



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY<sup>®</sup>  
YUNIBESITI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA  
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT  
INSTITUTIONAL OFFICE

## MEDIA POLICY

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<b>Policy owner</b>	Director: Corporate Communication & Stakeholder Relations
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<b>Procedures in terms of this policy</b>	Rules and Guidelines are attached to the policy as an addendum: "NWU Media Protocol"
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## Media Policy

### 1 Preamble

As a pre-eminent university in Africa, driven by the pursuit of knowledge and innovation, with a unique institutional culture based upon the values the university espouses, the North-West University (hereinafter referred to as NWU) has adopted this Media Policy on 20 November 2015.

This policy replaces any previous versions of a Media Policy that may exist/have existed at any of the campuses of the NWU.

### 2 Policy statement

It is in the best interest of the NWU to adhere to a media policy that supports the overall strategy of the university, as well as the current advancement goals of the institution, while simultaneously maintaining optimal relationships with the media – both in South Africa and internationally. Branding and promoting the public image of the institution facilitate the university's ability to be successful at its core business and such image is in turn directly impacted by what is reported in the media – hence, the rationale for governing the NWU media relations activities by means of this policy.

The overarching purpose of the policy is to enhance the university's public image, in particular by managing the institution's relations with members of the media. The policy is based on a number of fundamental principles, including:

- NWU values freedom of expression, a plurality of diverse views, academic freedom and critical thinking, but we do not subscribe to any form or advocacy of discrimination on the basis of race, age, religion, gender, marital status, national origin, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation or other grounds protected under South African equal opportunity legislation, or that which causes incitement to harm (such as "hate speech").
- The university encourages transparent contact with the media by internal stakeholders and recognises the media to be an important role-player within an increasingly competitive Higher Education (HE) sector generally, and in influencing public attitudes towards and perceptions of the NWU, in particular. In an ever-changing, technology-driven and instant communication society, managing the flow of information and optimising media relations is becoming an increasingly important, but challenging aspect of advancing the university.
- Communication must be honest, open, timely and accurate and we are striving to build sound irrefragable interpersonal relationships with members of the media.

The policy does not derive from a frame of reference that is aimed at restricting the constitutional rights to freedom of expression/speech/association, but, on the contrary, aims to facilitate the promotion and positioning of the NWU and its achievements in the public domain in a professionally accountable manner. However, all constitutional rights invoke corresponding responsibilities and hence internal role-players at the institution should realise their obligation for promoting the image/reputation of the NWU and that they will be held responsible for harming the good standing of the university by means of public commentary that might bring the university into disrepute.

The policy promotes the dissemination of current, informative and engaging material that is presented in a consistent, accurate and professional manner during all forms of media interaction – including printed, electronic, social media platforms, etc. It also provides practical guidelines (please refer to the NWU Media Protocol, attached as an addendum to the policy document) for managing the various aspects of media relations.

### 3 Scope of application

This policy applies to all operational units within the university – including its staff and students – at institutional, campus and faculty-based levels. For the sake of clarity, differentiation is made between official and unofficial (or private) conduct when interacting with the media by employees of the NWU:

- Firstly, the policy does not aim to constrain academic members of staff, researchers or discipline/topic-specific experts to hold or share any particular views/beliefs/thoughts/opinions, provided that the information that is provided to the media does not undermine the professional trust relationship between the individual and his/her employer or breaches any confidentiality agreements that might harm the business and/or brand of the university. Academic personnel are thus indeed encouraged to freely comment on their respective fields of expertise and to share relevant information with the media. To this end, a list of NWU experts/specialists is also available on the NWU website.
- Secondly, the policy does not aim to regulate the private receiving or imparting of information by staff/students, except for instances where such conduct directly harms the good standing of the employer (and which is regulated by the prevailing NWU Code of Conduct), or where the behaviour of the individual directly impacts the functioning and/or brand of the university negatively.
- Staff and students should take particular care in dealing with the media – including postings on social media platforms – to clarify that the information that is being disseminated or the response that they might be offering in reaction to an inquiry is put forward in either their official capacity as an authorised representative/spokesperson of the university or a unit within the university; or that they are commenting in their role as a discipline-specific/academic expert on the topic at hand; or that they are acting in their personal capacity. Particularly in the instance of social media, these lines are easily blurred.

