

**ASSOCIATION FOR CLINICAL BIOCHEMISTRY
GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS OFFICER**

STRATEGY FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS 2008 - 2010

Introduction

This document proposes a Strategy for PR and Media communications and training for the ACB from 2008 to 2010 inclusive. It incorporates experience gained since the appointment of a Government Affairs Officer and the draft Strategy for 2006 – 08 proposed in 2006.

Mission Statement

“To establish the Association for Clinical Biochemistry as the leading organisation for clinical, scientific and professional development of Clinical Biochemistry and Laboratory Medicine in the United Kingdom and as a powerful voice worldwide”

General Considerations

The Association’s approach to the Media and Communications has already moved from a largely reactive one responding to invitations for comment and so on to an active one. The Association identifies matters of key public and scientific/medical interest and promotes its role in them through ongoing promotional activities and targeted press releases.

The Association promotes and participates in collaborative activities with fellow organisations such as the Royal College of Pathologists, Institute of Biomedical Sciences, Association of Clinical Pathologists and British In Vitro Diagnostics Association. This enables us to share the resource implications with others and ensure that consistent messages are delivered. During the lifetime of this strategy the aim would be to spread the collaboration to other laboratory medicine disciplines and begin approaches to other branches of Clinical Science with similar objectives.

A variety of mechanisms will be employed including:

- Websites such as “Labs Are Vital”
- Press releases to announce innovative scientific publications, Association policies and responses to consultation exercises
- Press conferences if matters of significant public interest arise
- Targeted events to raise awareness of politicians and health service decision makers both of laboratory medicine and of the ways in which it contributes to effective and safe high quality health care and value for money.
- Public events such as “meet the scientist” and presentations to meetings of relevant groups such as patient groups, round table, and so on.

Strategic Approach

Adopting a strategic approach will allow the Association to direct its limited resources in the most effective way by concentrating on the most important issues and collaborating wherever possible with fellow organisations with common objectives to share the cost.

Outline

The strategy provides a “route map” that identifies:

- Specific objectives that, if achieved, would achieve the overall objective expressed in the Mission Statement.
- A list of (prioritised) mechanisms that will be used to achieve the objectives
- A schedule of tasks that need to be accomplished, organised into a plan indicating how and when the mechanisms will be put into action

Objectives**Concentrate on the key issues, identified as:**

- The harmonisation of clinical biochemistry and laboratory medicine in the interests of improved quality and patient safety.
 - Harmonisation of units and reference intervals
 - Minimum data sets for test profiles
 - Contributions to e-learning and “the map of medicine”
- The development of knowledge management as an educational programme to achieve good practice in the use of clinical biochemistry and laboratory medicine services.
 - Training in Evidence Based Medicine
 - Use of “best practice” guidelines
 - Sharing of good practice in primary care
 - Promotion of evidence-based demand management programmes
 - Publication of quality clinical audits
- Promoting work on future directions in clinical biochemistry and laboratory medicine.
 - Translational research achievements and opportunities
 - Point of Care testing
 - “Blue Skies” scientific meetings
 - Publicising “What’s New” on a regular basis in ACB News

Gain ownership within the Association

- Gain the approval of Council.
- Work with Regional Committees to take an active approach to promoting Laboratory Medicine.
- Work with Standing Committees to ensure that they concur with the strategy and its priorities and that Public Affairs and Publicity are aligned with the business activities of the Association.
- Develop the Expert Panel to ensure its continuity and effectiveness and equip its members with necessary skills.
- Provide, and act on, feedback mechanisms to involve the membership

Maintain the key issues

- Ensure that the key issues inform the forward planning processes of the Association and revise them if this is demanded by the changing political and managerial environment
- Ensure that any developments such as extending membership are reflected in the key issues and the mechanisms used to deliver our messages.

Deliver the Messages

- Exploit the mechanisms described below to deliver the messages to the audiences described and in the stated order of priorities.

