



AWARDS FOR  
EXCELLENCE IN  
**PUBLIC  
RELATIONS  
2023**



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# In-House PR Team of the Year



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha  
Department of Foreign Affairs

## Organisation

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA).

## Citation

The judges said that the winning agency demonstrated:

*"Multi-disciplinary and well organised, the winning In-House team is clearly focussed on the strategic. Judges described it as well structured, focused and delivering its role for a high profile organisation to a very high level through collaboration and co-ordination. It delivers proactive campaigns and manages a busy press office in an international media landscape".*

## **Brief description of the organisation and its objectives in the relevant period**

The mission of DFA is to serve the Irish people, promote their values and advance their prosperity and interests abroad. Communications contributes to this by enhancing Ireland's reputation, visibility and influence through strategic communication aimed at promoting wider and deeper international appreciation of Ireland's values, policies, culture and global impact.

Key organisational objectives for the Department in 2022/23 were:

1. Grow Ireland's global footprint and reputation for a values-based foreign policy.
2. Advance Ireland's prosperity by extending our influence and promoting our interests internationally.
3. Play a positive role in advancing global peace and security through Ireland's role as an elected member of the United Nations Security Council.
4. Protect and advance our interests within the European Union, including in the EU-UK relationship.
5. Provide an excellent service for Irish citizens overseas and those travelling abroad.

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## **Brief overview of the team's objectives and strategy**

The Communication Team's objectives aligned with those of the Department. Our key five objectives were as follows:

1. Enhance transparency and improve services to the public through the running of an effective press office and public information campaigns.
2. Communicate the impact of Ireland's work on the United Nations Security Council.
3. Promote the 50th anniversary of Ireland having joined the European Union/ECC.
4. Build capacity of the department and mission network for digital diplomacy.
5. Promote domestic public engagement in foreign policy through participation in public outreach.

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## **Analysis of team performance/delivery against those objectives**

### **1. Effective press office**

DFA operates a busy press office with over 850 media queries dealt with in 2022. The team provides 24/7 support to the media and strives to answer each query promptly and fully. Major media stories to which DFA press office played a central role included the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the ongoing political challenges posed by Brexit, and the surge in applications for passports.

In addition to responding to queries, the press office also mounts proactive campaigns. This includes major national marketing campaigns. Between March 2022 and February 2023, the team managed a national consular support campaign and a national passports campaign, each of which involved spend over radio, digital, press and outdoor.

A particular strategic target was to increase media coverage of Ireland's overseas development assistance programme, Irish Aid. Proactive media engagement throughout 2022 resulted in 158 national media reports featuring Irish Aid. This included a visit to the Horn of Africa with RTÉ.

### **2. United Nations Security Council**

Ireland was elected onto the UN Security Council (UNSC) for a two-year term from January 2020 to December 2022. Communicating Ireland's impact on the UNSC was a core objective. We organised regular background briefings for journalists on a range of issues. UN High Level Week in September 2022 was a key moment. We organised a detailed media programme for the delegation of 12 Irish media which travelled to New York. A press officer acted as liaison and arranged briefings, doorsteps with the Taoiseach and Minister for Foreign Affairs, and extra opportunities for journalists. This approach generated extensive broadcast, print and online coverage.

Proactive media work led to a consistent level of pick-up of Irish statements and positions in global media (e.g. Washington Post, Al Jazeera, Reuters etc.). Fellow elected members recognised our leadership on communications –

we were asked to share expertise and to help elected members with advice for planning communications around their presidencies.

Our Twitter impressions ranged between 400,000 and 2 million most months while on the Council. We reached over a million impressions for more than half of the months we spent on the Council. We recorded a series of expert talking heads videos to mark the conclusion of our term on the Council. These videos, featuring experts discussing Ireland's impact on the Council, recorded 275,000 impressions on Twitter and 11,500 engagements.

### **3. 50th anniversary of joining the European Union/ECC**

DFA ran an 18-month EU50 campaign to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Ireland joining the EEC/EU. Comms Unit supported major initiatives including Ministers and EU Ambassadors visiting schools on Europe Day 2022, the EU50 Single Market Conference, two major travelling exhibitions in partnership with the Royal Irish Academy, an Ode to Joy EU Anthem project in partnership with the Royal Academy of Music and the Department of Education, the MyEU50 Schools Competition, the EU50 Iveagh House Lecture Series, an op-ed from Tánaiste Martin, the launch of an EU50 stamp, and the production of a number of videos to mark the 50th anniversary of Ireland joining the EU Communities. Comms Unit also promoted EU50 events hosted by several of our Embassies across the globe. A video we produced for Europe Day was viewed almost one million times on Twitter.

### **4. Capacity for digital diplomacy**

DFA undertook a strategic and targeted use of social media which involved creating video assets for major campaigns including St. Patrick's Day, St. Brigid's Day, Africa Day, Bloomsday and the conclusion of our role on the UN Security Council. Over the course of 2022 and early 2023 the team has worked to develop its in-house capacity for the production of audio visual assets through the creation of a 'Content Studio' staffed by a combination of communications specialists and general service and diplomatic DFA staff. Building campaigns around these bespoke assets led to a significant increase in engagement rates. DFA recorded approximately 56 million impressions and over 700,000 engagements across its main Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn accounts in 2022. This approach also greatly improved engagement with our embassy accounts. There are 167 Twitter accounts across the DFA network, with a combined following of 922,000. There were 17.1 million visits to DFA websites in 2022.

### **5. Public outreach**

Our flagship public engagement event was Africa Day, held on May 25th annually. DFA runs national Africa Day events in order to celebrate the growing links between Ireland and the continent. We funded 30 local authorities around the country to host local Africa Day events, ranging from family fun days to children's sports events. We also hosted the first African Film Festival in Dublin, screening four African films for free over four nights in the IFI, Lighthouse and Savoy cinemas, as well as unveiling a mural to celebrate Ireland's links with Africa. In total, Africa Day events were attended by over 20,000 people, while the initiative secured 21 national media slots in 14 outlets such as the Irish Independent, Irish Times, RTÉ and Newstalk.

DFA also operated a large public tent at the National Ploughing Championships, which was visited by 18,000 attendees. This tent highlighted Ireland's diplomatic work around the world, as well as distributing almost 6,000 passport cards.

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## **Summary of outstanding achievements in the relevant period**

- 1.** The return of international travel led to a number of high profile visits to Ireland from foreign dignitaries. In March 2022, the then Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall visited Waterford and Tipperary. Over 110 media were accredited to cover this visit, including more than 20 journalists from the British media. DFA Press Office worked with counterparts from the British Embassy, the office of the Prince of Wales and An Garda Síochána to manage media activities, provide briefing sessions and set up media interviews with Ministers, other participants or members of the public.
- 2.** The team supported the roll-out of Ireland's St. Patrick's Day programme through embassies around the world. 1217 The social media video created was viewed almost 9 million times.

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