The policy explicitly does not apply to instances of protected disclosures (or “whistle-blowing”), which is separately regulated by the relevant legislation on the topic in South Africa.

#### **4 Definitions**

For the purpose of this policy, media contact includes: providing information via media releases or statements, letters to the editor of a publication, responding to media enquiries over the telephone/via email, conducting interviews or arranging a briefing, disclosing and discussing information on social media platforms, as well as media activities related to events, releasing reports, conducting a launch, etc.

In particular, it is clarified to refer to popular or “mass” media (such as newspapers, magazines, radio, television, news websites, social media platforms, etc.) and not to scientific or academic journals/publications.

Two categories of media contact are differentiated:

- Proactive media contact – instances in which staff or a department/business unit wishes to obtain media coverage for an issue of public interest (such as a new course, academic awards, industry partnerships, outreach projects, appointments, academic chairs, research findings, etc.), in which instance access to the media would need to be arranged. Of particular importance here is the potential level of public interest/journalistic value (or “newsworthiness”) of the matter.
- Reactive media contact – enquiries from members of the media on a particular university-related matter, in which case the dedicated spokesperson to respond thereto is defined below and staff members who receive such a request from the media should direct the enquiry to the correct university channels.

#### **5 Official spokespersons and approved media liaison staff**

The university differentiates between various categories of matters for which the respective media liaison officials are responsible, including:

- institutional/strategic/university policy matters
- university operational matters
- campus matters
- faculty matters
- academic/research/discipline-specific matters
- student matters.

In addition to the above, a particular Crisis/Emergency Communication Strategy, comprising specific media and communication procedures, is implemented by Institutional Advancement (IA) in circumstances that require a more centralised, controlled or carefully managed approach and in the event of managing a crisis, all internal role-players should be sensitised to be mindful of broadcasting views that could be misinterpreted (or “sensationalised”) by the media.

The mandated spokespersons of the NWU are as follows:

- for institutional/strategic/university policy matters:

- Chairperson of the NWU Council
  - Vice-Chancellor (VC) – who is the lead media spokesperson of the university – or his/her nominee/ appointed spokesperson
  - Executive Director: IA
  - Institutional Director: Corporate Communication & Stakeholder Relations or his/her nominee
- for operational matters:
  - the relevant member of Institutional Management (e.g. Registrar, Executive Director: Finance, etc.)
- for campus matters:
  - Campus Rectors
  - Campus Directors: Marketing & Communication (CMC) or his/her nominee
- for faculty matters:
  - Deans of Faculties
- for academic/research/discipline-specific matters:
  - academic members of staff (topic-specific experts) in departments/centres/units/schools
- for student matters:
  - general/institutional enquiries on student matters: Dean of Students
  - specific student matters: the appointed Student Representative Council (SRC) spokesperson.

## **6 Roles and responsibilities**

As a general principle, the Institutional Director: Corporate Communication & Stakeholder Relations or the CMC's are the first point of referral for all enquiries from the media and NWU staff is strongly advised to contact/refer questions to this office as a very first step. Such office will channel the request to the appropriate function/person and will also monitor that the matter receives the required attention.

The roles and responsibilities of the various role-players are summarised as follows:

### **6.1 Council chairperson**

The Council chairperson is the official spokesperson of the NWU on all Council-related matters and in his/her absence or unavailability the vice-chancellor (or a person delegated by the VC) assumes responsibility for this function.

### **6.2 Vice-Chancellor and members of Institutional Management**

The Vice-Chancellor is the official spokesperson of the NWU and in his/her absence or unavailability, the Institutional Director: Corporate Communication & Stakeholder Relations (or a person delegated by the VC) assumes responsibility for this function. Members of IM represent a "second tier" of respondents who engage with the media on matters related to their respective portfolios.

### **6.3 Institutional Director: Corporate Communication & Stakeholder Relations**

Under the guidance of the Executive Director: IA, the Institutional Director: Corporate Communication & Stakeholder Relations is responsible for implementing the NWU media strategy. In this capacity, he/she with the assistance of the CMC's, as far as possible, approves all external content for media releases by the university, which are required to comply with a prescribed format.

The director also provides advice to the VC and renders a media liaison service to the business units, coordinating the campuses' interaction with the media, supporting them in cultivating relationships with journalists, attending to and filtering media enquiries, as well as the monitoring of media impact. In addition, this office annually makes available a capacity-building intervention on the topic of managing media interaction for academic experts who wish to enhance their skills and to maximise the probability of success in this field.

