COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Da Vinci Institute is a private higher distance education institution offering programmes with outcomes-based curricula. This policy forms part of the institutional Quality Management System and details the principles for ensuring that programme offerings adhere to academic standards and empowers students to contribute to the transformation of their communities, society and the economy of the future. This approach is underpinned by the Mode 2 discourse on the generation and distribution of knowledge.

The Da Vinci Institute is committed to ensuring that appropriate policies and procedures are in place to support effective internal and external communications with its various stakeholders.

Sound internal communication is one of the vital ingredients in making the institution successful in achieving its strategic goals. Effective communication provides clear goals and objectives to assist employees to support the achievement of the institution's overall vision and mission.

Da Vinci as a Higher Education Institution recognises the value of freedom of speech, and the need to manage and coordinate the flow of official information, both internally and externally.

2. DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
'Act of God'	Is a natural disaster outside human control, such as an earthquake or tsunami, for which no person can be held responsible
Communications	Any officially released news item, statement, publication or internal messaging for staff, students and other stakeholders interested in the activities of Da Vinci
Channel/s	The method by which a statement or message is provided to a particular audience
Internal communications	Any communication, in any form, primarily intended for audiences of Da Vinci. This is usually staff and students, campus vendors and contractors or suppliers
Media	The mainstream television, radio and print media with regular bulletins or publication cycles, and established networks and business premises
Stakeholders	Individuals and organisations considered to have a genuine interest in Da Vinci. This may include staff, students, former staff, alumni, suppliers, contractors, the community, the media, education departments, other higher education

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	institutions, local and central government agencies and business interests
Stakeholder communications	Any communication, in any form, intended for audiences that have a genuine interest in Da Vinci. This could be staff or students, alumni, parents, schools, interest groups or other parties who show an interest, whether personal, for education purposes or business-related

3. LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS

The Communication and Media Policy is benchmarked against, and should be read in the context of the relevant legislation underpinning the principles against which institutional policies, processes and standard operational procedures are developed, implemented and maintained. These include:

    i.   Constitution of the Republic of South Africa No. 108 of 1996
    ii.   Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997 as amended 2003.

Da Vinci Policies:

    iii.   Archiving
    iv.   Communication and Reputation Management
    v.   Corporate Identity Guidelines
    vi.   Language
    vii.   Marketing and Branding
    viii.   Privacy and Confidentiality
    ix.   Records and Administration Management
    x.   Reputational Risk Management
    xi.   Social Media.

4. SCOPE

4.1. This policy applies to all Da Vinci permanent staff, contract staff and temporary workers.

4.2. This policy includes all forms of communication, including, but not limited to:

    4.2.1. Electronic communication

    4.2.2. Printed media

4.2.3. Marketing information

4.2.4. Statements (written or verbal).

5. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to outline the principles, guidelines, practices and processes that Da Vinci will make use of to enhance internal and external communication. At all times employees should be guided by the institution's values while communicating by means of the various channels.

6. PRINCIPLES

This policy is guided by the following principles to ensure that:

6.1. Employees are aware of and informed of relevant information and activity pertaining to the operations of the business in support of the strategic direction of the company

6.2. Staff is aware of their responsibility and accountability to maintaining effective communication practices

6.3. Access is provided to information that is essential and useful for staff, students and other stakeholders

6.4. Opportunities are provided for effective engagement and information sharing between staff, students and other stakeholders.

7. STAKEHOLDERS

7.1. Da Vinci's communication engagement is directed at either or both internal or external stakeholders.

7.2. Internal audiences
Internal audiences include staff and students.

7.3. External audiences
The external audiences include, but are not limited to:

7.3.1. Official government departments
7.3.2. Higher education councils
7.3.3. Collaborating institutions
7.3.4. Suppliers
7.3.5. Business development partners
7.3.6. Parents or guardians

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7.3.7.   Alumni

7.3.8.   The general public.

8.   INTERNAL COMMUNICATION TYPES AND METHODS

8.1.   Communication is encouraged to ensure that staff and students remain informed about developments, changes and new ventures that affect the institution.

