

PRCA **Communications** **Management** **Standard** (CMS) for In-House Teams



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for In-House Teams

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Introduction

Communications Management Standard (CMS) is the mark of communications professionalism worldwide. Created by the PRCA, it is based on ISO 9001 and Investors In People, with criteria tailored specifically to the needs of in-house PR and communications teams.

Independently audited on a regular basis, it is the accepted kitemark of PR excellence and professionalism. It helps to enhance the efficiency and practices of the teams, demonstrating that they are run to the highest of standards.

The CMS audit covers eight key areas of performance – which are as follows:

Leadership and Communication

The team must demonstrate that they are well-managed, and that responsibilities at all levels are clearly defined and communicated throughout the department and organisation.

Business Planning

The team must demonstrate that their planning is based on a clear view of the organisation's strategic plan, marketplace and/or policy issues, potential and direction. The plan should define goals and objectives that are SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound. They must demonstrate that the plan is used systematically by senior management, and that it is communicated throughout the team and reviewed on a regular basis.

Business Improvement

The PRCA CMS for In-House PR and communications teams demands a programme of continued performance improvement activities in order to achieve long term goals and objectives.

Budgetary Management Systems

The team must demonstrate that its budgetary management systems are adequate to ensure effective operational budgetary management. This

“Enhance the efficiency and practices of In-House PR and communications teams...”

element is not intended to be a comprehensive budgetary audit, but an exercise to ensure that basic budgetary management controls are in place and working for the organisation.

Project Management

The team must prove to the assessor that it has the systems in place to ensure effective planning, management, and evaluation of internal and external projects.

Monitoring satisfaction

The team must demonstrate systems to track satisfaction on a consistent and continuing basis. The department should appreciate that to improve its professional competence it must methodically investigate opinions of its performance, and use this information to enhance services.

People Management

There must be a clearly-defined and universally understood system for appraisal, training, and career development.

Diversity

There must be fair and transparent recruitment processes and workplace practices in regard to diversity and equality.

Scoring

To attain the standard, the team must pass each of the eight areas and score at least 75% overall. The diversity module score will not contribute towards an in-house teams overall CMS score, but they will receive a diversity kitemark if they get 75% in that module. A detailed report breaking down performance will be delivered to the team. This report remains strictly confidential between the auditor and the team.

1 Leadership and Communication

The PR and communications team must demonstrate that they are well-managed and that responsibilities at all levels are clearly defined and communicated throughout the department and organisation.

1

1.1 Have the management structure and responsibilities been defined and communicated? (Yes/No – 5 points)

The management structure should be communicated to demonstrate the appropriate division of responsibility between individual members of the team.

1.2 Does the definition and communication of the management structure include the following? (Assessor's judgement – max 10 points)

All management responsibilities should be defined and communicated throughout the team. This can be achieved through the use of organograms, management structure diagrams, job and role descriptions, and project briefs.

Evidence should be provided to demonstrate that the team is well led and that members know why they are there and how communications contributes to the organisation's success.

Individual team members should have clear and adequate authority to affect decisions, as well as a clear understanding of what the business expects of them and what they are required to deliver.

1.3 Are the risks to the organisation associated with major internal or external changes identified and planned for by the PR and communications team? (Assessor's Judgement – max 10 points)

The team should:

- identify any short or long term risk to the business
- evaluate the potential impact of each of the risks identified
- have plans to manage these risks

Where the potential risk is considerable, the team should develop appropriate contingency plans.

These plans should address:

- competency issues, i.e. the ability to continue to service the organisation

- effects on the management structure
- effects on stakeholders, i.e. employees, parent organisation, partners/affiliates, parent companies, etc

professional bodies, and educational establishments.

An external communications policy or procedure should document the above, along with the appropriate authorisation levels.

1.4 Is there a system to ensure effective communication to external parties? (Assessor's Judgement – max 10 points)

The team should identify all of its key stakeholders. It should also identify which issues and news information should be communicated, as well as when they should be communicated. Stakeholders will typically include: shareholders, the media, the local community, government agencies, non-government agencies, trade associations,

2

Business Planning

The PR and communications team must demonstrate that their planning is based on a clear view of the organisation's strategic plan, marketplace and/or policy issues, potential, and direction.

