



Corporate Communications Strategy 2009-11

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Contents	Page
Introduction	3
Responsibility for Communication	3
Purpose of the Strategy	3
Development of the Strategy	4
Corporate Communications Objectives	4
Our Principles of Communication	4
Our Audiences	5
Our Communication Channels	5
Evaluation	5
Main Priorities	6
Summary	6
Appendices	
Appendix 1 - Sources of Evidence and Research for the Corporate Communications Strategy	7
Appendix 2 - Our Audiences	8
Appendix 3 - How we Inform, Listen and Converse	9
Appendix 4 - Key Performance Indicators for Corporate Communications	10
Appendix 5 - Main Priorities	11

Introduction

Communication is a vital element of any organisation and it is the means by which information is shared, instructions are given, views and opinions are expressed and feedback is received. The efficient two-way flow of information should ensure that communication with both internal and external contacts is clear, honest, timely and relevant. The way in which people are communicated with is central to their perception of the organisation and its credibility.

Communication requires three key dimensions to be effective:

- To **inform** – providing audiences with the information they need, either to do their job, understand the organisation, share relevant facts, localise information or report progress.
- To **listen** – listening, and acting on feedback, is vital, whichever stakeholder group you are engaging with.
- To **converse** – establishing two-way communication channels to encourage involvement and invite dialogue from stakeholders.

To achieve these, we will undertake a planned and sustained approach to communications to support Yorkshire Ambulance Service's (YAS's) vision and strategic objectives, the core of which is to provide high quality clinical care to our patients.

Responsibility for Communication

A culture of good communication is the responsibility of everyone within YAS and it is vital that every member of staff is willing to receive and provide information. The Corporate Communications team is responsible for setting standards, providing guidance and establishing and maintaining channels of communication.

It is essential that we communicate in a professional and well-informed manner with anyone who comes into contact with the Trust - be it as a patient, relative, carer, supplier, commissioner, NHS partner, external organisation, member of staff, volunteer, member of the public or wider stakeholder, such as an overview and scrutiny committee. Messages need to be consistent, appropriate to an audience's needs and make people aware of how they can make their voice heard.

Purpose of the Strategy

This strategy has been developed to help YAS achieve its vision and strategic objectives through effective corporate communications activity.

It supersedes Corporate Communications Strategy – 'Look, feel, behave, deliver differently' – which was developed in late 2006 as a post-merger strategy to harmonise communications from the three former trusts and put some basic procedures, protocols and structure in place.

We now need to use the Corporate Communications function more strategically to support the objectives of the YAS Five Year Business Plan. This revised strategy is intended to build upon and strengthen our current approach to communicating with staff and all our stakeholders. The positioning of YAS is now more important than ever as preparations are made for Foundation Trust application and the recruitment of, and communication with, members. We need to be transparent and accountable to our members in all that we do. The YAS brand and reputation will only be strengthened by delivering the right messages and creating the right impression verbally, in writing and visually.

Development of the Strategy

The Corporate Communications function provides a service which is central to the organisation and its Integrated Business Plan, underpinning and linking the activities of all directorates. It performs a variety of internal and external communications roles, including staff and stakeholder communication, media relations, corporate and visual identity, crisis management and reputation management.

As with any strategy, an evidence-base is essential and regular research and evaluation must be carried out. This Corporate Communications Strategy is based on information from staff and stakeholders, NHS Yorkshire and the Humber (strategic health authority) surveys, feedback from the 2008 NHS Staff Survey, an evaluation study of organisational communication and media coverage and evaluation as detailed in Appendix 1. The Communications Strategy and its deliverables will be subject to regular independent external validation and review.

Corporate Communications Objectives

Internal

- To deliver management, operational and clinical information to staff and ensure they are well-informed [Alignment with strategic objectives: Our Patients, Our People, Clinical Excellence and Environment].
- To improve staff engagement by supporting a culture of two-way communication and ensuring staff have channels through which they can voice their opinions and have greater involvement in decision-making [Alignment with strategic objective: Our People].
- To build staff morale [Alignment with strategic objective: Our People].

External

- To increase public and stakeholder understanding of YAS and positively influence their opinions of our services [Alignment with strategic objectives: Our Patients and Our Partners].
- To listen and act upon the views of our patients and local people, including hard-to-reach communities and those with disabilities, to help shape future services [Alignment with strategic objectives: Our Patients, Quality and Clinical Excellence].
- To support appropriate use of our services [Alignment with strategic objectives: Our Patients and Our People].
- To enhance and defend YAS's reputation [Alignment with strategic objectives: Our Patients, Quality and Clinical Excellence].
- To maintain a consistent and positive profile and visual identity [Alignment with strategic objective: Quality].
- To support the marketing of the service for income generation purposes ie the Patient Transport Service, first aid training courses, Commercial/Event Ambulance Service [Alignment with strategic objectives: Quality, Clinical Excellence and Finance].

