

CHURCH OF SCOTLAND EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS REVIEW

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Chief Officer, Dave Kendall

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Encourage the Chief Officer and the Head of Communications to undertake a review of External Communications with a view to ensuring a fully integrated and professionally led strategic communications programme across all external media, and instruct the Assembly Trustees to bring an update on its implementation to the General Assembly in 2021.

Review of external communications 2020-2021

Introduction by the Chief Officer

The Church of Scotland is blessed in having a range of highly skilled and experienced professional services that enable the Church to function as one of Scotland's largest religious organisations and charities.

This review focuses on the Communications department which is a prime example of all that is good about the National Office team. The department is passionate and committed to providing the best possible communications to further the vision of the Church and support what is widely acknowledged as the most far reaching reform agenda that the modern Church has ever faced.

Over the last year this has been overlayed with the further challenge of supporting the Church through the pandemic. In many ways this has been particularly challenging for the communications team – the way we communicate in the modern world has moved on very quickly and significantly which has resulted in increasing demands on the resource and the requirement for new skills and platforms in what is a very fast-moving environment that demands an almost instant response. This has resulted in the need for multi-tasking, the expectations of customers rising and the stresses and strains on the team increasing.

Whilst this sort of backdrop is consistent across the service departments of the Church, what makes the Communications Department unique is that it is very hard to tightly define the scope of the work as the more high-quality communications we do the more is demanded of us. The Head of Department and her team have been extremely successful and adept in managing their way through this situation and this report demonstrates the progress made whilst noting that the current pace of working is not sustainable. It is acknowledged that it is hard to strike the balance in terms of the volume of communications that we produce, and there is a clear need for the senior management within the Church to provide proactive support in both shaping and prioritising the Communications agenda and supporting the team. This has resulted in the proposal to establish a Communications Strategy Board to support the Head of Communications.

This report represents real progress and impact from a team that is dedicated to their task.

Outcome of the Information Technology and Communications Task Group of relevance to the review of external communications

In September 2020 the IT and Communications Task Group reported to the Assembly Trustees. The Group had been tasked with progressing a number of remits; the first of which was “to support the Chief Officer in bringing about a streamlined single point of access for internal and external communications”. The report concluded that a robust communication strategy was required. It was noted that our current website, whilst externally-facing, was also providing access to resources for internal church use and it was recommended that the website be revamped with a focus on our external stakeholders. It should include a clear statement of the Church of Scotland’s vision and how this is being addressed by the Church. Whilst outside the scope of this review it was recognised that more needed to be done to provide a coherent, effective and efficient means of internal

communication so that information can flow and be accessed at national, regional and local level, resulting in the recommendation to develop a new intranet and the extension of the use of ‘churchofscotland’ email addresses.

It was suggested that the staffing resource needs to be reviewed and enhanced, if required, to allow us to take these items forward as a matter of high priority.

Progress is being made against these recommendations as work is progressing towards both instigating a new project to establish a new intranet platform with greatly enhanced content/access and extending the number of Church of Scotland users (currently limited to CSC staff) coupled with an extension of CofS email addresses to key stakeholders. A communications strategy is also in development which will reflect key elements from this external review.

In terms of additional resources, the staffing level of the Communications team has been maintained against the backdrop of a 20% reduction in National Office staffing levels. The budget for the department has also been maintained despite a 30% reduction across the National Office. This shows a real commitment to the communications function and there is recognition that additional resource is likely to be required to progress the growing internal communications agenda.

Remit 2 of the Group was to review the communication methods which had emerged during lockdown and make recommendations on areas for further training, support and investment – with particular examination of the development of online/digital church. The report recognised that the evolving use of online worship had created a greater engagement with ‘church’, creating a new opportunity for outreach. Local churches or groups of churches needed guidance and support in this area so that they can continue to use digital means even when we are able to return to our buildings. Meetings as well as worship can benefit. Webinars were recognised as a good resource to support this and they continue to be used frequently in communicating internally and externally.

The final IT and Communications Task Group remit of relevance to the review of external communications was to engage with and make recommendations on the effectiveness of Life and Work, St Andrew Press and other agencies responsible for producing regular publications. The very significant contribution of Life and Work to our communications internally and externally was noted and needs to be taken account of in our development of future strategy. We are continuing to see a move from paper publications to digital media in all aspects of the work of the agencies of the Church and a proposal was made to form a collaborative working group – PICT – where those responsible for Publications, IT and COMMS can share skills and expertise to make for more efficient ways of working while rationalising the volume of output in conjunction with the communications strategy which is in the process of development. This proposal is still to be progressed but will be implemented by the Chief Officer in 2021.

