Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy
1 Context

‘Safer Better Care’, The Health Information and Quality Authority’s Corporate Plan 2008 – 2010 outlines the role that the Authority will play in bringing about the necessary improvements in the quality of health and social care services in Ireland over the next three years. This plan outlines objectives and a supporting work programme for communications and stakeholder engagement.

The aims of the Communications Strategy are to:

- Outline the objectives underpinning the communications strategy
- Identify target audiences
- Outline approaches for communicating with the target audiences
- Identify key tactical tools of communication to promote the work of the Health Information and Quality Authority.

2 Communications Goal

Our communications approach will reflect the core values of the Authority by being fair, open, transparent and objective in how we work and how we engage with our internal and external audiences. We will work together with internal and external stakeholders in an innovative and accountable way demanding excellence in everything that we do. By effective and professional use of communication at the core of its activities, the public and our stakeholders will be aware of, engage with and be supportive of the Authority and its objectives.
3 Objectives underpinning the Communications Strategy

- To adopt a proactive role to communicating with our internal and external stakeholders
- To establish a clear understanding and awareness of the role of the Authority among key target audiences
- To develop a clear and consistent brand for the Health Information and Quality Authority
- To ensure that honest, accurate information is delivered in an open, effective and timely manner
- To be the central contact point, both internally and externally, for information on issues concerning the overall work and objectives of the Authority and each directorate within the Authority

4 Target Audiences

The diverse nature of the work of the Authority will require effective communications to operate at a number of levels. In overall terms however, our target audience groups will include:

- The General Public
- Service Users
- The Board of the Authority
- The staff of the Authority
- The Minister for Health and Children, Ministers of State (Older People, Disability, Children, Health Promotion), the Department of Health and Children and other Government Departments
- The HSE
- Private and Voluntary Service providers in health and social care services
- Staff working within the health and social services sectors in Ireland
- Patient advocacy groups and volunteer associations
- Members of the Oireachtas and Oireachtas committees
- The media
- International health and social services organisations
5 Our Approach to Communication

Promoting the work of the Authority

The Health Information and Quality Authority is unique to Ireland and, as we undertake our work, the Authority’s brand will become synonymous with patient safety, standards, quality healthcare, protection of patients service users and of those working in the services. It is important therefore that the Authority is recognised for our work and focus.

The Authority’s approach to how we communicate will be guided by the following principles:

- **Ensuring consistency of message throughout the Authority, all internal and external communications will be centrally co-ordinated through the Communications Department.**

- **Each Directorate – Healthcare Quality, Social Services Inspectorate, Health Information, Corporate Services and Health Technology Assessment will nominate a member of their team to act as a communications liaison. This liaison will be the contact point with the Communications Department.**

- **Regular meetings of all liaison staff and the Communications Department will be held to ensure a flow of information throughout the organisation and to co-ordinate the communications requirements of each directorate.**

- **All print and design materials will be produced centrally by the Communications Department to agreed print and design standards in line with brand requirements. Templates will be developed to assist with this process.**

- **All communications materials produced by the Authority will adhere to the Plain English guidelines recommended by the National Adult Literacy Association (NALA).**

- **Permission for use of the Authority’s name or logo by a third party may only be given by the Communications Department.**

- **One template to be used for all presentations by the Authority.**
All media queries should be forwarded to the Communications Department for appropriate response. In order to ensure consistency of message, no employee will provide any information about the Authority or relating to its work to members of the Media without the prior permission or involvement of the Communications Department. No employee of the Authority will conduct an interview with members of the media without the involvement of the Communications Department.

All communications materials, where practicable, shall be produced in multiple languages to reflect the diversity of society.

6 Communicating with our Stakeholders

The following is an overview of how the Authority will communicate with its various target audiences, this will be continually reviewed and new approaches adopted as the Authority expands and undertakes new work.

The General Public: a variety of communications tools will be used including focus groups, press releases, the website, internet, radio and print advertisements, information leaflets as appropriate, attendance at / hosting of conferences, and so on.

The staff of the Authority: through a variety of means including: regular staff meetings and management fora within and across the Authority the distribution of a regular news correspondence from the Chief Executive; the intranet; and round table meetings with the members of the Executive Team.

