



The information authority

Key Communications Activities for 2008/2009

Paper 7: Key Communications Activities for
2008/2009

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1. Purpose of this document

The Board is asked to review this brief summary of key communications activities for 2008/2009 and to:

- comment on the areas for priority that have been outlined, and;
- agree these areas of activity, subject to any comments or amendments that board members wish to make.

2. Introduction

The Communications Strategy for 2008 - 2009 utilises our experience to date to build on the previous strategy produced by *the information authority* and now includes:

- Key Communications Principles
- Areas Identified for Development
- Communications Action Plan / Targets and Measures
- Communications partners
- Communications Channels and Planned Activities for the year

The strategy outlines how *the information authority* is going to manage its communications activities over the coming year in order to:

- Develop our communications channels with new stakeholder audiences (e.g. local authorities).
- Develop further our reputation as an independent organisation working in a balanced and fair way on behalf of the FE system to reduce data burden and improve data standards.
- Ensure that stakeholder communications are consistent, synchronised, and appropriate for building and maintaining stakeholder commitment to the intended *information authority* outcomes.
- Engage the right stakeholders at the right time (objective-based stakeholder engagement), so they can contribute to the development and implementation of *the information authority's* plans and work.
- Continue to build on our network of contacts so that reciprocal relationships are built between *the information authority* and key stakeholder colleagues and to ensure that we are all dealing with the most relevant people.

3. Description

In the paragraphs below are a summary of proposed key areas for development for the coming year that have been extracted from the Communications Strategy. The Board are invited to note and agree these proposals, all of which are related closely to the actions in the Communications Action Plan (attached at *Appendix A*).

In brief, the Communications Action Plan contains the following targets:

- Target 1: To increase awareness of *the information authority* and our work with stakeholders.
- Target 2: To increase stakeholder engagement in our activities and gather useful feedback.
- Target 3: To increase our media coverage / general profile.
- Target 4: To ensure that our staff are kept informed and consulted.
- Target 5: To raise awareness and engage with colleagues at the LSC.
- Target 6: To increase brand recognition of *the information authority* and Data Service at a regional and national level.
- Target 7: To ensure that data users and providers are able to engage with relevant teams effectively (i.e. *the information authority*, Data Service, MIAP and LSC Funding Policy Team).
- Target 8: To effectively engage with DIUS and DCSF Policy makers.
- Target 9: To engage effectively with local authorities.

Areas for development:

Further details on all the points below are available from *the information authority* secretariat and are contained within our Communications Strategy.

i) Appointment of a dedicated communications post for *the information authority* and Data Service. Much of the work detailed within this document will be implemented upon the appointment of a new joint Marketing and Communications Manager for *the information authority* and Data Service. It is hoped that this post can be filled by early 2009. This document and related Data Service Communications Plans will guide the work of this role. **Target date: February 2009.**

ii) Development of media relations activities. Now that *the information authority* has started to make progress with its work plans, and we are producing results that are of benefit to the sector, a more proactive and regular approach is proposed with regard to media relations work. This will involve engaging with the media directly after each board meeting and throughout the year to communicate decisions and progress. **Target date: ongoing.**

iii) Developing, nurturing and utilising communities of practice. Where possible we should be seeking to tap into the communications and consultation opportunities offered by existing communities of practice (such as online discussion groups like JiscMail); as well as creating and nurturing new ones where appropriate. **Target date: ongoing.**

iv) Further development of communications with the LSC. As one of our key stakeholders and the source of many data requests, it is imperative that we have good communications with the LSC. Good work has been done so far in establishing links and regular contact with our colleagues in the LSC, but these activities are to be strengthened and increased in order to promote the work of *the information authority* further to LSC colleagues and to the

LSC's successor agencies. This includes utilising the services and advice of the LSC's Internal Communications Team to raise our profile via internal news items; e-mail lists; face-to face-meetings; workshops / sessions etc. **Target date: ongoing.**

v) Development of websites. Since launching in 2008, the corporate website and the **feconnect** consultation portal have been reviewed and are undergoing changes that will improve their usability and accessibility in response to feedback from users.