8.2.   Internal communication channels include, but are not limited to:

8.2.1.   Emails

8.2.2.   Meetings

8.2.3.   Newsletters

8.2.4.   Face-to-face interaction

8.2.5.   Notice boards

8.2.6.   SMS

8.2.7.   Social media platforms

8.2.8.   Electronic platforms (ECI).

8.3.   All communication should be easy to understand and devoid of slang, obscene, offensive or discriminatory remarks, ethnic slurs, or sexist innuendoes.

8.4.   General guidelines for internal communication

8.4.1.   Da Vinci encourages openness and transparency in internal communication with the sharing of information unless the content threatens to bring the company into disrepute.

8.4.2.   Staff is encouraged to make use of the communication channels available to ensure they stay abreast of new developments and changes. It is the responsibility of all staff to ensure that they demonstrate the Da Vinci values in their communication, irrespective of audience or channel.

9.   EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION TYPES AND METHODS

9.1.   Electronic communication channels include, but are not limited to the following:

9.1.1.   Email

9.1.2.   Website

9.1.3.   Social media

9.1.4.   Meetings.

10. RESPONSIBILITIES

10.1. All Da Vinci staff, whether employed on a full-time basis or contract basis, are responsible for adhering to this policy.

10.2. Da Vinci's Marketing and Communications Department acts as dissemination centre across a range of communication disciplines.

10.3. The scope of responsibilities requires the Marketing and Communications Department to provide input, advice and strategic assistance.

10.4. The Marketing and Communications Department cannot always be solely responsible for the delivery of all communication. The department requires the assistance of all staff across Da Vinci to assist in identifying communication opportunities and gaps, and to escalate this to the Marketing and Communications manager or to members of Da Vinci's executive management.

10.5. The Insights and Growth Manager is responsible for the website and its content.

10.6. The Marketing and Communications Manager is responsible for official Da Vinci-related social media publications and campaigns.

10.7. Meetings.

Meetings are regularly held with external audiences to facilitate on-going dialogue in the development of its services and programmes. These meetings are regulated by keeping an agenda, participant list as well as minutes of meetings for record keeping purposes.

11. PRINCIPLES OF GOOD COMMUNICATION

11.1. Da Vinci endeavours to provide its stakeholders with timely, accurate, clear and concise information about its policies, programmes, services, and initiatives. This policy outlines core principles of good communication practice as a guide to communicating with its stakeholders.

11.2. English is the language of choice for all communication and should be adhered to in all forms of communication.

11.3. Effectiveness
All communication should be effective, appropriate and should convey the correct information through the appropriate communication channels.

11.4. Clarity

Information should be clear, uniform and easily understood in language that is jargon-free.

11.5. Transparency

The institute will continue to be as transparent and accountable as possible in the areas of strategic decision making, new business developments and important/sensitive announcements.

11.6. Efficiency

All information should reach the intended recipient through the most relevant method of communication in a timeous manner.

11.7. Diversity

All communication should respect the diversity of staff, students and stakeholders.

11.8. Integrity

All internal and external communication will be guided by high levels of integrity.

12. EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITY

12.1. All employees are responsible for the effective management of the Communication and Media Policy.

12.2. Da Vinci employees should be:

12.2.1. Aware of the Communication and Media Policy requirements

12.2.2. Demonstrating the Da Vinci values in communication

12.2.3. Demonstrating the principles of good practice in communication

12.2.4. Responsible for ensuring that communication is effective and appropriately in line with the given standards of communication

12.2.5. Aware of the various methods of communication and utilise these according to the required scope of work

12.2.6. Address incidents of poor communication in proactive and constructive ways

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12.2.7. Ensure that information is shared appropriately and in a timely manner.

12.3. Supervisory and managerial staff should:

12.3.1. Ensure that staff members are familiar with the Communication and Media Policy requirements

12.3.2. Lead by example by ensuring good practice is demonstrated when communicating

12.3.3. Provide effective and appropriate information and feedback to staff and students (where applicable)

12.3.4. Reflect on communication standards and practices within their respective divisions/teams and identify opportunities for improvement

12.3.5. Resolve issues of poor communication that is raised by staff and/or students

12.3.6. Support and promote a culture that encourages inclusion, transparency and involvement in communication

12.3.7. Ensure that staff has a thorough understanding of the company's strategic vision, and the department/team's role to support these goals through effective communication.

