

## MA ICM Open Afternoon Transcript.

**Emily Darling:** This is the time for questions at the end, but it's really helpful to have people ask as we go. We can make sure they're all answered for you during the session. So welcome and over to you, Liz.

**Liz Cochrane:** Brilliant. And yes, welcome from me and indeed from the whole team as well. And so what most of this session is just going to be you asking what you want to hear about. I'll start off just by, we'll go around the team and do a few introductions. And then most importantly, we've got two members of our alumni with us as well and I know you're going to be quizzing them. So we'll get Liz and Erin to introduce themselves as well.

But what we're going to do now is just basically say who is here from IOIC, get them to introduce themselves. The course team will introduce themselves. Liz and Erin will do so.

While we're doing all of that, excuse me, start to think about your questions and pop those into the chat. Because that way, by the time we finish the introductions, we'll have some nice juicy questions that we can kick off with and then just take it from there and see where it goes on our master's magical mystery tour. Excellent. And so actually, Jen, could you introduce yourselves, please?

**Jennifer Sproul:** Yeah, absolutely. And I should just check the time then. I was about to say good morning, but it is good afternoon. We're on the right day of the week. It's Thursday afternoon, just to reiterate.

Lovely to see so many people here and looking to find. So those that don't know me, my name is Jen or Jennifer Sproul, and I'm the CEO here over at IOIC and have worked with Liz and the course team, of course, the HQ team for many years and the delivery of it. And this course and this programme is such an important part of our work at IOIC and how we drive it. And I think that you're here showing an interest to learn more about it is excellent. And I think that what you'll hear today from the amazing course team is how this can make such an impact in your work.

So I'm here as well if you want to ask any other random IOIC questions. I'm here as well to be on vice, but most importantly is to hear from the course team and of course the alumni. So that's from me, Liz.

**Liz Cochrane:** Thank you. And Emily, you've already said hi to everyone. Fuller introduction, please.

**Emily Darling:** Hi, everyone. I'm Emily Darling, professional development manager at the IOC. So I look after everything that comes under that banner, but particularly our qualifications. So I oversee our qualifications and in particular relationship with Solent University. As you know, this is a fully accredited master's qualification.

And I'll just echo what Jen said. It's amazing you're all here thinking about your development, and this really is, not sure if I like this term, but the jewel in our crown, this qualification. And it's a fantastic one. You'll hear a lot more from the course team, but it's something I am extremely proud of and really, really adore this programme. So thank you.

**Liz Cochrane:** Thank you, Emily. Stella, over to you.

**Stella Ditri:** Hi, everyone. My name is Stella. I'm a professional development officer at the IOIC. So I work across our qualification programmes, which obviously includes the masters. So I support students throughout their journey with us, particularly for the masters. It's the application side. And I work closely with the teaching team and Solent University as well.

**Liz Cochrane:** Brilliant. Thank you.

So to start with the team introducing themselves now, so I'm Liz, I'm the course director, so I kind of have a bit of an overview, though we all kind of pitch in and work very much as a team all the way through. But I'm also specifically responsible for module one. And what we do in module one is really look at the fundamentals that you need to really get a deeper understanding both of the organization and of the way we tick in communication terms as well.

So we take quite a deep dive into looking at different elements of culture and leadership communication and power in organizations, all sorts of things like that. And then we also look at sense making and just what goes on in our brains as we individually make sense of the world.

So that's me, but I'm going to hand over to Oli next.

**Oli Howard:** Hi Liz, thanks very much and welcome everyone. It's great to have so many people on the call this afternoon. A little bit about me, then I'll say a bit about the two modules I currently manage.

So I had a career in internal communication for about 10 almost 15 years. During that time, back in about 2010, I did this course when it used to be the post-grad diploma and it really changed my outlook on the work that I did as an internal comms professional and it's been really important in my career ever since. So I was delighted when I was asked to come onto the teaching team a few years ago.

Now my day job is with the CIPD, which is the professional body for HR management and I really enjoy the combination of these two things because this is all about how do we as leaders in organisations get the best out of our people and make sure that the interests of the organisation and those who work for it are aligned and pursued together. And so those two bits of my working life, I think, work really well as companion pieces. I enormously enjoy working with students as part of the programme here.

I also continue to take an interest in internal comms through writing as well. I was the lead author on the internal comms strategy guide that the IOIC put together a few years ago.

So I'm currently the module leader for modules 2 and three. By the time you're on the program, Chris Coburn, who's not with us today, will be picking up the lead on module 2, though I will stay involved in that, of course. Module 2 really focuses in on how we as communicators can have the biggest impact possible on the organizations that we work for. And that really looks therefore at strategy and how we can understand strategy and internal communication strategy, how we can

develop effective strategies to support initiatives in our organization, including how we manage change as communicators.

We also have a detailed look at the employment relationship and how that really functions building on some of what we cover in module one, because a lot of the employment relationships really held in people's minds. So that's module 2.

And then in module 3, we focus in on influence. We look at how we can position ourselves as communicators, as influential advisors to leaders in organisations, how we can play a part our organisations, put ourselves in a position where we're able to command the attention of those who we need sponsorship from in order to do our jobs well. And we also look at persuasive communication through theories about rhetoric and discourse analysis.

So how can we construct language in a way that enables us to have the most influence possible? It's all really fascinating stuff. I really love working on the two modules and I can see how they contribute a huge amount to people's approach to their work over the course of the assignments that people complete as part of both modules. That's probably me. Shall I pass on to Domna?

