



**Council**  
**2 February 2021**  
**Communications and Engagement Strategy 2021-24**

<b>Classification</b>	Public
<b>Purpose</b>	For decision
<b>Issue</b>	The paper seeks agreement of the Communications and Engagement Strategy 2021-24 and our approach to implementation of the strategy.
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. To agree the Communications and Engagement Strategy 2021-24.</li><li>2. To agree the approach to implementation.</li></ol>
<b>Financial and resourcing implications</b>	<p>In November 2020, Council agreed to the discontinuation of The Osteopath magazine, which means we are able to make direct and indirect savings.</p> <p>This paper shows how we are reinvesting our resources to give effect to the Communications and Engagement Strategy 2021-24 which is focussed on a more balanced approach to engagement (listening) as well as communications (informing).</p>
<b>Equality and diversity implications</b>	Equality and Diversity is embedded within our Communications and Engagement Strategy principles.
<b>Communications implications</b>	This paper outlines the communications implications.
<b>Annexes</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>A. Communications and Engagement Strategy 2021-24 for agreement</li><li>B. Communications and Engagement Strategy 2021-24: Activity Plan</li></ol>
<b>Authors</b>	Liz Niman, Matthew Redford and Fiona Browne

### **Key messages from the paper:**

- A new draft Communications and Engagement Strategy for 2021-24 was developed following the Council strategy day in September 2020 and discussed at the private session of Council in November 2020.
- The strategy contains a short vision statement, three aims and a set of core principles which underpin the strategy. The new Communications and Engagement Strategy will support us in the delivery of the GOsC Strategic Plan 2019-24 and is annexed to the paper for Council for approval.
- Our approach to implementation of the new Strategy will ensure a balance between engagement (listening) and communicating (informing).
- The paper outlines specific activities for the beginning of the business year and goes on to explain how more qualitative activities and metrics will be developed during the course of the year focussing on 'listening'.

### **Background**

1. The General Osteopathic Council (GOsC) does not have a current Communications and Engagement Strategy. The previous strategy ran from 2016-19 and was not renewed at the same time as the GOsC Strategic Plan 2019-24.
2. Council identified this gap as a strategic risk and have been working with the Executive to develop a new strategy which looks afresh at our approach to communications and engagement. Council was interested to explore how a new communications strategy might help us:
  - improve relationships with stakeholders
  - improve understanding of our role
  - enhance understanding of the benefits of osteopaths being regulated (primarily among patients and osteopaths but also more broadly)
  - increase engagement with stakeholders
  - enhance the quality of our engagement and impact with patients and the public, alongside a pro-active, planned and focussed approach with clear actions.
3. Council held a communications and engagement focused strategy day in September 2020 which took into account a variety of feedback and research from stakeholders, but which also recognised our need to more systematically and effectively 'listen' to all our stakeholders.
4. At the strategy day, Council noted that:
  - The values of the GOsC, the profession and patients are similar; we have common interests in regulation (e.g. common interests in safety and

quality of care, candour, openness, good practice and ensuring that the integrity and reputation of the profession is maintained).

- There is an overreliance on 'traditional communication methods' such as print, for delivering information when other, more timely communication channels would be appropriate, e.g. ebulletins, social media, web-based and face-to-face (virtual or in person).
  - The strategy should be a decision making tool to support the Executive in determining what activities are undertaken now and in the future.
  - We need to use insight and data to help us to predict future developments, to help ensure that our communications and engagement are informed, relevant and timely.
  - We should put a 'human face' on our communication and engagement activity.
  - There should be a focus on communication and engagement activity which supports upstream regulation, such as our involvement with patients as part of a co-production model.
  - The development of a new communications and engagement strategy represents an opportunity for systemic change and a break from past ways of working.
5. Council considered a draft strategy in November 2020 at its Private meeting. Council noted that the draft Communications and Engagement Strategy was rebalanced with a focus on communications (informing) but also an increased emphasis towards engagement (listening). It was designed to both implement our current Strategic Plan but also based on listening and capturing feedback systematically to inform future communications, engagement and strategy to build trust and confidence in our regulatory approach.
6. Council have also had the opportunity to feed back to the Executive between meetings. Feedback from Council included:
- The need for a more dynamic strapline
  - Editing to make it shorter with less repetition.
  - Broadening the evaluation dashboard to include registration applications and registrant attendance.
  - Enhanced metrics for engagement to help to identify which media and articles are interesting our stakeholders to support more targeted and relevant information given the new focus on digital media.
  - To ensure inclusion for all stakeholders.
  - To include milestones, timelines and resource implications but also to recognise that immediate implementation should also be a focus.

