

Protocol for PSL Provider / Partner Communications

Update as of 23 August 2017

As the Partnership Schools for Liberia (PSL) initiative continues to develop and grow into year two, it is important all communications around our activities are kept streamlined.

This document provides an updated protocol which should be applied to all PSL initiative communications, ranging from those at the local level (community meetings, local radio broadcasts, etc.) to those at the national and international level (interviews, op-eds, press releases, etc.).

The purpose of the protocol set forth below is to ensure that PSL has a clear, coordinated voice, which speaks directly in the interest of the initiative and all those involved.

Please note that this document replaces the previous protocol, which was circulated in April 2017.

Approach

For the benefit of the PSL initiative, the providers, the Ministry, and other stakeholders, the Ministry has been taking a more proactive approach to communications. This is a process through which all parties involved in the PSL initiative cooperate to ensure that communications are coordinated and harmonized.

Required notification period

More specific examples of what is expected from PSL providers and partners is summarised below but, in general, the following notification periods must be adhered to for all external communications:

- General proactive communications – 72 hours in advance of planned communications
- Reactive communication to an external enquiry – within 24 hours following receipt of enquiry and prior to any response
- For specific issues which could undermine the reputation of the PSL program – Immediately once you become aware of the issue

Notifications are made to the Chief of Staff to the Minister of Education, cc-ing the press@moe.gov.lr email address.

Protocol

Given its role overseeing and determining the future of the PSL system, it is important that all providers keep the Ministry fully informed of all developing and future communications activities, and consult with the Ministry in a timely fashion to ensure agreement before messages and communications are made public.

The system consists of a two-pronged communications protocol: one approach for issues impacting the wider PSL program and all providers, and a second for issues specific to an individual provider.

This two-pronged approach enables us to act swiftly and effectively on issues that affect the PSL system as a whole, while retaining sensitivity to the varying needs of individual PSL providers.

1. Issues impacting the wider PSL program and all (or most) providers:

The Ministry has established a “PSL Communications Working Group”, chaired by the Chief of Staff to the Ministry of Education, and facilitated by the Ministry’s communications advisors. The Working Group includes one representative from each provider who is responsible for communications.

The Ministry’s communications advisors play an active role in coordinating the activities of the Working Group, drafting and circulating agendas, convening meetings, and engaging in proactive offline dialogue on behalf of the Chair.

This group will convene at least once per month, as part of the regular PSL providers meetings hosted at the Ministry of Education, to ensure appropriate flow of information as well as address any questions or concerns.

Additional calls or meetings will also be convened in advance of any major announcements or issues that impact all providers/the PSL program to coordinate the organizations’ communication on the subject.

The Working Group will also be responsible for coordinating rapid response to critical media coverage impacting PSL, as needed (see Rapid Response Protocol below).

The Working Group will continue to evaluate and refine its working practices to ensure good communications built on strong cooperation on an ongoing basis.

On top of the regular meeting, the Ministry and providers should use the full email distribution list for the Working Group to raise any issues and share updates and important information.

All PSL content, once approved, will be circulated across the Ministry (including county offices). The Ministry’s communications on additional issues (e.g. education reform beyond the scope of PSL) will be shared with providers so they have context on the Ministry’s wider efforts.

2. Issues impacting just one provider:

For communications issues that are specific to one provider, the Ministry should be kept informed directly.

To that end, PSL providers will:

- Send any planned communications (public statements, press releases, op-eds, media engagements, newsletters, social media campaigns etc.) regarding PSL to the

Chief of Staff to the Minister of Education, cc-ing the press@moe.gov.lr email address as early as possible, ***in advance of distribution***.

- Except for exceptional circumstances (e.g. immediate reporter deadlines) all planned communications should be provided with at least 72 hours' notice for Ministry review and sign-off. Including the Ministry's team in the approval process of these communications will allow for better coordination and preparedness.
- Notify the Chief of Staff to the Minister of Education and the press@moe.gov.lr email address immediately when any interview request is received and, if determined by the Chief of Staff or the Ministry's communications advisors to be appropriate, also suggest to the reporter that they contact the Ministry for comment via press@moe.gov.lr.

Putting more efficient processes in place allows for the Ministry to direct its attention toward proactive media outreach, leading to opportunities to highlight providers' success stories. The Minister's office has put providers in touch with our communications advisors and we ask that you continue to coordinate closely with them.

Rapid Response Protocol

This separate protocol is to be followed if an issue develops which could be to the detriment of the reputation of the PSL program.

Examples could be publication of critical articles in major publications in need of correction; an attack on the merits of the program and its benefits to the education of the youth of Liberia by activist groups whether local or international; a major issue at an individual school.

This list is not comprehensive but aimed at describing the *type* of issue that would merit following the Rapid Response Protocol rather than the general protocol outlined above.

If this type of issue becomes known then notify the Chief of Staff to the Minister of Education and the press@moe.gov.lr email address immediately.

The Chief of Staff will then work with the Ministry's communications staff and advisors to coordinate the response, involving the full Working Group as appropriate. All communications must be signed off by the Chief of Staff or his designee prior to dissemination.

Messaging

The Ministry will continue to take a proactive role in shaping the external messaging around both PSL and its wider reforms.

The Ministry, with support from our communications providers, is responsible for developing and reviewing overarching messaging as well as talking points and lines to take on emerging issues. Messaging on key issues has already been distributed through the Working Group, and additional messaging will be disseminated to partners as and when needed.

The success of the PSL program – and external recognition of that success – is to the benefit of all those involved, and it is important that the Ministry and providers do not speak at cross purposes. We are strongest when we work together and remain on the same page.

Social and Digital Media

Social media platforms are a simple and effective way to positively communicate the successes of the PSL program. There is no restriction on the content that providers can post as long as it is within the agreed messaging framework and is not critical of other PSL providers.

As with all communications via other media channels any major new social media campaign, such as the release of an Infographic or video content, related to PSL should be highlighted to the Ministry with at least 72 hours notice, with the Ministry retaining the right to approve or reject.

The same applies to any fundraising appeals that may be launched specifically if undertaken online or via email. The same clearance process needs to be adhered to.

Research and Evaluation

As set out in the PSL Partnership Agreement, PSL operators will adhere to Ministry guidelines regarding research. Providers will adhere to accepted international standards for measurement and evaluation.

The Ministry has put educational performance at the heart of the PSL program and so has commissioned third-party external research into the performance of the PSL program and will dictate the terms of releasing any research commissioned. All providers must defer to the Ministry regarding the timing and format of the release of this information.

In addition, providers are required to clear any future research with the Ministry. No access to data or the schools can be provided for research purposes without prior Ministry approval.

Accountability

Contracts with providers stipulate that adherence to the Ministry's communications protocol will be required for participation in the PSL program. This protocol is an appendix to these contracts.