**Liz Cochrane:** Why not?

**Oli Howard:** Domna.

**Domna Lazidou:** Thank you, Oli. Hi, everyone. Lovely to see all of you. So my name is Domna Lazidou. My background is in internal communication management and consultancy working internationally for several years. My specific area of interest and expertise is communication and culture and I both practice and teach in this area including things like global leadership, cross-cultural differences, diverse teams, all of those things.

So what I do with you in the course is I take a couple of sessions during Liz's first module, one on cultural differences and communication and one on leadership. And then I see you all again for the final module by which time you are able to put everything else you learned in the three modules that Liz and Oli described to practice.

So the idea of the last module is that you do your own research in your organization or another organization if you're a consultant on a topic that is of interest to you and is critical for the organization. And you're using, we go through understanding the research process very, very thoroughly from an academic and a practitioner perspective.

And the idea is that not only are you able to understand an issue thoroughly as you research it, but by the end of it you are able to come up with your own specific recommendations for how to resolve or how to improve that particular issue in the organization from a communication using communication action.

I know our alumni are going to talk you through what they've done and both of them did superb work in that area. And that's me.

**Liz Cochrane:** Brilliant. Thank you, Donna. So that's everyone in the team. And so now on to the most interesting people in the room this afternoon. Liz, if I can start, ask you to introduce yourself as a member of our alumni.

**Liz Fairbrother:** Yes, thank you. Hi, Liz. Hi, everybody. So I am the operational communications manager for Currys. I support the supply chain service operations and our contact centre area.

I effectively business partner the directors in those areas and I'm responsible for communications from our directors or down to our colleagues on the front line and they could be colleagues that are delivering your washing machine or coming to fix your telly or the people that are based in our repair centre at Newark, the largest in Europe.

So really wide, really wide audiences. And I'll just say what Oli said about this course, it completely, it's like a light bulb moment and it sets you up in ways that you have no idea about.

**Liz Cochrane:** Amazing. Thank you very much and look forward to, I'm sure you're going to be grilled so you can tell us more as people ask their questions. And Erin, over to you.

**Erin Askew:** Hi everyone. So I'm Erin Askew. I work for BAE Systems in the defence sector. I'm the communications manager. When I started the course, I was working in a small business within BAE Systems where we sell munitions. So you can imagine with everything going on in Ukraine and everything going on around the world at the moment, it was an incredibly busy time. But you know, what a fantastic opportunity doing this course to be able to implement all my learning lifetime as we were going along.

I wouldn't say it's a direct result of attending this course, but it was definitely connected that about two-thirds of the way through, I got a promotion and I moved roles. And I would definitely say that this course gave me the confidence and evidence to be able to succeed in an interview.

So yes, and I totally concur with Liz, total light bulb moment all the way through. And yeah, it will you like nothing else, but what a fantastic opportunity for you all to learn some more.

**Liz Cochrane:** Fantastic. Thank you. Thank you very much indeed. Right. I think I've asked everyone now to introduce themselves. I don't think I've left anyone out. Excellent.

In which case I'm now going to ask Ollie if you can do the fantastic facilitation job you normally do for us at these sessions and start being our question masterpiece. It's a bit like question time on the TV, isn't it? But we're possibly not going to be at loggerheads.

**Oli Howard:** Not as hard hitting. Probably. Let's hope not at least. Thanks, Liz. Okay, let's start with one that always gets asked, which has come up already.

This is around how do you juggle the commitments of study with a busy job and lots of other stuff going on in your life? And the best people to ask about this will be Liz and Erin, because that is exactly what they have just been through. Erin, do you want to start on that one?

**Erin Askew:** Yeah, it's a really valid question actually, because there is a lot of work involved in this. There's no point being under any illusion that this is an easy run because it's not. However, I

think the important thing to note is how practical this course is. So what you find very quickly is that you're integrating things with your day job. You're talking about and learning about topics that are directly connected to things that you're doing every day. Therefore, you can legitimately align the course and your day job.

So what I personally found is that I was doing my course assignments at the same time as doing my job because they ended up being exactly the same thing. So for example, the second module around writing a comms strategy and a comms plan, well, you know, as a comms manager, that's your bread and butter. So it's really easy to be able to align those things and save yourself a lot of time.

I think in terms of the way I worked is personally, I'm not very good at working in the evenings, so I think there was only maybe one or two occasions where I worked in the evenings. I'm definitely a morning person, but I did hit it hard over the weekends, not every weekend, but when you're in that kind of that flow of finishing off your assignments, you know, you do find that you're using the weekends to get those nails and get them across the line. But yeah, it does take a lot of time, but the trick I think is to align it to your day job.

**Oli Howard:** Yeah, there's definitely some efficiency to be had there for sure. Liz F, what did you find?

**Liz Fairbrother:** Yeah, so yeah, I agree with what Erin's just said. You are doing a master's in 13 months, right? You've got to dedicate time to it and you're not going to write your assignments in two weeks or whatever you think. But then, you know, time management will be different for everybody.

For me, I'd start each module reading over weekends and that could be at my desk or if the sun was out, which is not now, I would be sat on my safe outside reading my books and making my notes. And then as I got nearer to the deadline, I would probably work weekends and some evenings as well. But you do find lots of ways that you can fit studying into your lifestyle. So for example, I attended a wedding that was about 2 1/2 hours away. So I just spent the journey doing some reading, making some notes about what I wanted to do. So there's lots of like little hacks that you'll come up with and that you'll find that work for you personally. But honestly, the time that you put into it is nothing compared to how much you'll use what you learn.

It just set you up for everything that comes after. And it's also quite handy because, you know, if you want to dodge anything, being able to say that you're studying is really quite handy. So there are benefits, got to clean out the garage, sorry, I've got my assignments to write.

