

## Policies and Procedures

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### Media Relations policy

**Policy Number:** 1.6.4.02  
**Responsible Officer:** Director - Strategic Partnerships, Advancement & Communications (SPAC)  
**Policy Editor/Contact:** Manager, Communications  
**Approving Authority:** Vice-Chancellor & President  
**Date approved:** 1 September, 2015  
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#### 1. Statement of Policy

- 1.1. The University of the South Pacific (USP) seeks to establish and maintain cordial relations with all sections of the Media in its Member Countries and internationally. It recognises the value of the Media in free and open societies, as a public university, and values transparency and the intellectual debate that is fostered by a high-quality press.
- 1.2. USP respects the laws of its Member Countries and supports the freedom of the Press. From its respected School of Journalism to its regular contributions to the regional Media, USP has supported, and continues to support, the growth and development of the Media in the Pacific Islands. The University also recognises the power of the Media in terms of its portrayal of the University, and seeks to engage with it in such a way that the University, its staff, students, and alumni activities and achievements, are reflected promptly and accurately.
- 1.3. USP engages positively with the Media in order to further its own institutional aims (which support the objectives of all of its Member Countries) and because it believes that a robust and flourishing Media supports just and equitable societies.
- 1.4. This Policy explains how these principles and values are reflected in USP's engagement with the Media on a daily basis. Its implementation will ensure that USP's policies, activities, and positions are effectively communicated and reflected precisely in the Media. The policy will help to ensure that USP's media presence is consistent and that its messages are clear, internally as well as external to the University, in all member countries, throughout the region and beyond. In all of its dealings with the Media, USP seeks to ensure that its image and reputation are upheld.
- 1.5. The Strategic Partnerships, Advancement & Communications (SPAC) office of the Vice-Chancellor and President's (VC&P) Office co-ordinates all official University communications and relations with the Media. The University engages transparently with the Media, providing information on its own activities and scholarly analysis of the events in its Member Countries and the region. It welcomes new and emerging modalities, and seeks to ensure USP's presence across the wide spectrum of print, radio, television, electronic and Social Media. USP expects the Media to respect this Policy and uphold the highest standards of responsible reporting.
- 1.6. The Vice-Chancellor and President is USP's main spokesperson. He addresses the Media on major issues that concern the University as a whole. Public responses to the comments of Prime Ministers or Presidents of University Member Countries will only be issued by the Vice-Chancellor and President. The Director SPAC acts as spokesperson when the Vice-Chancellor and President is not available, or when the topics being discussed do not require his public attention. The Vice-Chancellor and President

can delegate any member of his Senior Management Team (SMT) to speak, relevant to the issue(s) raised. All Human Resources matters will be addressed by the Vice President Administration and he/she will be responsible for advising the Vice-Chancellor and President. The Communications Unit of SPAC will then issue a response based on the advice from the Vice-Chancellor and President.

## **2. Rationale**

- 2.1. This Policy is designed to ensure that the University's (including the institution and all of its staff members) communications with the media are clear and consistent. The application of this Policy will safeguard USP's reputation as a trusted, credible, and reliable source of information. It clarifies the responsibilities of the Communications Unit of SPAC office and delineates responsibility for communications and media liaison by the subject and scope of media enquiry.
- 2.2. Whilst the Communications Unit of SPAC office directs media relations activities, distributes information, and facilitates media requests, other sections and staff interact with the media with regard to their academic specialisms. Clarity on the flow of information is provided in the attached Procedures/Guidelines.
- 2.3. USP is a large regional organisation, with many sites and over a thousand employees who are subject to different media environments, social and economic conditions, and cultural sensitivities. This Media Relations Policy provides a guide to engaging with the media that is relevant to all employees at all locations, and increases the likelihood that all interactions with the media will result in the University's viewpoint being accurately portrayed. This policy sets out the rights and responsibilities of USP staff members vis-à-vis the media, and also informs the media as to the most efficient way, by topic, to obtain information and commentary from the University.

## **3. Individuals Affected by this Policy**

- 3.1. The Policy applies to all members of staff of The University of the South Pacific (USP) at all campuses and centres, and to associates, contractors and students of the University in certain instances (where they are explicitly requested, and agree to adhere to it).
- 3.2. The independent USP Students Association is not subject to this Policy, and remains free to deal with the Media and make statements.