Developments include:

- An upgrade to the Community Server software that drives the **feconnect** portal in order to provide it with more functionality (including closed discussion forums).
- Styling work on both sites to ensure that they are i) accessible (font sizes increased, contrast colours adequate etc.); and ii) that the look and feel of both sites is compatible, providing users with a more 'seamless' experience.
- Improvements in the hosting and support for the **feconnect** portal to ensure better response times to technical developments and issues; and closer control over the support contract.
- Improvements to the corporate website in order to ensure that the team have direct control over the navigation as well as content.

Target date: first round of improvements completed by January 2009.

vi) Identifying and developing communications channels with new and key audiences With our external communications activities, there will be a greater focus on communicating and establishing a dialogue with key audiences, such as local authorities, college principals and policy leads in DIUS and DCSF. This is to ensure that we have relevant communication channels in place to support the Machinery of Government changes and to create 'advocates' for our work. **Target date: ongoing.**

vii) Change of focus on conferences and public events. *The information authority* has made a great effort over the last twelve months to ensure that it has a good presence at relevant national conferences (e.g. FAB, AoC and ALP) by booking exhibition space as well as hosting events.

However, exhibition space is costly and the returns are fairly low in terms of audience engagement. Therefore, it is proposed that we only exhibit at events where we are seeking to engage with **new audiences** in future (e.g. the LGA conference), and that we channel our resources into using other large and medium-sized events in a more cost-effective way by concentrating on activities such as speaking and facilitating workshops.

It is also proposed that a greater proportion of our marketing budget is spent on direct communications, and the sponsorship of events e.g. the AoC NILTA CIS Conference, which will allow us to hold multiple workshops and publicise ourselves in a high-profile way.

This approach also means that our branding will appear in conference materials and that information about our work will be made available on national partner websites as part of the conference publicity package. It will also allow us to distribute our publicity materials at workshops and to encourage delegates to sign up for the monthly **Inform** newsletter. These activities will also be monitored for cost effectiveness and reviewed within the twelve month period covered by this strategy. **Target date: ongoing.**

viii) Review of publicity materials. All publicity materials are being reviewed on an ongoing basis and an assessment made as to their effectiveness and value-for-money before re-ordering.

For example - *the information authority's* 'overview' flyer is an effective way of telling stakeholders about our work, our latest projects and our achievements. However, it becomes out of date quickly and does not provide value for money if produced in large print runs. In order to make it more cost-effective, in the future the flyer will be reviewed each time it is to be distributed at an external event; updated whenever necessary and printed only in small runs (up to 100 copies) in-house on the colour printer as needed. This will cut costs and allow us to update frequently. The most up-to-date copy will always be available to team members in electronic format for printing when needed. (So, for example, this would translate as a potential saving of 95% per copy for a colour print run of 500 flyers). **Target date: ongoing.**

ix) Development of cross-organisational communications activities.

Liaise with colleagues within teams carrying out related strands of work to ensure that we communicate to our customers and stakeholders in a 'joined up' manner where possible. For example a meeting held in September 2008 facilitated a useful discussion between *the information authority*, the Data Service, MIAP and LSC Funding Policy around the following topics:

- a) the audiences being targeted by each team;
- b) the scope of our overlapping areas of responsibility (England post-16);
- c) communication channels currently being utilised by each team;
- d) identifying potential communication channels that could be used in addition / instead of;
- e) discuss the effectiveness of current communications – in particular:
 - i) How we are presenting ourselves to our stakeholders.
 - ii) Are we being clear about the ways in which we work together / our differing roles?
 - iii) How do we ensure that stakeholders are channelled to the right place for help / guidance?

