

Public Relations Consultants Association

Introduction

1. Established in 1969, the Public Relations Consultants Association (PRCA) has over 120 member consultancies which represent some 70 per cent of the UK public relations consultancy market.
2. On behalf of its members, the PRCA would like to make the following points for consideration by the Review Group, and would be available to expand on them if appropriate in an oral submission.

Role of Public Relations in Delivering Understanding of Public Policy

3. We believe that public relations should play an even greater part in the communications mix for government campaigns and also in the ongoing dissemination of information to the public by ministries/departments and government agencies.
4. Government campaigns frequently involve press, outdoor or broadcast advertising, literature dissemination, on-line communications, exhibition attendance etc; any or all of which may be vital for raising awareness/familiarity with an issue/initiative. Public relations will also help increase awareness of campaigns/issues in this way. Most important however, public relations activity; by working to invite the third party support/endorsement of people/organisations which enjoy extremely high levels of credibility with the target audiences (such as journalists and NGOs); has a unique role in also being able to increase the favourability/depth of understanding behind the campaign, as well as trust in the campaign; owner, i.e. the government overall and the campaigns sponsoring ministry.
5. This depth of understanding/favourability/trust is essential for creating lasting impact on the group or groups principally being targeted. And it is essential also if the objective of the campaign is to engender a degree of behavioural change amongst those being targeted.
6. We also draw attention to the unique ability of public relations to reach groups that are difficult and/or expensive to reach through traditional advertising and literature dissemination. Many such groups are low consumers of traditional media. Public relations can however target such groups; and those to whom they most listen - with little waste and maximum credibility. Such groups may for example be regional, ethnic, in certain age groups, socially excluded or with certain lifestyles.
7. For all the above reasons we believe that the role of proactive public relations merits a higher priority than is sometimes given, and that its role is given fullest consideration early in campaign planning.

Supporting the Government Service

8. We believe that greater use of accredited public relations consultancy support can add real value to government and departmental work by offering experienced teams which can complement existing government communications resources at times when additional resources may be needed. Public relations consultancy relationships can also add value with strategic thinking and proactive communications support, given the inevitable heavy day-to-day pressures on departmental communications professionals in servicing departmental and ministerial needs. Public relations consultancy can also provide a rigorous, independent perspective based on wide comparative commercial experience

Best Practice

9. We commend the professional approach to public relations consultancy selection/briefing etc by the COI, and believe in the continued cross-dissemination, to the benefit all government communications work, of best practice in agency relationships with the private sector; such as through various guidelines agreed with ISBA, the MCCA, PRCA, IPA and DMA on e.g. pitching guidelines, briefing and measurement and evaluation.

Standards Setting

10. The PRCA would welcome a call by the Review Group for government to work exclusively with external communications agencies in the private sector which have attained a quality-assured, independently assessed standard such as Investor in People, ISO 9000 and the PRCA's own Consultancy Management Standard.

Conclusion

We are delighted to have had this opportunity to set out our views and we would be available to offer further oral evidence, should this be helpful to the Review Group.