**Oli Howard:** All right, so it will help you to avoid things you want to avoid as well. That's unexpected. They've never heard that position as a benefit to the masters before, but I actually quite like it. Emily, can we get that onto some of the marketing materials?

**Emily Daring:** I've made a note, don't you worry.

**Oli Howard:** Very nice. Okay, great. Thank you. Let's move on from that. Actually, sorry, Liz. Liz C, do you want to add anything in terms of the time commitment and what people tend to do in order to try and manage the juggle?

**Liz Cochrane:** Yeah, I mean, the key things for me would be one of the things we do in the first few days in the masters is give loads of hints and tips about how to be studying in the absolutely most efficient way.

So, we're very big on, don't, if you've picked up a book, for goodness sake, don't read the whole book. You go in, you get what you need, you come out, you're really, really strategic about it in the same way, the way that you read articles, there's all sorts of hints and tips to make things, to speed things up for you.

And we do structure the programme as well so that if you're someone who wants to work at a steady pace throughout, you can do that, typically, certainly for the first three modules, there'll be a couple of weeks where you might be looking at being involved in a discussion board on a particular topic where you're sharing, you know, what you've been reading and, you know, what the implications are. And then you've got sort of eight or nine weeks or whatever to be preparing your bigger assignment as well.

So you can sort of just plot it out nicely. Obviously not everybody works that way and some people do, back end and it works for that too, really. And in terms of total time scale. It is like Liz and Erin have said there's a sort of an element of a piece of string to it. When I've asked people over the years, they've typically said like it's a day at the weekend and an evening, a couple of evenings during the week as well. It's the kind of scale that you're probably looking at. Oli or Donma, do you add anything else that is relevant and that I've missed?

**Oli Howard:** I think you've picked up on the main points, Liz. I'd only emphasize that it is different for each individual and if you work super efficiently on it, which I know is easier for some than for others, and you kind of maintain some boundaries, then it doesn't have to take over your life.

It is a serious commitment. Of course it is, it's a master's programme. And we're there to support the whole way through.

**Liz Cochrane:** And in fact, just to add to that, we are really clear right from the outset, don't let it take over your life. You absolutely don't want to do that. You need the time out. You need to be doing other stuff as well, because otherwise you'll you'll start to get stale. So yeah.

**Oli Howard:** And you'll be quoting communication theorists to your friends and loved ones and they'll start to look at you a bit funny by the time you're six months in. Okay, let's move on. There's a few questions about the similarities, differences between the masters and the advanced diploma. And also, how we would guide people as to which of those is most appropriate for practitioners at different stages in their career. Emily, is it all right if I come to you first on that in terms of the major distinctions?

**Emily Daring:** I'll pick up on that. I think Simon, he was asked a question about similarities and differences. He studied the advanced diploma. I think Neris is looking to choose between the courses.

**Oli Howard:** Exactly, yeah.

**Emily Daring:** So in terms of the two courses, so hopefully it makes you familiar with the profession map, so the levels of the courses obviously different to start with that. So the advanced diploma is equivalent to a level 6, so last year of an undergrad degree, and that is matched to our level 2 of our profession map.

The masters is obviously a fully fledged level 7 masters and it is mapped to levels three and four of the profession map. So the masters really is that strategic focused course and obviously the course team will be way better than I am at talking about the content on the masters but it is that strategic focus.

The advanced diploma is around how you're managing internal communication. You've moved beyond delivery and you're looking for those maybe business partner roles.

In terms of how they actually run the logistics the Masters is a very structured program you have 4 modules you're doing more. Your assessments, you've got things like discussion boards, which again, the course team be able to pick up on. And you've got that research project at the end. And obviously it's a 13 month programme.

The advanced diploma is less prescriptive. There aren't modules as such on the advanced diploma. You set your own objectives and you work through those objectives and you also do a collaborative group project. So everyone's experience of the advanced diploma is going to be different.

Their experience of the masters, obviously it's applicable to what you're doing in the workplace, but the structure and the themes and the content are the same. It is that masters programme.

And I think the only thing I would pick up on is the advanced programme is fully online and the masters does have the option. I know someone in the question has asked because they're in the US, we have in-person workshops on the masters as well, so the structure is a little bit different as well on that. So I think hopefully that, from my perspective, the IOIC picks up on that, but obviously the course team, and I know Domina teaches on the advanced diploma as well. And Chris, who we mentioned earlier, is also the facilitator of the advanced diploma and he's now going to be a module lead on the masters.

So there's a lot of work and co-collaboration to ensure that the levels of the course are very distinct. So Simon, you would find it is that step up.

**Domna Lazidou:** Can I say a couple of things? Obviously, I don't have, I mean, Chris will have the overview of the diploma programme. I only teach on two of the modules. But from what I have seen and the comparison between the two, I would say exactly all of the things I said absolutely right. There is much more focus on academic rigor on the MA. So there is breadth and depth in terms of academic sources and topics that we bring in. And in terms of your assignments, again, it's much more demanding in terms of how much you have to engage with, academic literature. So there is a depth in the kind of the learning experience that the MA gives you because, you know, it's a master's. That's what you get at the end of it.

So, but one of the things I would say is that increasingly, I'm very impressed with the intellectual ability and the critical thinking I get from students on the diploma course. So I remember every

time almost at the end, Chris and I have the same discount, God, these students, they could easily be on the masters. Don't be afraid to try it.

It's just, I think, expect more commitment in terms of how much you need to give to your studies if you're doing the masters.

**Oli Howard:** Liz, is it worth picking up on that to say a little bit about how the application process works and what people need to provide us with in order to get onto the programme?

