

Hull York Medical School

Communications plan 2011-2013

Summary of this plan

For the years 2011-2013, HYMS communications staff will:

- align communications activities with the developing strategy of the school as a whole
- develop appropriate methods of communication for important audiences, specifically students and alumni
- develop the existing Boomerang Online site into a single unified online resource for HYMS staff (analogous to an intranet)
- focus on developing mature content management systems for the website so that future updates can be efficiently delegated to colleagues without losing quality oversight
- [*depending on what's decided about the prospectus:*] move to a lighter printer version of the undergraduate prospectus accompanied by greater detail online
- secure colleagues' support for a realistical prioritisation of workload which takes into account staff resource limitations

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1. About this plan

This is the communications plan for the Hull York Medical School from 2011 to 2013. It describes our intended communications activities for that period.

The activities covered by this plan do not include purely academic communications (that is, communications between HYMS or university academics working in the same field, or communications which use exclusively academic channels such as journals). They also do not include informal, purely curriculum-based communications with students, such as the regular interactions between tutors and students which take place as part of the teaching process.

2. Requirements and objectives

The objectives of HYMS communications activities flow from the requirements of the school.

Staff

HYMS staff are geographically widely distributed, working in a variety of different roles in very different physical and technical environments, usually not full-time. This makes internal communication both very important and very challenging.

Objectives:

- All staff should be kept informed of key activities across the organisation.
- Staff should be able to access information in a way that enables them to choose the medium of communication that is best suited to them, and to choose when and how often they wish to access it.
- Staff should be able to respond to communications and to communicate meaningfully with HYMS senior management.
- Key message: *HYMS values its staff and listens to what they have to say.*

Students

Historically, communications staff at HYMS have not been directly involved with student communication (except via generic channels which are also aimed at staff and the public).

However, the quality of the student experience is becoming increasingly important to the success of the school. This is particularly true given the changes to higher education funding which are expected in the period 2011-2013. The way in which the school communicates with its students is one of the main factors in that student experience. So communications with students will need to be professionalised.

Objectives:

- Students should have a single clear channel of communication with the school.
- Student communications should be coherently branded and professional, while also maintaining a friendly tone.
- Communications should be adapted to current trends in the media of communication already in use by the student body.
- Intercalated degrees should be marketed to undergraduate students to increase takeup.
- Emergency methods of communication should be available should the need arise.
- Key message: *HYMS is a professional yet friendly medical school focused on providing a top-quality student experience.*

External audiences

For historical reasons, external audiences have never been an official part of the HYMS remit (hence the communication team's official designation as 'internal communications'). This is because external relations have traditionally been reserved by the parent universities.

However, siting external relations outside of HYMS would mean that we would not have control over our own external relations strategy. For this reason, in practice the majority of the HYMS communication team's activities have in fact been for external audiences, including applicants, the media, and the general public.

Regardless of where the work takes place, objectives for communication with external audiences are:

- Student recruitment for postgraduate courses should be prioritised. In the increasingly competitive environment that we anticipate for 2011-2013, we also expect an increased need to focus on recruitment for undergraduate courses, and on attracting students from other institutions for our intercalated degrees.
- The HYMS website should be continually developed and maintained to make it a comprehensive, modern and accessible source of information for all our external audiences.
- The distinctive nature of research at HYMS, whether solely or in partnership with parent universities or other organisations, should be communicated to the public, our competitors and our external stakeholders.
- Communicating our widening participation activities should be a high priority.
- Media relations should focus on the local and regional media to raise awareness of the contribution the school makes to healthcare in the region.
- Key messages: *HYMS is a progressive, innovative medical school producing top-class doctors. HYMS is improving the health of its local region. HYMS works to widen participation in medical training in the UK.*

Alumni

To date, HYMS has not successfully engaged with its alumni. But there are now compelling reasons to do so, including marketing postgraduate courses, cultivating future clinical academics, raising the school's profile in the NHS, and long-term fundraising efforts.