Our Principles of Communication

In operating the Corporate Communications function, we comply with the Vision and Values of the Trust and work to the following principles:

- Open, honest and accurate
- Accessible to all relevant stakeholders
- Clear and user-friendly (Plain English)
- Consistent and relevant messages
- Timely and current

- High quality
- Cost-effective
- Prepared in accordance with relevant legislation, Codes of Practice and within national NHS protocols and guidelines, including alignment to the NHS Constitution
- Fully approved by all relevant parties including NHS Yorkshire and the Humber (Strategic Health Authority) where necessary
- Monitored and reviewed regularly.

Our Audiences

YAS has a number of internal and external audiences that need to be kept informed, need to be listened to and with whom we should have regular dialogue. Please see Appendix 2 for a summary of YAS's audiences.

Different audiences need varying levels of engagement which is determined by their significance in helping to achieve the strategic objectives in the YAS Five Year Business Plan and the Corporate Communications objectives.

Our Communication Channels

A proactive approach to communication, maintaining and developing effective two-way dialogue and working closely with our key partners are essential components of any activity.

A variety of internal and external communication channels are used to inform, listen and converse. They are detailed in Appendix 3.

Evaluation

This strategy, and the tactics (methods and channels of communications) used to implement it, will require ongoing evaluation and fine-tuning to ensure they continue to meet the needs of the organisation and the additional support required for the Foundation Trust application process.

The techniques for measuring the effectiveness of this strategy will be qualitative (such as feedback from individuals or through focus groups) and quantitative (such as the number of media releases issued). Valid key performance indicators (KPIs) can be output-based, impact-based and outcome-based. Please see Appendix 4 for a summary of these metrics.

Evaluation of internal communications includes:

- The volume and type of internal communications material issued (quarterly)
- Staff feedback on communication via the NHS Staff Survey (annually) and direct comments (ongoing)
- The measurable outcome/response/action taken following the communication of specific messages eg incident reporting, change to a procedure or completing an e-learning module
- Information on intranet usage
- Bi-annual communications audit (to include focus groups and questionnaires).

Evaluation of external communications includes:

- The volume and type of external communications material issued
- Media monitoring, the rating of coverage (positive, negative or neutral) and its Advertising Value Equivalent - the equivalent cost of buying space devoted to editorial content (quarterly report)
- Information on website usage

- Feedback from stakeholder groups including overview and scrutiny committees (OSCs), local involvement networks (LINKs), patient groups, our NHS partners
- Feedback from the Patient Services team - letters, emails, telephone calls (monthly reports)
- Hits to YAS website pages and comments from this source
- Bi-annual communications audit
- External surveys/assessments such as those from NHS Yorkshire and the Humber and Care Quality Commission.

Feedback is built into day-to-day operational planning and every opportunity will be taken to review the effectiveness of communications, identify gaps or additional needs and review activity where necessary.

Main Priorities

The main priorities for the Corporate Communications team are outlined in Appendix 5. They relate to 'internal', 'stakeholder' and 'external' audiences and, in addition to **informing**, **listening** and **conversing**, are aimed at motivating people to act upon messages and maintaining and building relationships.

Summary

Effective communication at YAS can be achieved through the right blend of **informing**, **listening** and **conversing** with all its audiences.

Whilst measurement and evaluation play a key role, the essentials of good communication within any organisation are:

- clear aims and objectives
- management commitment
- staff participation
- efficient, effective methodology to deliver the aims
- firm intention and process to act effectively.

Appendix 1

Sources of Evidence and Research for the Corporate Communications Strategy

Staff Survey - Feedback from staff in the 2008 NHS Staff Survey informed us that changes and improvements need to be made in how we communicate with staff across the organisation. Some staff expressed a desire to be more involved in making decisions.

Evaluation Study of Organisational Communication in Leeds - The results of an evaluation of organisational communication with staff carried out by John McSorley (Locality Manager, Leeds and Wakefield) at Leeds Ambulance Station in April 2009 came up with several recommendations:

- Separate correspondence for important clinical messages
- Executive visits to YAS sites should be better publicised and consideration given to hospital site visits where potentially more staff can be seen
- Review the IT resources available on stations
- Seek volunteers on stations to take responsibility for displaying staff information
- Provide clinical team leaders and clinical team educators with advance notice of clinical changes prior to them being communicated more widely amongst all operational staff
- Feedback to be provided to staff by managers on a regular basis, not just at their Personal Development Review (PDR) session
- Greater opportunities for staff to communicate their ideas and suggestions to their line manager
- Hold station meetings/briefings for important changes that are happening within the Trust
- Engaging with staff and encouraging them to be involved in decision-making.