Several areas of development were identified which are being taken forward by individuals and it was agreed at a recent Management Team away-day

that a new working group should be set up to plan and to take actions forward. **Target date: ongoing**

4. FE Sector Implications

The purpose of the communications strategy is to raise the profile of *the information authority* within the FE and training system to:

- ensure more informed debate on proposed changes;
- to facilitate earlier identification and resolution of data issues; and
- to promote the use of data standards.

5. Next Steps

If the Board is in agreement with the 'direction of travel' proposed in the Communications Strategy for managing *the information authority's* communications over the coming year then the strategy will be implemented forthwith. Progress and key achievements will be reported regularly to Board members and other key stakeholders. The strategy is a working document and will be reviewed regularly and amended as appropriate.

6. Contact Details

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APPENDIX A: Communication Action Plan

Note: C&S Manager – Community & Stakeholder Manager; C&ST – Community & Stakeholder Team

Target 1: To increase awareness of the information authority and our work with stakeholders

Key issues			
Need higher percentage of stakeholders who feel well informed / quite well informed. We carried out a stakeholder perception survey in Summer 2008 and received 134 responses in total, mainly from government departments or agencies, HE providers and Local authorities. Encouragingly, 58% of respondents were aware of <i>the information authority</i> before completing the survey and 62% of the respondents had some awareness of the work we do. However, 64% of respondents did not realise that we were responsible for agreeing the changes to the ILR for the last two years; and most respondents felt that they could not say how effective we had been in improving the setting and regulation of data standards.			
Actions	Outcomes / Measures	Timescales / Deadlines	Lead
Appointment of a dedicated communications post	Increased recognition of the <i>information authority</i> and our work. To be measured using a second perception survey with appropriate stakeholders	By Sept 2009	C&S Manager
Appointment of a new Community Facilitator	As above	By Sept 2009	C&S Manager
Appointment of a new Stakeholder Engagement Manager (to fill vacant post)	As above	By Sept 2009	C&S Manager
Increased engagement with the media	As above	As above	Comms Manager
Development of internal communications within the LSC	As above	As above	Comms Manager
Change of focus on conferences and public events	As above	As above	Comms Manager
Improved publicity materials	As above	As above	Comms Manager
Publication and distribution of annual report	As above	As above	Comms Manager
Working in a mutually beneficial way with our communications partners	As above	As above	All <i>information authority</i> staff
Improving our online corporate presence (www.theia.org.uk)	As above	As above	Stakeholder Engagement Mgrs
Improving our online consultation activities (FEConnect)	As above	As above	Stakeholder Engagement Mgrs
Creating and nurturing our 'communities of interest.'	As above	As above	As above
Working to engage new and key stakeholder groups such as local authorities; college principals; key DIUS and DCSF policy colleagues	As above, and create 'advocates' amongst these stakeholder groups who will publicly support our work.	As above	C&S Manager

Target 2: To increase stakeholder engagement in our activities and gather useful feedback

Key Issues:
 Use the feedback on the ILR consultation process 2009-2010 to make improvements to the way that we carry out consultation with our stakeholders and elicit their views. This will include improving the channels used, making contributors feel more comfortable with the processes and raising awareness that providers and stakeholders can get involved and their views will lead to changes.

Actions	Outcome / measures	Timescale / Deadlines	Lead
Solicit feedback via Advisory Groups	Qualitative and quantitative data that we can use to inform our processes.	October 2008	Stakeholder Engagement Mgrs
Solicit feedback via Workshops	As above.	November 2008	Stakeholder Engagement Mgrs
Solicit feedback via '2-minute' online survey	As above.	November 2008	Stakeholder Engagement Mgrs
Solicit feedback via detailed online survey	As above.	December 2008	Stakeholder Engagement Mgrs
Commission Ambay Software to customise and improve FEConnect	Increase in use and user satisfaction with FEConnect.	November 2008	Community Facilitator
Feedback improvements and actions to Board	Briefing paper for the board. Actions implemented.	03 December 2008	Stakeholder Engagement Mgr
Implement other changes / improvements required	Gather qualitative and quantitative data that we can use to inform our processes. Increase in user satisfaction with our processes. Increase in engagement.	Ongoing	All team

Target 3: To increase our media coverage / general profile

Key Issues:

To increase the public profile of *the information authority* across key stakeholders and wider audiences. An article published in FE Focus in Feb 2007 named *the information authority* as a new “quango”. We need to be vigorously counteracting this view and publicising our work, aims and successes.