## **4. Exclusions**

- 4.1. Individual students are not subject to this Policy, but should be mindful of the fact that scholarship providers, sponsors, and organisations with which the student may have formal links may have their own restrictions or policies on engagement with the Media.
- 4.2. Students must not portray themselves as speaking for the University when engaging as individuals with the Media. If they do so, they may be subject to disciplinary action for misrepresentation.

## **5. Responsibilities**

- 5.1. All staff members should refer to the Media Relations Policy and Guidelines when engaging with the Media. All members of staff should consult with their supervisors and with the Communications Unit of SPAC office before communicating with the media if they intend to speak from a professional standpoint, unless they have been specifically authorised to act with such consultation. Under no circumstances should information pertaining to a case that is in litigation be discussed publicly without

the prior approval of the Vice-Chancellor and President.

- 5.2. All staff are required to adhere to this Policy, and compliance shall be monitored by staff supervisors.
- 5.3. The Communications Unit of SPAC office is responsible for ensuring that this Policy is up-to-date, relevant, useful, accessible, and is responsible for the overall implementation of this Policy at the University. It arranges for periodic reviews of the Policy, in conjunction with, but not limited to, regular reviews of management and administration.
- 5.4. The Director SPAC is responsible for the oversight of Policy implementation. The final decision on all media relations matters rests with the Vice-Chancellor and President.
- 5.5. Student and Staff Disciplinary Committees will assess any allegations of violations of this policy, as per established practices. Failure to comply with this policy could result in disciplinary action, up to and including suspension or termination.

## 6. Definitions

**Media:** All references to “the Media” in this document should be understood to describe the broad spectrum of media organisations and representatives, including, but not limited to, newspapers, magazines, newsletters, online publications, television, blog sites, radio and credible social media pages.

### **SPAC**

Strategic Partnerships, Advancement & Communications (SPAC) office, part of the Office of the Vice-Chancellor and President, headed by the Director.

### **Related Policies, Documents, and Forms**

[Code of Professional Conduct for Academic Staff](#)

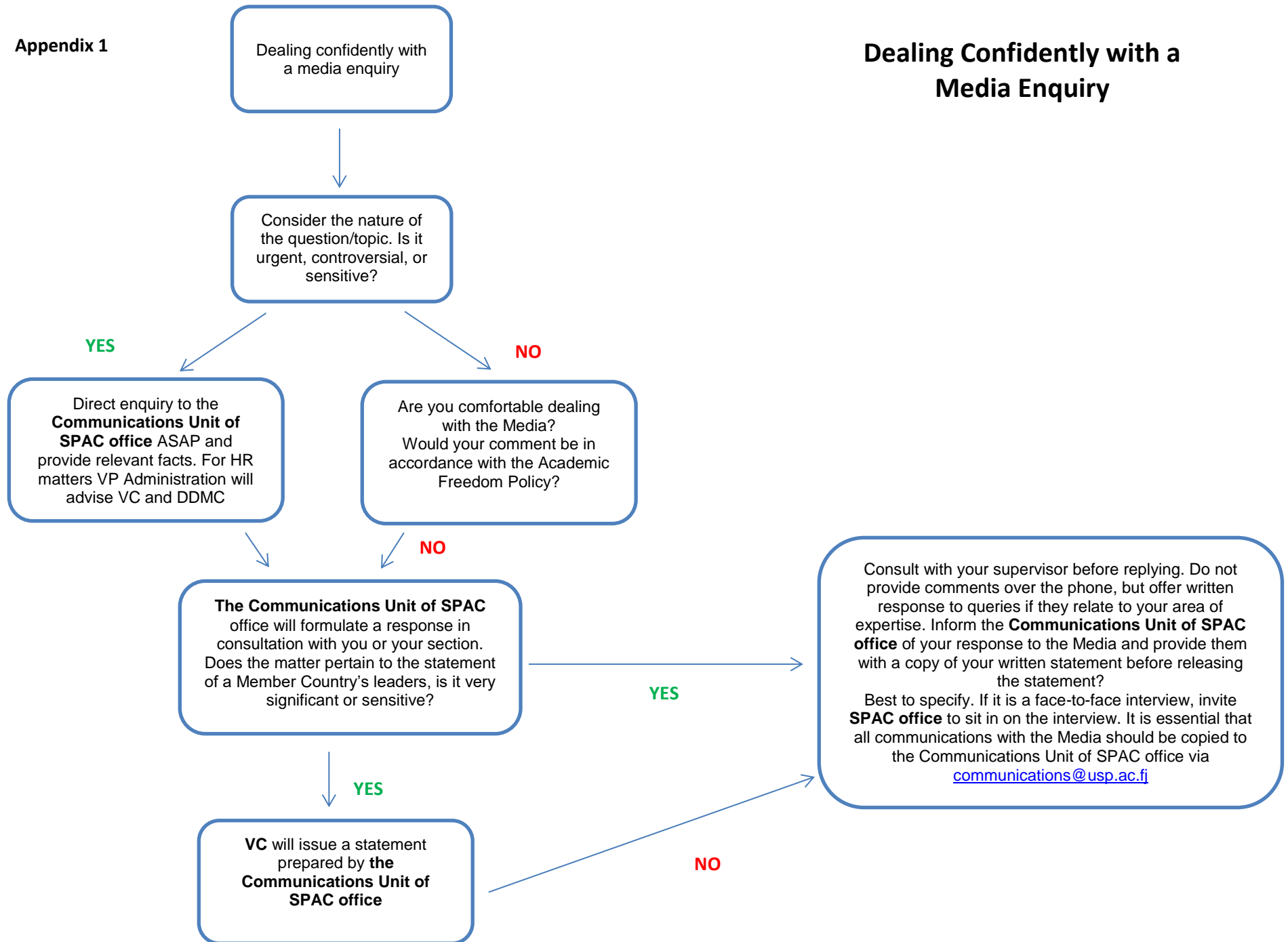
[Media Coverage and Information Guideline](#)