Some of these areas have already been addressed, but other suggestions are still to be followed up and evaluated.

Communications Audit - During the third financial quarter of 2009-10 (October-December 2009) a baseline position will be established via a communications audit. This will be carried out by a team of final year students (BA Hons in Public Relations) from Leeds Metropolitan University.

The brief is to assess the effectiveness and credibility of current communications activity and channels (internal and external), provide evidence of what does and doesn't work (including best practice from other ambulance services), and recommendations for improvement. The results of this audit will be used to help shape future activity by indicating any changes or additions necessary to the strategy and workplan of the Corporate Communications function. In particular, the results should address:

- whether the communications requirements of the YAS Five Year Business Plan need to be refreshed
- what communication support will be needed for Foundation Trust membership.

Listening Watch - Information gathered from the Executive Team's monthly Listening Watch initiative provides anecdotal feedback on what staff are happy or unhappy about in their working life. Feedback relating to communication issues can be provided directly to the relevant teams.

Media Coverage and Evaluation - Daily press cuttings and monthly evaluation of media coverage on YAS provide a barometer reading on how positively or negatively the Trust is being portrayed externally to the public. Where the Trust has received negative coverage about a particular subject matter or a specific location, action is taken to minimise further adverse publicity and look for positive stories to counteract this.

External Surveys – Surveys from NHS Yorkshire and the Humber (strategic health authority), Care Quality Commission and Audit Commission.

Appendix 2

Our Audiences

The following table summarises YAS's main target audiences - 'internal', 'health/social services' or 'external'. As a regional organisation, YAS's main audiences will be regional/local, although on occasion this will extend to communicating or influencing at a national level.

Audience Segmentation	Audience Description
Internal - YAS Employees	Staff employed by YAS, or on secondment to YAS or agency staff
Internal - Staff-side	Members of staff with official union recognition
Internal - YAS Volunteers/Support	BASICS doctors Community First Responders Voluntary car drivers (PTS)
NHS (regional)	NHS Yorkshire and the Humber (Strategic Health Authority) Acute, Mental Health and Primary Care Trusts – especially CEOs, Chairs and Commissioners Health Protection Agency
Health and Social Services (regional)	GP surgeries Out-of-Hours GP Services NHS Direct Social Services Departments Health Overview and Scrutiny Committees Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) Patient Advice and Liaison Services (PALS) Nursing and residential homes Childrens' homes Health-related charities
External - Partner Organisations (regional)	Fire and Rescue Services Police Coastguard Local Authorities – especially CEOs, Chairs and Emergency Planners (Local Resilience Forums) St John Ambulance
External - Political (regional)	Regional MPs Councillors with relevant or topical interest in the work of YAS or the wider NHS
External - Public (regional)	Patients } Residents } of Yorkshire Tax-payers }
External - Media (regional)	Local and regional media Ambulance and Health titles
External Stakeholders (national)	Department of Health Other ambulance trusts National media Regulators (eg Care Quality Commission)

Appendix 3

How we Inform, Listen and Converse

	Inform	Listen	Converse
Internal Communications	<p>Team meetings/briefings</p> <p>One-to-one staff/manager sessions</p> <p>New starter staff induction sessions</p> <p><i>Operational Update</i> – weekly staff newsletter</p> <p><i>News Alerts</i></p> <p><i>Staff Notices</i></p> <p><i>Teambrief</i> newsletters</p> <p><i>YAS Matters</i></p> <p>Payslip attachments</p> <p>Annual Report email</p> <p>YAS intranet</p> <p>NetConsent messages/reminders</p> <p>Noticeboards</p>	<p>Executive Team - Listening Watch initiative</p> <p>Team meetings/briefings</p> <p>One-to-one staff/manager sessions</p> <p>Q&A section of <i>Operational Update</i></p> <p>NHS National Staff Survey</p>	<p>Team meetings/briefings</p> <p>One-to-one staff/manager sessions</p> <p>Q&A section of <i>Operational Update</i> staffmailbox@yas.nhs.uk and internalcomms@yas.nhs.uk</p> <p>Executive Team - Listening Watch initiative</p> <p>Regular emails to management team from Chief Executive (with feedback encouraged)</p> <p>Staff focus groups NetConsent mini-polls</p>
External Communications	<p>Proactive media releases and reactive media statements</p> <p>YAS publications, including: <i>YAS at a glance</i> Annual Report Introduction to our service</p> <p>Patient information leaflets</p> <p>YAS website</p> <p>Articles in NHS and emergency service partner publications</p>	<p>Feedback from the YAS website</p> <p>Feedback from Patient Services team</p> <p>Meetings with stakeholder groups including overview and scrutiny committees (OSCs) and local involvement networks (LINKs)</p>	<p>Online feedback via corp-comms@yas.nhs.uk mailbox</p> <p>Meetings with stakeholder groups including overview and scrutiny committees (OSCs) and local involvement networks (LINKs), patient groups</p> <p>Journalist enquiries</p>