Mechanisms**Internal Communications**

The bulk of the membership is by now aware of the efforts being made to raise the Association’s profile and increase its influence. In order to take those initiatives forward it is necessary not only to inform but also to engage the membership. There needs to be strong leadership from the centre, which in this case means strong commitment from Council and

Executive to the key objectives and messages, coupled with actions at a Regional and Local level in addition to the more central activities like Labs Are Vital™.

- Establish a point of contact and action group for PR/PA with every ACB Region
- GAO visit/communicate with every Regional committees at least once per year.
- Regular (annual, eg at local AGM or scientific meeting) Regional update for local members on key policies and issues with discussion and feedback to the centre.
- Regular briefing to all members through ACB news on:
 - Issues arising at Government level
 - Key Association Messages
 - Local issues that have potential for becoming more widespread
 - Policies/Strategies that are required
 - Invitation for feedback on general and specific topics.
- Establish Web based mechanism for discussion of key topics within the capabilities of the available technologies.
 - Blogs
 - Mailbases
 - Chatrooms
 - Accessible, real time updated “database” of policies, press releases, questions answered, publicity received

External Communications

The target audiences, in priority order, for our messages have been identified as:

1. “Local” NHS Management
2. Central NHS Management
3. The Public
4. Politicians and Central Decision Makers

Local Management

- Corporate approaches under the umbrella of Labs Are Vital™
- Participation in Management groups whenever possible
- Presentations to Management Boards, eg at Annual General Meetings.
- Pool of materials (eg presentations) available from ACB for local tailoring.

Central NHS Management

- Establish ourselves as a representative voice for Clinical Science in Biochemistry/Immunology and more widely as our membership grows.
 - Anticipate issues and send out our message before they develop.
 - Respond rapidly to issues that arise unexpectedly.
 - Publicise relevant research that we are undertaking that contributes to the quality, reliability and advancement of Clinical Science and Laboratory Medicine.

The Public

- Establish ourselves as a reference source for the news and publication media.
 - Identify our expert representatives (Expert Panel), define their role and mandate and equip them with necessary media and communication skills.
 - “Register” ourselves with organisations such as the Science Media Centre.
 - Establish contacts with the press and other media and providing them on a regular basis with interesting material relating to the profession.
 - Information Packs

- Press releases – announcing new developments, important publications, meetings, etc. as well as responding regularly to news items relating to clinical science and laboratory medicine
 - “Promotional” Videos – There would be advantages to our preparing some short video presentations of our key messages, including scenes of laboratory activity, interaction with patients, and so on. Such material is often in demand as background for news items and so on.
- Following up on any items relating to clinical science and laboratory medicine that we are invited to respond to.
- Promoting our view in relevant areas when we are not explicitly invited to!
- Alerting the press to any of our meetings that may include matters of general interest, eg FiLM.
- Establish a public profile (to consolidate a base from which to influence target audiences)
 - National Pathology Week
 - Organise public events such as “meet the scientist” and participate in public facing events.
 - Encourage local participation in public information exercises like open days and so on.
 - Provide information about laboratory medicine and blood testing to the public (websites like LTOL, LRV, brochures and pamphlets in clinics and surgeries, participation in local radio and TV programmes about health topics, and so on)
 - Exploit our own technical events (eg Focus) by making the public aware that we are organising them in their area and attracting internationally renowned pioneers in our field, and so on.
 - Participate in initiatives aimed at young people to arouse their interest in – and understanding of – science and medicine.
- **Politicians and Central Decision Makers**
 - Respond to Government and Parliamentary inquiries and consultations that are in any way relevant to clinical science and laboratory medicine in our own right and attach our own “branding” even where there has been collaboration with others (eg RCPATH).
 - Maintain a stock of up to date promotional material about clinical science and laboratory medicine and the profession *and send it out when opportunities present themselves.*
 - “Lobby” interested/sympathetic MPs, Peers on SIGNIFICANT issues that arise. We could organise this through regional groups with pre-addressed cards and so on.
 - Organise events that draw us to the attention of politicians and Government decision makers *eg* Launch of National Pathology Week

