

RSCDS Press Pack Materials for Branches

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

The Royal Scottish Country Dance Society is a global network of Branches and Affiliated Groups, and at its core are passionate, dedicated members who love to Dance Scottish. We believe that it is important for dance enthusiasts' worldwide to see the energy and dedication of our members and the benefits of Dance Scottish for their social life, health and community. One of the best ways to achieve this is through securing media coverage, so many more people can about the amazing things your branch offers.

Why has the RSCDS developed this pack?

We hope that this pack will help your Branch promote Scottish country dancing more widely in your area. The guidance is aimed at helping you strengthen the relationships you have with local media and be more successful in getting press coverage for your RSCDS branch stories. These stories may be about important people in the branch who have contributed a lot to SCD (say a person receiving a branch award or Scroll of Honour); work your branch might be doing linking with others in your area which is benefiting the community; or promoting classes, events or activities you are trying to attract more people to. You might be aiming to recruit more members to your branch through the media.

This Press Pack is designed to;

- a) Give you the tools needed to approach media effectively, and so increasing the chance of them covering your story.
- b) Help your Branch catalogue any relevant information, pertinent to current or future press inquiries which will help others in the branch, in future, to learn from your experience and to have some continuity. It is also useful to have this information sent to Headquarters for inclusion in a mass directory to assist with future promotion.

The guide is divided into the five main steps you might take to develop success with the media:

Step 1: Doing your research - gathering information on what your local media outlets are, the key contacts in these outlets and what interests them.

Step 2: Planning your media activities over the year – what key stories, topics or events does your branch want local media coverage for over the year and setting up a simple time plan for when you need to get started on each event/topic.

Step 3: Finding your ‘hook’ or ‘story’ or becoming a journalist - for each individual press article put yourself in the journalist’s shoes and think what the main interesting “hook” might be to attract the attention of the journalist/editor and the reader. An event is not a story in itself – something else needs to be the story, and the event is just included in the details.

Step 4: Writing the press release or article – this puts more detail on the issue(s) you summarised in your ‘hook’, including details of any event or activity that you want to publicise (i.e. location, time, how to book, contact info, etc.)

Step 5: Working with the journalist to secure the story - send the press release off to targeted journalists/press outlets that you think will have a particular interest in this story or hook and where possible follow up to warm them up a bit more.

Step 6: Keeping records of successful (or unsuccessful) media work and learning from this – what outlets are interested, who wrote a story but also who was not interested and why / any feedback.

STEP 1 DOING YOUR RESEARCH

Research a number of things. The first is to look at what your media outlets are – these might be local newspapers, local radio, and local TV or community publications. Or you may have a regional or national story – in which case look national.

In addition to print there is always the world of digital media. Media outlets are now on Social Media sites and linking press with radio, TV and the web is easier than ever before. Many media outlets offer space via digital, print, or both, so think about how you want your readers to interact with your article as various platforms have different audiences. What works for print won’t necessarily work for digital, and vice versa.

The second is to then to research who in these media outlets might be interested in your stories – which might be related to dance, to fitness, to community activity, cultural aspects or health for example. Don’t just limit yourself to thinking about who is

interested in Scottish dance – there are other ‘stories’ to be told. Keep a record of the name and contact details of the Editor but also specific journalists with niche interests such as the Arts correspondent, or the journalist with responsibility to cover the sports and fitness or community activity.

There are several ways to get your topic published, including an article, letter to the editor, feature piece, picture, etc. So you also need to think about this and find out what the options are and which you are most likely to be successful with.

Step 1 resources: RSCDS Press Details Excel Spreadsheet

Attached is a spreadsheet which is a simple way to record any contacts you make within a media outlet during your research. It is essential that you write down the contact’s name, position, organisation, then as you work through your steps you can also keep a record of progress with the journalist. You can also keep any other relevant details that might be vital to not only the coverage but also a possible future relationship.

Please use this spreadsheet in all aspects of press coverage. If you are unsuccessful in obtaining exposure, the contact details of the media outlet are still important as Headquarters may wish to use these details at any point in the future for marketing purposes.

Step 1 Tip:

When researching media contacts, the best method is to find contact information via the About Us page, Contact Us page, check the Editorials or telephone. Remember; only approach those contacts who are relevant: if you are holding a social dance event, a contact in the Sports department won’t be able to assist you but get in touch with the Editor, Assistant Editor, or a reporter in the Arts or Entertainment sector. However, if you are organising a danceathon for 5 hours to build fitness the Sports or Health reporter might be interested.

STEP 2 PLANNING YOUR MEDIA ACTIVITIES OVER THE YEAR

Have a look at your Branch’s calendar for the year – what significant activities are you doing over the year – courses or classes, events, anniversaries or celebrations for example. Think about which of these might generate good stories that journalists might be interested in. Put these into the spreadsheet attached which is a planner for the year and then think about when you might need to start planning press work for each opportunity you have identified over the year.

Keeping track of when you need to send out your first Press Release, second Press Release, etc. and what details are included in each will help you ensure that you are not repeating details, and will also allow you to create a Media Strategy. This is a good way of seeing where you could improve tactics, what worked in which campaign, and plan for future events.

Step 2 resources: Spreadsheet for Press planning for the year and for an event

In addition to recording the details of your media contacts on the spreadsheet at Step 1, there is also a spreadsheet to create a Press Plan for the year and then also one for a Press Release Timeline to help you coordinate press materials when preparing for an event.