7. After the Council meeting on 24 November 2020, we also sought further feedback from stakeholders including osteopaths and patients. Feedback has generally been positive about the principles and direction, although further thought about ensuring the inclusion and focus on disability was recommended.
8. This paper asks Council to agree the Communications and Engagement Strategy 2021-2024 and to agree the approach to implementation.

## Discussion

### *Communication and Engagement Strategy 2021-24*

9. The Communications and Engagement Strategy 2021-2024 is attached at Annex A and the activity plan is attached at Annex B. Council will note that this is aligned to the Business Plan for 2021-22 which is set out at Annex A of Public Item 11 on this agenda.
10. The strategy is grounded within the context of our core statutory functions, to ensure that the new communication and engagement strategy supports the successful delivery of the GOsC Strategic Plan 2019-24.
11. Within the new strategy, we have summarised our approach through a short vision statement, supported by three concise aims and a set of communication and engagement principles.

**Vision:** we will promote patient safety, and support osteopaths to deliver high quality care through a current, responsive, inclusive, and agile approach to communication and engagement.

**Purpose:** this strategy supports and provides direction for the efficient and effective delivery of our overarching strategic goals and business plans by informing the engagement activities that we undertake now and in the future.

**Aim 1: Promote trust:** Continue to improve our relationships and engagement with our stakeholders so we can increase levels of trust in us as a regulator and increase understanding of our role.

**Aim 2: Be timely and responsive:** Take a timely approach and be responsive both to stakeholder needs and to changing situations and requirements, based firmly on insight and effective planning.

**Aim 3: Be a forward looking regulator:** Ensure that our approach and our portfolio are current, relevant and forward looking.

**Principles:** We have a set of core communication and engagement principles which underpin our work and which help us use this strategy as a decision making tool for all future activities. The core principles are:

- **Open, inclusive and coherent:** we will be open and transparent, inclusive and personal; creating a unified approach across our channels; and reflecting our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion including, but not limited to, recognising disability in our audiences.
- **Reflective and insight-driven:** we will seek feedback, actively engaging with – and listening to – our audiences to increase our understanding so that our approach is reflective, outward-looking and insight-driven.
- **Targeted and purposeful:** we will communicate and engage with a clarity of purpose and direction that is aligned to our overarching strategic aims and goals.
- **Appropriate in tone:** we will ensure our tone and approach is supportive, wherever appropriate, and encourages engagement.
- **Proactive and timely:** we will respond to arising communication needs in a timely way with a clear emphasis on building positive relationships with our stakeholders.
- **Two-way:** we will ensure we have a proportionate balance between what we say – ‘informing’ – and the insight we gain through engagement and research – our ‘listening’.
- **Forward looking:** we will ensure our approach, channels and products are fresh and forward looking, taking account of user feedback and wider societal context and trends.
- **Cost effective, environmentally aware and evaluated:** our communications and engagement activities will be planned, costed and will include measures of progress and success. We will also seek to minimise any negative environmental impact in what we do.

### *Approach to implementation*

Transitional approach:

12. In November 2020, Council made a decision to discontinue The Osteopath magazine which takes effect after the final edition is published in February 2021. The reason for the decision was multi-faceted and taken to:
  - free up resources to ensure we could focus on a more pro-active and listening approach;
  - maintain and enhance our existing communications content;

- put into place a more effective data collection, analysis and insight model.
13. Taking this approach ensures that we can provide a longer term and more evidence informed approach to the implementation of our strategy, which in turn will inform future strategic developments.
  14. Our activity plan at Annex B also includes an extract from our Transitional Activity Matrix (TAM) to provide Council with assurance about the approach we are taking. We will use this to monitor our key messages in and out to stakeholders, our communications and engagement activity for all our stakeholders, along with a revised mechanism for enhancing and aligning communications across the organisation.
  15. The TAM, together with supporting Senior Management Team (SMT) meetings, will enhance and systematise our communications and engagement allowing for more targeted and informed updates to Council. This can be undertaken either as part of the Chief Executive and Registrar's report or as a separate regular standing item. We would not present the operational detail contained within the TAM to Council; however, it will enable us to draw out the important and strategic insights about which Council needs to remain aware.
  16. The TAM will enable us to meet the aims of the Communications and Engagement Strategy as follows:

**Aim 1: Promote trust:** Continue to improve our relationships and engagement with our stakeholders so we can increase levels of trust in us as a regulator and increase understanding of our role.