The office is furthermore responsible for media monitoring at an institutional level.

### **6.4 Campus Rectors and Campus Marketing & Communication Departments**

Campus Rectors or their nominees act as the official spokespersons of each campus, supported by their Campus Marketing & Communication (CMC) departments. CMC's focus on communication with the media, primarily on matters related to each of their respective campuses, including the drafting of media releases and statements, conducting media interviews, preparing media kits/background material and liaison with the relevant staff in order to coordinate appropriate responses to media enquiries.

CMC's are expected to alert the Institutional Director: Corporate Communication & Stakeholder Relations to sensitive or controversial media issues relevant to the institution.

When engaging an external public relations agency or consultant, the relevant business unit is required to engage the Institutional Director: Corporate Communication & Stakeholder Relations or CMC in order to obtain guidance, prior to entering into any agreements. All public relations consultants are furthermore required to

work collaboratively with the CMC and/or IA and they are not authorised to distribute publicity material or media releases on behalf of the NWU without prior approval.

## **6.5 Academic experts**

All academic staff members who are experts in their respective fields are encouraged to engage in public debate and to provide commentary within his/her area of expertise. Academic members of staff should therefore also ensure that their details are captured on the university's list of experts, which is provided to the media in an attempt to promote media exposure opportunities for those academics/researchers who wish to explore such prospects.

Notwithstanding the right to express their academic views without restriction, it is strongly advised that experts discuss any controversial issues/findings/announcements that they wish to make to the media with regard to issues that directly reflect on the university, with the Institutional Director: Corporate Communication & Stakeholder Relations or the campus director: Marketing and Communication first, in order to ensure effective coverage and to limit any possible negative publicity.

## **6.6 Staff and students**

Staff or students who require the release of information to the media are requested to contact the CMC (at campus level) or Institutional Director: Corporate Communication & Stakeholder Relations (on institutional matters) who will assist in drafting a media release or statement. In the event that members of staff or students are contacted directly by a journalist, they are required to refer the matter without any delay to the CMC or the Institutional Director: Corporate Communication & Stakeholder Relations.

Personnel and students are dissuaded from using the various media platforms as mechanisms to give credence to personal grievances/differences of opinion with the university or in an attempt to settle internal disputes – formal channels and procedures are available to resolve such matters. They should bear in mind that the right to free speech applies to everyone, and that they are still in a trust relationship with the university and bound to follow the applicable codes of conduct and grievance procedures.

Only the Institutional Office (IO) has the mandate to lodge a complaint at the Press Ombudsman on behalf of the university and in such cases, the university's Legal Services department is normally involved.

## **7 Rules in terms of the media policy**

Rules for specific aspects of managing media contact are attached as an addendum to the policy, including the following:

- 7.1 Rules for management issues and crisis communication
- 7.2 Rules for media training
- 7.3 Rules for media engagement
- 7.4 Rules for media monitoring
- 7.5 Rules for confidentiality
- 7.6 Rules for discretion.

## **8 Guidelines in terms of the media policy**

Guidelines for the following aspects of media contact are attached as an addendum to the policy:

- 8.1 Guidelines for publishing and commenting on media platforms
- 8.2 Guidelines for engaging with the media
- 8.3 Guidelines for seeking media coverage
- 8.4 Guidelines for visiting journalists, photographers and film crews.

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## Rules in terms of the media policy

### 7.1 Management issues and crisis communication

- All staff and students are expected to bring any emerging issues of potential media or public interest/sensitivity related to the NWU to the immediate attention of the Institutional Director: Corporate Communication & Stakeholder Relations or the relevant CMC, who will activate the university's crisis communication plan if deemed necessary.
- The Institutional Director: Corporate Communication & Stakeholder Relations or CMC, along with the relevant staff, will then develop a media response that is consistent with the NWU's media strategy.
- No individual staff members or students are authorised to speak to the media on behalf of the campus or NWU as an institution in the event of any crisis, unless authorised to do so in accordance with the Emergency/Crisis Communication Plan, which is available on the NWU Intranet.

