

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS POLICY



This Policy sets out Aston University's approach to managing its marketing, communications, social media, public relations and events activities.

Version	1.1
Executive Sponsor	Executive Director of Marketing, Recruitment and Communications
Officer Responsible for Policy/ Procedures	Director of Marketing
Consultation Process	<p>Colleagues within Marketing, Recruitment and Communications: Director of International Recruitment; Director of International Development; Director of Student Recruitment and Outreach; Heads of Department within these areas and in Marketing and Communications, as well as College and RKE Marketing Managers.</p> <p>Colleagues across the University: Director of Development and Alumni Relations; Director of Student and Academic Services; Director of Estates; Acting Deputy Director of Employability; Associate Director of Human Resources; and General Counsel)</p>
Date of Approval and Committee and/or Executive Officer	Executive Engagement Group Executive Operations Group Executive
Effective Date	29 March 2021

1. SCOPE OF THE POLICY

1.1 Purpose of the Policy

This Policy sets out the University's approach to the management of its marketing and communications activities.

1.2 What is covered by the Policy?

This Policy sets out the basis of the University's marketing and communications activities, including:

Marketing

- Aston University - Brand Identity and Corporate Guidelines
- College, Recruitment Cycle and RKE Marketing campaigns and plans
- Advertising – campaigns, recruitment and broadcast
- Print materials (including campus signage and merchandise)
- Promotional and Corporate Events – on and off campus
- Market Research Office
- Working with External Services Suppliers

Communications

- Staff and student communications – internally and externally
- Press and communications - stakeholder engagement

Digital Marketing

- Production of Digital Assets
- Campaigns
- Social Media activity
- Websites

Please note that there is a separate Social Media Policy which sets out the University's approach to activities in this area.

1.3 Who is covered by the Policy?

This Policy applies to all colleagues within the Marketing, Recruitment and Communications division who are engaged in marketing and communications activities on a daily basis. It also applies to all colleagues with marketing and communications responsibilities within their remit. This includes but is not limited to: International Recruitment and Partnerships; Student Recruitment and Outreach; Alumni; Admissions; Estates; Student Services; the Students' Union; and University Research Institutes (URIs) and research centres.

In addition, the policy covers third parties with which the University works. This includes suppliers (both contracted and preferred) of marketing services such as printers, designers, media buyers, photographers etc. It also includes university partners and organisations with which the University is contracted (e.g. the supplier of the embedded foundation centre).

The policy covers marketing and communications activities with other audiences (e.g. Human Resources in their staff recruitment activities). It also covers commercial outlets communicating to audiences outside of the University, such as Sport Aston and the University's conferencing subsidiary.

1.4 Breach of this Policy

Any breach of this Policy and its associated procedures by staff may be investigated and referred to the relevant University procedures. Any breach of this Policy and its associated procedures by non-staff will be investigated and steps taken in accordance with the law and any relevant contract.

1.5 Policy Ownership

This Policy is owned by the Executive Director of Marketing, Recruitment and Communications and the Director of Marketing is responsible for the Policy. It has been approved by the Executive. Any questions about the operation of this Policy or any concerns that the Policy has not been followed should be referred in the first instance to the Director of Marketing.

2. THE POLICY STATEMENT

2.1 Guiding Principles

The University acts lawfully and in a fair and transparent manner in its marketing to and communications with its audiences and in its dealings with third parties and suppliers to deliver marketing and communications in line with this Policy.

2.2 Procedures and Guidance

The following procedures and guidance implement this Policy:

- Marketing and Communications Procedures
- Brand Guidelines
- Privacy Law Implementation Guidelines for Marketing and Communications
- Marketing Staff Guidelines
- Video Brand Guidelines
- Commissioning Photography Guidelines
- Protocols for Communicating with Students and Offer-holders
- Student Communication Framework

3. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

The terms used in this section 3 apply to this Policy:

Advertising: A form of communication used to convince a target audience to take a course of action; for example to study at, work at or donate to Aston University, through paid channels such as print, outdoor, magazine, digital, video, television, cinema and radio.

Aston University brand: The Aston University brand encapsulates who we are as an organisation, incorporating elements including our brand values, personality, and tone of voice, as well as devices such as our logo, colours, fonts etc, that are used to articulate the brand.

Aston University logo: The Aston University Master logo consists of the Aston triangle and the wording 'Aston University'. The logo colour is Aston purple (Pantone Reference to be 100%), and is also available in all black and all white. There is a second version which is the same as the master logo but with an additional rectangle below containing the words 'Birmingham UK'.

Beneficiary groups: The groups which Aston University exists to serve. These are categorised as: our students, who progress to be our graduates and alumni; external organisations (businesses, public entities, the not-for-profit sector, and the professions); and Birmingham and the West Midlands region, and wider society.

Brand Guidelines: Guiding principles and requirements which establish, implement and protect all elements of a brand. They are a guide to ensure consistency in the way we use the Aston University brand to communicate.

