-worth of central government and European funds for the Oxfordshire economy

In addition, it's important OxLEP Skills and OxLEP Business both have the flexibility to promote its own 'proposition' – therefore, specific key messages should be:

OxLEP Skills:

- OxLEP Skills enables opportunities across Oxfordshire, through building meaningful relationships between business and education

OxLEP Business:

- OxLEP Business supports companies to start-up, grow and locate in Oxfordshire

Statistics:

It is vitally important that – wherever possible – we use verified and robust statistics to support our narrative and key messaging (for example – figures from the Office for National Statistics). We will continue to monitor and proactively use up-to-date statistics whenever possible.

Example statistics would include:

Economy:

- Oxfordshire is one of just three net county contributors to the UK economy, with a GVA of £23bn per year

Five-year business survival rate:

- The UK five-year survival rate for businesses born in 2011 and still active in 2016 was 44.1%, Oxfordshire averaged 49.3%.

Creation of new jobs:

- Around 50,000 new jobs have been created in Oxfordshire between 2012 and 2017 (five-year period)

4. Strategy aim and objectives

Our communications activity will prioritise communicating with relevant, identified audiences (more in section five) – namely:

- The business community in Oxfordshire
- Communities in Oxfordshire (i.e. the general public)
- Government (both national and local)

The overarching aim for the strategy is:

- To ensure all of OxLEP's communications activity is targeted and gives the organisation the best 'return on investment' wherever possible

This strategy's objectives are:

- To ensure OxLEP's three priorities – **productivity, place-making** and **connectivity** – are communicated authoritatively across all channels
- To ensure OxLEP has **at least** an equal voice when communicating the success of ALL projects
- To lead the organisation in developing a collaborative, joined-up approach – both internally and with external partners
- To protect OxLEP from threats to its reputation and improve the organisation's ability to manage issues and to handle a crisis event

Specific measurements:

The success of our communications output will be measured and benchmarked on a monthly basis as of April 2019 using the following metrics:

Media relations:

- Monthly reach of coverage (circulation/audience reach)
- Monthly percentage of coverage recording an agreed corporate key message or a pre-agreed project key message

Social media:

(Specifically regarding our four main social media channels of Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and YouTube):

- Monthly net increase in followers
- Monthly 'impressions' social media activity has made
- Monthly average engagement rate

Website:

- Percentage of new visitors
- Percentage of returning visitors
- Average monthly sessions on site
- Average monthly 'unique' users to site
- Average monthly page views
- Average monthly time on site

- Bounce rate – i.e. percentage of users leaving site after one page
- Acquisition of visitors to site – direct, organic, referred or via social media activity

Events:

- Number of event attendees
- Number of returning event attendees
- Feedback received following each event

5. Audiences

To ensure that this strategy is successfully-implemented, we will need to engage with a range of audiences – this communications strategy acknowledges that requirement and the need for our messaging to be tailored to give the best ‘return on investment’.

This strategy splits these audiences into two groups; **primary audiences** and **secondary audiences** – **primary audiences** are those we aim to reach directly, **secondary audiences** allow us to connect with our primary audiences.

Primary audiences:

- **The business community**

All businesses based both inside the county and outside the county – from sole traders to multinationals, including businesses currently based in the Oxfordshire, and those considering being based here. This also includes those businesses with the ability to be key influencers to drive forward our Local Industrial Strategy and the emerging Oxford-Cambridge Arc.

- **‘Local’ communities in Oxfordshire (i.e. the general public)**

All those living and/or working in Oxfordshire, as well as those being educated or educating people in the county.

- **Government (both national and local)**

Key politicians at a national level (MPs, departments – particularly BEIS – sector champions and civil servants) and a local level (councillors and officers).

Secondary audiences (including – but not exclusively limited to):

- Partner organisations (private sector, business parks, other LEPs and the LEP Network)
- The media and other influencers of opinion
- OxLEP Board and sub-group members
- OxLEP staff

6. Strategic approach

Central proposition and messaging

Following-on from previous work that has seen OxLEP move away a from multi-brand organisation – we will continue to operate all of our communications across three aligned channels, namely:

- OxLEP
- OxLEP Skills (business and education alignment, work experience and apprenticeships)

- OxLEP Business (business support – including start-ups and scale-ups – and inward investment)

As well as bringing together all of the ‘products’ and services we offer, this strategy aims to promote and communicate OxLEP as one centralised offering, ‘brought to life’ through unifying campaigns.

Spokespeople will continue to be identified and professionally-trained, being rehearsed in consistent messaging.

Bringing together of resources

All communications channels, databases, etc. need to be centralised rather than managed within teams.

This will lead to numerous benefits, notably:

- Better ability to cross-sell and show the extent of OxLEP.
- Channels will be made stronger and more content rich, resulting in better engagement

We will continue to work with colleagues to achieve this.