### 7.2 Media training

- The Institutional Director: Corporate Communication & Stakeholder Relations, as well as the CMC's at campuses, are available to assist academic members of staff with matters related to interaction with and management of the media, including assistance with preparation for media interviews through briefings, guidance and support in attending to enquiries from the media, drafting media releases, etc.
- All topic-specific experts of the NWU are also strongly encouraged to attend the media training opportunities that are annually arranged by the Institutional Director: Corporate Communication & Stakeholder Relations, aimed at developing the skills of NWU staff in this area.

### 7.3 Media engagement

- In terms of the Promotion of Access to Information Act, the media is fully entitled to information and it should be noted that dealing with the media warrants the same level of professional courtesy/respect as interaction with all other NWU stakeholders. It should also be borne in mind that media representatives are most often operating under time pressure (to "break the news first" or to meet a publishing deadline) and hence quick response times are important within this context.
- Upon receiving an enquiry directly from the media, NWU staff should – as a matter of course – refer the caller to the Institutional Director: Corporate Communication & Stakeholder Relations or CMC. On a practical note, responses that indicate either an unwillingness to assist or a lack of authority to respond (such as "no comment" or "not allowed to speak to the media") only serve to frustrate journalists – the enquiry should rather be dealt with by being helpful and referring the person to the correct channels (including the provision of the relevant NWU contact details to the journalist).
- All information that is provided to the media should be truthful, accurate, unambiguous, clear and factual, avoiding subjective contributions. Media responses are hence always "on the record".
- Apart from commenting on the university itself, remarks may also not include any disparaging comments on other organisations, groups or individuals, outside of the institution. Expert comment and research-based findings are excluded.
- All media enquiries and the NWU responses thereto are encouraged to be logged by the Institutional Director: Corporate Communication & Stakeholder Relations and/or CMC.

### 7.4 Media monitoring

- The Institutional Director: Corporate Communication & Stakeholder Relations assumes responsibility for ensuring that a media monitoring service is in place to monitor the NWU's news coverage and to assist in managing the reputation of the institution.
- In the event of staff or students having interaction directly with the media, the Institutional Director: Corporate Communication & Stakeholder Relations or CMC should be informed thereof in order to keep track of such article/insert/publication/comment/posting and to enable the relevant person of origin to check on the correctness of the facts as presented.

### 7.5 Confidentiality

- Personal or contact details of staff, members of IM and Council, as well as students, are protected by the stipulations of the Protection of Personal Information Act and such details may hence not be provided to

the media without their explicit prior consent. This does not include official spokespersons, other individuals or experts who have agreed to their contact details being made known.

- The release of any information about NWU staff will be managed consistently with the institution's human capital and confidentiality policies.

## **7.6 Discretion**

- Proper consideration must always be given to the sensitivities and potential for causing offence when discussing the topics of religion, politics or any other controversial issues that may provoke a charged, emotional response.

## **Guidelines in terms of the media policy**

### **8.1 Guidelines for publishing and commenting on media platforms**

- The NWU endorses the concepts and practice of freedom of opinion/expression as essential to implementing the core business of the university – including teaching, research and the pursuit of academic scholarship. Within such ambit lies also the traditional role of the university in making informed comment on societal mores and practice, and in challenging generally held beliefs, policies and structures. This right does invoke the responsibility by staff and students to use these privileges in a manner that remains consistent with an accountable, honest search for knowledge and truth, grounded in scholarly evidence and taking cognisance of the university's vision, mission and values.
- In engaging with the media, expert commentators can rightfully expect support from the NWU. This does not necessarily imply endorsement of a particular view being put forward, but does include respecting their right to speak as experts within their respective academic disciplines and also includes assistance with regard to managing the interaction with the media.
- When a member of staff or student anticipates that commentary or statements – excluding any announcements/information being based on scholarly evidence or professional expertise – may cause offence to a stakeholder or will be controversial, they are strongly advised to first consult with the Institutional Director: Corporate Communication & Stakeholder Relations or CMC. This will allow the NWU to exercise its duty of care towards staff members and students who otherwise may be the subject of public controversy; and to effectively manage the university's stakeholder relations and reputation in a proactive manner. All comments, whether based on scholarly evidence or professional expertise must at all times be fair and non-discriminatory.
- NWU staff and students should consciously take care not to engage with the media or public by commenting on an activity/topic that is designed to bring the NWU into disrepute.
- Students and staff should make a clear distinction between commenting in their capacities of respectively an appointed spokesperson, a topic-specific/academic expert, or acting in their private/personal capacities. It is vital to point this out at the beginning of any commentary/interview/posting and to insist that the relevant capacity be made apparent in the publication/insert. It follows that anyone who is commenting in their personal capacity should neither make reference to the NWU or their position/designation at the employer.
- Anyone being asked by a journalist for a quotation should request to be given the opportunity to review the quotation, prior to its publication.