Approach:

- The school should identify and liaise with members of its existing alumni community to agree strategic priorities for alumni activity.

3. Core communications activities

Brand and visual identity

Our current visual identity was created when HYMS was set up. Although the school has grown and developed considerably over the years – in terms of identity, reputation and remit, as well as size – our visual identity has remained the same and it is now beginning to look dated. From a design point of view, it is also proving unadaptable given the increasingly different demands being made upon it.

It is noticeable that recent communications work carried out both internally and by external contractors has tended to move away from the constraints of the old brand in a rather ad-hoc way. It is also noticeable that both our parent universities have updated their visual identity during the lifetime of HYMS.

But before our visual identity can be revised and updated, we need to produce a clear definition of the wider HYMS brand, including our organisational aims, values and key messages. Until now, these have never been formally agreed and recorded, which is extraordinary for an organisation of our size and reputation. All communications work should be based around our brand.

Activity plan for 2011-2013

We will consult across the organisation to define our brand, values and key messages. We will then develop an updated visual identity based on these definitions, and implement it across the range of HYMS communications.

We will identify the best way to carry out this work. At present we expect that it will probably best be carried out by an external agency working closely with the communications team.

Boomerang Online

Boomerang Online is an internal news site accessible to HYMS and NHS staff which was launched in 2009. It had an extended bedding-down period, but its popularity has increased, and a survey in November 2010 (Appendix 2) showed it to be respondents' favourite medium of internal communication. We should build on this success.

We now have a need to make static information about the school available to all staff in an organised and accessible way. The current solution (where information is stored in a wide variety of relatively unstructured places, including web pages, shared drives, on paper, in emails and in staff members' heads) is awkward, insecure, unsustainable and a threat to further development.

Activity plan for 2011-2013

We will develop, test and roll out a single point of access for news, staff information and staff resources. This will be a web-based, intranet-style solution which builds on the existing Boomerang Online system. We will develop a unified visual style across our different communications channels, as far as is possible.

We will delegate content management for some areas while retaining overall quality control of content in the communications team. We will provide training and support to staff in using the new solution. We will advertise it internally to encourage take-up. We will discontinue redundant channels of communication as this new solution becomes more widely used.

We will consider the best technology to implement this. If resources allow, it will probably prove most effective to manage this project in-house, with individual parts of the work outsourced where necessary.

HYMS sheet

The HYMS sheet is an informal paper-based and electronic newsletter circulated every 1-2 months. It has a wide readership among staff, and research shows that it is especially valued by colleagues whose work is more distant from the HYMS core. It is also read by students and some visitors. It brings together news items that have been published elsewhere in the preceding few weeks, as well as new, informal content from staff and students. It was well received by respondents to the staff survey (Appendix 2).

Activity plan for 2011-2013

We will continue to produce the HYMS sheet in its current format and circulate it to staff and students.

Email

Internal email can be used to target individuals or groups with key information.

In recent years, we have acted to reduce the number of 'blanket' emails used to distribute information, which had proven very unpopular in the past. As an official communication channel with all staff, the email system is now used only to distribute urgent, time-critical information.

Activity plan for 2011-2013

We will continue to use blanket emails sparingly for urgent, time-critical information. We will continue to discourage their use by colleagues and to provide effective alternatives.

Boomerang meeting

The Boomerang meeting is a general weekly meeting open to all staff. Although it is not a communication channel managed by the communications team, it was included in the survey of communication methods carried out in November 2010 (Appendix 2). Results showed that it was poorly attended and in general respondents did not regard it as a good method of communication.

Activity plan for 2011-2013

We do not regard the Boomerang meeting as an effective method of communication. It is not 'owned' by the communications team, so we are not able to discontinue it. But we will provide the results of our survey to inform any future discussions about the meeting that may take place among colleagues elsewhere in HYMS.