The Minister for Health and Children and Secretary General of the Department: the Chief Executive, Chairperson and senior management of the Authority will meet with the Minister and her officials on a regular basis. Meetings between individual Authority Directors and the Ministers for State at the Department of Health and Children will be undertaken as required. Newsletters and information materials produced by the Authority will be distributed to the Department of Health and Children.
The HSE: The Authority will engage with executives and staff throughout the HSE on a professional basis. Regular engagement will be required as the Authority undertakes its work of driving continuous improvement throughout the health and social care system within the country. Newsletters and information materials produced by the Authority will be distributed throughout the HSE informing and actively encouraging open communication.

Service Providers and Staff in Health and Social Care Services: newsletters, website, media relations; seminars and working groups will be the key tools for engagement with service providers and staff in health and social care services.

Members of the Oireachtas and Oireachtas sub committees: A programme of engagement with members of the Oireachtas will be managed by the Head of Communications and Stakeholder Engagement. It will include; briefing meetings with key Authority staff, both on a one to one basis and as a group at sub committee level, presentations, distribution of new and relevant information including reports, statements, newsletters and information materials.

Patient Advocacy Groups and Volunteer Associations: We will engage with patient advocacy / volunteer groups in the service areas identified as priorities by the Authority. These include cancer care, healthcare associated infections, residential care settings; and in the medium term diabetes, heart disease and maternity care.

Engagement will be through focus groups, website, media relations, newsletters, attendance at conferences / seminars, and partnering with selected groups.

Media: all media communications will be centrally co-ordinated through the Communications Department. Engagement will include; a relationship programme for individual directors with members of the media; press conferences; press briefings, press releases; placement of expert articles; interviews.

International Organisations: The Health Information and Quality Authority will be working with international organisations such as the International Society for Quality in Health Care (ISQua), the World Health Organisation - World Alliance for Patient Safety and European Networks. We will engage with these international organisations through the participation of Authority executives in joint working groups, the website, newsletter, and media relations.
7 Tactical Tools of Communication

7.1 External Communications

**Website:** The website is the most important information resource available to the Authority to provide information on its work in an easily accessible way to a widespread and diverse audience.

The website will be redeveloped in the coming months. A proactive approach to the website will be adopted so that it becomes an up to date resource for all those interested in the work of the Authority. It will be built in such a way that it can grow and adapt to the changing needs of the growing organisation. The Authority is committed to maintaining and monitoring the accessibility of the website and it will be designed in accordance the W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, as our current site is.

The website will over time become an interactive mode of engagement between service users, providers, advocacy groups, the general public and other interested parties with the Authority.

It will be developed in accordance with plain English guidelines, in a number of languages and will be built to allow the website to grow in a considered way as the organisation expands.

**Media Relations:**

The Authority will engage with the media in an open, transparent and honest way. Relationships will be developed with journalists both nationally and regionally, including print, broadcast, online and specialist healthcare media.

The work of the Authority will be publicised through:

- *Press Releases*
- *Press Briefings*
- *Press conferences*
- *By-lined articles in the media*
All media enquiries will be directed through the Communications Department, who, in conjunction with the Chief Executive, will decide on the appropriate spokesperson to respond to the particular enquiry. Nominated spokespeople will be identified throughout each Directorate and will be provided with media training by the Communications Department.

**Focus Groups:** To identify the perceptions of the Authority among target audiences, in particular the general public, staff working in health and social care services and among patient advocacy organisations, focus groups will be held at various locations throughout the country. The focus groups will provide feedback to the Authority where to focus communications so as to ensure clarity of message and also to measure the effectiveness of the Communications Strategy.

The Focus Groups will be held on an annual basis in 2008, 2009 and 2010.

**Newsletter:** A twice yearly newsletter on the work of the Authority will be produced. The newsletter will communicate to key stakeholders the work being undertaken by the Authority, and its role in bringing about the necessary improvements in the quality of health and social care services in Ireland.

This newsletter will available to the general public in PDF format on the website. Copies will also be printed and distributed to key stakeholders including members of the Oireachtas and local government; service providers in health and social care services; international organisations, patient advocacy groups, libraries and to citizen information bureaux.

