News Centre
Functions

Last updated January 2017
About the News Centre

The News Centre, part of the Communications Team within the Division of External Relations, has a core function to enhance the reputation of the University of Leicester by securing media coverage for research advances, key corporate activities and expert comment opportunities relating to topical news.

The team is a primary content generator and this content is used in marketing and student recruitment materials across the University.

There are four full-time and two part-time members of staff working together to achieve this goal:

- Director of the News Centre
- News Projects Officer
- News Centre Multimedia Officer
- News Centre Executive
- Freelance Reporter (1 day a week)
- Higher Education Consultant (2 days a month)

Working closely with academics and Corporate Services staff from across the University, the News Centre identifies newsworthy stories before they are in the public domain and works to produce accessible and informative copy for journalists to ensure media coverage for such stories.

The output of the News Centre feeds information streams across the University. The content we produce populates the corporate website and is used for internal news communications. It is housed on College and departmental websites and forms the basis of the University’s corporate magazines and other communications such as ezines to stakeholders, including alumni and schools. The news stories we produce are used to inform management teams of the latest advances and form the basis of presentations given by academic leaders.

In short, we produce content that provides a narrative for the way we can all talk about the University.
Communication channels

The News Centre raises the profile of the University, both internally and externally, in a number of ways:

**Press releases**

These provide key facts about new research, events or announcements in an accessible way for journalists to use as a source for a news story. This will include quotes from key partners, both internally and externally where appropriate, and will often be sent out under embargo to give journalists a chance to prepare their stories before the information becomes public knowledge.

Often original images and even multimedia content will be issued alongside a press release to enhance the story and provide more information. Press releases are written specifically for journalists and issued via a media contacts database targeting specific journalists who will be interested in the specific topic of the release.

Press releases remain factual and are issued from the corporate perspective of the University. They are only issued with the approval of the academics and funding bodies involved and act as an invitation to a journalist to cover the story.

**EXAMPLE**

**EMBARGOED UNTIL FRIDAY 18 NOVEMBER AT 6PM GMT (1PM EST)**

**Juices from damaged salad leaves massively stimulate Salmonella growth and salad leaf colonisation, study shows**

University of Leicester team show leached juices from leafy vegetables enhance growth and virulence of food poisoning bug

- Lab study shown juices from damaged leaves in bagged salad increase Salmonella pathogen growth 2400-fold over a control group
- Leached juices also increased the pathogen’s capacity to form a strong and wash-resistant attachment to salad leaves
- Research highlights need for growers to maintain high food safety standards

Watch and embed a video interview with Dr Prinsee Freestone and Gannan Koukkides: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GJq8d9L-6w8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GJq8d9L-6w8)

Photographs of salad leaf microscopes press and researchers available to download: [https://www.dropbox.com/sh/1hapvqt66g579yq/7PlPmWOPg0O8XQkJLdHcFt?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/1hapvqt66g579yq/7PlPmWOPg0O8XQkJLdHcFt?dl=0)

A QA feature by the researchers for the general public is available here: [https://www.dropbox.com/sh/1hapvqt66g579yq/7PlPmWOPg0O8XQkJLdHcFt?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/1hapvqt66g579yq/7PlPmWOPg0O8XQkJLdHcFt?dl=0)

Investigations by University of Leicester microbiologists have revealed that just a small amount of damage to salad leaves can massively stimulate the presence of the food poisoning bug Salmonella in ready-prepared salad leaves.

The scientists have discovered that juices released from damaged leaves also had the effect of enhancing the virulence of the pathogen, potentially increasing its ability to cause infection in the consumer.

The research is led by Dr Prinsee Freestone of the University’s Department of Infection, Immunity and Inflammation and PhD student Gannan Koukkides, who has been funded by a Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) CASE Studentship.

Their research investigates novel methods of preventing food poisoning pathogens from attaching to the surface of salad leaves to help producers improve food safety for consumers. This latest study, published today (18 November) in Applied and Environmental Microbiology, found that juices from damaged leaves in bagged spinach and mixed salad increased Salmonella pathogen growth 2400-fold over a control group and also enhanced their adherence to surfaces and overall virulence, or ability to cause disease.
News feed

Sitting on the homepage of the main University website, as well as the staff and student pages, is a news feed. This is populated with shorter news items written based on information from the press releases for the general public (much in the same way that a journalist would write about our news based on the press release they receive).

There is more room here to add some personality to the news item and incorporate the University's tone of voice by using pronouns such as 'we' as opposed to the corporate use of 'the University of Leicester' that is commonly found in press releases. News items are written for the University's community of staff, students and prospective students as well as the general public browsing the University's homepage.