**Liz Cochrane:** Yeah, sure. So you will, when you apply, there's an application form asks you a series of questions, as you'd expect. And you also need to provide a little portfolio of work that you've done to date. So that would include things like an example of a communication plan, an example of some research you've been involved with, an example of communication writing, sort of channels that you've been responsible for.

What I do is I review all of that and then interview each individual applicant and so what I'm actually assessing whether or not somebody has the requisite experience to be accepted at the master's level. And it really is that, sort of it's that strategic appetite, I think, and demonstrating that you've got the potential to fulfil that, that's key.

The other thing that's relevant here is that if you don't have a degree to start with, that's not a barrier to entry because there's an extra step you go through in the process. I will give you an assignment to do, a sample assignment to do that you work through, but I use it absolutely as a coaching opportunity. So you'll sort of start to work on it, send the draft through to me, I'll give you lots of comments, send it back, you'll, you know, sort of have a look at those, send it back to me. And it's all designed to make sure that you've really got that academic rigor that Donna was just talking about.

And I would sum up our academic rigor as being, it's a combination of making sure that you can really back up every single thing you say, either with a source or with evidence. And that's so valuable as a way of working generally in your working lives, because it so helps with making sure that you can be really justifying, proposals, et cetera, that you're making.

And then I think the other thing is, sort of Donna was saying, lots of good examples of critical thinking with diploma students, but we're really getting you to flex that muscle, as far as critical analysis is concerned. And I think that's just one of the most valuable things you get from the programme. And I've had students come back and say that as well, because it means you can really hold your own when you're working with those senior leaders and we'll be really encouraging you and pushing you on that, which is getting into the once it starts, but kind of was a natural segue from the application process as well.

**Oli Howard:** Gaynor's asked some questions specifically about in-person online and needing a live case study for the research project. We will definitely get to those. There were also a set of questions about the assessments and I just want to make sure that we pick up on those as well to give people a clear sense of what the shape of the assessments looks like as we go through the programme.

So I'll start off on this. Then Liz, Erin, I might ask you both to comment a bit on which of the assessments you got the most from, to give people a sense of kind of the colour of it as well.

So in terms of the number of assessments, there are seven over the course of the whole programme. Liz alluded to this a little bit earlier, that for the first three modules, you have a big assignment and then you have a smaller assessment that looks a bit different.

So the big assignment is always a 4,000 word written submission. And the topic and format of that varies slightly dependent on which of the three modules it is. And then that equates to 80% of your mark for the module. And then there's a smaller assessment which comprises 20% of the mark for the module. And that varies. It looks like different things.

So actually, Erin and this, you didn't do quite the same thing. We've just completed the small assignment for module 2 and it's a video submission now. You talk for 10 minutes about the nature of the employment relationship in your organization and submit that to us. It's a thing we call an academic poster in the first module and it's a discussion board in the third module. So that varies as you go through the program to keep things a bit different and interesting.

And then we have the research project for, which is the only assessment for module 4, which it's worth saying a bit about as well. And there have been a couple of specific questions about that. So we'll deep dive on that in a minute too. Liz, Erin, maybe Liz, if we start with you, which of the assessments did you get the most from?

**Liz Fairbrother:** So that's a really tricky question because I think you definitely get a lot from every single one.

I think the one I enjoyed the most of writing the most was the third assignment, the module 3 assignment, which is all about stakeholders and influencing my influencing. And I have I have a stakeholder that I found extremely tricky. He and I just we could not see how we just butt heads, we could not understand each other at all. And I honestly thought that he was just, a lunatic. Turns out we're communicating in completely different ways. We thought about things in completely different ways. And it was only from doing this assignment that I suddenly realised everything I assumed about him was completely wrong. And so I've now changed the way that I work and communicate with him. And we've gone from, you know, bashing heads to send each other gifts. So right from what literally one extreme to the other. But that worked with him. But it's also something that I can now do with every one of my stakeholders.

I know that I need to flex. I know what I need to do to be able to do that. And it was an enjoyable assignment. And it's really great when you get feedback that this was a good assignment to read or it really, really is special.

You do have to make sure that you do try and put as much into both elements of the assessment, the assignment and the second part, the 20%, because they are equally as important, even if sometimes you kind of think, well, I don't know if I don't have the energy for the second part, but I'd suggest really making sure that you really try and focus on that as well.

**Oli Howard:** Thanks, Liz. That's fantastic. It's great to hear that you got such practical value out of that assignment because that is one of the things that causes communicators so many day-

to-day problems in their roles, just running into these relationship issues they can't get past. Erin, same question to you. Also, could I ask you to comment a bit on the support and feedback you got while you were working on assignments from the course team?

And while you answer that, I'm going to let my daughter in who's just got home from school. I'll be back in a minute.

**Erin Askew:** No worries. So I would say my favourite bit was module 2. I think module 1 is all about laying the foundations and I've been in a situation where I've been out of the classroom for 25 years. So it was just like I was in that process of really, and my boss nailed it, switching back on my academic brain.

When I got to module 2, it was switched back on and I just felt it flow. I just kind of like, I really felt like when I started module 2, I really came into my own.

It was also quite helpful as it was kind of around a change that had happened in your organization. You had to write a strategy and a plan. And I was in a situation where my organization had recently gone through a change it got communicated appallingly, badly, really terribly and a lot of damage was done as a result of the way it was communicated and this kind of assignment almost gave me the opportunity to put right all those wrongs and write down exactly how I would have done it if I had been there. And it was quite cathartic, I think as well, because it was just like all these like looking back at everything that had gone wrong. And it just felt like being able to make it right again.

