

<b>Health and Safety Executive Board Paper</b>		<b>HSE/03/029</b>	
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## **HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE**

### **The HSE Board**

## **COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY**

**A Paper by Kate Timms**

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### **Issue**

1. Progress on work on our communications and re-positioning strategy, and next steps.

### **Recommendation**

2. Board is invited to:
  - note the progress made thus far on enhancing our communications effectiveness and the planned further work;
  - note the relationship between this work and that being carried out in the corporate support review context, and the synergies between them;
  - agree the overall objectives for our communications strategy as set out in paragraph 5;
  - endorse the emerging conclusions in paragraphs 7 and 8.

### **Background**

3. The Board agreed in September last year that a separate project should be established to improve the effectiveness of HSE's communications:

- the July SCS Conference identified effective external communications as a key factor if our influencing strategy were to be successful;
- the communications function and organisation was identified by the Change Team as an issue to be addressed in its own right;
- effective communications also featured in the Executive's Action Plan after the SCS Conference.

With the help of Radical consultants, we quickly identified what we lacked if we were to make a step change in our effectiveness as communicators, namely much greater clarity as to the message we are seeking to convey about us as an organisation. This issue, rather than the second-order question of how we organise ourselves internally to deliver our communications, led to the articulation of the Board vision in January and underpinned the positive debate at the Commission's February and March discussions of strategy.

### **Current position**

4. A good deal of ground has been covered. There is I believe general recognition of the following points:
  - that HSC/E must position its communications more strategically and centrally if we are to strengthen our collective ability to inform, persuade and present ourselves positively;
  - that communications must be integrated into every policy and operational activity, and not regarded as at best an "add-on"; indeed the overall approach we adopt to communications is a strategic issue on which SID will have a critical input;
  - that we communicate in what we do and how we do it as well as through our more formal communication products;
  - that therefore all of our staff, and most particularly our front line staff, should understand their role in communicating HSE's key messages to those with whom they come in contact and be better empowered and equipped to do that;
  - that communications "products" (publications, internet etc) and messages should become much more responsive to customer demand, and the whole set within a communications strategy agreed at Board level.

### **Next steps: objectives**

5. The principles set out above, taken together with the work already done on the profile and positioning of HSC/E, and on our vision and mission, translate into the following strategic aims for our communications effort:
  - (i) To articulate and win commitment for HSC/E policy and operational activity amongst the media, external stakeholders and the wider public in positive and pro-active terms;
  - (ii) To identify, and define ways of dealing with, the weakest areas in our communications effort, in particular corporate activity such as reputation management and positioning, and internal communication to our own staff (not just in written form) to our own staff – a particularly weak point at present;
  - (iii) To create an effective customer/supplier relationship in the provisions of communications products within the framework of an overall communications strategy;
  - (iv) To identify the negative messages about health and safety (whether generated by HSE or by others) and to identify opportunities and modalities for countering those messages.

### **Next steps: further work**

6. There is further work to be done to help realise these objectives, in particular in relation to measuring external customer perceptions, strengthening internal communications and identifying the total resource currently devoted to communication across the whole of HSE. Diagrams indicating the gaps in our communications activity are attached. These streams of work are being taken forward by SID in collaboration with DIAS and policy and operational colleagues.