The Communications department’s vision

To be the trusted lead communicators in relation to the Church of Scotland and associated agencies of the Church.

Responsible for working with and supporting all parts of the Church as an enabler to coordinating communications activity across the organisation to ensure our stakeholders are engaged with our activities, and provided with the information they need in a timely manner using the most appropriate and effective communications channels and approaches.

Our Communications department

The Communications department is made up of experienced communications experts working across external and internal communications with specific expertise in strategic communications, media relations, digital, social media, web, video, events and design. A more comprehensive list of our core skills and services [can be found here](#).

The headcount of the team has not changed in the last decade (eight full-time staff and one part-time member). However, the demand for our services and the range of communications possibilities open to the organisation, and to which we are asked to respond, has grown year on year and therefore need careful management and prioritisation. As noted above, the Communications resource and budget has remained stable whilst the central organisation has contracted by 20% in terms of staff and 30% in terms of budget which demonstrates a real commitment to the Department.

The Church of Scotland's Communications department is run by a Head of Communications and Communications Manager. The team comprises:

- A senior communications officer and two communications officers with a primary focus on external communications
- A web developer and web editor responsible for managing [the Church of Scotland website](#)
- A design team leader and senior designer (part-time)

The staff are all professionally qualified and have extensive communications experience across the private, public and third sector.

Key activities

Communications staff care deeply about the organisation and the roles of the people within the Church. They are often first in the queue to tell the good news stories about the Church and her people and highlight our successes but also act as the first line of defence against external attack.

Our external communications activities, including how we engage with the media, our news stories, newsletters, social media posts, images, videos and publications are all carefully assessed to ensure they are maximising our opportunities to represent the organisation and associated partners to the best of our ability.

- We promote the reputation of the Church, through proactively telling the uplifting stories of local church and our people, showcasing their work and faith in action and by publicising church initiatives and events
- We protect the reputation of the Church by anticipating and responding to issues with potential to be damaging, from attacks on faith and the decline in belief/membership to safeguarding and discipline issues
- We help ministers, congregations and staff deal with crisis communications and handling the media when their communities/churches are dealing with a challenging event or tragedy
- We create content for the media, for the website and for social media
- We copyedit text written by Church staff
- We advocate for the Church of Scotland brand in the production of leaflets, booklets, book covers, posters, calendars, cards, letter-heads, social media graphics, videos, banners and much more
- We respond to calls seeking communications advice every day from presbyteries, ministers, local churches, staff and volunteers

- We coordinate the response to media requests for comment 24/7 365 days of the year
- We support staff and local churches on a wide range of communications issues, from the importance of using plain English to best practices for digital content, web and social media management
- We issue communications best practice and guidance and conduct training in areas including social media management, media relations and newsletter production.

External support to the Church of Scotland and associated agencies

Demand for professional communications support is growing year on year and the current team is very stretched as it endeavors to respond to all the needs of the Church of Scotland.

We support two-way communications and actively encourage engagement using the feedback we receive to better inform our activities.

We take a strategic approach to our work, focusing on how best to use our finite resources to deliver effective, impactful and accessible communications that support the organisation and its people to deliver their aims and objectives.

Acting for the Church, we provide a service to all the departments of the central offices including the Foras, Priority Areas and the Guild.

More broadly, we provide services at presbytery level to churches, ministers and those holding a church office, MDS staff, congregational members and volunteers.

We act as spokespeople for the Church and answer enquiries from broadcast and print media and the public through our website, email and social media channels. This requires close working with the relevant experts, specialists and owners of the issues raised.

Whilst this document will refer to the Church of Scotland Communications department activities it does not reflect all of the service responsibilities of the Department, focusing only on the main elements of external communications. It is important to recognise too that others outwith the department also contribute to the external communications of the Church.

In addition to our 'core' role we provide significant additional communications support to CrossReach, the social care arm of the Church and one of Scotland's largest voluntary social care agencies. It operates more than 70 services across the country including residential care, drug and alcohol addiction services and counselling services.

We provide considerable communications support to the General Trustees which is a separate charity within the Church of Scotland. They are responsible for managing church buildings and funds in the best interest of the Church and in support of parish ministry.

We support the ecumenical Scottish Church Leaders Forum, Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS), partner Interfaith agencies, Christian Aid whose international relief work we sponsor as a Church, Eco-Congregations Scotland, Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees (SFAR) and the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office (SCPO).