13. COMMUNICATION TOOLS

13.1. Letterheads

13.1.1. Staff should exercise caution when using Da Vinci's official letterhead. If writing in the capacity of an individual and not on behalf of the company, an official letterhead must not be used.

13.1.2. The latest letterhead as distributed by the Registry should be used.

13.2. Branded Templates

13.2.1. Approved Da Vinci branded templates must be used for all Da Vinci documentation and presentations.

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13.2.2. No individualised templates reflecting the brand may be used. Refer to the Marketing and Branding Policy for more information.

13.3. Email

It is important for all staff to display appropriate email etiquette and best practice when scripting emails to prevent privacy breaches or reputational issues for Da Vinci.

14. MEDIA

14.1. Communicating with the Media

14.1.1. Media engagement plays an important role as part of Da Vinci's strategic planning in positioning Da Vinci as a thought-leader in the field of education and as an institute of choice.

14.1.2. All media engagement should be directed to the Insights and Growth Manager or the CEO upon receiving the enquiry. The CEO will decide upon the appropriate response as well as the content of information to be shared.

14.2. Official Comment

14.2.1. Official comment is only made by the CEO and when and where necessary. No other staff members are authorised to offer an official opinion or comment unless otherwise instructed by the CEO.

14.2.2. Should any members of staff be approached on a matter, or become aware of a matter that may be sensitive, or an issue that could be considered to be contentious with possible reputational risk, they are advised to immediately escalate this to the Insights and Growth Manager who will escalate the matter to the CEO.

14.2.3. Official Da Vinci news releases are facilitated through an agreement with a third party Public Relations (PR) agency.

14.2.4. No staff member can submit any press release/s without prior approval from the Insights and Growth Manager who will consult with executive management.

14.3. Media Enquiries

14.3.1. Should a staff member receive an enquiry from the media, the enquiry has to be sent to the Insights and Growth Manager who will escalate the query to the CEO for decision making.

14.3.2. Should staff members be approached by the media for comment, staff should note the reporter's name, organisation the reporter is representing, contact details, topic of discussion and applicable deadlines.

14.4. Social Media

Staff should exercise caution when posting on social media. For more information refer to Da Vinci's Social Media policy.

15. RISK MANAGEMENT

15.1. In the event that an incident takes place which could potentially bring the institution into disrepute, proper processes should be followed to ensure the integrity of the brand, the safety and well-being of the staff and students, as well as the interest of the institution's stakeholders.

15.2. Types of threats that would potentially need to be managed:

15.2.1. Safety and security

15.2.2. Technology failures

15.2.3. 'Acts of God'

15.2.4. Operational or supply chain failures

15.2.5. Legal matters

15.2.6. Human rights violations

15.2.7. Marketplace changes.

15.3. The threat levels needs to be determined and escalated immediately.
In the event of any serious threats, the CEO needs to be informed.

15.4. Other threats that can be managed should be escalated to the Executive Dean and Insights and Growth Manager, who, in

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consultation with the CEO, will decide on the appropriate plan of action.

15.5.   The CEO is the authorised spokesperson in the event of any potential threats that could affect the institution, its staff and students, as well as its stakeholders.

15.6.   Employees should not offer any opinion, written or verbal, on the matter until notice is received from the CEO or other executive management members authorised to do so.

16.   MANAGING AND REPORTING OF COMMUNICATION

16.1.   If a significant issue arises, particularly one affecting or implicating Da Vinci or its staff or students, the following steps are recommended:

16.1.1. Identify the level of issue, the stakeholder group and channel used

16.1.2. Contact the Insights and Growth Manager immediately about the issue

16.1.3. The Insights and Growth Manager will decide on a necessary course of action or escalate to the CEO where required.

17.   REVIEW OF THIS POLICY

Regular review and any amendments of this policy will be done in line with the approved institutional policies. This will take place in consultation with the relevant quality assurance structures at departmental and institutional level, under the auspices of the official custodian of this policy, namely the Executive Insights and Growth Manager.