

LSST:UK Communications Officer (0.2 FTE)

The Vera C. Rubin Observatory's Legacy Survey of Space and Time (LSST, see www.lsst.org) will be one of the most exciting astronomy projects of the 2020s and 2030s. The observatory is currently nearing the end of construction in Chile, and, once completed, it will undertake (from early 2025) a ten-year survey of the southern sky, to generate an unprecedented multi-colour, multi-epoch "cosmic movie". This vast dataset will form the basis for analyses across the full range of astronomy, from Near Earth Objects to the furthest quasars and the dark energy believed to be driving the accelerating expansion of the Universe. The breadth of the science possible with LSST led to the formation of an LSST:UK Consortium (www.lsst.ac.uk), comprising researchers from all UK astronomy groups, to coordinate UK involvement in the LSST.

The LSST:UK Consortium is now seeking a part-time Communications Officer to coordinate its communications activities. The postholder will be part of the LSST:UK Science Centre (LUSC) Project Office - a distributed team comprising the Project Leader, Project Scientist, Project Managers and (soon) a Project Assistant – and will report to the Project Leader. This position is available immediately for an initial period of two years, but may be extended thereafter; funding currently exists to March 2027, and support from then will be sought as part of the continuing STFC-funded LUSC programme. It is expected that this role will be filled by buying time (nominally 0.2 FTE, dependent on grade) of a communications professional already holding a similar post in a UK institution and with a good set of contacts with UK media sources, but all interested parties are welcome to apply, following the procedure outlined below. Applications are particularly welcomed from candidates who would increase the diversity of the LSST:UK leadership team.

The role

The Communications Officer will coordinate the development and implementation of the LSST:UK Communications Strategy, and, during LSST operations, act as a first point of contact for media enquiries relating to LSST:UK. A draft of the Communications Strategy is included in the Appendix below, but it is expected that the Communications Officer will contribute significantly to its completion. As noted there, the Communications Officer will work as part of a team, which will comprise both scientific advisors and a cohort of UK researchers ready to communicate LSST science to the media and to other groups. This will complement the LSST:UK Education and Public Outreach programme, with the distinction between the two being that the communications activities will be more driven by specific events and discoveries, while the EPO programme will follow a longer-term approach to using LSST science to enhance science capital within key sections of the general public.

Prior to the start of LSST operations in early 2025, the activities of the Communications Officer will focus on:

- Developing a good working relationship with the Rubin Observatory communications team
- Recruiting a cohort of UK researchers, across institutions and science areas, and supporting their obtaining media training
- Building a social media presence for LSST:UK
- Determining a process for multi-institutional LSST:UK press releases
- Supporting communications within the LSST:UK Consortium (e.g. website, newsletters)

Once these processes and relationships are in place, and LSST operations have begun, the focus will shift somewhat to:

- Acting as first point of contact for media interested in LSST:UK science stories
- Coordinating press releases related to LSST:UK science

General requirements and skills

While support will be provided by a variety of LSST:UK Consortium members, this role will suit a self-motivated person with a proven ability to work independently, to initiate specific activities within an agreed overall plan, and, since this is a 0.2 FTE position, to balance commitments to multiple projects.

Essential Criteria

- Significant experience working in science communications
- Good existing contacts with UK media sources interested in science
- Excellent communication skills, both written and verbal
- Experience in developing and delivering social media engagement strategies
- Ability to work independently and to assess when, and from whom, to seek help
- Expertise in the design and operation of web resources for science communication

Desirable Criteria

- Prior experience communicating astronomy
- Experience working within a large, international project
- Knowledge of techniques for evaluating communications strategies

Application Procedure

For further information about this position, please contact the LSST:UK Project Leader, Prof Bob Mann (rgm@roe.ac.uk).

To apply for the position, please submit an application comprising:

- A brief CV, highlighting relevant experience (e.g. including links to online resources you have developed) and including the contact details for two referees.
- A short (<3 pages) cover letter, addressing the Essential and Desirable Criteria listed above, and presenting your thoughts on the role. This should address the outline provided in the draft LSST:UK Communications Strategy and describe how you would recommend that the strategy be completed, given your understanding of the communications needs of LSST:UK.
- (If you are currently employed) a letter of support from your current line manager to confirm that you would be able to take on this role, given your current commitments, and when you would be available to do so. This letter should also contain your current salary level.

Application materials should be emailed to Bob Mann (rgm@roe.ac.uk) by 16.00 BST on Friday, June 23rd, and it is intended that interviews will take place online in early July.

Appendix: Draft 0.3 of the LSST:UK Communications Strategy

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Document outline:

1. Introduction
 - Background information
 - Purpose of the comms strategy
 - The distinction between Comms and EPO in LSST:UK
 2. Communication Objectives
 - To build a social media presence
 - To convene a diverse bank of UK researchers in each science area and ensure they are media-trained
 - To develop stakeholder relations before the first light to ensure good media coverage.
 - To determine a process for multi-institutional LSST:UK press releases.
 - **Support internal communications & collaboration website.**
 3. Operations of the LSST:UK Comms
 4. Evaluation and Assessment (How will success be measured, and how will progress towards our goals be tracked?)
 5. Conclusion
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1. Introduction

Background information

The Rubin Observatory Legacy Survey of Space and Time (LSST) has scope for incredible discovery potential that will be of deep interest to academics and the broader public. As a key group in the project, LSST:UK has a critical role in communicating discoveries from Rubin LSST effectively and efficiently.

Purpose of the communication strategy document

This LSST:UK Communication Strategy document sets out our top-level objectives and describes how LSST:UK will ensure we disseminate LSST discoveries across the UK and the world.