That being said, I did also really enjoy the third module about kind of, I was writing about my boss, really delving into his personality. And he'd always said to me, you know, we're almost the same person, Erin. And then looking at his personality and learning more about that and looking at mine the same time, I could see exactly where we were the same, but also where we had differences and how I could use my differences to help him.

So, just incredibly, incredibly interesting, but also, really, really valuable, not only in your job now, but in every part of life. Even with my husband, I now look at his personality and I think, where are we different and how I can use the skills that I learned on the course to ease those moments of tension.

In terms of the support, it's phenomenal. I don't want to put kind of, I can't really underestimate how good it is. So a couple of days after we had the first in person session, I had a planned operation. And after my operation, I didn't quite come out all guns blazing, should we say? And I could feel myself really getting behind on module one.

So right from the off, I felt like I was coming out of the blocks behind everybody else. And the support I had from Liz in particular and Oli just bringing me along and never pressure, but real support to get me back on track and get me in a place where, like I said, by module 2, I was bang right on it and ready to go. So, in terms of that support, fantastic.

And then throughout, when you're submitting your kind of your draft assignments and you're getting feedback on them, the feedback really starts to make you think of things differently. And it just like sometimes puts that little light bulb on and you go, yeah, of course. So, the feedback

is, it sometimes is challenging to receive because, we all think this is what it is. And then when somebody comes in with, some, maybe try this. And at first you start thinking, okay. But then when you really delve into it, the learning you get from that feedback alone is phenomenal. So thank you everybody for all your feedback and all your red pen. It was, yeah, remarkable. Thank you.

**Oli Howard:** I hadn't told Erin I was going to ask her that question. But we do encourage students to send us drafts for all of the assignments as you go through. We will comment on those, especially early on when you're thinking about how you're going to approach the assignment question. As Erin says, it's all a really vital part of the learning process. So it's not just that you get a workshop with us and then we disappear out of your lives and you submit something into an online platform 8 weeks later, it's that we're working with you to develop your thinking throughout the process of crafting and drafting and submitting.

**Erin Askew:** It's literally every step of the way, Oli. So you're there holding our hands and encouraging us. So thank you for that. It's really appreciated.

**Oli Howard:** And we love doing it, Erin. So I want to turn our attention to the research project in module 4. Domna, do you want to describe a little bit what we ask people to do there? And then someone's asked, which I think is a great question, what Erin and Liz covered for their research topics. And also while we're picking up on that, let's pick up on Gaynor's question about what do you do if you don't work in an organisation at the moment? So perhaps we deal with that at the tail end of it, but we will pick up on that part of it too. Domna, you first.

**Domna Lazidou:** Actually, as it happens, we have, I've written a whole piece about the final project, which should be on the website. Stella, I'm assuming, is still there. So if people want more detail, I'll describe it in a minute, but if people want more detail, there is more detail about it on the website.

So what you have to do for your project in module 4 is choose an issue that is critical for the organization, a business issue before you decide what the communication problem is, and then look at how you as a practitioner can address it through communication. And that becomes your research focus for your research project.

What you are asked to do is to decide exactly what your research question is, what particular issue you're researching and to what purpose, and then design a research project. So design a methodology, choose a sample, come up with a research question protocol if you're doing qualitative research or a survey design if you're doing quantitative research and then conduct the research, analyze the results, put it all together, come up with your findings and on the back of that decide what your recommendations for communication action are for the organisation. So that's a project of about 8,000 words, an essay over 8,000 words. And that's pretty much 100%, well it is, 100% of your mark for that module. You don't have to do anything else to pass that module.

So most people do decide to do their research in their own organization. The access is easy for one. And of course, you already know what the issues are. You have a vested interest, all of those things.

If for any reason you don't want to do the research in your organization, you have valid reasons, or indeed you are not working in an organization at the moment. You have a number of other options. You can, if you are a consultant, for example, you can do it with a client organization. You can approach a previous organization where you still have good relationships. You can negotiate access there. You could also do a piece of research that involves other practitioners. So you can choose a topic which is of interest to the profession. And your subjects, your research subjects can then be other practitioners. They can be members of the cohort in the masters or indeed you can reach out to people in your broader network through LinkedIn, etc.

It will depend really on what it is you're researching. You have to have very valid reasons why you're choosing the research question you're choosing and the sample you're choosing and the research design you're choosing. And we take you through a very rigorous, very rigorous training on how to do your methodology and your research design. Is that enough from me?

**Oli Howard:** Lovely. Thank you, Domna. That's brilliant. Go on, Liz.

**Liz Cochrane:** I'll just add to that. You do also, you have one of us supervises you through the process as a whole. So it's not just the training initially. You've then got somebody that's kind of working alongside you to help you really get the most out of the project overall.

**Oli Howard:** Yeah, good addition. Thank you, Liz. So very briefly, Erin, what topic did you choose and what were the main kind of features of interest for you of the project? How did you find it doing that research?

**Erin Askew:** So following on from what I said about module 2, where we had this hastily communicated return to office mandate as it was and everything that went wrong with that.

I then for module 4 looked at how do we now go about rebuilding trust with employees through communication. I can honestly say it's the single most powerful thing I've done in my entire communications career. The lessons that I learned through doing that, I will take with me for my entire career going forward. What I've got out of it at the end is what I'm classing as my blueprint for leadership communication. And I think whichever role I go into from here on for the next 20 odd years of my career, I will be going back to that report and implementing what I learned as a result of that report.

