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HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE

The HSE Board

Communications: updating the Board

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Issue

1. To bring the Board up to date on developments in building HSC/E's strategic communications capacity.

Timing

2. For discussion at Board meeting on 3 December 2003.

Recommendation

3. To note and endorse developments in respect of the Director of Communications post; work on a communications strategy; the direction of the DIAS review and further work on the publications moratorium; and next steps.

Background

4. The Board discussed progress on communications at its meeting on 1 October and agreed that it should figure as a major issue at the SCS conference on 14/15 October, as it did. The draft HSC/E strategy also identified communication as an essential element in delivering HSC/E's objectives – an intervention in its own right.
5. Since October we have:
 - Appointed Colin Douglas as Director of Communications with effect from 5 January 2004.

- Worked with Star Alliance to develop a communications structure and provide intray material to equip the new Directorate, including in particular a draft outline communications strategy;
- Offered a communications module as part of the leadership programme;
- Taken forward the review of DIAS under Heather Bolton and implemented the publications moratorium;
- Set in train a stakeholder survey due to deliver results in February 2004.

Communications Directorate – emerging shape

6. As from 5 January Colin Douglas will assume overall responsibility for communications. Initial thinking suggests that he will be supported in this role by three teams consisting of Shelagh Molloy (communications strategy) Sian Lewis (Press Office), and an as yet unfilled post dealing with internal communications and stakeholder management, with appropriate support. The Directorate will assume “customer” responsibility for the provision of communications products and services to HSC/E as a whole, with DIAS as principal (though not necessarily exclusive) provider. In order to support the Director and his team in promulgating effective communications throughout HSE, a network of “communications partners” has been identified whose role it will be to work with the new Directorate from within their existing work areas and help turn the emerging strategy into communications plans. Arrangements are in hand for bringing the communications partners together in a working session to define their roles and responsibilities and identify further training needs. Board members are asked to recognise that this work will require a commitment of time for the communications partners, and give them their full support in developing this important role.
7. As part of the Star Alliance leadership training, a communications module has been on offer to SCS members (including to Board members) to help give everyone a greater understanding of the role of communications in achieving HSE’s objectives. Take up of the module has been disappointing. We have scope to run more such events between January and March. Board members are asked to encourage SCS colleagues to participate in these, as well as taking up the challenge themselves.

Communications strategy – emerging picture

8. The emerging strategy outlined in the 1 October Board paper has been further refined and updated with the help of Star Alliance and a draft of this, and of the emerging communications plan structure, are attached at Annex 1. The next step will be for the Director of Communications to put the draft strategy and plan into definitive form and deal with outstanding issues. The strategy and associated positioning statements in relation to HSC/E are intended to inform stakeholder relationships and define messages so as to present a consistent picture of what we are about. The plan will provide the framework within which to set delivery of both external and internal communications activity.

Review of DIAS and the publications moratorium - impact

9. Draft terms of reference and an outline plan for the DIAS review have been issued to HSE Trade Unions and all DIAS staff for comment. Heather Bolton and Karen

Clayton (the Review Team) are now in the investigation phase, meeting staff and gathering information about current processes. Initial priorities for the review include publications, publicity and intranet/internet/infoline. DIAS staff have expressed concerns both about the review and the publications moratorium, having had to deal with criticism from across the organisation specifically about issues raised by the moratorium. The Review Team have set up a structure of formal and informal meetings, together with regular written updates and an intranet community interest group to keep staff informed and involved.

10. The publications moratorium agreed by the Board and announced by Timothy Walker in late September has delivered disappointing results. Of the total of 292 publication bids outstanding at end-September, some 104 have been granted exemption from the moratorium either by strategic programme directors or functional directors, or by direct appeal to the communications steering group (CSG). So high a number of exemptions suggests that the criteria elaborated for exceptional treatment (delivering HSC/E's strategy, delivering PSA targets, inescapable legal or political commitments) have been applied without rigour, and that relatively little work to prepare publications has been stopped, and little resource freed up for strategic communications purposes.
11. The next step will be for the Director of Communications to review the current position with regard to the publications moratorium and make recommendations to the Board as to how matters are to go forward on a more rigorous basis than has been achieved so far. In the meantime, an interim procedure designed to handle the inevitable requests for exemptions from the moratorium in the coming weeks is at [Annex 2](#). Board members may wish to strengthen the procedure outlined in the diagram by asking the CSG to endorse all exemptions from the moratorium from now until a definitive procedure is in place.

Communications –next steps

12. Work on communications should go forward from this point in parallel with:
 - Development of the 2004-2010 HSC strategy in the light of the consultation just completed;
 - The business planning process on which Directorates will be fully engaged from January 2004 onwards;
 - Work to raise the profile of communications with Commissioners as well as HSE staff, and to respond to Commissioners' expressed wish to be more proactive in this area, subject to their having appropriate support.
13. This suggests that the most pressing issues to be addressed as the next stage of this work will be:
 - a) Completion, refinement and promulgation of the HSC/E's communications strategy with the involvement of stakeholders and staff;
 - b) In order properly to inform the above, as well as to establish a baseline from which the effectiveness of communications activity can be measured, taking forward a large scale survey of attitudes and perceptions of health and safety and of the institutions that deliver them; in this context plans have been agreed to

carry out a stakeholder/customer/public attitudes survey to be run in December/January with results expected in February 2004;

- c) Evaluation of the impact of the publications moratorium; continued downward pressure on the number of publications; and recommendations as to next steps;
- d) Development of training opportunities in communications, in particular through greater participation in the SCS leadership programme module on communications, and training to support the new network of communications partners.

Recommendation

14. The Board is invited to:

- note the work already done to develop the capacity of HSC/E to be more effective communicators;
 - address in particular the issues underlined in paragraph 6,7 and 11 above;
 - to endorse the next steps in taking this work forward, under the leadership of the Director of Communications, as set out in paragraphs 13(a) to (d) above.
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