The TAM implementation approach will enable us to focus on the diversity of our stakeholders, which in turn will require us to listen more effectively to their different needs, gain insight and take action in a more structured way to help improve engagement.

**Aim 2: Be timely and responsive:** Take a timely approach and be responsive both to stakeholder needs and to changing situations and requirements, based firmly on insight and effective planning.

The TAM approach will enable us to review and respond on a regular basis to the key messages and insight gained from stakeholders increasing our timeliness and responsiveness.

**Aim 3: Be a forward looking regulator:** Ensure that our approach and our portfolio are current, relevant and forward looking.

The TAM approach enables us to focus on our osteopathic stakeholders but also crucially, our other external stakeholders including patients and other

health professionals. This ensures that we engage with, listen to – and influence – our external stakeholders and will enable us to continue to be aware of changing needs and environment, as well as allowing us to benchmark our performance against other health professional regulators. In doing so, we ensure our portfolio of communications remains current, relevant and forward looking.

17. The TAM meets the principles in our Communications and Engagement Strategy as follows:

- **Transparent, inclusive and personal:** by actively considering all our stakeholder communications to us, and our messages to them, in a systematic way, we will move towards a more inclusive approach where our stakeholder voices are heard.
- **Reflective and insight-driven:** the TAM enables us to actively direct resource each month (informed across the GOsC) to considering feedback from stakeholders and to translate this into insights and next steps.
- **Targeted and purposeful:** our activity will be informed by our business plan which is in turn informed by our strategic plan. This will enable us to ensure a diverse approach to our communications while remaining focused on our key aims.
- **Appropriate in tone:** our insight as recorded in the TAM will enable us to better consider ourselves in the shoes of our stakeholders, in a systematic and reflective way to better inform appropriate tone and approach.
- **Proactive and timely:** by being more systematic with our listening, and to creating next steps, we will enhance the timeliness of our responses and appropriate changes in our communications.
- **Two-way:** the approach provides a structure for ensuring that we dedicate as much resource to the messages we receive 'in' as to our messages we send 'out'.
- **Forward looking:** the insight and next steps sections of the TAM provide a structure to ensure appropriate resource goes into planning current and future communications rather than the more backward looking and untimely approach that we have had to employ in the past.
- **Cost effective, environmentally aware and evaluated:** the approach enables us to ensure that our communications and engagement activities are planned and costed and will include measures of progress and success. We will also give careful consideration to the environmental impact(s) of our communications.

18. This approach includes a core set of activities to assure Council that our communications are not reducing during this transitional period, but importantly, it will provide Council with a much better sense of the 'listening', and a much better understanding of the engagement that we get from our stakeholders, our insights on this and our next steps.
19. This will provide both Council, but also we hope our stakeholders, with evidence that we are listening and responding appropriately, which in turn we hope will begin what is likely to be the slow process of attitudinal change in enhancing trust and confidence in our regulatory approach.

### **Future approach**

20. Over time, we intend that the information gained from this transitional approach will provide evidence for our activities moving forward as we begin to implement, more effectively, the listening part of the strategy. This will be a continuous approach. For example, we may find that we end up having more osteopaths attending our FTP webinars than opening our monthly ebulletins, in which case, we may end up doing fewer ebulletins and more frequent FTP webinars to increase the reach of our messages out to osteopaths.
21. We intend to evaluate our TAM against our longer term plans for each aim to ensure that there are no gaps, and to report on this to Council at each meeting.
22. It is intended that these evaluations will inform our longer term data collection, analysis and insight strategy as outlined in the Business Plan 2021-22.

### **Conclusions**

23. Our two stream approach (immediate/transitional and longer term) is designed to ensure that we implement the principles of the Communications and Engagement Strategy 2021-24 as soon as the Business Plan 2021-22 period commences. That Business Plan includes a focus on the diversity of our stakeholders and informing activity and our listening.
24. But we will also gradually record and systematise the messages in, the insights derived from these and our next steps to inform future activity. We intend to evaluate this over a three to six month period to show activity against each of our aims, and to show how and why our communications and engagement activities will change over time in response to the insight gained.
25. In this way, we hope to provide assurance to Council that we are both immediately implementing the strategy whilst also taking time to properly evaluate, engage and direct future strategy to respond to messages received.



**Recommendations:**

1. To agree the new draft Communications and Engagement Strategy 2021-24.
2. To agree the approach to implementation.