



Communications Strategy 2018 to 2021

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY 2018–21

This document sets out the CCRC's External Communications Strategy for 2018 to 2021. The strategy is driven by the aims set out in the current Corporate Plan and Business Plan.

Our Target Audiences

CCRC communications target a wide range of audiences with the key ones being:

- applicants and potential applicants (particularly those in custody)
- lawyers, including those acting for CCRC applicants
- victims of crime
- the media
- the public
- stakeholder groups / campaign groups / non-statutory caseworking groups such as charities and university based appeals projects
- statutory bodies such as the appeal courts, prosecuting and investigating authorities, prison authorities and the Government, including our sponsors unit at the MOJ
- opinion formers such as MPs (including members of the Justice Select Committee and other relevant committees and groups), members of the House of Lords, journalists, think tanks and professional bodies.

Our Aims

The principal aim of our external communications activity is to demonstrate and persuade that we are fair and thorough and that we reach the correct decisions in the cases we consider.

Beyond that the CCRC's communications aims are to:

- encourage well founded applications to the CCRC by building informed awareness of our role and requirements among applicants, potential applicants and their representatives and supporters
- ensure that the CCRC is accessible and understandable to all who might need it by making our communications and the information we provide clear and user friendly
- promote to the full range of our stakeholders a better understanding of the role of the CCRC and the nature of our work
- demonstrate that we are a serious, secure, trustworthy organisation performing its statutory function to a high standard and that we are spending public money appropriately.

- position the CCRC as a leading voice in debates about miscarriages of justice and related issues and to initiate such debate where appropriate
- build the CCRC's reputation as an independent investigatory body working to the highest standards of quality and integrity
- raise public awareness of the outcomes of, and lessons learned from, CCRC casework and thereby help build public confidence that safeguards against wrongful conviction (and incorrect sentencing) are working properly.

Communicating with people in custody

About 80% of our applications come from people who are in custody. The specific circumstances in prisons, such as the lack of access digital devices and online services, mean that communicating with applicants and potential applicants in custody is a particular challenge. It is also reasonable to assume that the widely reported crisis in UK prisons has made matters worse in recent years. We are concerned that prison staff are often too busy with their basic duties to worry about matters such as distributing CCRC material. It may also be that the morale of prisoners and their ability or appetite to apply to the CCRC is affected by conditions in prisons.

Prisoners are, however, not a homogeneous group and our communication approaches need to address factors such as low educational and literacy standards, ethnicity, gender and age. Our ability to reach prisoners with information to help them make informed decisions about whether and when to apply is a vital aspect of our providing access to our services and will be crucial to our success in encouraging well founded applications. Our interactions with prisons and prisoners are principally led by the Customer Service Manager.

During the period covered by this strategy we will:

- continue to analyse application intake and carefully target the supply of forms and information accordingly
- continue with the long-running programme of prison visits aimed at raising awareness of the CCRC among staff and prisoners
- further develop prison surgeries for applicants and potential applicants piloted with some success at recent prison visits
- work with HM Prison and Probation Service to provide training material on the CCRC for the training of prison staff
- continue to work with prison media (e.g. Inside Time newspaper and National Prison Radio) to give those in custody relevant information and contact details for the CCRC
- ensure that we are early adopters of emerging digital technology in prisons and create and make available information in formats appropriate to that medium
- identify and target specific sections of the in-custody population from whom we would expect more proportionate numbers of applications

- work with other bodies such as the Independent Monitoring Board, Chaplaincy Service, HM Inspectorate of Prisons to improve distribution of CCRC material and ensure that prisons comply with PSO 4400.

Channels of Communication

We reach our stakeholders through a range of communications channels. A broad approach to each is set out below.

CCRC publications

Our written explanations of who we are and what we do will often be the first, impression-forming experience that individuals, particularly applicants, have of the CCRC. Therefore, all material designed to inform applicants or potential applicants about our role and requirements must be clear, professional and accurate and written in a way that is as accessible as possible to its target audiences. Our range of Easy Read materials reflects this ambition.