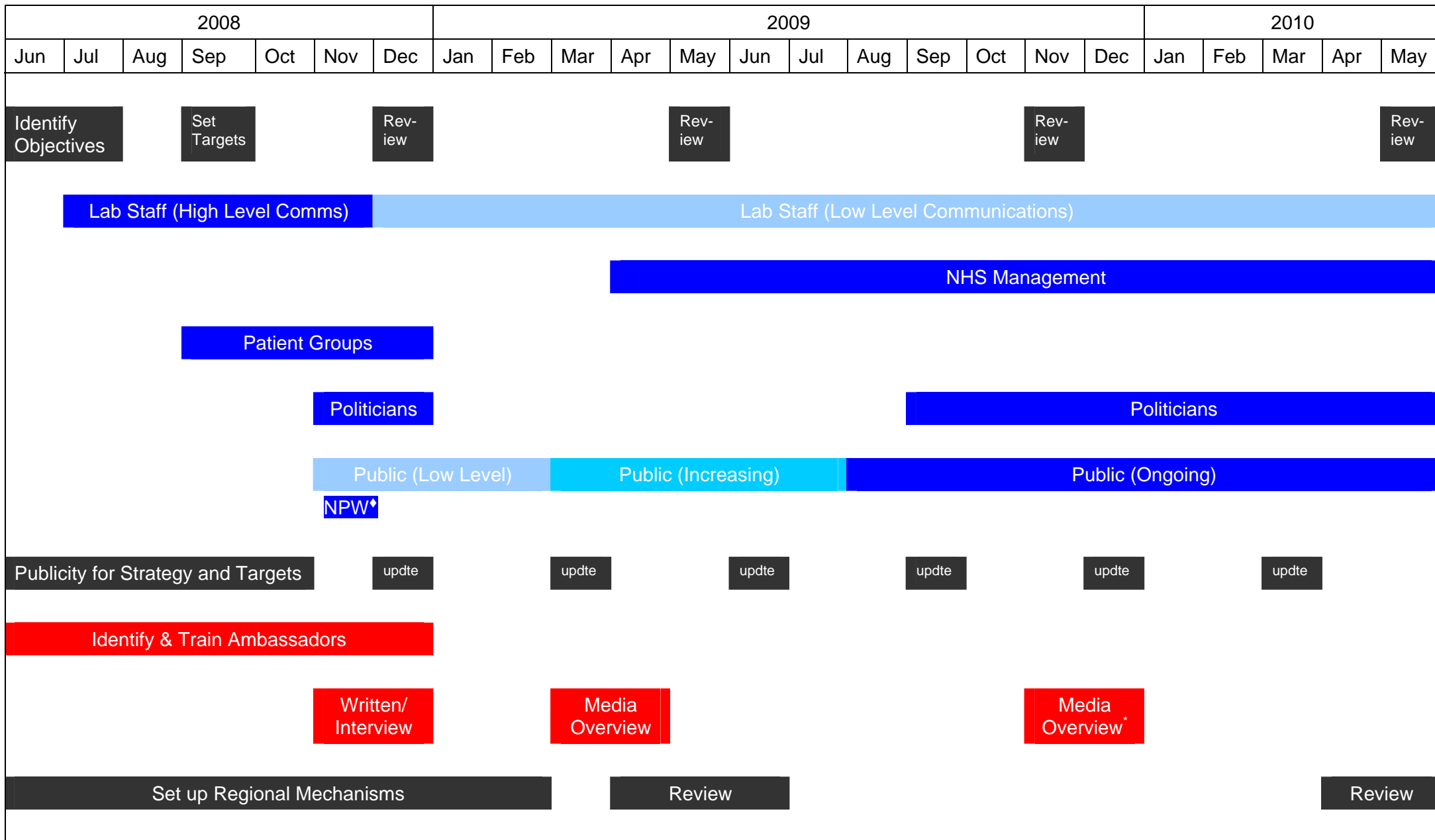
Measuring Performance

It is important to be able to measure our performance against the objectives throughout the lifetime of the strategic action plan. A suitable mechanism for this will be to set targets to be achieved for each of the objectives. For example, taking the example of the objective “Harmonisation of units and reference intervals” the target might be to achieve this for the “top twenty” most requested tests within the first year, the next thirty within the second year.

The action plan includes provision for setting targets and regular review of achievement.

High Level Action Plan

Task	Date	
Identify the Objectives		
Three key topic areas (eg MSC, POC/Screening, Medical Education)	June – July 08	Annual review
Set targets for measuring performance against objectives	August 08	Repeat if topic areas change
Review performance against targets	November 08	6 monthly
Identify the Audience(s)		
Lab Staff	Autumn 08	reducing
NHS Management	Summer 09	And ongoing
Patient Groups Diabetes UK, Renal Patients, etc	Autumn 09	ongoing if successful
Politicians/Civil Servants	Late 09/Early 10	ongoing
Public	Low level Autumn 08 (NB NPW 3-9/11/08)	Ramp up during 10 then ongoing
Inform the Membership about PR/PA Activities		
Widespread publicity to membership for this Strategy	06 – 10/2008	
Regular update on progress to membership	December 08	Quarterly
Expert Panel Training and Development		
Panel Meetings, Focus and ?	2 per year	
ACB Executive/Nominations Committee identify “Abassadors” (x 6 to 8) for full Media training	Aug - Sep 08, Winter 09	Ongoing as needed
Full media training for ambassadors (Already funded)	Winter 08/09	To Suit participants
Presentation and Drafting Skills training x18 participants (Already funded)	02/12/2008	
Media Awareness Overview Training	Spring 2009 Autumn 2009	Funded Not funded
Regional Organisation		
Set up local mechanisms (key contact, working group, ...) and approaches by GAO visiting all Regions	06/08 – 02/09	And ongoing
Review Arrangements	Spring 09	



♦ National Pathology Week 3 – 9 November 2008

* Not included in initial funding