**Advertising:** Subject to the availability of necessary resources, a public information campaign will be undertaken to create awareness among the general public of the Authority. The public information campaign will focus on supporting the work of the Authority’s Directorates by creating awareness of the work of each Directorate and its impact in driving improvements in Ireland’s health and social care services.

In addition, advertising campaigns will be developed for specific activities. In 2008, these may include:

- A print and radio advertising campaign on the new standards for residential care settings for older people will be undertaken once the standards are mandated by the Minister for Health and Children.

- An advertising campaign seeking submissions on the standards for residential care settings for people with a disability.
A consumer education campaign on Health Technology Assessment and its role in promoting safe, quality care for health and social care service users.

**Information Leaflets:** Public engagement will also include the production of explanatory information leaflets on the work of the Authority focusing particularly on where education is needed. For example an explanatory information leaflet on Health Technology Assessment; layman’s guides to standards mandated by the Authority and so on.

These leaflets will be produced as required and distributed through citizens information bureaux; health centres; public libraries and will be available on the Authority’s website.

**Conferences / Seminars:** The Authority will be an active participant in conferences and seminars which seek to debate and progress Ireland’s health and social care services through senior executives addressing such conferences on areas of expertise. These conferences / seminars will provide an opportunity for the Authority to engage with key stakeholders.

In addition, the Authority may, as deemed appropriate, host a national conference on a key aspect of the health and social care services in Ireland.

### 7.2 Internal Communications

Internal communication is essential to help our employees understand our vision, values, and culture. Internal communication will also involve staff members in issues that affect working life and will keep staff informed on important decisions taken by management. A dedicated resource for Internal Communications will be appointed from within the Communications Team.

**Round Table with Chief Executive and other Directors:** True communication requires a two-way process (a dialogue, not a monologue). Listening to employees (an integral part of two-way communication) enables management to identify strengths and weaknesses, which helps in the process of decision making. The Chief Executive will hold regular office meetings with staff as a sharing and listening exercise.

Quarterly round table sessions with the Chief Executive and employees will be held. Each quarter 15 employees from throughout the organisation will be invited to an informal session with the Chief Executive at which they will have the opportunity to share their views on the work of the Authority, what is satisfactory and where they believe the Authority could improve its performance.
Intranet: The intranet will be a key resource for internal communication. It is intended to adopt a pro-active approach in managing the intranet to ensure it is regularly updated with material which will assist staff by keeping them fully informed.

Generally, the internal communications work will be guided by:

- An internal communications strategy
- Preparation of briefing materials for manager’s use when communicating with their teams regarding organisational objectives and developments
- Ensuring that communications and messaging are accessible and effective in language and design
- Working with management to ensure that internal communication across the organisation is done in a timely and consistent manner
- Developing and implementing internal communication vehicles, notice boards, newsletters, table top memos and the intranet etc. and measuring their effectiveness
- Working with Human Resources Department on employee relations and organisational development initiatives
- Championing employee needs when internal communication decisions are being made
- Conducting employee surveys and providing feedback on results
- Ensuring that upward feedback is a key component in all internal communications and employees are given a voice and influence during design and implementation
- Promoting the role of internal communications during Induction.
8 Indicators of Success

A system of continuous measurement will be undertaken to ensure that key messages are disseminated in an appropriate and timely way and that the key target audiences are aware of the Authority and understand its role in driving continuous improvements in Ireland’s health and social care services.

This measurement will include;

- Polling of members of the general public on an annual basis to measure awareness of the Authority and its work.
- The hosting of annual focus groups with representatives of advocacy groups, patient and service users; service providers, and other key audience representatives
- An annual staff survey to measure the effectiveness of internal communications
- Online user feedback surveys on the Authority’s website to measure the ease of use of the website, the relevance of information provided, etc.

9 Conclusions

The Authority’s Communications Strategy is aimed at supporting the work programme and overall strategic objectives of the Authority. It is a working document which will guide the Communications Department and the Authority’s other Directorates in achieving these objectives in an open and transparent manner.

The Authority’s Communications Strategy details the communications methodology, who our target audiences are, and the overall strategic approach that we will employ to drive the necessary improvements across our health and social care services. It sets out a series of core principles which form the basis of how we undertake our work and how we communicate with all of our key stakeholders.
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