There continues to be significant crossover here between the CCRC's work on communications and customer service. Those involved will work together to ensure that there is joined-up between these functions.

Translations

We keep under review demand for materials in languages other than English and currently have available 13 translations of our Q&A document. We aim for the translations of our core material to reflect identified changes in need within the population and within the prison population in particular. We will introduce new translations of material in response to specific circumstances.

Correspondence

The tone and frequency with which the CCRC communicates with applicants, their representatives and / or lawyers is of the utmost importance. Clear, professional and consistent communication will help enhance the CCRC's reputation as a body that deals fairly and consistently with applicants. We will keep under review our material, templates, standard letters and so on to ensure that our use of language is appropriate to its audience and that standards of clarity in explanation are consistently high in all our communications with applicants and other correspondents.

The News Media

Coverage of CCRC cases in the broadcast, print and online news media is the principal way in which the wider public learn of the CCRC and form opinions about the value of our work. It is the principal means of raising the public profile of the CCRC and the public profile of miscarriages of justice.

It follows that influencing the news and proactively generating coverage of the CCRC and its activities is also the principal means of managing our reputation with the public and with other stakeholder groups including applicants and potential applicants, MPs, ministers, civil servants and others.

During the period of this strategy, we will:

- create and take appropriate opportunities to gain positive media coverage of the CCRC and its cases in order to raise awareness of our work and promote the CCRC as a professional, expert, independent body performing a necessary role in the criminal justice system
- provide information as appropriate in order to assist journalists to produce accurate, informed and interesting news and current affairs content relating to CCRC cases and other business
- identify appropriate opportunities to allow controlled media access to CCRC cases and processes
- identify appropriate opportunities to initiate and/or contribute to debates about miscarriages of justice and related issues in which we have a legitimate interest
- cultivate constructive relationships with leading journalists in relevant fields
- identify and pursue opportunities to place articles generated by the CCRC in professional publications for lawyers, the police, prison officers and so on
- respond constructively to criticism in the media and where necessary rebut inaccurate coverage.

Social Media

The CCRC has a presence on Facebook and Twitter and we keep under review the desirability of adding, or changing to, other social media platforms. We principally use Twitter to publicise referrals and to inform followers about our position on relevant issues by tweeting news and linking to press releases and statements on the website. Facebook generally replicates that material. We also use Twitter to respond constructively to criticism.

During the period of this strategy we will:

- Tweet as appropriate and where possible cross refer between tweets and CCRC material on our website and Facebook page.
- increase the number of followers by 2,000¹

CCRC website

The CCRC website at www.ccrcc.gov.uk provides information about the CCRC and materials relevant to a range of stakeholders from applicants, their supporters and lawyers, to academics.

In the next three years we will

- continue to develop and add sections to our website to provide for identified need, to improve access to our services, including exploring the use of audio and video content, and to stimulate interest in particular areas of our work
- use our website to host open source resources for stakeholders and others wishing to inform and teach about the work of the CCRC

¹ Effectively tripling the number of followers of the @ccrcupdate handle.

- develop and make available on the website a downloadable electronic application form
- explore the possibility of creating an on-line application form with interactive elements and the capability for information to be uploaded to the CCRC, to improve efficiency, security, legibility and minimize postage, storage and transport costs.

Planned stakeholder events

The CCRC aims to work constructively with its stakeholders to provide them with opportunities to air their views, help develop future services, to develop constructive relationships with them and to build understanding.

We will:

- continue staging regular CCRC stakeholder conferences with at least one during this corporate plan period
- introduce regular stakeholder forum meetings for a number of identified active stakeholders
- introduce a series of lectures by prominent figures in relevant fields
- build and maintain constructive relationships with campaigning organisations and provide training and information to improve their understanding and opinion of the CCRC
- seek particularly to engage directly with and rebuild relations with university based criminal appeal projects and others trying to assist with alleged miscarriage of justice cases
- continue to work with SCCRC and the Norwegian CCRC at tripartite meetings and take other ad hoc opportunities to do so.