Resource Implications

The full resource implications are difficult to estimate. The areas in which resources are required include:

- Collection of Material♦
- Collation and maintenance (updating) of material.
- Drafting of press releases.
- Issue of press releases.
- maintenance of press and media lists.
- Coordination of responses to press releases.
- Central point for press inquiries and redirection to relevant experts.
- maintenance of websites (acb, etc).
- LRV Executive.
- LRV Working group.
- Media training•
- Monitoring activities – government sites, news and media for new stories, news and media to track uptake of press releases.
- Press briefings, press conferences.
- Public Affairs events (eg Parly & Scientific Committee, direct briefings by invitation, etc.)▪
- Hospitality (briefings, events, etc).

I have tried to identify the approximate balance between financial and personal time resource implications (see footnotes) but details of actual time and cost are very difficult to assess. The best approach might be to estimate costs and approve individual elements on an ongoing basis with very careful monitoring of planned and actual “expenditure” so that future budgetary planning can take place. Value for resource must be the ultimate arbiter of actual budgetary allocations.

The scale of activities envisaged in this strategy would not have staffing implications additional to the existing staff complement. A large increase in activities might have such implications in respect of gathering and disseminating information as well as organising meetings, briefings and so on.

Broadening of the membership will influence both the scale of expenditure and the availability of resource but it is likely that the balance would shift in favour of the increased resource availability as the initial set-up resource requirements will already have been met.

*J O’Meara
Government Affairs Officer
3rd October 2008*

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- ♦ Mostly personal Time and Expertise implications
 - Mostly Financial implications
 - Combination of financial and personal Time implications