The plan should define goals and objectives that are SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound. The PR and communications team must demonstrate that the plan is used systematically by senior management, and it is communicated throughout the team on a regular basis.

2

2.1
Does the PR and communications team have a strategic communications plan? (Yes/No – 5 points)

2.2
Does the strategic communications plan include the following? (Assessor's judgement – max 10 points)

The team must demonstrate a plan that clearly sets out the short term and long term goals and objectives for your organisation. This plan must be the engine that drives the search for continual improvement. This plan is normally produced annually and is developed alongside, and reviewed against, the organisation's statement of visions, values and long term improvement activities.

The plan will typically include the following:

- a summary of market trends or political/issues landscape
- budgetary status of communications activity
- budgetary/policy goals and objectives
- any major improvement projects
- identification of future resource requirements (training, recruitment, IT, etc)

2.3
Does the plan define clear goals and objectives? (Assessor's judgement – max 10 points)

The plan should define business goals and objectives that are SMART:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Realistic
- Time bound

2.4
To what extent is the plan communicated to all levels in the PR and communications department? (Assessor's judgement – max 10 points)

It may not be appropriate to communicate the entire strategic plan with team members; but at the very least you must be able to demonstrate that the key goals and objectives have been communicated throughout the team.

2.5
Is the communications performance reviewed at six monthly intervals (at least) and against the plan's goals and objectives? (Yes/No – 5 points)

It is important that performance is monitored and compared against the goals and objectives

established in the strategic communications plan. Any deviations between current and desired performance of the plan should be reviewed and corrective action should be taken, i.e. reset the goals and objectives, or amend the actions and timescales to achieve the original set of goals and objectives. Changes in resources and delivery processes will be taken into account (if they exist).

Management should determine the frequency of the reviews, but they should be sufficient to cover the period of the strategic plan, i.e. an annual plan should be reviewed quarterly or at least six monthly and long term goals (three to five years) should be reviewed annually.

2.6
Is the plan reviewed for adequacy? (Yes/No – 5 points)

At review, it may be necessary to change the strategic communications plan due to external influences (e.g. changing market circumstances), or internal influences (e.g. change in business or policy direction, change of key personnel).

You should produce evidence of such review processes in your minutes of the review meetings.

3

Business Improvement

The PRCA CMS for In-House PR and communications teams demands a programme of continued performance improvement activities in order to achieve long term goals and objectives.

3

3.1
Has the PR and communications team established a vision and key values statement which sets out its purpose and long term goals? (Yes/No – 5 points)

stakeholder satisfaction, people management, performance, key values, and quality of service.

Key values may be expressed as trust, excellence, professionalism, growth development, enthusiasm, commitment, and ownership.

3.2
Does the vision and key values statement include the following? (Assessor's judgement – max 10 points)

The vision and key values for the team will typically be expressed as a simple statement of the overall aims and objectives. They should link directly with the long term goals of the organisation.

The organisation's vision statement is an important component of its definition and may refer to the following elements: parent organisation/

To what extent does the organisation involve the PR and communications team at all levels in the business improvement activities? (Assessor's judgement – max 10 points)

The organisation should involve the team in improvement initiatives to foster their ownership and commitment.

Examples of business improvement activities are:

- suggestion schemes
- away days

- competitions
- recognition schemes
- presentation of improvement ideas at team meetings
- best practice workshops

3.4
Does the PR and communications team carry out effective benchmarking as a means to business improvement? (Assessor's judgement – max 10 points)

Benchmarking is defined as "the process of comparing something or someone with best practice".

The team should define clearly what it will compare and whom to compare against.

On "what to compare", there are three types of benchmarking:

- Internal – against different teams and divisions within an organisation
- Competitive – against competitors in the same sector
- Generic – against organisations in other sectors

other teams to position them against the rest of the industry, e.g. PRCA Benchmarking Survey, industry league tables, industry salary comparisons

- Process – identifying best practice process e.g. In-House CMS Audit, PRCA Best Practice Papers or latest HR industry data on graduate recruitment
- Strategic – identifying the policies and methods of your competitors and comparing with yours

With regard to "whom to compare against", there are the following types of benchmarking:

3.5
Is there a system to manage improvement projects? (Yes/No – 5 points)

Examples of improvement projects would include: major investment projects – IT or capital investment, developing new markets, and launch of a new service/policy.