EXAMPLE

University researchers show juices from damaged salad leaves massively stimulate Salmonella growth and salad leaf colonisation

Research investigates how leached juices from leafy vegetables can enhance growth and virulence of food poisoning bug Salmonella. Investigations by Leicester microbiologists have revealed that just a small amount of damage to salad leaves can massively stimulate the presence of the food poisoning bug Salmonella, even in ready-prepared salad leaves.

Our scientists have discovered that juices released from damaged leaves also had the effect of enhancing the virulence of the pathogen, potentially increasing its ability to cause infection in the consumer.

The research is led by Dr Primrose Freestone from our Department of Immunity, Inflammation and Infection and PhD student Giannis Koukidis, who has been funded by a Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) CASE studentship.

Their research investigates novel methods of preventing food poisoning pathogens from attaching to the surface of salad leaves to help producers improve food safety for consumers. Their study, published today (19 November) in Applied and Environmental Microbiology, found that juices from damaged leaves in bagged spinach and mixed salad increased Salmonella pathogen growth 2400-fold over a control group and also enhanced their adherence to surfaces and overall virulence, or capacity to cause disease.

Dr Freestone said: “Salad leaves are cut during harvesting and we found that even microliters of the juices (less than 1/200th of a teaspoon) which leach from the cut ends of the leaves enabled Salmonella to grow in water, even when it was refrigerated. These juices also helped the Salmonella to attach itself to the salad so strongly that vigorous washing could not remove the bacteria, and even enabled the pathogen to attach to the salad leaves.”

Salad leaf microbe prints on Luna Agar Media plates.

Credit: Carl Vivian – University of Leicester
Features

Features provide a more in depth insight into a story than a press release or a news item. They can be linked to latest news stories, offering a different angle, or can be about something completely separate that lends itself to a longer, more engaging piece than a factual press release or a short and snappy news item.

Features will often incorporate the personality of the writer more than other types of written content and will be published on the website as well as in print publications as an additional way to enhance the reputation of the University in an interesting and engaging manner.

EXAMPLE

From Hate to Hope - IS captive describes how she survived genocide to fight for a better future

Powerful testament by Nadia Murad urges each and every one of us to make a difference

A powerful personal testament to the horror of genocide, and of how hope can emerge from the darkest of places, has been presented by Nadia Murad, a Yazidi woman who was held captive by Islamic State.

In an emotive public talk at the University of Leicester on The Struggle of Yazidis Against IS, Ms Murad voiced hope for young people – for students in the lecture theatre and beyond – to counter the ideologies of hate in the future.

"Today the goal of terrorism is to end peace. It is a threat to the world. Terrorists who use religion to hide behind their acts pose a danger to all us – and not just to a single community," she said.

"The world has failed to put an end to terrorists or bring them to justice. But I think that the youth, students studying here, can do a lot. We need your help to stand with us – it will be the youth and not politicians who will end terrorism."

"We have taken our case to more than 20 countries and they have not done much about it - so I think the future is the young people. Everyone within their capacity, with the power of their voice can stand up for this cause. Many people did not know about this cause - but when we raised awareness of it, people supported it," she added.

She described how, historically, many countries had supported organisations that are now perpetrators of terror providing financial, arms and political support. Terror had now spread around the world.

Ms Murad (23) is a Nobel Peace Prize nominee and UN Goodwill Ambassador. She was at the University of Leicester to speak as part of the School of History, Politics and International Relations Public Lecture Series on the Kurds and the Middle East.

Ms Murad is winner of the EU's prestigious Sakharov Human Rights Prize and is dedicated to helping women and children victimized by genocide, mass atrocities and human trafficking heal and re-build their lives and communities.

Ms Murad said: "If we all do our small part, in every corner of the world, I believe we can end genocide and mass atrocities against women and children. If we have the courage to stand up and fight for those we don't know - who live thousands of miles away – we can make a difference. The world is one community and we need to act as such."

In her lecture, speaking via a translator, she described in stark and raw detail how Daesh terrorists attacked her community, raped women and children, massacred the men and enslaved people and drove survivors into the mountains where many perished through exhaustion or starved. She, along with others, only received safe passage out through the help from the Yazidi volunteers, YPG or Syrian Kurds, and US air support.
The Conversation partnership and Think: Leicester platform

In August 2014, the University entered a partnership with The Conversation, an independent source of news and views pieces written by the academic community. This involves the News Centre communicating daily with The Conversation’s editorial team to commission topical opinion pieces for their website which is viewed by academic peers and news seekers globally.

To host the opinion pieces on the University’s website, the platform Think: Leicester has been developed to provide a platform for original thinking as well as to archive the opinion pieces authored by our academics and ensure they are accessible to the University’s community. Other opinion pieces not necessarily written for The Conversation are also hosted here.

EXAMPLE

The five most common reasons for airliner disasters

November 2, 2013, Kevin Adey

News of any terrible air accident instantly raises questions about aircraft safety and the threat of terrorism. But until the facts are known, it is unwise to speculate on what might actually have caused a specific crash. What we do know is that there are several causes that are more likely to occur than any other.