Contracted suppliers: Suppliers appointed under a framework agreement established in accordance with the Procurement Policy.

CMA: The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) is an independent non-ministerial department that promotes competition for the benefit of consumers, both within and outside the UK.

Digital assets: Images and content (written, video or audio) that exist in a digital format, and are typically stored on the website or used in digital advertising; this includes the creation / co-creation of websites, microsites, social media and other digital channels where the University's assets will be used for promotion or association.

External audience: Individuals external to the Aston University community.

Internal audience: Individuals within the Aston University community, including staff and students.

Preferred suppliers: Non-contracted suppliers who are not part of a framework agreement but with whom the University has previously or is currently working in accordance with the Procurement Policy.

Print materials: All printed materials and electronic formats of items such as magazines, newsletters, leaflets, brochures, booklets, as well as corporate stationery such as letterheads, compliment slips and business cards.

Public relations: The relationships between Aston University and its beneficiaries and other external audiences, and the activities undertaken to communicate with them.

Social media: Platforms that enable users to create and share information or ideas with others or to participate in social networking, whether known now or developed in the future.

4. MARKETING

4.1 Brand Identity

The Aston University brand is a valuable asset and is integral to the University's image and reputation as perceived by its beneficiary groups. It articulates its mission and values, strategic vision, culture and purpose. Colleagues within the University must comply with the following principles in relation to using the Aston University brand. All Aston University branded marketing and communications materials for external audiences, and wherever possible internal audiences, must be produced as outlined in this Policy.

The use of the Aston University logo is the main visual identifier for Aston University and its use on any communications implies a level of endorsement by the University of that message to the intended audience. As such, usage of the Aston University logo must be strictly adhered to, in accordance with the Brand Guidelines that are available to colleagues on [AssetBank](#). In addition to the Brand Guidelines, the branded templates published in the AssetBank must also be used in all circumstances.

The Brand Guidelines apply to all departments, institutes, centres and individual projects within the University community. Guidance on the use of agreed sub-brands within the Aston University brand hierarchy is included. All other areas should adhere to the principals of the Aston University brand guidelines.

Further advice on using the Aston University brand on print, digital and web-based material can be obtained by emailing brandapproval@aston.ac.uk.

Any variations or exceptions in the use of the Aston University brand must be approved by the Executive Director of Marketing, Recruitment and Communications. The development of variations to the Aston University brand will only be considered in very exceptional circumstances. The process for the consideration of any proposed variation or exception are set out in the Marketing and Communications Procedures.

Any unauthorised usage of the Aston University brand is reportable to the Executive Director of Marketing, Recruitment and Communications (or their nominee) and will be addressed in accordance with the Marketing and Communications Procedures.

4.2 Marketing Campaigns and Plans

All marketing campaigns and plans for the Colleges, student recruitment and the RKE are produced by the Marketing department and all requirements for such marketing and communications support should be directed to the relevant contact in the Marketing and Communications department. Any requests for marketing support that does not deliver against income related marketing campaigns and plans such as ad hoc campaigns and marketing collateral are to be directed to the Director of Marketing in the first instance.

4.3 Advertising campaigns, recruitment and broadcast

All advertising campaigns must comply with the law relating to advertising standards. As such, the Marketing and Communications department manages and maintains all supplier relationships with media buying agencies. This includes digital, print and out of home advertising in the UK and globally in relation to student recruitment. The placement of any advertisement on behalf of the University requires the prior approval of the Director of Marketing (or their nominee) to ensure brand consistency and value for money.

4.4 Print materials (including campus signage and merchandise)

This Policy applies to the production of all print, merchandise, campus branding and signage. The content in all print materials must be accurate and maintained and must be published strictly in accordance with the Marketing and Communications Procedures.

4.5 Promotional and corporate events – on and off campus

All promotion and corporate events both on and off campus must comply with the Freedom of Expression Policy and the associated Safety Management Standard – On Campus Events.

4.6 Market Research Office (MRO)

The MRO provides market research services to the University and operates in accordance with the Market Research Society Code of Conduct. The MRO holds licences for online survey design software to provide the best possible experience for survey respondents.

The Head of Market Research must be contacted in relation to all market research requirements including for research into proposed new programmes, to investigate market demand for programmes in line with the requirements of the Programmes Approval Sub-Committee (PASC). For projects that require greater resource or if the MRO cannot accommodate a particular piece of research, it can advise on external research suppliers.

4.7 Working with external services suppliers

The University works with third party providers to provide brand, design, creative or communication services. These include but are not limited to designers, photographers, videographers, voiceover artists, musicians, illustrators, media buying, market research and public relations service providers.

In instances where there is not a contract in place, the external creative supplier should be issued with the University's standard terms and conditions for the third party to sign and to be signed by the Executive Director of Marketing, Recruitment and Communications (or their nominee) in accordance with the University's delegated authorities. This contract will set out the position with regard to intellectual property ownership and rights and protect the Aston University brand and reputation.