The LSST:UK comms team should work closely with the comms teams in the US to ensure. Early work will need to be done by the team to find effective mechanisms for doing this.

Depending on the composition of the Comms team, LSST:UK should consider forming a complementary advisory science team that can help set the context of the promoted science.

The distinction between Comms and EPO

The EPO focuses on events and educational resources for schools, community groups, and public talks. These activities are essential for disseminating the significant role that the UK plays in the Rubin Observatory and sharing the findings of LSST:UK research. The Comms focuses on raising awareness of the project through traditional and social media coverage, including radio, television, and press outlets. The EPO work follows up with targeted outreach events. Comms activities will, therefore, be more related to, and driven by, specific discoveries and news items, whereas the EPO programme will cover LSST research in the UK at a more general level

2. Communication Objectives

The first task of the communication team will be to define your target audience. This can include other scientists, funders, policymakers and the general public. As part of the ongoing Rubin discoveries, the comms team will support LSST:UK in identifying key messages and choosing the appropriate communication channels.

Social media

Many different social science studies demonstrate social media can reach a significantly broader and more diverse audience than traditional media outlets. It provides the opportunity to share LSST:UK research in a way unfiltered by the conventional media spin. It also gives a prominent platform to advertise EPO events and resources.

Building a social media audience takes time, and consistent work through regular postings as the followers slowly trickle in. For example, the Astronomer Royal for Scotland Twitter account has

taken nine months to reach 2.2k followers, with postings reaching an average figure of 6k views. This is good but is still nothing compared to the reach of more established Twitter accounts. If we want LSST:UK to have a strong social media presence in time for the first science, the work and effort to build a social media presence must start now.

To convene a diverse bank of UK researchers in each science area and ensure they are media-trained

If LSST:UK provides an engaging expert to a media stakeholder, they will be asked to do the same again and again later. We must have a bank of enthusiastic media-savvy researchers on call to respond quickly to media requests. As working with the media is fairly unnatural for most scientists, media training is essential. Where Universities offer such training, the Comms Officer will ensure researchers have engaged with these courses. Best-practise workshops will also be organised to share experiences within the group so that everyone is prepared for a media role. Again this work needs to start quickly in preparation for the first light news stories.

To develop stakeholder relations before first-light to ensure good media coverage.

The media are always interested in hearing about a good UK story. Rubin is, however, mainly viewed as a US-only project. The Comms Officer will therefore need to start early, briefing science journalists about the significant role that the UK plays in Rubin. By developing relations now, the Comms Officer will become a visible first point of contact for the media in time for the first science stories.

To determine a process for multi-institutional LSST:UK press releases.

A light-touch process needs to be determined, agreed and in place before the first science stories are released. This will help coordinate activities across the relevant UK institutions to ensure maximum impact and coverage across the UK and internationally.

Support internal communications & collaboration website.

The Comms team will also coordinate internal LSST:UK communications, such as support for the internal Newsletter¹ and communication within the consortium, alleviating pressure from the already heavily overloaded Project Office. The Comms team will also support the overhaul of the LSST:UK website (www.lsst.ac.uk) to ensure that it supports their comms activities.

3. Operations

To act as the LSST:UK first point of contact for media

The UK media work with a turn-around time of hours between deciding whether to run a story and it going live. If they cannot easily find a media-savvy UK expert to comment on the story, they will

¹ See <https://lsst-uk.atlassian.net/wiki/spaces/HOME/pages/1202520079/LSST+UK+Newsletters>

often simply not run it. A visible LSST:UK Comms Officer should rapidly respond to requests and line up an appropriate LSST:UK representative.

A Comms Officer will proactively target UK media contacts about upcoming Rubin milestones (e.g. first light, first data release). This will generate interest in the project and raise the UK profile, which will be missing from the US press releases. It is unlikely that individual University press offices will undertake this concerted effort as LSST:UK is a broad collective. Many Rubin stories will not include the unique University branding aspect that is typically required for University press offices to commit resources. These stretched, non-specialist local officers would likely welcome a coordinated draft press release that they can tweak to their individual needs/audiences, a function/service that an LSST:UK Comms Officer could provide to all consortium members facilitating consistent stories across multiple institutes.

The presence of a Comms officer will not preclude individuals from responding to personal media requests. In these cases, they can provide additional support if the targeted researcher cannot respond to a media request and help suggest an alternative expert.

To coordinate press releases

This is a multi-fold task:

UK-US liaison: The Comms Officer will liaise with their counterparts in the US to coordinate Observatory-wide press stories. The goal is to raise the profile of the UK in the US press releases, which traditionally gain more traction worldwide.

Inter-UK liaison: By its nature, Rubin science is big-team science. Press-worthy results will merit multiple press releases by individual Universities. In general, the UK press officers do a good job of coordinating multi-institutional press releases. There have, however, been some notable exceptions in the past, where the differing media spin on the results has led to conflicting stories being released. This benefits no one and confuses everyone. Furthermore, as press office support differs significantly across Universities, some researchers become excluded from multi-institutional press releases when their University does not have the resources/interest to promote the story. The Comms Officer would take the lead in coordinating multi-institutional press releases to ensure all parties are fairly represented, and a consistent story is shared. The Comms Officer will provide a service to the LSST:UK community, making the whole UK press release process significantly less cumbersome for all the involved parties.

4. Conclusion

The LSST:UK comms team is responsible for effectively communicating discoveries from the Rubin Observatory Legacy Survey of Space and Time (LSST) to academics and the public. The LSST:UK Communication Strategy outlines objectives for disseminating LSST discoveries across the UK and the world, with the Communication team coordinating internal and external communication and the EPO team focusing on events and educational resources.