### **8.2 Guidelines for engaging with the media**

- When engaging in media interviews or making media statements, staff should refrain from:
  - using profane or offensive language or content
  - engaging in topics/content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, age, religion, gender, marital status, national origin, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation or other grounds protected under South African equal opportunity legislation
  - constructing content/drafting a posting or using material that is, or might be construed as threatening, defamatory, harassing, bullying or discriminatory towards any stakeholder of the university – internally, as well as external role-players
  - accepting/making solicitations of commerce
  - engaging in conduct or encouragement of any illegal activity
  - submitting information that might compromise the safety or security of the public/public systems
  - using content that violates a legal ownership interest of any other person, including breach of copyright or intellectual property rights of the university/another institution or person

- disclosing any confidential or personal information obtained in their capacity as a staff member/contractor of the NWU
- use the NWU name, crest or logo without first obtaining prior approval from IA or the CMC
- using content that is either misleading or deceptive.

### **8.3 Guidelines for seeking media coverage**

- Members of the university community who wish to attract media attention in order to obtain publicity/exposure for their work/successes/research findings/impact in the community/scientific contributions are welcome to contact the Institutional Director: Corporate Communication & Stakeholder Relations or CMC, who will assist with drafting a media release, pitching coverage of particular events and arranging news conferences, etc.
- Campuses/faculties/academic departments/business units/centres that wish to undertake a media release are encouraged to submit a draft statement to either of the Institutional Director: Corporate Communication & Stakeholder Relations or CMC for editing and/or approval.
- Media statements are always prepared in accordance with the following standard format:
  - the corporate NWU logo
  - date of release
  - heading (or title of the statement)
  - release instructions – for immediate publication or embargoed (in which instance, the date and time when it can be made known to the public is stipulated)
  - the contents of the release (if possible, a maximum of 800 words)
  - further enquiries – stating the name and contact detail of the media liaison person and/or expert that can assist with more information
  - standard footer pending on the author of the release

### **8.4 Guidelines for visiting journalists, photographers and film crews**

- The NWU welcomes journalists, news photographers, videographers and broadcasters to the university's business units. However, permission to shoot in both interior spaces and outdoor university facilities is always required, including NWU administration and office buildings, classrooms, laboratories, residences, etc. and the rule applies to all types of photography (stills, video and film).
- In the event that a member of the media requests permission to interview staff or students, take photographs or to film inside the university's facilities/business units for the sake of obtaining news content or for compiling a documentary, the request should be referred to the Institutional Director: Corporate Communication & Stakeholder Relations or CMC for authorisation. Protection Services will also need to be informed.
- Should a journalist, reporter or camera crew show up unannounced at a NWU facility – such as during newsworthy crisis situations (for example, a demonstration/boycott) – the Institutional Director: Corporate Communication & Stakeholder Relations or CMC should be contacted without any delay in order to assist in managing the situation.
- The following guidelines should be used when journalists/television camera crews/print photographers show up unannounced at a facility:
  - Although one cannot prevent the media from interviewing any individual, photographing or filming the exterior of our facilities, the applicable news room and/or editors will be contacted for clarification of the purpose of their visit.
  - The media may not enter any NWU facility to photograph or film without permission. Such authorisation will be considered based on the submission of a letter of intent to the Institutional Director: Corporate Communication & Stakeholder Relations or CMC, indicating the relevant information (such as the requested location, dates, times, duration and number of people/vehicles to be involved in the proposed project, a list of NWU-related materials that will be utilised, as well as a description of the project and its intended use).
  - The media may not block the entrance to any NWU facility or prevent people from entering such facility or conducting university business as usual and the university may inform the media if any NWU customer should complain about the inconvenience caused (for example, in the parking lots or walkways).
  - Anyone who wishes to use the NWU's name, nicknames, building or unit names when filming, videotaping and/or photographing the university's campuses for commercial and/or entertainment purposes may only do so with the prior written approval of the Institutional Director: Corporate Communication & Stakeholder Relations or CMC's.