Where colleagues wish to engage a creative services provider, they must contact the Director of Marketing to verify if there is a contracted roster of companies for this specific service, or a preferred supplier that has already been engaged by the University. This will ensure quality control of the service being bought. If there is not an existing contracted or preferred supplier, the Director of Marketing (or their nominee) can advise on which supplier to use, and to ensure appropriate processes are followed to identify the optimal creative services supplier.

5. COMMUNICATIONS

5.1 Staff and student communications – internally and externally

Internal communications with staff in the University are managed by the Head of Press and Communications, and student communications are managed by the Head of Communications. Requests for support with staff and student communications should be directed to these colleagues in the first instance.

Colleagues should refer to the Protocols for Communicating with Students and Offer-holders and the Student Communications Framework for information about communicating with students and offer holders.

As at March 2021, as part of the ongoing Digital Aston strategy, a new intranet is being scoped in order to bring the University's internal website up to the same standard as the website that is being developed across 2020 and 2021 in Drupal for the externally-facing site. The standards and sanctions for breaching this Policy for the externally-facing website outlined in this Policy will apply to the new intranet once it has been implemented, in order that the intranet will be maintained to the same high standard as the externally-facing site.

5.2 Press and communications - stakeholder engagement

The Press and Communications team:

- engages with subject experts, senior management, staff and students to proactively issue news releases and news stories;
- responds to incoming requests from journalists;
- provides advice and training to staff in dealing with the media; and
- proactively manages content and provides suitable spokespersons when the media make enquiries.

The Vice-Chancellor and members of the Executive are the principal spokespeople for all matters relating to Aston University policy and corporate issues. Academic experts for the three Colleges who have been media trained may also speak to the media on behalf of the University, in conjunction with the Head of Press and Communications.

All media enquiries must be referred to the Press and Communications team who is responsible for managing external relations. Therefore, the team must be informed of events concerning the University and its staff and students that may attract media attention/comment. Any approaches by the media to members of staff at the University for comment about events pertaining to Aston University must be notified to the Press and Communications team.

Staff authorised to represent the University in sharing their expertise to the media must disclose their official position as an employee of the University (including their School or research group), and conduct themselves at all times as representatives of the University. Any comment by a colleague on matters outside of their area of expertise, or in circumstances where the staff member is not speaking as a representative of the University, must be expressly and clearly made in that colleague's personal capacity by stating that comments are personal opinions.

Where students have been selected by the University to represent Aston University to discuss their course or student experience with the media, such comments must be made in accordance with the relevant Regulations. The Press and Communications team will provide advice and support for dealing with the media.

There are areas of the University, such as research institutes and centres, that may have specific media communication needs to support targeted approved strategies and goals. These areas will be by written agreement with the Head of Press and Communications.

6. DIGITAL MARKETING

6.1 Production of digital assets

All digital marketing collateral is to be produced in accordance with the Brand Guidelines and using the templates available in the Asset Bank.

Colleagues in the Marketing and Communications team regularly run photography and video shoots to ensure that there is up-to-date and relevant imagery and video of the University, the campus, students and other beneficiaries that reflect the University's activities.

Requests for support with photography should be directed to the Head of Communications in the first instance (or their nominee), who will be able to advise on preferred suppliers for photography services. For video requests, colleagues should contact the Head of Digital Marketing (or their nominee), who can similarly advise on preferred videographers.

6.2 Campaigns

The Marketing and Communications team conducts digital marketing campaign activities each year, including digital advertising (paid search, programmatic and retargeting), social media campaigns, working with online marketing partners (such as The Student Room) as well as owned-channel campaigns (such as email marketing campaigns).

6.3 Social Media Activity

The Digital Marketing team coordinates social media marketing activities for Aston University, managing channels at an institutional level, and liaising with the College Marketing teams for College-level social media activity as well as other colleagues for other social media accounts across the University. Colleagues are asked to refer to the separate Social Media Policy.

6.4 Websites

The Digital Marketing team has overall responsibility for the maintenance and development of the Aston University website platform. The externally facing website – www.aston.ac.uk – and the URLs within the website contain a wide range of content, including detailed course pages, information about the University's research activities, business engagement content and College level information, as well as content from departments across the University.

In order to manage the site, responsibility for the development and maintenance of specific URLs and sections is devolved to content owners across the University. It is the responsibility of these colleagues to ensure that the information on the pages for which they are accountable is up-to-date and accurate, and meets the requirements of consumer law and the associated relevant sector guidance published by the CMA. For further information, colleagues should refer to the Website Governance and Management procedures.

There are occasions when colleagues within the University work on initiatives or projects that may require the development of a website or microsite separate or distinct from the primary www.aston.ac.uk site. As these situations arise, the colleague must contact the Director of Marketing (or their nominee) for guidance on this.



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