### **Conclusions**

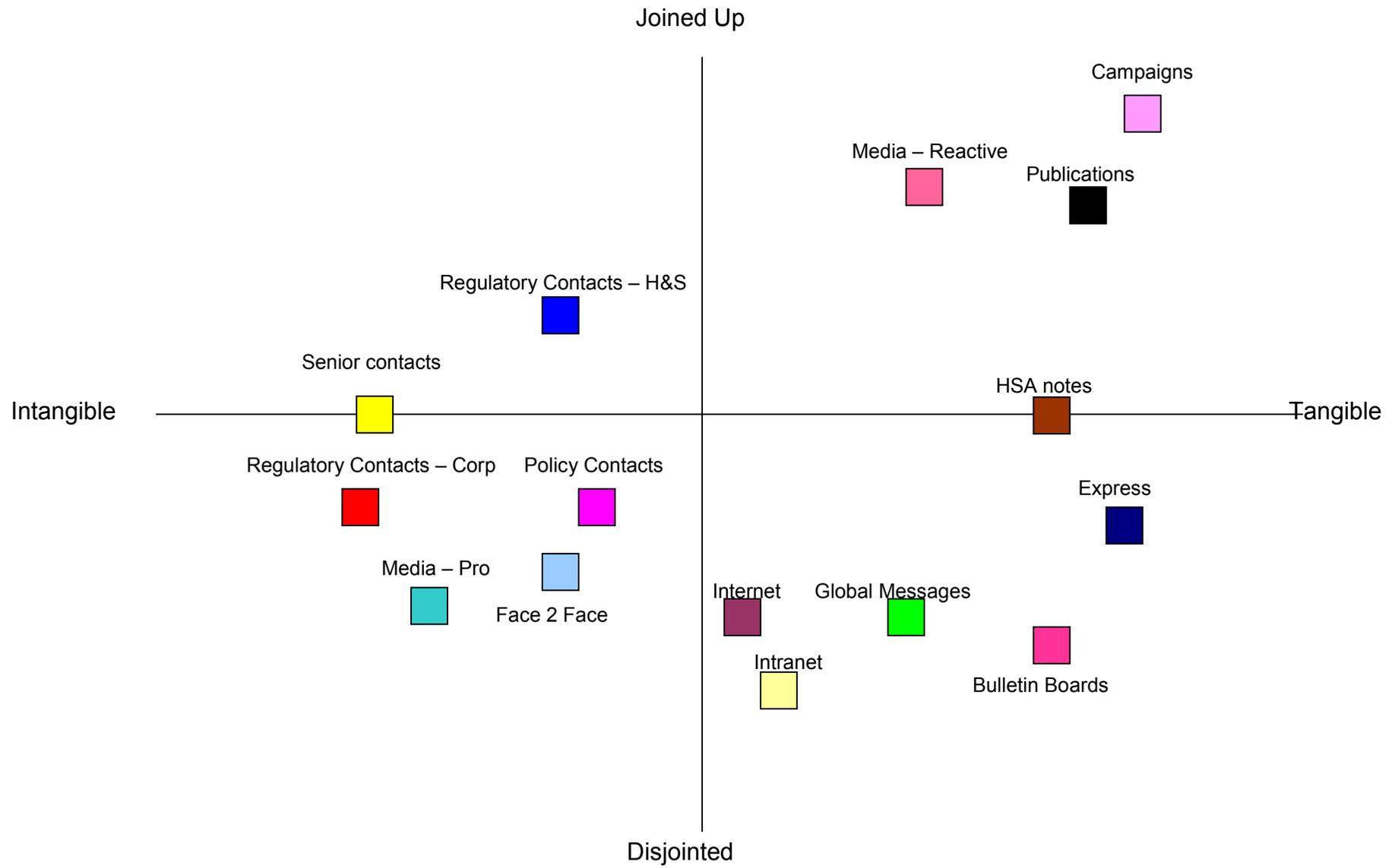
7. Even before this further work is completed, some conclusions can be drawn about what is needed to effect a step change in our effectiveness as communicators:
  - First, there must be a clear high level focus for our communications effort, placed centrally and strategically at the heart of HSE's activities, with ready access to the Commission and Board, and close working links with Strategy and Intelligence Division (SID) and with our parent Department (DWP);
  - Second, that central focus/resource should be enabled to give leadership to the organisation as a whole in its communications effort, setting the strategic framework and direction for communications but also helping equip people at all levels to become effective communicators on behalf of HSE in their own right;
  - Third, the paramount importance of better communications with our own staff should be recognised and a strategy developed for achieving this;
  - Fourth, the relationship between the "central and strategic" focus and the communications providers (at present DIAS) needs to be given very clear

definition. The work which Stephen Williams is carrying out in respect of corporate support has identified the need for a stocktake of DIAS's current business. It suggests that this may be led at SCS level and carried forward in the light of issues raised about DIAS' work during the CSR, as well as this wider work.

8. In the light of the emerging conclusions in this paper and in particular the gaps which have been identified in relation to our effectiveness as communicators, three strands of work can be distinguished. These will bring together in a coherent fashion the work of the CSR and that of the communications group in the following areas:
- to complete the analytical work set out in paragraph 6 above;
  - to take forward a rapid review of our communications products and their delivery (CSR recommendation);
  - to clarify the role and responsibilities of a possible SCS appointee as head of communications and the resource implications of this.

It is recommended that these three activities proceed quickly and in parallel, and the work facilitated with the help of Star Alliance consultancy.

# Communication: Now



# Communication After