Thought leadership

We will continue to create thought leadership articles on topics which OxLEP are seen as experts. These themes will help drive communications activity (especially through PR campaigns) and help to prioritise speaking opportunities to pursue.

Reputation management

By becoming increasingly proactive in our communications activity, it is vital that we continue to invest in managing our reputation.

This will entail identifying the key issues and reputation risks affecting the organisation, and through a system of prioritisation, we will monitor and eliminate them, or mitigate their impact.

A media handling procedure exists to support this and is owned by the Communications Manager.

7. Resource

To ensure that we have the resilience to achieve this strategy’s objectives, it has been budgeted – and subsequently agreed – that during the 2019/20 financial year, the communications function will be made-up of:

- A full-time Communications Manager
- A full-time junior PR role
- Support from a retained PR agency (currently 28 hours per month)

Once this strategy is agreed, a formal brief will be presented to our retained agency to be fully-costed and adopted and specific tasks and responsibilities will be drawn out across the communications function.

****A job description for this new role has been created and presented to our Nominations and Personnel Committee***

8. Key activities:

To ensure that the communications function has the scope and ability to focus on key areas of work, this strategy proposes the following strategies, plans and workstreams/emerging workstreams form the MAIN EMPHASIS of our efforts:

- Key priorities as identified within the OxLEP 2019/20 business plan
- The Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy
- The Oxfordshire Transformative Technologies' Science and Innovation Audit
- The Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal
- The emerging '*Oxford-Cambridge Arc*' and associated activity
- The updated Strategic Economic Plan

In addition – this strategy creates the capacity for continued partnership working, in particular with those key businesses driving forward science and innovation in Oxfordshire.

We are leading a 'cluster communications group' who's aim is to continue to promote Oxfordshire's global strengths in science and innovation – organisations within this group include:

- Oxford University Innovation
- STFC (Harwell)
- Immunocore
- MINI BMW
- Williams F1 Advanced Engineering
- MEPC (Milton Park)
- Harwell Campus
- UKAEA (Culham Science Centre)
- University of Oxford
- Oxford Science Park

9. Channels

To ensure that we are able to give this strategy the best chance of achieving its objectives, we need to fully-utilise the channels available to us – this includes, but isn't exclusive to – the following:

Database management

Continuing to build an effective database of contacts in-line with GDPR guidelines.

Website

Recognising that our website is our flagship communications resource, we will aim to ensure that the website provides significant engagement opportunities for our key audiences, through the following:

- Extensive news articles
- Blogs – both OxLEP-generated (thought leadership) and with partner organisations
- Vlogs – again, both OxLEP-generated (thought leadership) and with partner organisations
- Updated imagery reflecting our extensive level of work

We will also ensure that our website is 'future proof' to meet relating to national assurance framework expectations.

E-newsletter

We are committed to creating monthly e-shots to keep our key contacts up-to-speed with developments around our work and the Oxfordshire economy.

This programme of activity will also be supplemented by appropriate 'special editions' such as a focus on the Budget or the Autumn Statement.

OxLEP Skills and OxLEP Business e-shots are also produced on a monthly basis, showcasing more tailored content.

Social media

We will continue to focus on Twitter and LinkedIn initially as the key channels to engage with our identified audiences – in particular, our business community and government audiences.

To reach our 'local communities' more effectively, we will increase activity across our Instagram and YouTube channels.

In addition, making use of appropriate partner-driven content across OxLEP channels will also enrich our own channels to facilitate better engagement with the wider Oxfordshire business audience.

OxLEP Skills and OxLEP Business have their own social media channels, again providing more tailored content for key audiences.

PR / media relations

We will continue to build strong relationships with local, regional – and increasingly – national and trade media, which is helping it to reach target audiences.

This will be supported and strengthened throughout the year with a plan of activity, with priority given to campaigns, key stories and surveys.

We will also build-on the many proactive thought-leadership messages (blogs), which support the key strategic priorities of OxLEP.

Utilising partner organisations

We will continue to collaborate with our wider network of organisations across Oxfordshire and more nationally in order to achieve our objectives – this includes working with key PR counterparts who have 'signed-up' to our cluster communications group, our local authority partners, LEP colleagues and PR colleagues working within government departments.

Events

We will continue to both create and target relevant events that provide us with the best opportunity to effectively communicate with our key audiences – this includes, building on the momentum created during both 17/18 and 18/19 through our quarterly business Q&As events and House of Commons economic briefings.

Supporting collateral

We will continue to keep stakeholders updated through the publication of our quarterly update 'Insider'.

Internal communications

We will continue to ensure that colleagues are up-to-speed with developments, themselves acting as key advocates for our work.

10. Timing**Suggested action plan**

A budget for PR and communications activity during 19/20 has been approved – therefore, planned activity will be built around this budget allocation.

Once this strategy is adopted, a quarterly tactical plan will be drawn out based around priority projects and workstreams.

**ENDS
RP (March 2019)**