Action	Outcome	Timescale	Lead
Generate news coverage around our annual report.	Positive news coverage in national / specialist media.	November 2008	Comms Manager
Generate news coverage after each <i>information authority</i> Board meeting.	Positive news coverage in national / specialist media.	Ongoing	Comms Manager
Work with Communications Partners to put in place reciprocal arrangements regarding placing news and articles in each other’s online and offline publications. (See <i>Section 7: Communications Partners</i> for more details).	Positive news coverage in partners’ online and offline publications.		Comms Manager
Update news stories at least once a week if not more frequently on <i>the information authority</i> corporate website.	Homepage of website should change and be refreshed frequently.	Ongoing	C&ST
Update blogs and news items on FEConnect at least once every two weeks.	Feedback from stakeholders – increase in website hits and discussions.	Ongoing	Stakeholder Engagement Mgr
Develop new areas of <i>the information authority</i> website to show our attendance at conferences etc.	Feedback from stakeholders – increase in awareness of our work and website hits.	Ongoing	C&ST
To make good use of conferences and events.	Feedback from stakeholders – more data users signing up for Inform etc. Good numbers attending conference sessions and workshops.	Ongoing	C&S Manager
Change the “Spotlight” portal on <i>the information authority</i> website at least once every 6-8 weeks.	Homepage of website should appear to users to be changed and refreshed frequently.	Ongoing	Community Facilitator

Target 4: To ensure that information authority staff are kept informed and consulted

Key Issues:

- *Information authority* staff need to work together as a cohesive unit – in particular the Community and Stakeholder Team need to work effectively with the Quality and Standards Team and ensure that a good standard of information flow and co-operation is created and maintained.

Action	Outcome	Timescale	Lead
Hold weekly 'buzz' sessions	Effective working relationships between staff – "right hand should know what left hand is doing!"	Ongoing	<i>information authority</i> Management Team
Encourage all team to get involved in outreach sessions / workshops / attendance and conferences etc.	Increase understanding of each other's work and how it relates to providers and other stakeholders.	Ongoing	All
Monthly Team meetings	Effective working relationships between staff – "right hand should know what left hand is doing!"	Ongoing	<i>information authority</i> Management Team
Use <i>the information authority</i> Teamsite effectively for collaboration / dissemination	As above.	Ongoing	All
Team Away Day	As above.	Nov 2008	<i>information authority</i> Management Team
Hold occasional social events for <i>the information authority</i> and Data Service teams.	Team building and development of informal communications channels.	Ongoing	All

Target 5: To raise awareness and engage with colleagues at the LSC

Key Issues:
 Some colleagues within the LSC national and regions are still not aware of our work, or clear about what we do, making it more difficult to work effectively with them. A more pro-active stance is to be taken with regards to promoting the work of the authority among LSC colleagues. This includes utilising the services and advice of the LSC's Internal Communications Team to raise our profile via internal news items; e-mail lists; face to face meetings; workshops / sessions etc. to raise our profile and facilitate good working relationships.