Something that I found absolutely fascinating, following on a lot from module 3 when you're kind of thinking about other people's personality and thinking about your own, I felt with module 4 is a lot about self-reflection. So for example, when I was talking to employees. I've got this tendency, I wanted to defend things because I felt so passionate, but I just had to sit back and let them talk and let them tell me how terrible everything was. And it was a real moment of learning for me around listening to understand. And I'd only ever seen things from the leadership point of view before. And now all of a sudden, I could totally see why these employees were feeling the way they were. It wasn't about that they were just moaning, it was because they honestly cared and they felt hurt and let down. And you suddenly find this whole new level of understanding of the things that are going on in your organisation and exactly what you can do to help put them right.

So hands down, the most powerful piece of work I've ever done.

**Oli Howard:** Fantastic. Thanks, Erin. Liz, follow that.

**Liz Fairbrother:** Yeah, thanks, Erin. Yeah. So for my research project, in 2023, Currys launched a initiative to try and tackle significant operational inefficiencies. So and our continuous improvement culture. So we launched a colleague ideation platform called The Pitch and we did big campaigns to obviously get colleagues to submit ideas and to engage with it.

A year in we found that our operational teams were all over it, but our support functions who were desk-based colleagues who had a bit of a wider view of the business weren't really engaging with at all. So I was, I really was really interested to try and understand if you take away time, if you take away access, you take away all those things that you assume that would stop someone from accessing a platform like that, an online platform, why weren't these colleagues engaging with it?

I found the methodology section really helpful. Again, stuff I'd never even thought about in a million years, but even thinking about who I was choosing, who we were choosing to take part and why they were right or why they weren't right.

Even I'm currently doing another research project at the moment internally and I was thinking about the validity of the data, how it's reliable, you know, all these things that I would never have thought of before that and also including references so I can back up what I'm saying and why I'm making these recommendations.

Yeah, and it was really, really interesting because what I assumed was the reasons weren't the reason at all. And so when we rolled out the pitch to a different area of the business, I was able to say, here you go, here's a plan on why everything that we did initially, what we could have done better. And it's had a much better rollout into the retail area. So it really did, has made a difference. Some recommendations have really made a difference, which is really good. And like Erin said, you know, I've used this research and the process 100 times even since January in everything I've done, you know, you've got that in your brain.

You are thinking about that, whereas you wouldn't have done before. And 8000 words sounds horrific. I know even the 4000 words sounds horrific, but honestly, that is reaching that workout is not your worry at all. It is. It's being able to have the discipline of being able to go and edit yourself and bring it back in, I think is one of the biggest challenges that you face. Yeah, that's what I would say.

**Oli Howard:** And that's true throughout that, the word counts might seem daunting when you first see them. They are not. Your challenge will be being able to express everything you want to within that limitation, which again, we support with. So thank you.

Both great projects, if you don't mind me saying, Liz, Erin, they're really interesting topics and I can see the practical value that you've got from them.

Let's come back to Gaynor's other question about the in-person and online participation. Liz, do you want to pick up on, let's see, sorry, do you want to pick up on this one in terms of what's expected and what options people have?

**Liz Cochrane:** Okay, so we run each of the work main workshops we run face to face and we find people really get a huge amount out of that because obviously you've got all that additional interaction that you don't have on a Zoom or a Teams call.

But in each instance, we do offer the opportunity for people to join online if they need to we tend to say you probably find that the in-person will give you the most out of it, but people who join virtually also really benefit and say, they're glad that opportunity existed. And for example, we've had people who, students from the States, from Canada, from all over Europe, from further afield as well. And it can be really, really useful in those circumstances. And sometimes for people who are UK based too, there's just, you know, there's reasons why it's easier to join online.

Over and above the workshops, which are two days in length, you've then got some additional online sessions that happen the following week. With modules 2 and three in particular, those are led by guest speakers who are kind of thought leaders in their field. Oli, it probably makes sense if you talk about those in a second.

Modules one and four, there is some sort of a, well, in module one, there's some additional kind of core content that we're sharing in those online sessions. And I'd stress as well, all of the sessions, both the workshop sessions and the online sessions, are incredibly interactive. We're not into, you know, sort of just talking at people want interaction all the way through during the plenary and there's loads and loads of group work and discussion.

And we're constantly, our mantra throughout is theory into practice, theory into practice. What does this mean? What are the implications for your organisation? Because there's no point in learning theory or knowing theory if it's not going to be useful in some way, shape or form to you.

Sorry, module 4 is slightly different in that we have our half day in late July to start people with their, the process of sinking and doing a little bit of reading over August if they wish to. And then there's a two day again in-house workshop in September. But once again, all of those can be attended either virtually or in-house. Does that cover that?

**Oli Howard:** I think it covers it. I mean, basically, Gaynor, it's fine. And for everyone else who's thinking about whether they'd need to do elements of it online as well or all of it online, it's entirely possible to do so. You miss out on some of the stuff around the fringes, but you certainly don't miss out on any of the content.

You get the same level of support on all of the assignments. People do it every single year and have a perfectly good experience of the programme. So don't let it put you off for sure.

**Liz Cochrane:** And I'd add we've got lots of experience of running virtual as well. We bear the scars of it from time to time in terms of the technology and everything, but you won't feel that you're just sitting there listening in. You're very much felt, you feel like you're part of the whole thing.

But you nearly skipped just talking a bit about our brilliant guest speakers, which I would do.

**Oli Howard:** So currently this year we've had Professor Rita Men, who has produced probably more original research on internal communication topics than anyone else working in the industry at the moment. She's with the University of Florida and leads a global group of researchers and practitioners developing internal communication standards and practices.

We have a session with Rachel Miller, who will be known to many of you. I'm sure she's written two books on internal communication practice now and runs the very successful All Things IC consultancy. She does a session for us on collaboration, social media, AI, knowledge management.