Website

The current incarnation of the HYMS website was developed and launched over a period of six months in 2009. It targets the widest possible external audience, including (significantly to the school) potential applicants for both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

The overall structure, appearance and usability of the website, and the technologies which underpin it, are jointly controlled in HYMS by the communications team and the web manager. These overall aspects have proven robust. However, other aspects of quality and usefulness vary by area across the site:

- The 'About HYMS' area is presentable and regularly updated, but a number of key areas are not yet fit for purpose. For instance, staff information is piecemeal and we

have no sophisticated way to store, maintain and display it; back-end news headline functionality is not yet mature and integrated with other communication channels across the organisation; information about management structure, especially committees, is poorly organised and patchy.

- The 'Undergraduate' area is excellent, with comprehensive content updated at least weekly and often daily, and closely linked to matching content in other publications such as the undergraduate prospectus. This has been achieved through significant engagement with colleagues in the admissions team, and close editorial control by communications.
- The 'Postgraduate' area has also benefited from significant engagement with colleagues in the postgraduate centre, but it is not yet mature. Content is generally up-to-date but there is no mature mechanism for making updates or delegating content, so this is done manually by communications staff. Difficulties also arise through staff availability and working patterns in both communications and postgraduate teams, so progress has been very slow.
- Development of the 'Research' area has suffered from a lack of engagement with colleagues and no strategic direction. The current site does not reflect the structure of the school and content is very limited compared to our competitors'.
- The 'Alumni' area is almost non-existent, but this does reflect the level of alumni activity in HYMS generally.

Because of a pressing need to replace our old website in 2009, our original intention was to develop the website in a two-stage process: first the front-end features (content, images, structure, design), then the back-end features (database support, features to enable delegated management of dynamic data). Before the completion of the second stage, most updates to the website have to be made manually through communications (or the web manager). The first stage completed on target in 2009. The second stage has proceeded very slowly because staff resources are limited, and there are many competing demands on the website with no clear organisational strategy to determine how these should be prioritised.

In practice, we have been delaying making large structural changes to the website because of the constant need to make small, time-consuming content updates, even though those large

changes would make the process of updating content much easier in future. We need to break this cycle.

Activity plan for 2011-2013

In the short term, we will focus on content for the following priority areas: research, postgraduate courses, committees, student prizes. In the longer term, we will identify parts of the website where control of content can be delegated to colleagues, and develop mature, integrated systems to allow this to happen.

We will aim to complete this work by the end of 2012. This will almost certainly involve outsourcing packages of work to external contractors. We will work to make this effective both technically and in terms of work planning.

Pioneer magazine

Pioneer is a biannual magazine aimed at a wide external audience, including other medical schools and universities, prospective students and their families, politicians and policy-makers, other stakeholders and the general public. There are also specific pages aimed at our alumni.

Because of its wide audience, it is difficult to assess the usefulness of the magazine or how well it is received by readers. However, it does reach an audience which no other channel reaches, and it mirrors publications produced by other institutions.

Activity plan for 2011-2013

We will continue to produce Pioneer biannually. We will undertake to collect data on its usefulness as far as this is possible.

We will update the design and layout of the magazine following the refresh of the HYMS brand.

Communication with students

The communications team currently has no official remit to communicate with students. For ad hoc communications, we use a mixture of Blackboard, email and the HYMS Sheet. We need to develop this further.

Activity plan for 2011-2013

We will work with the undergraduate school to agree the best channel of communication with students. This will take into account current trends in methods of communication used by students, and methods of communication already used by colleagues.

We will provide templates and resources so that official communications between the undergraduate school and students can be as professional and HYMS-branded as possible.

We will develop a method of emergency communications in case we need to issue whole-school messages to students at short notice.

Communications with alumni

The communications team currently has no official remit to communicate with alumni, except by sending them Pioneer magazine; nor does any other part of the organisation. We need to develop this further.

Activity plan for 2011-2013

We will work with members of our alumni community to determine what communications would be useful for them, and we will develop them in conjunction with volunteers from the community. This activity will be alumni-led.

In particular, we will investigate the potential for using social networking and other digital communications tools.