Action	Outcome	Timescale	Lead
Contribute items to the LSC Bulletin (weekly).	Increased awareness of <i>the information authority</i> ; our work, aims and objectives amongst LSC colleagues at national office.	Ongoing	CS&T
Lunch and Learn at LSC national office with a revised focus on our role within the 'changing FE landscape' / MoG.	As above.	Ongoing	CS&T
Sessions with teams within the LSC to explain our work and discuss how we can effectively engage.	As above.	Ongoing	CS&T
Internal mail distribution lists (e.g. senior managers)	Increased awareness of <i>the information authority</i> ; our work, aims and objectives amongst senior LSC colleagues at national office.	Ongoing	CS&T
Contribute items to the LSC's Resources monthly newsletter.	Increased awareness of <i>the information authority</i> ; our work, aims and objectives amongst the Resources Team .	Ongoing	CS&T
Contribute items to the LSC's IM Monthly newsletter.	Increased awareness of <i>the information authority</i> ; our work, aims and objectives amongst the IM Team .	Ongoing	CS&T
Work more closely with regional and local teams. Hold workshops / training sessions and awareness raising events etc.	Increased awareness of <i>the information authority</i> ; our work, aims and objectives amongst LSC colleagues at regional and local offices .	Ongoing	CS&T
Contribute items to the LSC intranet	Increased awareness of <i>the information authority</i> ; our work, aims and objectives amongst LSC colleagues at national office .	Ongoing	CS&T

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Regular briefing note (monthly) to senior LSC staff, <i>the information authority</i> Board, DIUS and DCSF policy staff to inform them of our work and projects.	Increased awareness of <i>the information authority</i> ; our work, aims and objectives amongst senior LSC colleagues at national office.	Ongoing	CS&T
Attend team meetings where possible and invite other colleagues to attend our team meetings to brief us on their projects.	Increased awareness of <i>the information authority</i> ; our work, aims and objectives amongst LSC colleagues at national office .	Ongoing	CS&T
To attend meeting(s) of the LSC Communications Group and brief them on our activities, as well as ask them how to engage with particular groups (such as regional and local offices).	Increased awareness of <i>the information authority</i> ; our work, aims and objectives amongst LSC colleagues at national office and local offices .	December 2008	Community & Stakeholder Manager

Target 6: To increase brand recognition of *the information authority* and Data Service at a regional and national level

Key Issues:

To ensure that our service users / providers / data users etc. are aware of *the information authority* and Data Service brands and work towards those brands being associated with quality and good service. To raise awareness of the services and work carried out by the respective brand owners.

Action	Outcome	Timescale	Lead
Investigate the 'decision tree' scope and investigate procurement of a software "walkthrough" to go on all websites to help our audiences (and colleagues) identify which organisation they should contact about various issues.	Draft a proposal of how such a tool might work; source possible suppliers/products; and work up costs for a business case.	January 2009	C&S Manager and Funding Policy (SC)
Brief version of above re: the new delivery of services (<i>information authority</i> and Data Service) post-LSC that can be taken out to meetings / workshops etc. by all partners.	Draft, agree and trial at the November workshops.	November 2008	C&S Manager
Work with Communications Partners to put in place reciprocal arrangements regarding placing news and articles in each other's online and offline publications. (See <i>Section 7: Communications Partners</i> for more details).	Positive news coverage in partners' online and offline publications.	Ongoing	Comms Manager
To make good use of conferences and events to disseminate information and display our branding.	Increased awareness and recognition of the brands.	Ongoing	Comms Manager
To enforce our respective branding and editorial guidelines to ensure that all online and offline publications are consistent, of good quality and that the brands are used correctly both internally and externally.	Increased awareness and recognition of the brands.	Ongoing.	Comms Manager

Target 7: To ensure that data users and providers are able to engage with relevant teams effectively (i.e. the information authority, Data Service, MIAP and LSC Funding Policy Team)

<p>Key Issues:</p> <p>Need strong central management and co-ordination of communications – and need staff engaged in projects with overlapping target audiences to work together. Liaise with colleagues within teams carrying out related strands of work to ensure that we communicate to our customers and stakeholders in a 'joined up' manner where possible. Take forward the issues identified for action during the meeting on September 2008 between <i>the information authority</i>; the Data Service, MIAP and LSC Funding Policy.</p>