### **Website Address for this Policy**

<http://www.policies.usp.ac.fj/index.php?docid=5298>

Appendix 1

# Dealing Confidently with a Media Enquiry



## **Appendix 2**

### **Media Relations Policy - Implementation Guidelines**

#### **Shared Responsibility**

Effective media relations require outstanding performance from the main implementing section (the Communications Unit of SPAC office) and the cooperation and understanding of all staff members. Having a robust Policy is a starting point, but comprehensive Guidelines provide valuable assistance to staff members who must adhere to the Policy. These Guidelines, based on the acceptance of shared responsibility, will make it easier for all staff to implement the Media Relations Policy.

The Communications Unit of SPAC office is the lead implementer of this Policy and so has a crucial role in its effective application. This Policy also requires that all other members of staff and individual students understand and exercise their responsibilities. It is recommended that all faculties/sections nominate a staff member as their main point of contact with the Communications Unit of SPAC office, so as to speed up communications and ensure that all media enquiries are handled confidently and in a timely manner.

The Media is advised to direct their enquiries to the Communications Unit of SPAC office or relevant Campus Director, but, in many instances, media representatives will approach members of the academic staff directly. In cases where the staff member is knowledgeable about the topic being queried and confident in their ability to engage with the Media, then they may choose to do so. All employees are, however, welcome and encouraged to request the assistance of the Communications Unit of SPAC office. The Communications Unit of SPAC office will then issue a response directly to the Media or provide appropriate advice to the referring staff member.

The following Guidelines feature information on who is authorised to engage with the Media and the circumstances under which this may occur, advice on how to handle routine requests from the Media, information on how to respond to Media approaches about sensitive or unusual matters, and detailed information on the role of the Communications Unit of SPAC office.

#### **Authority to Liaise with the Media**

##### ***A. Authorised Academics***

Academics approached by the Media for comments related to their work are at liberty to respond within the framework of the *Code of Professional Conduct for Academic Staff*. They must, however, inform the Communications Unit of SPAC office and provide a copy of their comments before the interview. While only authorised individuals will speak publicly on behalf of USP, the University recognises that the exercise of academic freedom carries with it the right to offer scholarly opinion to the public.

Staff engaging with the Media should have due regard for the University's reputation while addressing any issues in their professional capacity. The Communications and Public Relations staff members are available to provide preparation, assistance, or advice about media interviews. A representative from the Communications Unit of SPAC office will be required to either sit through the interview or review the written materials provided to the Media by the faculty member.

### ***B. Nominated Position Holders with Authority to Speak on Behalf of the University***

This group comprises members of the University's Senior Management Team (SMT) and Regional Campus Directors, both have the authority to speak with the media- on behalf of the University- on topics within their area of responsibility and expertise. Although these position holders possess this authority, they are fully supported by Communications and Public Relations staff members, who are available to provide comprehensive assistance and/or advice about engagement with the Media.