The project's system must be consistent with the strategic communications plan and include:

- defined responsibilities
- establishment of procedures
- defined approval stages
- milestones and deliverables
- final review
- implementation plan

4 **Budgetary Management Systems**

The PR and communications team must demonstrate that its budgetary management systems are adequate to ensure effective operational budgetary management. This element is not intended to be a comprehensive budgetary audit but an exercise to ensure that basic budgetary management controls are in place and working for the organisation.

4

4.1

Does the PR and communications team have adequate management accounts? (Assessor's judgement – max 10 points)

Relevant budgetary management information should be available, for example: key ratios/ indicators and budgetary summary reports that are produced for management.

**"Effective
operational
budgetary
management..."**

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5 Project Management

The PR and communications team must prove to the assessor that it has the systems in place to ensure effective planning, management and evaluation of internal and external projects.

5

5.1
Does the PR and communications team have an effective system for capturing project requirements? (Yes/No – 5 points)

5.2
Does the system for capturing project requirements include the following? (Assessor's Judgement – max 10 points)

From formulation of the brief, there should be systems in place to capture requirements covering:

- project objectives
- critical success factors – the key activities necessary to ensure a successful project
- key performance indicators
- milestones and deliverables
- approval processes

5.3
Is there an effective planning system to ensure delivery to pre-set expectation levels? (Assessor's judgement – max 10 points)

The team must demonstrate the use of planning activities such as:

- pre-project research
- project planning
- allocation and availability of appropriate resources: time, personnel, budget, outsource skills / agencies
- communications processes: points of contact, feedback on progress and meetings

5.4
Does the PR and communications team have effective information control? (Assessor's judgement – max 10 points)

The team should have effective systems for the identification of critical information, for example: electronic and manual filing, handling, back-up, retrieval, disposal, and security.

Critical information will include: correspondence, approvals, photography, logos, proposals, plans, reports, and invoices.

5.5
Does the PR and communications team ensure the consistent delivery of services by suppliers? (Assessor's Judgement – max 10 points)

The team must demonstrate that its suppliers go through a process of selection, approval and monitoring to ensure consistency of service. An effective system may include the following:

- process for evaluation, approval, and review
- approved list of suppliers
- accredited suppliers

5.6
Does the PR and communications team monitor project performance and take appropriate actions? (Assessor's Judgement – max 10 points)

Project performance should be measured regularly to ensure:

- the effective implementation of the project plan
- key requirements are met
- reputation is maintained or enhanced

6 Monitoring Satisfaction

The PR and communications team must demonstrate systems to track satisfaction on a consistent and continuing basis. The department appreciates that to improve its professional competence it must investigate methodical opinions of its performance, and use this information to enhance services.

6

6.1 Does the PR and communications team have a system to monitor the wider organisation's satisfaction? (Yes/No – 5 points)

The team should have a system for measuring the wider organisation's satisfaction, which encompasses all departments. This system should be appropriate to the size and the complexity of the organisation:

The system will typically include some of the following activities:

- regular review meetings
- regular informal meetings or lunches
- formal annual/six-monthly reviews
- perception surveys/questionnaires
- complaints systems
- reviews from other team leaders within the department

The system should indicate the frequency of the review activities, the forms of measurement being used, and it should set key performance indicators for the organisation's satisfaction.

The team must document the outputs from the organisation's review system.

6.2 Does the organisation's satisfaction measurement address all elements of the service? (Assessor's judgement – max 10 points)

In order to ensure that the organisation's perception of the team's service matches their expectation, it is important for the department to understand all aspects that will impact on the organisation's satisfaction.

Either written or verbal feedback is taken from the organisation – and the department can then analyse the information.

The organisation review system should measure the department's performance/service levels on the following:

- understanding the organisation's expectations
- meeting the organisation's expectations
- communication with the organisation
- market knowledge
- creativity
- strategic thinking
- team work
- timeliness of delivery
- quality of service delivery

6.3 Is the organisation's satisfaction measurement effectively implemented? (Assessor's judgement – max 10 points)

The team must demonstrate that the organisation's satisfaction is measured against the set performance targets and that actions are taken as a result.

Results must be communicated throughout the department and action points agreed with staff as appropriate.