Action	Outcome	Timescale	Lead
Survey the Services Desks (Funding Policy, MIAP and the Data Service) to find out what issues / queries they are dealing with	Reference list of issues / queries being dealt with by the different teams.	December 2008	MIAP (DM)
Research internal understanding of <i>the information authority</i> , MIAP, Funding Policy and the Data Service (Scott Curtis – TB to raise with Caroline K)	An informed view of how aware LSC staff are of the different teams and their functions, and how it relates to their work.	January 2009	LSC Data Service (TB)
Describe work in progress re: Data Service communications plans.	Up to date plan of communications activities for Data Service to be utilised by new Comms Manager.	Complete	CW
Identify a 'communications owner'. Role of cross-organisational working group to be decided – chair / function etc.	To work effectively with each other either using a real or 'virtual' group.	January 2009	LSC Data Service (TB)
Surveys / Questionnaire of communications channels – review and collate results that have already come out of any surveys carried out.	See what is effective and what can be developed / utilised by other teams.	January 2009	All
Review today's meeting and actions, summarise and get agreement from the group to take forward.	Actions to be agreed and progressed.	Complete	C&S Manager
Investigate the 'decision tree' scope and investigate procurement of a software "walkthrough" to go on all websites to help our audiences (and colleagues) identify which organisation they should contact about various issues	Draft a proposal of how such a tool might work; source possible suppliers/products; and work up costs for a business case.	January 2009	C&S Manager and Funding Policy (SC)
Brief version of above re: the new delivery of services (Funding Policy, MIAP and the Data Service) post-LSC that can be taken out to meetings / workshops etc. by all partners.	Draft, agree and trial at the November workshops.	November 2008	C&S Manager
Formalise relationships and draft a communications process document that can be agreed by <i>the information authority</i> , MIAP, Data Service and Funding Policy Team. Agree key messages and comms channels.	Communications process document to be drafted, agreed and made available to all interested parties.	December 2008	C&S Manager to draft. All to agree.
<i>the information authority</i> to attend MIAP Comms Group regularly.	<i>the information authority</i> to have place on group and attend.	Ongoing.	C&S Manager

Target 8: To engage effectively with DIUS and DCSF policy makers

Key Issues:
 A greater focus is needed on communicating and establishing a dialogue with key audiences, such as college principals and policy leads in DIUS and DCSF. This is to ensure that we have relevant communication channels in place to support the impending Machinery of Government changes and to create 'advocates' for our work.

Action	Outcome	Timescale	Lead
Monthly update for these key audiences via e-mail	Increased understanding of <i>the information authority</i> , our work, aims and objectives amongst policy makers.		Head of <i>the information authority</i>
Signing up to RSS feeds, newsletters and proactively spotting trends and news stories, publication of White and Green Papers that signal policy changes.	Increase in invitations to attend policy meetings and to contribute to policy documents or decisions.		Comms Manager

Target 9: To engage effectively with local authorities

Key Issues:
 A greater focus is needed on communicating and establishing a dialogue with Local authorities. This is to ensure that we have relevant communication channels in place to support the impending Machinery of Government changes and to create 'advocates' for our work.

Action	Outcome	Timescale	Lead
Attend the ICES conference to introduce <i>the information authority</i>	Gauge interest in an <i>information authority</i> workshop at a future conference. Start to establish 'best contacts' list	February 2008	C&S Mgr and Head of
To contribute regularly to the DSP news bulletin	Increased awareness of <i>the information authority</i> and its work among target group.	Ongoing	Comms Mgr
To meet with the Star Chamber to discuss future ways of working and the possibility of signing up to a joint Memorandum of Understanding.	To ensure co-operative working with this key partner.	Jan 2009	C&S Mgr and Head of <i>the information authority</i>
To attend other events as identified appropriate for local authority audiences (eg SOLACE conference)	Increased awareness of <i>the information authority</i> and its work among target group.	October 2009	C&S Mgr and Head of <i>the information authority</i>