Although members of this group may respond to the Media directly, they should, where practicable, inform the Communications Unit of SPAC office in advance of this response. In extreme circumstances where it is not possible to inform SPAC office prior to the issuance of a response, the Communications Unit of SPAC must be informed immediately afterward via [communications@usp.ac.fj](mailto:communications@usp.ac.fj)

The Vice-Chancellor and President reserves the right to withdraw this authority to speak on behalf of the University at any time, should he feel that is in the best interests of the University.

### ***C. The Need for Clarity***

There are indeed many cases in which it is appropriate for academic staff members to engage with the Media; however, there are limited numbers of academic staff members who are authorised to speak on behalf of the University. This is a simple and easy point where clarification is required. Academics who are offering a scholarly opinion must explicitly state to the Media whether or not they are speaking on behalf of the University.

## Handling Routine Requests from the Media

This section provides guidance to those persons who possess the authority to speak to the Media, whom are unsure about the limits of their authority, or who wish to know more about media engagement at USP. Engaging with the Media, and handling requests for interviews or comments is actually straightforward, once the nature of the format of the query and the nature of the query are established. Each staff member should be clear as to when they do, and do not, have the authority to speak or liaise with the Media.

The Media Relations Flow Chart (**Appendix 1**) provides simple guidance on whether it may be appropriate for an academic member of staff to respond directly to a media enquiry. “How to Handle an Approach by the Media”, the table found in (**Appendix 3**), also offers instructions. If a situation is unique and does not seem to lend itself to decision-making using the Flow Chart, Table 1, or this text, then the staff member is advised to contact the Communications Unit of SPAC office for individualised guidance.

In general, staff members should pay heed to the following advice, and adopt an open, yet careful, polite, and respectful manner when engaging with the Media. If a Media Representative contacts a USP staff member, then the staff member is advised to:

- 1) Maintain a cordial tone and ascertain exactly what is of interest to the journalist. If the issue relates to the staff member’s area of expertise, then they are free to respond. The Communications Unit of SPAC office can provide advice on how to raise specific points and interest journalists in certain research areas or scholarly priorities. If the staff member does respond immediately to a media inquiry, then the Communications Unit of SPAC office should be notified directly afterwards.
- 2) It is best to request that questions are emailed, rather than engaging in a question and answer session on the telephone. For radio interviews, it is possible to request questions in advance and prepare written responses.
- 3) An alternative to answering questions one may not be fully prepared to address is to issue a brief “holding” statement, explaining that details and clarification will be provided as soon as practicable. This gives the staff member time to seek guidance or consult on a substantive response.
- 4) Provide written responses when possible, and mark them with the time and date. In certain cases, it will be appropriate to obtain clearance/permission from the Vice- Chancellor and President channelled through the Communications Unit of SPAC office prior to the issuance of written responses.

- 5) If a journalist contacts a staff member about a topic outside of their work area or academic expertise, then the journalist must be immediately referred to the Communications Unit of SPAC Section. The Communications Unit of SPAC office will then seek out the most appropriate unit to develop a prompt response.
- 6) All staff, if contacted by a journalist should treat media enquiries as urgent and respond promptly in consultation with the Communications Unit of SPAC office.

### **Handling Non-Academic/ Non-Routine Topics and Personal Opinions**

Even for staff members with authority to speak on their academic specialty or on behalf of the University, media enquiries relating to sensitive or controversial topics, even those that fall within the academic staff member's area of responsibility or expertise, must be referred to the Communications Unit of SPAC office.

Employees who liaise with the Media on matters relating to their area of expertise must clearly identify themselves by their title and must not offer personal opinions. If employees do wish to offer personal opinions on non-academic topics, then they must use their private addresses and make clear that they are doing so as a private individual and do not speak on behalf of the University. Staff members should exercise their own discretion in terms of the advisability of speaking out as concerned individuals, particularly if they are well-known by the public as USP staff members.

There may be situations that arise where a USP staff member may worry that the Media will find out potentially damaging or erroneous information. In a crisis situation, or if media interest is anticipated, staff members should contact both their supervisor and the Communications Unit of SPAC office for advice and assistance. All official statements and media engagement relating to the situation or emergency will be coordinated by the Communications Unit of SPAC office.