Individual roles in high level stakeholder engagement

Public perception can be shaped by key opinion formers such as particular journalists, influential MPs, special interest groups in Parliament (such as the All Party Group on Miscarriages of Justice formed in 2017), members of the House of Lords, professional bodies and experts in, or commentators on, specific areas.

Engagement with such stakeholders will sometimes need to be reactive, but a considered proactive approach to high level stakeholders is also required.

During the period of this strategy we will aim to identify current and emerging key opinion formers and selectively target them in order to promote a better understanding of the CCRC and as far as possible to foster favourable opinion.

The Chair of the CCRC has a key role to play here. Where particular expertise or specialisms are relevant, other board members and/or CCRC staff will also have a role to play. We will also keep track and make use of key contacts accessible by virtue of Commissioners' existing professional relationships.

To assist in operational planning, a structured annual timetable will be developed for each year of the strategy period targeting high level

stakeholders relevant to current issues. This may include a programme of bi-monthly visits to the CCRC. Subjects will include figures such as ministers, law officers, interested politicians, leaders of the Law Society and the Criminal Bar, institutions involved in legal training, leaders of inspectorates and so on.

Speaking for the CCRC

Generally

Confident and clear communication is fundamental to creating the right impression as well as conveying the correct information. It is the responsibility of everyone at the CCRC to ensure that all our verbal and written communications with applicants, lawyers and others is clear and professional.

Dealing with the media and other stakeholders

The Head of Communication will generally be the first point of contact and spokesperson for the CCRC on a day-to-day basis and will usually be responsible for dealing with the media and other stakeholders.

In 2018, a new Chair will be appointed to the CCRC. Currently, the Chair tends to be the principal public face of the CCRC and first port of call when there is a need to speak for the CCRC in an interview for broadcast, or for a senior named interviewee for print media on policy, or general CCRC topics.

Commissioners, the Chief Executive and others will also speak for the CCRC when specific subject matter, or other circumstances, mean that they are best placed to do so.

The CCRC will during the period of this strategy provide professional media training for those who might be called upon to speak for the CCRC. Our aim here is to develop a core of confident, well-trained people willing and able to deal with media opportunities and, where necessary, to respond well to negative publicity.

Commissioners and members of staff may take on lecturing, public speaking engagements and represent the CCRC elsewhere as appropriate.

Monitoring and Evaluating

The assessment of success, or failure, of the External Communications Strategy will depend upon on a mix of quantitative and qualitative measures as well as upon anecdotal evidence and some gut feel.

We will:

- continue with the electronic monitoring of traditional and social media and be alive to the tone of coverage of the CCRC and its activities²

² A normal approach to monitoring would involve looking at sentiment of media coverage. Since moving in 2009 to online media monitoring (where the work is done by an algorithm rather than a person) sentiment monitoring has been problematic. Sentiment monitoring is based largely on the proportion of positive sentiment words in an article. The issue for us is that because most media coverage relates to crimes, to criminal convictions and so on,

- continue to develop the means by which we monitor applicants' and others' attitudes towards us and seek to make more and better use of information we already gather from applicants³
- continue to monitor our case intake in relation to characteristics of applicants (such as age, gender, ethnicity, disability) and the source of applications and to respond appropriately to changes in the results
- continue to monitor the number and proportion of complaints to the CCRC relating to various issues including how and when communication issues are a cause of dissatisfaction
- develop an approach to stakeholder tracking among a range of groups in order to benchmark opinions about the CCRC against which to measure progress.

stories are full of terms that algorithms count as negative. As a result, the sentiment score of the stories tends to be negative even when the coverage is neutral or even positive in nature.

³ We seek feedback from via the Easy Read feedback forms at application stage and at case closure. Results are fed back to SMT.