Appendix 4

Key Performance Indicators for Corporate Communications

Output-based metrics	Impact-based metrics	Outcome-based metrics
<i>Measures levels of activity</i>	<i>Measures changes in awareness, understanding or attitude</i>	<i>Measures changes in behaviour</i>
Internal Communications Number of newsletters, alerts, <i>Teambrief</i> documents issued Number of staff briefings held Intranet usage and hits to specific sections	Opinion surveys NetConsent online polls Focus groups	Action taken following specific message eg incident reporting Staff turnover NHS National Staff Survey (comparisons year-on-year) Results from Communications Audit
External Communications Number of press releases issued Number of press enquiries received Volume of media coverage Tone of media coverage Message penetration (number of mentions) Number of events held Website usage and hits to specific sections	Stakeholder surveys Online feedback/surveys Focus groups	Patient satisfaction More appropriate use of the service Results from Communications Audit

Appendix 5

Main Priorities

Priority	Action	Alignment with Strategic Objective	Measurement	Timing	Responsibility
<p>Internal</p> <p>1. To ensure staff are well-informed by providing clear and accurate information</p> <p>[Desired result: Better informed staff and improved awareness of clinical information and issues]</p>	<p>Provide comprehensive, clear and accurate information through existing, and any newly-identified, channels (ongoing).</p> <p>In conjunction with the Clinical Director, Assistant Medical Directors and the clinical management team, develop the communications material and channels of distribution for clinical information (to include new monthly document 'Clinical Summary' and further details of Clinical Incident Reviews and lessons learnt) (ongoing)</p>	<p>Our People</p> <p>Our Patients</p> <p>Clinical Excellence</p>	<p>Views expressed in NHS Annual Staff Survey Results</p> <p>Views expressed in Communications Audit (initially in December 2009, then bi-annually)</p>	<p>Completion of survey: October - December each year. Results available in February each year</p> <p>Recommendations expected from Communications Audit in December 2009</p>	<p>YAS Corporate Communications team</p> <p>YAS management team</p> <p>YAS clinical management team</p>
<p>2. To help managers to communicate more effectively with their staff</p> <p>[Desired result: Improved manager/staff relationships and increased dialogue]</p>	<p>Work with Organisational Development (OD) to provide core material, examples of good practice and templates to management team (November 2009 – January 2010 for initial work then ongoing)</p>	<p>Our People</p>	<p>Views expressed in NHS Annual Staff Survey Results</p> <p>Views expressed in Communications Audit (initially in December 2009, then bi-annually)</p>	<p>Completion of survey: October - December each year. Results available in February each year</p> <p>Recommendations expected from Communications Audit in December 2009</p>	<p>YAS Corporate Communications team</p> <p>YAS OD team</p> <p>YAS Executive Team</p> <p>YAS Assistant Directors</p> <p>YAS management team</p>

Priority	Action	Alignment with Strategic Objective	Measurement	Timing	Responsibility
<p>Stakeholders</p> <p>3. To ensure there is a coordinated approach to managing stakeholders (internal and external) to help the Trust meet its aspiration of becoming a Foundation Trust in 2011</p> <p>[Desired result: Well-informed stakeholders who understand the implications of Foundation Trust status and who support YAS's application by becoming members]</p>	<p>Work closely with the YAS Foundation Trust Programme team to produce and implement strategies and plans for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ communication and engagement; ▪ helping to explain the Trust's plans; ▪ consultation; ▪ recruiting to the target membership and maintaining levels. <p>(November 2009 onwards)</p>	<p>Our Partners</p> <p>Our Patients</p> <p>Our Staff</p>	<p>Plans in place</p> <p>Responses to the consultation</p> <p>Membership numbers</p> <p>Governor nominations</p>	<p>TBC</p> <p>TBC</p> <p>TBC</p> <p>TBC</p>	<p>YAS Foundation Trust Programme team</p> <p>YAS Corporate Communications team</p>
<p>External</p> <p>4. To enhance and defend YAS's reputation in the media and among the public</p> <p>[Desired result: Greater awareness of YAS and what the Trust does. Balanced media reporting]</p>	<p>Programme of proactive media releases (using case studies where possible) (ongoing)</p> <p>Make more of YAS's role in incidents where specialist skills and/or equipment have been used (ongoing)</p>	<p>Our Patients</p> <p>Quality</p> <p>Clinical Excellence</p>	<p>Quantity and tone of media coverage</p>	<p>Monthly media monitoring reports</p>	<p>Corporate Communications team (with input from Access and Response and A&E Operations)</p>