It is important that results of surveys are communicated back to the organisation and individual feedback with particular departments may be appropriate.

“Key performance indicators for parent organisation satisfaction...”

7 People Management

There must be a clearly-defined and universally understood system for appraisal, training, and career development.

7

7.1
Are the processes for selection of prospective employees determined according to the needs of the position? (Yes/No – 5 points)

7.2
Does the selection process include the following? (Assessor's Judgement – max 10 points)

The employee selection methods used may include:

- review of qualifications
- relevant experience
- psychometric/personality profiling
- testing of PR skills
- structured interviews

7.3
Is a general induction conducted for new employees in their first week of employment? (Yes/No – 5 points)

The content of the induction will vary depending on the position of the new employee, and may include an introduction to the following:

- organisation background and credentials
- the team
- internal systems and processes
- criteria and methods for project planning, research and evaluation
- human resources
- health and safety
- pension and finance issues
- PRCA Professional Charter and Codes of Conduct

7.4
Does the PR and communications team conduct training needs analysis? (Yes/No – 5 points)

The team should demonstrate that it conducts a needs analysis to identify the training necessary

for specific roles within the team which is necessary to implement the communications plan. It will focus on what training is required to meet business needs; rather than what individuals would like to be trained in. A training needs analysis will include a review of tasks and job descriptions and a review of existing competencies. It should be conducted for business improvement initiatives, introduction of new services, changes in the market, and major departmental changes.

Useful references for conducting a training needs analysis are:

- PRCA Best Practice Paper on Core Competencies

7.5
Are personal development plans developed for staff based on training needs analysis? (Yes/No – 5 points)

The communications department should demonstrate that the personal development plans for individual staff match the team's training needs analysis.

Effective personal development plans will contain SMART goals and targets for employee training and development (SMART = Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time Bound). The communications team should give evidence through records of training delivery for both internal and external training activities.

7.6
Is training performed in accordance with personal development plans? (Assessor's Judgement – max 10 points)

The team should demonstrate that the training provided is in line with personal development plans through its training records. The

auditor may also seek verification of training activities through personal interviews.

7.7
Does the PR and communications team have a formal appraisal system? (Yes/No – 5 points)

The team should demonstrate that it has a formal appraisal system which is designed to review performance against the personal goals and targets of each member of staff. These goals and targets will include both business and personal development.

The PR and communications team will determine the frequency of formal appraisals, but must also demonstrate: the occurrence of appraisals; the review of follow-up action; and that it feeds into the organisation's recognition and reward systems for the retention of key staff.

8

Diversity

8.1

Is there a diversity and equality policy that demonstrates best practice? (up to 7 points)

The organisation should be able to demonstrate that best practice is being followed by ensuring there is a diversity and equality policy in place, in order that staff members are clear about the requirements.

The policy can be a stand alone document or part of the employee handbook and should include the following elements:

- Fair treatment in terms of recruitment and employment
- A process to pro-actively seek a wide demographic pool of candidates
- The organisation is free from harassment and bullying or any unwanted behaviour
- Equal right to contribute by all – therefore no workplace discrimination

8.2

How has the organisation supported managers and employees with diversity and equality practices? (up to 3 points)

The organisation should be able to demonstrate that diversity and equality practices are included as part of manager training, that it runs dedicated training sessions, and it has developed specific guidelines for managers in order that they are clear about their responsibilities.

The organisation can also demonstrate they carry out other activities for staff to ensure their understanding and buy-in to diversity and equality:

- Internal and external recognition schemes
- Internal events
- Internal communication
- Training and reporting

8.3

Does the organisation ensure diversity and equality practices are followed when recruiting? (up to 7 points)

The organisation should be able to provide evidence the policy is being followed in terms of recruitment, in particular:

- When preparing recruitment agency briefs or internal adverts they should ensure the terminology used does not discriminate against individuals and is specific to the role being advertised
- Copies of recruitment agency briefs should be kept, showing they have specifically asked for a wide pool of diverse candidates
- Proving that the selection process is fair and consistent by demonstrating that a documented process for each

8.4

Does the organisation ensure diversity and equality practices are followed throughout the new starter process? (up to 3 points)

The organisation can demonstrate that the new starter form allows for relevant diversity and equality information.