Undergraduate prospectus

The current design and format of the undergraduate prospectus was created by an external agency in 2009, and intended to last three years. After this date, the prospectus will be due a redesign. Experience of this process in the past suggests that it takes the best part of a year to conduct market research, put the contract out to tender, identify contractors, agree a new design, produce content and review the document, given the number of stakeholders whose input will be needed.

DRAFT – choose one of these two options for the final version of this document

The cost of designing and printing a full undergraduate prospectus is by far the biggest single slice of the communications budget, and the workload

Although we have considered moving away from producing a full printed undergraduate prospectus towards producing a lighter, less formal document

<p>implications for both the communications team and admissions colleagues are very significant. Since we anticipate increased financial pressures in the period 2011-2013 and no alleviation of pressure on staff resources, this is an opportune moment to consider whether this style of document represents the most effective use of resources. We also note that an increasing proportion of applicants rely solely on the internet when preparing for university applications, that HYMS has always emphasised modern, environmentally-friendly methods of communication, and that space and time constraints mean that the undergraduate area of the HYMS website already contains more information in more detail than any printed document.</p> <p>So we recommend switching to a lighter mini-document, containing a few pages of marketing information and some detailed admissions requirements, and linking this to a comprehensive and regularly-updated area of our website aimed specifically at undergraduate applicants.</p> <p>This is not a risk-free change, since few of our direct competitors have yet made such a bold move, but it will bring significant advantages. The final decision on how the undergraduate prospectus is presented is for the undergraduate school.</p>	<p>linked to detailed information online, we don't feel ready to do this yet as it is not an approach that has been adopted by a majority of our competitors in student recruitment. Over the next three years, we will continue to provide a full range of detailed marketing and admissions information in a printed document as well as on our website.</p>
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Activity plan for 2011-2013

We will use the existing template to create the 2013 undergraduate prospectus in-house in 2011.

We will concurrently begin the process of redesigning the prospectus for the following three-year period (2014-2016). This will need to be informed by the HYMS brand and visual identity, which we are planning to revise. Since this work will need to start before the end of 2011, we will need to have completed work on the HYMS brand and visual identity in 2011. *[update this paragraph to reflect which of the two options is chosen]*

Postgraduate prospectus

In 2010, work on the postgraduate prospectus was led by the postgraduate centre with minimal input from the communications team. This was not an ideal situation, but it was unavoidable given both teams' workload pressures. We are fortunate that the result has been positive because colleagues in the postgraduate team have some communications expertise and have worked with a strong external consultant.

Ideally, we would like the postgraduate prospectus to follow a similar workload model to the undergraduate prospectus, with the postgraduate centre acting as client and the communications team managing the work. But this is not going to be practical in the foreseeable future, given that we have no resources to allocate to it.

Activity plan for 2011-2013

So long as colleagues in the postgraduate centre have the technical and resource capacity to manage the production of their own postgraduate prospectus, we will continue to support them in this and provide limited input where requested. If capacities change either in communications or in the postgraduate centre, we will revisit this arrangement.

Events

At present, the communications team organises and delivers two main HYMS-wide events: a post-graduation reception and an annual lecture. Both of these events are opportunities to communicate HYMS key messages to our staff, students and graduates as well as to external stakeholders. We also carry some of the expenses of the annual education conference, which is organised by the undergraduate school.

Activity plan for 2011-2013

We will continue to organise and deliver the post-graduation reception, and we will organise and deliver a new annual HYMS-wide prizegiving event which may incorporate a lecture.

We will continue to support the education conference.

4. Resources

Staff resources

In-house communications staff at HYMS are:

- **Communications Officer**, 1.1 fte
- **Communications Assistant**, 0.7 fte

Financial resources

Budgets for 2011-2013 have not yet been set, but for the purposes of planning the communications budget for 2010-2011 was £106 675.