We have a session with Hilary Scarlett. Hilary wrote a book which has been updated twice now on neuroscience and change in organisations. That's absolutely fascinating. You get some real insights into how the brain works and how that helps to explain how people respond to much of the communication that they're involved in their lives. So that is a brilliant session.

We have a session with Dominic Walters, who's the IOIC president and the co-host of the Future of Work podcast with Jen. And he does a session for us on coaching leaders to be stronger communicators. He's got tons of practical experience of that from working with huge organizations over the course of his career. So again, that's a real goldmine, that session.

We have a session that focuses on technology that's been fronted by Mark Wright, who founded the Simply IC consultancy. He's retiring and traveling. So we're just in the process of lining someone up to lead that session for next year. But we will keep that going because it's important that we have some expert speakers on technology.

And we've had a couple of bonus sessions over the last year or two as well. Had a session with Alison Arnott, who's recently written a book on crisis management in internal communication, which was really interesting.

And we had a session with Michael Heller, yes, who has been leading the history of internal communication project over the course of the last two, three years. And that was great as well.

So yeah, you get to hear from loads of fascinating people as part of the programme. I think we, I think we've exhausted all of the questions except I know Jan asked some questions about some specific topics. So firstly, Emily, can people get hold of the course handbook at this point?

**Emily Daring:** No, not normally, but what we can do, depending on the, we have things like module descriptors and extra bits we can give. But no, the course handbook wouldn't be available until people are on the programme. Yeah.

**Oli Howard:** Okay. You can provide some outlines of the content of each module beyond what we've said here. People can just e-mail you for that.

**Emily Daring:** Just e-mail us. Yeah, e-mail either me or Stella put our emails in and just ask us for more information. And obviously they are, depending on, for example, if they're having reading list, that is an indicative list, but to give you an idea, because every year it does evolve and change.

**Oli Howard:** Yeah, and in terms of some of the specific things you've asked about, ROI, we have a session in module 2 that focuses entirely on measurement and different approaches to measurement of internal communication. So I would say we touch on ROI as part of that.

We look at employee experience as well as one of a variety of ways you can view the employment relationship in module 2. And we look at AI in module 3 and its applications for internal communication. So all of those things we touch upon.

It's probably important to say that what we don't do on the programme is instruct you how to use certain technologies or to carry out certain processes because it's pitched at a strategic level. And what we're interested in primarily is almost the psychology of the employer-employee relationship and the culture of organisations and how we navigate those things as communications all of which are sometimes hard to measure and explain in entirely quantitative ways. But we touch on all of the stuff that you've described there to some degree or another. Liz, I don't know if you wanted to add anything to that.

**Liz Cochrane:** No, I think that felt like a pretty comprehensive part. I mean, I was thinking, with AI, we actually, these days, I can think there's bits of it in module one and module 2 as well, but you're right, it's mainly module 3 that we'd look at that. And we're constantly also thinking about content and making sure it's really totally relevant for people and is what people need. And to help with that, we have this really, we strongly believe in employee voice. I'm very, very passionate about it. And that extends to the student relationship as well. And so we have lots of consultation about, okay, so to what extent is this meeting your needs? What else do we need to be thinking about?

And then with IOIC, obviously IOIC is very much sort of tuned into the future and what the future needs of professionals are. And as part of that, there's the Skills and Standards Board, which is quite newly established. And I'm the chair of that board.

So again, you've got a whole group of highly experienced professionals who sort of will be feeding in their thoughts, et cetera, about needs. And sort of the profession map came out of the last iteration of that board and we'll be looking at updating that.

And then they, the whole thing works together as an entity really to make sure that we've really got our finger on the pulse.

**Oli Howard:** It's never the same masters twice. We're always updating our materials a week before delivering a workshop, we'll be looking around for new things that we can add to it, new perspectives we can bring to it. So that's always the case. We try and keep it as current as it can be.

**Domna Lazidou:** And is it worth saying, Ollie, with reference to AI in particular, we've just started a research project as a team.

**Oli Howard:** Yes, it is worth saying that, Domna. Say a bit more about it.

**Domna Lazidou:** So we've only just begun it. We're looking at how communication professionals and others in organizations are using AI for internal communication purposes and what is the

impact of that, what support, training, learning do people need. And as we are doing the research and as we are learning things, inevitably it will inform, that will inform both the content of the course and possibly also approaches, teaching and learning approaches. And I'm sure we'll be sharing our findings with IOIC or through IOIC. So yeah, that's a little bit of a watch this space.

**Oli Howard:** Watch this space indeed. Emily, do you want to do a bit on dates, costs and probably worth saying a bit on financing options as well?

**Emily Daring:** Yeah, absolutely. And I'm just really quickly going to also pick up on support as while I'm talking. Obviously, you've got the amazing support of all the course team. You've got Stella on the IOIC side who she would never say herself, but is incredible, very efficient, always there to support. I'm there to oversee as well.

But also, students are fully fledged students of Solent University and everything that entails. So there's a sector librarian, for example, called Dan Scupp, who is incredible, lovely, always looking to help. I'm sure Erin and Liz, if they had contact with Dan, can testify. Whenever we had feedback, it was always, Dan is amazing. So you get that support. And also there's things like wellbeing services and support as students. So I just wanted to add to that, add that there.

Yeah, so start date. So it's starting on 3rd November. The course schedule is actually available on the website for you. So anyone can't find that, just let us know. You can download and look at the dates. So we obviously get that arranged quite a lot in advance. So anyone planning ahead can plan kind of from now.