Once completed, it should be documented within individual personnel files and other employee data.

There is also evidence that the organisation collates, summarises and reviews this information on a regular basis.

8.5

Does the organisation measure diversity and equality among its current employees? (up to 6 points)

The organisation can demonstrate various measures of diversity and equality, in particular:

- Regular salary surveys are carried out
- KPIs are in place to measure diversity as a whole such as demographic data, employee surveys, recruitment and promotion, maternity leave returner rates and cultural measures
- Their diversity figures show that they are performing better than the most recent PRCA's Census results

8.6

What adaptations does the organisation make in terms of diversity and equality? (up to 4 points)

The organisation must demonstrate that modifications have been made for those who are disabled, whether staff or visitors, in line with company policy and also the Disability Discrimination Act.

They can also show evidence that they accommodate different religions and beliefs by ensuring flexibility in the working day, prayer arrangements etc.

They review all maternity/ paternity returner requests e.g. flexible working – part-time, job share, home working etc.

8.7

How does the organisation recruit interns in terms of diversity and equality? (up to 8 points)

For interns, the organisation will be required to demonstrate that there is full line management for the individual, a structured training plan, as well as exit interviews on leaving. The organisation's website should include all internship and graduate recruitment policies.

Interns (as defined in the PRCA Internship Guidelines) should also be paid at least the National Minimum Wage or London Living Wage, in accordance with the PRCA guidelines.

For the purposes of the PRCA Diversity CMS module please consider the following classifications.

Ethnicity

- White British
- White non-British
- Mixed / multiple ethnic groups
- Asian / Asian British
- African / Caribbean / Black British
- Other

Disability

- Physical impairment (such as difficulty using your arms or mobility issues which mean using a wheelchair or crutches)
- Sensory impairment (such as being blind/ deaf or having a serious visual/hearing impairment)
- Mental health conditions (such as depression or schizophrenia)

Age

- <18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+

Religion

- Christian
- Muslim
- Hindu
- Sikh
- Jewish
- Buddhist
- Other
- No religion

Sexual orientation

- Heterosexual
- Lesbian
- Gay
- Bisexual
- Other

Gender

- Male
- Female
- Transgender

Nationality

- UK national
- EU national
- Non-EU national

Dependents

- Disabled dependents
- Elderly dependents
- Other

Frequently Asked Questions



Q:
How can we best prepare for the In-House Communications Management Standard Audit?

A:
Most of what will be assessed will already be happening in your organisation – but it may need to be formalised for the audit. Someone will need to be the ‘owner’ of the project to achieve the standard; and it is a good idea to have individuals overseeing specific elements of the audit to look at how they meet the CMS criteria.

Q:
What help and advice can we get during the preparation phase?

A:
The PRCA are happy to answer any questions that you may have during the preparatory

phase. Please contact Katie Packham on 020 7233 6026.

Q:
How do we arrange an audit when we think we are ready?

A:
Contact Katie Packham at the PRCA on 020 7233 6026 and ask for a quotation. The PRCA will provide a quote based on the size of organisation. Please note that lead times are usually 6-8 weeks on average.

Q:
How much will it cost?

A:
The price of the audit will depend on the size of the team. All quoted prices are subject to VAT at the current rate, but are fully inclusive of

all attributable expenses. Audits will typically last for a half or full day's duration. Please call Katie Packham on 020 7233 6026 for an estimate.

Q:
What is the typical audit programme?

A:
Your auditor will contact you to arrange timescales for the initial appointment to discuss the audit programme. This will be agreed in the opening meeting, and you will not be asked to provide any documents additional to your financial records.

Q:
When will we know the outcome?

A:
The auditor will advise on the outcome at the end of the audit. They will then either write up the report “on-site” or e-mail it shortly afterwards.

Q:
Do we need to prepare a folder/portfolio of evidence for the audit?

A:
Not at the initial preparatory stage. Working with the account teams, the auditor will search and ask for the information during the audit itself. Some strategic documentation, including business plans and financial reports, may not be so readily available and may require some advanced work.

Q:
Who needs to be involved?

A:
Senior management; people with specific responsibilities for elements of the audit (e.g. financial, HR, new business, etc); And those involved in the management of the accounts selected. Others may be interviewed, but it is unlikely all employees will be involved.

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