1. Pilot error

As aircraft have become more reliable, the proportion of crashes caused by pilot error has increased and now stands at around 30%. Aircraft are complex machines that require a lot of management. Because pilots actively engage with the aircraft at every stage of a flight, there are numerous opportunities for this to go wrong, from failing to programme the vital flight-management computer (FMC) correctly to miscalculating the required fuel uplift.

While such errors are regrettable, it is important to remember that the pilot is the last line of defence when things go catastrophically wrong. In January 2009 an Airbus A320 hit a flock of geese over New York City. With no power, the captain, Chesley Sullenberger, had
Video

To enhance the impact of press releases, we regularly commission research videos with colleagues in the Creative Services team. These videos, which are issued with press releases, illustrate the news stories by providing visuals and a more detailed narrative than press releases can provide.

The content is much more engaging for our audiences and enables academics and students to go into more depth with their research. The videos are uploaded onto our YouTube channel which has more than 400 videos with 6.3 million views and nearly 14,000 subscribers. We encourage journalists to download and embed the videos to illustrate their own news stories and we also embed them on our own website.

Video content is decided upon based on the strength of the story and the ability to enhance it with visuals. It takes approximately three to five days to create a two to three minute video.

EXAMPLE
Media appearances

We try to arrange for the majority of major TV appearances to be recorded by Audio Visual Services (AVS) and the Video Team and uploaded to the [News Centre's YouTube channel](https://www.youtube.com/). We embed these into news items where possible and use on social media.

![Image of Leigh Fletcher at BBC Breakfast](https://www.example.com/leigh_fletcher_bbc_breakfast)

**Juno Spacecraft Says 'Hello' From Jupiter**

University of Leicester News Centre

194 views

Published on 6 Jul 2016

After an almost five-year journey to the solar system's largest planet, NASA's Juno spacecraft successfully entered Jupiter's orbit this morning during a 35-minute engine burn. Confirmation that the burn had completed was received on Earth at 8:53 pm. EDT, or 4:53 pm UK time.

Podcasts

We also produce podcasts to enhance our press releases. These audio files work similarly to research videos by enabling academics to provide more detail about their research. We produce a variety of short sound bite podcasts (two to three minutes), more in depth sounds (five to ten minutes) and discussion pieces involving multiple people (five to ten minutes+).

The audio files are uploaded to our SoundCloud channel which was launched in October 2012 and has had nearly 60,000 listens. Similarly to videos, we encourage journalists to download and embed the sound files to illustrate their news stories and we also embed them on our own website.
Podcasts are decided upon the strength of the story and the ability to enhance it with an in depth audio interview. It takes approximately one day to create a two-three minute podcast.

EXAMPLE

**Game of Thrones star Will Tudor: "How amazing it must be to be a student at Leicester at the moment"**

In an interview with the University's News Centre, Will discusses his memories of studying at Leicester and performing with Leicester University Theatre.

Will Tudor is an actor and graduate of the University of Leicester. Perhaps best known for playing Olyvar in the popular HBO TV drama Game of Thrones, Will also plays Odi in Channel 4's Humans, which returns for a second series later this year, and he has an upcoming role in the film Tomorrow, executive produced by Martin Scorsese.

In this interview Will discusses his memories of studying English Literature at the University of Leicester between 2005 - 2008 and his fond experiences of the city and campus, including visiting the Students' Union with Leicester University Theatre, of which he was an active member.

Social media

The News Centre's Twitter account, [@UoLNewsCentre](https://twitter.com/UoLNewsCentre), which has more than 1,700 followers, targets journalists with our latest general interest news stories. The channel exists to communicate our news quickly and often includes multimedia content and links to press releases and news items.

The channel works in partnership with the University’s central Twitter account, @uniofleicester to promote national news stories and also live tweets events of interest to journalists and the general public.

It is a great tool to engage with other departments across the University who often retweet and favourite our posts, as well as direct message us about academics’ appearances in the media which we retweet.

Examples of positive news coverage are also highlighted via these channels.

The News Centre also has a [Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com) which works in a similar fashion to the Twitter account.
EXAMPLE

Live tweeting

Highlighting news coverage

The Sunday Politics Show (East Midlands) discusses the government's pledge to increase the number of trainee doctors by 25%.

Will this increase be enough to solve the shortage of doctors and tight budgets within the NHS? Students and staff at the University of Leicester Medical School contribute to the discussion.
Press Packs

The News Centre creates online press packs for larger or ongoing stories and projects and these provide journalists with a wealth of content; written and multimedia, in one place. Links to press packs are included in press releases.
University of Leicester and the Juno mission to Jupiter

The University of Leicester is home to the only formal UK science lead for the Juno mission. NASA’s programme to study our solar system’s largest planet, Jupiter. Planetary scientists and astronomers from our Department of Physics and Astronomy will be studying the gas giant’s magnetosphere, dynamic atmosphere and the beautiful polar auroras.