It is crucial to remember that the Communications Unit of SPAC office should be notified about any and all media contacts, either positive, negative, or seemingly minor and inconsequential, so that they can monitor media coverage of the University.

### **A Question of Authority- Who is Responsible?**

When in doubt as to one's freedom to speak with the Media, or one's authority/ability to comment on the particular topic that a Media Representative has raised, then it is always best to seek advice from one's supervisor or the Communications Unit of SPAC office. It is always better to ask than to make a potentially serious mistake and expose the University to a damaged reputation, strained institutional relations, loss of development assistance, or even lengthy and costly litigation. If a staff member does not seek advice, and does make a mistake, then they will bear the responsibility for that mistake, through the established procedures of the University.

The Communications Unit of SPAC office is solely authorised to handle Media interactions on behalf of the University as an institution. This includes issuing USP news releases and official University statements to the media and scheduling news conferences.



The Director SPAC is the principal contact between the University and media representatives. He/she relates USP's official position on issues of university-wide interest or significance, or for situations that may be sensitive. All media inquiries about such matters should be referred to him/her or the Manager Communications.

The Communications Unit of SPAC office must be immediately informed of all potentially sensitive or controversial media inquiries, including, but not limited to, questions on politics, policies, or socioeconomic conditions of Member Countries. If a public statement is required, then the Communications Unit of SPAC office will liaise with relevant sections of the University to ascertain the facts of the situation and prepare a written position statement, which will be issued to the Media. In certain situations, such as when the Prime Minister or President of one of USP's Member Countries has made a statement relating to USP, the Vice-Chancellor and President will issue a statement on behalf of the University. In some situations, the Vice-Chancellor and President will identify another appropriate spokesperson.

### **Detailed Media Relations Role of the SPAC Office**

There are six areas of communications responsibility held by the Communications Unit of SPAC Office that are relevant to this Policy. They are as follows:

#### ***1) Coordination of all Media visits to University premises***

The Media should lodge any requests for campus/centre visits to the Communications Unit of SPAC office or relevant Campus Director. Any other member of staff who receives a request for a visit from the Media should inform their supervisor and immediately refer this request to the Communications Unit of SPAC office or relevant Campus Director. While on University property or upon entering residence halls and other University's facilities, news media representatives must be accompanied by a Communications staff of SPAC office or a University employee designated by the Communications Unit of SPAC office.

#### ***2) Dissemination of all information on emergencies to the Media***

This is an important area and all information should be coordinated by the Communications Unit of SPAC office. All emergencies with the exception of staffing issues should be referred first to the Communications Unit of SPAC office for advice.

#### ***3) Media Liaison for official announcements***

All Media Releases must be cleared by the Director SPAC, who will discuss any sensitive issues with the Vice-Chancellor and President. For all queries received from the Media, the relevant faculty/section must provide all facts relating to the issue to the Communications Unit of SPAC office so that the University is able to respond in an accurate and timely manner. Here the response from the faculty/section should be immediate. All Human Resources matters will be addressed by the Vice President Administration and they will be responsible for advising the Vice-Chancellor and President as well as keeping Director SPAC fully informed, as a point of contact for the media.

**4) *Maintenance of an up-to-date web site***

The web site holds valuable information that will be of interest to journalists. The Media may even generate ideas for stories based on the articles found on the USP web site, so it is crucial that the site is current, accurate, and very well-written with attractive photographs.

**5) *A Directory of Experts available to speak with authority on any academic topic***

This database is a source for the Media and the public, who can search for USP experts in any given area. Faculty and staff members are encouraged to volunteer their inclusion. All Faculty/Section Heads are to send a list of the names of experts who can talk on their area of expertise to the Communications Unit of SPAC.

**6) *Ensure that the Media provides good coverage of the University's activities, events, and achievements***

The Communications Unit of SPAC office promotes the University to the public on a daily basis, interacting with prospective students, their parents, employers, sponsors, and the Media regularly. If an event attracts or should attract Media interest, all press releases and statements to the news media will be routed through, approved and disseminated by the Communications Office. It is the responsibility of each Faculty Dean, Head of School/Section/Department/Regional Campuses to implement procedures to support and enforce this communication flow. Relevant Faculties/Sections/Schools/Regional Campuses are to assist the Communications Unit of SPAC office to get approvals for news stories from their respective line SMT.