However, we have discretion over only a very small proportion of this expenditure. Two thirds of our budget (about £70 000) is spent directly on behalf of the undergraduate school, including printing study guides, designing and printing the undergraduate prospectus and organising the graduation reception. Most of the remainder is earmarked for projects over which we have no control, such as postgraduate publications, events, staff ID badges, the Dean's Christmas cards, and so on. Only about 4% of our budget (roughly £5000) is available to us to cover projects originated within the communications team.

One important consequence of this is that we do not have any significant flexibility within our budget, so we are not able to reallocate expenditure to pay for projects which arise between budgeting periods, even when these projects are regarded as very high priority (such as the website redesign in 2009). Another consequence is that we cannot rely on being able to make significant changes to the communications budget for the period 2011-2013, even if we plan significant changes in our approach to communications.

One possible solution to this difficulty would be to delegate parts of the budget to the parts of HYMS which currently control them, notably the undergraduate school. Colleagues would then request work from the communications team when they needed it, and provide funding to pay for it. This would be a more rational arrangement and it may help both us and our colleagues with work planning. However, we judge that it would be a significant risk to the organisation, since we would then be vulnerable to some colleagues

commissioning communications materials without recourse to quality control and oversight from the communications team (as has already happened several times in the past few years). HYMS is not a sufficiently mature organisation to prevent this happening through its requisitioning and budget control channels.

5. Prioritisation and management of workload

Staff resources are obviously very limited and no further staff resources are anticipated to become available in the period 2011-2013. Given these constraints, it will not be possible to meet all the school's communications requirements in full.

We will therefore need to develop mechanisms so that we can:

- prioritise objectives so we can meet key objectives as effectively as possible within the constraints of existing resources, and secure agreement from HYMS management for this process
- manage demand on communications services from other parts of the organisation, and manage expectations so that colleagues' plans are not disrupted by our inability to provide support for low-priority work
- improve internal systems to reduce workload demand
- move towards a commissioning model for communications work, using 'job sheets' so that colleagues can formally request work from us and we can prioritise and agree timescales appropriately
- consider outsourcing communications work where appropriate

Appendix 1: Current communications activities

Job	Main domain	
	internal	external
Sourcing and writing news stories	✓	✓
Writing & designing the HYMS sheet	✓	
Writing & designing the external magazine		✓
Maintaining & updating the website		✓
Designing & specifying new website developments		✓
Designing & writing ad-hoc marketing materials for colleagues		✓
Collating & printing curriculum materials	✓	
Coordinating events	✓	
Responding to media enquiries		✓
Organising media training		✓
Managing internal use of HYMS brand	✓	
Advising on external use of HYMS brand		✓
Writing & commissioning intercalate.co.uk		✓
Replying to general public emails		✓
Coordinating alumni activities		✓
Writing & commissioning undergraduate prospectus		✓
Liaising with UoY press office on PR		✓
Attending meetings, advising colleagues on comms issues	✓	
Proofreading and editing comms produced by colleagues	✓	✓
Publicising HYMS events externally		✓
Publicising external events internally	✓	
Organising staff events, farewell gifts, etc	✓	
Maintaining contacts database	✓	✓
Monitoring media coverage		✓
Ordering & selling HYMS merchandise	✓	✓
Maintaining photo library		✓
Evaluating communications activities	✓	✓
Compiling lists of things we do	✓	✓
Total	12	19

Appendix 2: Results of 2010 staff survey

Please tell us how useful you find each of the following methods of communication in HYMS.

	Not at all useful	Occasionally useful	Often useful	Invaluable	Total of often useful + invaluable	I never see / attend this	Don't know
HYMS Sheet	3.3%	35.3%	31.4%	5.2%	36.6%	17.6%	7.2%
Pioneer	15%	26.1%	12.4%	0.7%	13.3%	35.3%	10.5%
Boomerang Online	2.6%	27.5%	28.8%	7.8%	36.6%	26.8%	6.5%
Boomerang meeting	11.1%	10.5%	3.3%	5.2%	8.5%	55.6%	14.4%
Total number of respondents: 153							