Juno’s cruise to Jupiter is due to arrive at Jupiter on 4 July and Jupiter orbital insertion (JOI) begins at 1:28:33 AM at 3:15 PM on 5 July. You can find out more about the University of Leicester’s involvement in this fascinating project on this website and more information on the mission status can be found on the USST JUPITER PHYSICS site.

Hubble captures vivid auroras in Jupiter’s atmosphere - 30 June 2015

Mission launch

Juno’s journey

Science at Jupiter

Press releases

- Hubble captures vivid auroras in Jupiter’s atmosphere - 30 June 2015
- Glorious, glowing Jupiter awaits Juno’s arrival - 27 June 2015

University of Leicester Team

- Team outline and biographies

Features

- It’s been a tumultuous start for Juno as it now delivering spectacular insights into Jupiter by Dr Leigh Fletcher
- Valled - How the Northern Lights are helping us hunt for life on other planets

Previous News

- BBC News - First images from NASA’s Juno spacecraft
- BBC News - First-ever images of Jupiter’s north pole
- BBC News - First images from Juno spacecraft

Links

Department of Physics and Astronomy
NASA Juno Mission website
National Space Centre
Experts Guide

The News Centre manages an online database of media experts searchable via key word and department. This invites journalists to search for expert commentators on topical news stories based on an academic’s area of expertise. This also encourages academics to consider how to present their expertise to the media.

Each member of staff in the database has their own media profile page which details their expertise, contains any multimedia content we have produced with them and links to past media appearances. This acts as a show reel to journalists to allow them to see how suitable the academic would be for their media request. It also acts as a fantastic resource for the team when looking to respond to expert requests from journalists and *The Conversation*, both of which often come in with really tight deadlines.

EXAMPLE

**Dr Leigh Fletcher**

*Senior Research Fellow; Royal Society Research Fellow*

*Department of Physics and Astronomy*

✉ University email: leigh.fletcher@le.ac.uk

📞 University phone: 0116 252 3586

Twitter username: @LeighFletcher

**Specific area(s) of academic interest:**
- Astrobiology Giant planet atmospheres (Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune)
- Moons in the Solar System
- Planetary exploration by spacecraft (e.g. Cassini, Juno, JUICE)
- Ground-based professional and amateur observing of planets
- Weather and climate in planetary atmospheres
- Atmospheres of exoplanets

**Multimedia Content:**
- Dr Fletcher maintains a blog here

« Previous: Dr Lewis Dartnell  » Next: Dr Suzanne Imber »
Crises communications

The News Centre takes a lead in advising on and producing content in response to various corporate reputational issues that arise. This includes informing appropriate senior managers of potential issues and media enquiries of concern and drafting statements to journalists on behalf of the University.

EXAMPLE

A spokesperson for the University of Leicester said:

“The University of Leicester is ranked among the top 1% of universities in the world and is committed to providing high quality teaching. Student feedback, both in terms of the National Student Survey and our own surveys, shows high levels of satisfaction among the student body. In line with other universities, Leicester will implement an inflationary increase for 2017/18 full-time undergraduate home and EU new entrants to the level set by government - from £9,000 to £9,250 pa. However anyone who joined Leicester in 2016/7, or earlier, will continue to pay a maximum of £9,000 for the duration of their course.”

Ends

Impact

The success of the News Centre's media work is measured using a media monitoring service, Kantar. This provides us with daily alerts of all UK media coverage, print and broadcast, which mentions the University of Leicester, including our latest research and expert commentators. This allows us to analyse which stories are having the most traction with the media, enabling us to seek out similar stories in the future.

Media coverage isn't the only way for the News Centre to demonstrate impact, however. As well as building up relationships with key journalists to ensure future coverage and pitching academics to appear on The Conversation, we measure hits to our podcasts and research videos, followers on Twitter and hits to our news items online, all of which evidences engagement with our audiences.

We have a constant stream of stories coming into the office for press releases and news stories from across campus which demonstrates the reputation we have across the University and the value academics place on our work. Our sign-ups to the Experts Guide and the numbers of academics contributing opinion pieces to The Conversation and the Think: Leicester platform are rising and traffic is increasing to our Twitter channel. We have had a lot of success with online newspapers embedding our multimedia content which shows they are satisfied with the content and quality and trust us to provide interesting and engaging multimedia news stories.
Testimonials

The News Centre brings together examples of some of the experiences staff members have had working with us, which can be found on the testimonials page.

Details of awards received by the News Centre can be found on our awards page.

We also keep a document which collates praise from journalists and members of the public for our work surrounding the discovery of King Richard III.

Find out what we can do for you: http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/cap/press