The cost is 7,350 pounds plus VAT. And we offer flexible interest free payment plans. So anyone who's either looking to be supported by the organisation or self fund, we try where possible to be as flexible as possible. So it could be some people sponsored by the organisation might be able to pay up front, others might need to split in financial years. If people are self-funding, we know it is a commitment, a financial commitment. So you can split that. It could be a monthly payment plan across the duration of your studies that can reach to sometimes 15 months, for example. It could be splitting into set chunks. We can work around you. We want to kind of help where possible. So hopefully that covers that side of things.

And in terms of our international students, in terms of VATs, we get this question quite a lot. If you're self-funding, VAT is applicable. If your company's funding you, VAT is not applicable because of the UK law. So just add that there as well. Any other questions on finance while I'm talking about it? I know it can be. We'll also, often people that are looking to be supportive of an organisation need to put in a business case. We can support with that. We've supported many students in the past. We can offer support.

As everyone's talked about on this call today, the course is so valuable for you as professionals, but also for your businesses and your organisations or if you work with clients. And so I would say it really is worth asking your organisation for support because they are going to get so much back from you studying this program.

Not just that amazing research project, but throughout the course, you'll be taking that learning, implementing it. You can cascade that learning down if you work with teams, you work

with other members. So it really is worth making. It's a very special course in that respect. So it really is also worth making that case.

I think you've asked, is there additional cost of books and resources? So as Solent students, you get access to their full online library. So there are a lot of resources on there. You also get access to what's called the Sconal programme. So if you're based in the UK, it's a programme that Solent University is enrolled with and it means that you can visit other universities who are also in that scheme across the UK. So if you want to use a physical book and borough book and you're nowhere near Southampton, you could visit another library.

But I would say Erin and Liz may correct me on this. I would say people probably want to buy some of their own books and that obviously would be an additional cost because people want to make notes, want to write in those columns. So I would normally say students should have some small budget for books, but you have a lot of resources you can gain through Solent and through your kind of through us as well. Erin, you came off mic there.

**Erin Askew:** Yeah, I was going to say I probably spent about 50 pounds, I would say, on books because I just bought them off eBay and I think somebody else was on the course was saying world of books. You just get them really cheaply on there. And whilst they might not be the up-to-date edition, you know, it's neither here nor there. So, the information in them is pretty much the same.

And the online library is phenomenal, absolutely phenomenal. I still go on there now and I do a little bit of reading every now and again.

**Liz Cochrane:** And so is Dan, the librarian. He is just unbelievable in how helpful he is, including if you're stuck and you want to find, a source on a particular topic, he'll help you with all of that. He's just the personal service is phenomenal and I'd say for Solent generally they are such a student focused university and not all universities are but they you know they really value the student experience and want it to be as good as possible for people.

**Emily Daring:** Yeah definitely. Liz F, I think you were going to, were you going to add something?

**Liz Fairbrother:** I was just going to say that I think I'm SCONUL's biggest fan. I found that so helpful. I live near Lincoln, so I went into Lincoln University and some of my best Saturdays were spent in the library at Lincoln University. Really great to get other books that aren't necessarily on the reading list. And also, you know, putting yourself in an environment which is all about study, I found really helpful. Even if it did make me feel a little bit old, but we'll skin over that. Generally, it was a fantastic experience.

**Emily Daring:** Thanks, Liz.

**Oli Howard:** Thanks, Liz. I think I've covered, we've covered everything that's been put in the chat, but let me just give an opportunity for any final questions anyone's got. If you just want to come off mute or pop your hand up. Then we can pick up anything else. Now's your opportunity. Any final questions? In which case, I guess we've been comprehensive, Liz.

**Liz Cochrane:** One thing I'd add, because I think we've talked around it, but maybe not said it explicitly, and it's back to the assignments again. We are pretty anal in our obsession with theory into practice, I would say.

And one of the things about each of the big assignments you do, and the small assignments are all focused on your specific organisation as well. But each of the assignments will have conclusions and recommendations. You're all the way through what you're doing is taking current organisational scenarios and really exploring them and prodding them with the theory and using all your critical analysis, etc, in order to come up with something that's practical at the other end of it, which I think sort of underlines the point that Emily was making as well about the value that the organisation gets.

And we will typically get people saying to us, within three or four weeks of the programme starting, oh, yeah, I've got stakeholders who are saying they're seeing a difference. So it's a good selling point if your business is thinking about paying for it. The business value that they will get from it is absolutely huge.

**Oli Howard:** Save you on internal comms consultancy.

**Liz Cochrane:** Absolutely.

**Oli Howard:** All right. So it sounds like we probably have picked up everyone's questions. Thank you everyone for joining. We really appreciate it. I'm just going to hand over to Liz, I guess, for any final thoughts you've got before we let people go today, Liz.

**Liz Cochrane:** OK, no, thank you. Thank you, Ollie. You told me you were going to do this and I'd forgotten again because otherwise I would have said that what I've just said as my final...

**Oli Howard:** Oh, OK, was that what it was? In which case, no, that's fine. This is slick. No problem. Just people in indication of our general level of coordination as we go through the programme. Right, in which case I think it is just to thank people and we really appreciate you taking the time to join.

We really appreciate your interest in the programme. We hope to see as many of you as possible when we get around to induction day in November.

**Liz Cochrane:** I have thought of one final thing after all, so not as slick as you were claiming. If people want to just have a chat about it, then There are few things in life that I like more than talking about the masters. So I'm always happy just to, have a one-to-one chat, about anything that you might want to be talking through at all and just get in touch with Stella and Emily and we'll get that fixed up.

**Emily Daring:** I was going to add that at the end. She's not just saying that. Liz absolutely adores talking to prospective students. So yeah.

**Oli Howard:** Lovely. That's a good note to end on. Thanks everybody for your time. We really appreciate it.

**Emily Daring:** Thank you all.

**Liz Cochrane:** Thanks.