Step 2 Tip:

The first Press Release is usually sent out at least a month before the event; this is to make all relevant media outlets aware of your event and to allow them enough time to plan for a representative to be present. A second Press Release could be sent out two weeks before the event to remind the media outlet that your event is indeed going forward, and to explain any details, relay the itinerary, and make the representative aware of any special instructions or permissions.

STEP 3 FINDING YOUR 'HOOK' or 'STORY' – becoming a Journalist

Finding a 'hook' or 'story' to interest the reader and the journalist is key to success. You have to get the journalist interested otherwise they will not run your story. The event or the class itself is very rarely the story – you just sneak the details of the event into the article alongside the story!

When thinking about publicising an event or an activity, a great way to start is to put yourself in the shoes of a journalist. What is it about your event that might make a story or be exciting or appealing to a reader? Often hooks for stories are about interesting people or personal stories (long lost sisters meet up at the dance, a young person who achieves something new or challenging is getting an award at the event, an older person is still very active and has achieved something challenging, someone is doing something helpful for the local community, etc.). Sometimes the hook might be about an anniversary (your Branch is 50 years old and someone who is coming to the event has been a member for these 50 years) or a historical aspect (you are holding your event in an ancient monument). If you know important people, the hook can involve someone important (e.g. a celebrity or a local politician or well recognised person). Another way

A Press Release should be unique to each story (which might be related to a specific event), and the content aligned with your press schedule. For example, when sending out your **first** Press Release to a Media outlet, the information should be topical, focus on the hook (as mentioned above but you can also explain your event, a bit of background on the Society and your Branch, etc. It is much easier to get press coverage with an interesting hook!

A follow up Press Release should continue to focus on the hook and story, but you might also sum up the event or angle, provide specific “day of” details.

Each Press Release can have the same format, but the content will differ. You should start off with material that will be of interest to a media outlet(s) and focus on something specific. If you would like to provide background information on the Society, this can be added at the bottom of the press release, unless the media outlet asks for more details.

Good Photos – these can really make a story stand out!

When creating a Press Release always include information about photos; for example, whether you will provide accompanying photos or invite the media outlet to send a photographer.

When choosing a photo make sure that it relates to your ‘hook’ or ‘story’ – it needs to quickly grab attention and relate to the strapline. It also needs to be of good quality - at least 300dpi and at least 500MB.

In terms of content, it is really about the perspective of the article. If you want press coverage on a personal story or individual, make sure you have a good close up of the person or of them in the context of the story. If it is about a global audience attending a special event, then a large shot of a mixed group of people dancing will be best. Try and find positive images of happy people dancing; range of people showing variety of types of dancers; pictures that are not too busy and crowded, are well focused, colour balanced and not too bright or dark.

When you are choosing photos, remember – you must have the permission of the people in the photo – this is crucial particularly where there are children or vulnerable people in the photo, so when your branch is taking photos for future press articles please remember to secure permission first.

Step 4 Resources: Sample Press Release

Within this Press Pack is a sample press release that you are welcome to use when constructing your approach to a media outlet. This is a template with which to expand on with your own details.

We have also included three photos within this Press Pack that are designed to help you think about what kind of photos might appeal to media outlets.

In addition, we have also included two documents to help you attain photographs at events.

1) Photo Permission Form

- a. This should be used if a photo will be taken of a minor, in which case you need the approval of their parent or guardian in the form of a signature

2) Notice of Photography

- a. Place this notice up at your event preferably in plain sight for all attendees to see as each person should be aware they are being filmed or photographed.
- b. Make an announcement stating that filming/photography will be occurring and that if an individual is not comfortable with their image being taken to get in touch with staff
- c. If an individual will not give you permission the best course of action is to take their picture and then go about taking photos during the night. During the editing stage keep that photo handy so you can see which photos can be kept.

STEP 5 *WORKING WITH THE JOURNALIST*

Once you have submitted your press release or article someone must be available to deal with any questions or requests for follow up information, from the journalist. They are always working to tight deadlines and fast paced changes. It is important that whoever you put on your press release as the main contact for journalists is someone who will be available in the hours and days after you have sent it. This person must also be someone with a good knowledge of the 'story' who can get them quick answers or decisions. It is

important that this person has a mobile phone (and that this number is put on the contacts section of the press release (at the end), and so is readily contactable.

STEP 6 KEEPING RECORDS AND LEARNING FOR NEXT TIME

As mentioned at Step 1, it is helpful to keep records of your work with the press. When you have finished working with a particular story or press situation, update the spreadsheet you set up during your research. Which journalists were responsive or very un-responsive? What were they most interested in? What kind of stories seemed most attractive and worked best? Which stories did not get picked up?

It is good to keep copies of media coverage you secured (scanned or hard copies of newspaper articles, recordings of radio or TV coverage, etc) as guidance for others in the branch in future about what works.

ALL THE BEST WITH YOUR MEDIA WORK

This is a guide to help you approach media outlets and gain some publicity; it is a starting point to help you get in to a marketing state of mind. Approaching media can have many benefits for your branch and will get you in to the rhythm of promoting an event and thinking long term.

... and if you want more help ...

If you would like more information or advice, please feel free to contact us; info@rscds.org. In addition, there is more material for use on the RSCDS website under the Press section.

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