**News Conferences**

No section of the University should issue "official" news or information without the express permission/clearance of the Communications Unit of SPAC office. The Communications Unit of SPAC office will lead in the arrangement of news conferences, and will decide when news conferences are justified. This will help ensure that the best possible Media exposure and will preserve the University's relationship with the Media.

**Other Publicity**

Employees, faculties, schools, campuses or sections that hope to generate external media coverage must contact the Communications Unit of SPAC office before taking any action. The Communications Manager or Media and PR Coordinator will provide appropriate advice, guidance, and assistance. The Communications Unit of SPAC office will use its numerous media contacts, and will work with faculties and staff to coordinate publicity. There are various tools that may be used, including press releases, media advisories, calendar releases, or post-event articles. SPAC office can also assist in the creation of letters to the editor or feature news articles. The Communications Unit of SPAC office will facilitate social media coverage through the official USP platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and Snapchat.

## **Media Coverage of Events**

Plans for events that require publicity should be shared with the Communications Unit of SPAC office at least three weeks in advance. The Communications Unit of SPAC office encourages all faculty and staff members to frequently share information with the Communications Unit that could be used to generate stories or sharing with the Media.

## **Enforcement**

In cases where a member of staff is found to have spoken outside of their specific authority, or engaged with the Media in a manner contradictory to the Media Relations Policy and Guidelines, then that staff member's supervisor will take appropriate disciplinary action. In extreme cases, the matter will be brought before the Staff Disciplinary Committee.

## **Contact**

High-quality, professional Media Relations and professional communications are key to realising the University's transformation from good to excellent, as prescribed by the University's Strategic Plan, and thus are areas all staff members should support.

If you would like to become more involved with Media Relations at USP, or have any queries or concerns regarding this Policy, please contact the Communications Unit of SPAC office on [communications@usp.ac.fj](mailto:communications@usp.ac.fj) or contact the Manager Communications on email: [Kalpana.prasad@usp.ac.fj](mailto:Kalpana.prasad@usp.ac.fj).

### Appendix 3

**Table 1: How to Handle an Approach by the Media**

Situation	Appropriate Action	Additional Notes
Journalist rings and asks about your area of expertise or for routine information (programme offerings, student support services available, how to apply, etc.)	Record questions and provide a timely response in writing. Be wary of telephone interviews that are not recorded. Be aware that anything said can be quoted. When called by telephone unexpectedly, you can ask for time to prepare a response. If asked in advance for an interview, you should ask for the questions in advance or for some information on the topic to be discussed.	Secure clearance/ seek advice from supervisor or the Communications Unit of SPAC office if unsure. Clarify in writing that any opinions offered are your own, and not those of the University.
Journalist rings and asks about an area in which you are not an expert	Refer journalist to the Communications Unit of SPAC office by providing phone and email contact details.	Inform the Communications Unit of SPAC office that a query has been received
Journalist emails questions related to your area of expertise	Provide written responses in a timely manner if you are authorized to do so. A holding statement can be issued first if you need time to check details. Copy Communications Unit of SPAC office on all your responses.	Be sure to distinguish between fact and your opinion, and make clear in writing that any opinions (only offered if they will not damage the University's reputation) are your own
Journalist emails questions related to another academic area or ordinary matters	Send an acknowledgement note and refer them to the Communications Unit of SPAC office (copy in the Communications Unit of SPAC office)	Media inquiries on day-to-day matters such as course information, awards, special events, scholarships, and publications can be answered if you are sure of being correct, but inform the Communications Unit of SPAC office.
Journalist asks about any matter that is sensitive, controversial, or the subject of legal proceedings and you are familiar with the topic	Immediately refer the journalist to the Communications Unit of SPAC office, which will involve the VC if necessary. Matters such as personnel issues, crisis management, emergencies, USP policies and finances should be <i>immediately</i> referred to the Communications Unit of SPAC Section, which will liaise with the VC.	Do not engage in any discussion. Simply stated "I would like to refer you to the Communications Unit of SPAC office. Thank you"
Journalists/media organisations want to shoot and take photos on Campus on a matter which is not related to the University.	It is best to inform the Communications Unit of SPAC office and seek approval to take shots, photos and cutaways on any of the Campuses.	The photos/videos should be relevant to that particular person/topic and should not interfere on the day to day affairs of the University or inconvenience staff/students of the University.