All of these separate entities have complex communications needs and at various times throughout the year we provide both professional advice and practical support to them on a voluntary basis as part of progressing the Church of Scotland agenda.

Our approach to communications

It is imperative that all our communications activities fulfil a clear purpose and that we use our finite communications resources well.

This will ensure that the Church of Scotland can use the power of communication to help people understand what the organisation does and how it contributes to improving people's lives and fulfilling its mission to "...inspire the people of Scotland and beyond with the Good News of Jesus Christ through enthusiastic worshipping, witnessing, nurturing and serving communities."

To do this we ensure our communications activities fulfil some or all of the following requirements:

Witness – demonstrate how we love and worship God through inspiring stories of faith

Inform – provide clear and timely information that people need to do their jobs, carry out certain tasks and engage with the Church of Scotland

Educate – share how and why we do the things we do, our plans for the future and how people can get involved

Raise awareness – highlight initiatives and campaigns that matter to the Church of Scotland to garner support and engagement

Behaviour change – support people to work effectively through improving their practice

Connect – build strong relationships with our key audiences and stakeholders

Involve – give people the opportunity to be involved with the Church of Scotland and influence its activities and engage with any changes that might affect them

Influence – support good corporate decision-making and external advocacy in particular through media relations and public affairs

External communications

For the purposes of this review we will look at some of our key activities in five core areas of external communications:

- **Media relations**
- **Social media**
- **Digital communications**
- **Web**
- **Design**

Media relations

In the year 2013-2014 we recorded 5,966 media mentions for the Church of Scotland. In the year 2019-2020 we recorded 9,740 media mentions. Whilst this is only one small part of the work we do it does show both our proactivity in delivering a very significant profile in the media on behalf of the Church and also the growing demand and volume of issues which we are responding to and managing in the media.

It is important to note that the statistics only record part of our success. To track our press coverage costs money – the more cuttings we produce the more it costs to track. For that reason, we do not monitor press coverage for CrossReach, the General Trustees, local churches or any of the

associated agencies we generate press coverage for as the volume of content would be too great. But the likelihood is that our media coverage is considerably higher than we currently record.

The media staff are extremely proactive at sourcing ‘Good News’ stories about the Church and her people on a daily basis. These stories are carefully researched, usually through interviews conducted by communications staff and written in a style that makes publication or broadcast in the media as likely as possible. We also source appropriate images to accompany our news items and, on some occasions, will create a complementary video to help us share our news more effectively.

The media team wrote 360 stories for the Church of Scotland website in 2020, introducing new ministers, highlighting the response of congregations and CrossReach during the pandemic, supporting Guild projects, promoting events, launching new initiatives and highlighting the Church’s mission of sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ. The majority of these stories appeared in national and local newspapers across the country and many also featured on radio and television.

During 2020 the media team responded to 538 formal queries from journalists and monitored 194 issues with potential to unfold into media stories requiring our support. The team also provided advice to local ministers and presbyteries on a range of issues likely to result in public interest and media coverage.

The media team worked closely with the Moderator on several video initiatives including a topical discussion series – ‘It’s a Fair Question’ - and supported various online events, visits, prayer, worship initiatives and the very well received annual Advent Calendar on the Web page.

The media team publicised: The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity; Thy Kingdom Come, a prayer initiative that runs from Ascension to Pentecost; and the Scottish Church Leaders’ Forum weekly ecumenical prayer posted to the Church of Scotland channels that includes a video/audio prayer.

During 2020, in addition to delivering messages of encouragement and uplift to communities across the country, the team issued press releases on a vast range of subjects including: how we were providing spiritual and practical support during the pandemic; the urgent need to provide PPE to care home staff; the international nuclear weapons treaty; healing the divisions of Brexit; violence in the United States; online hate speech; the value of including people with lived experience in policymaking; and the importance of a just and green recovery.

A short Commission of Assembly, held in July, and a two-day General Assembly, held in October, were livestreamed on the Church of Scotland website with thousands of viewers tuning in to watch.

Contributing to the delivery of the Church’s reform agenda, the department worked closely with the Assembly Trustees, the Chief Officer and the Principal Clerk to ensure regular updates were shared and those affected by changes had the opportunity to engage with the process.

The team also publicised updates on: new presbyteries; new initiatives, such as the Listening Project and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group; and brought attention to staff and volunteer vacancies. The department also supported the work of the General Trustees on buildings and land use.

The media team played an integral part in communicating the impact of Covid-19 on the Church, sharing frequent updates and using the media to tell our story through carefully managed engagement opportunities. Our strong relationships with terrestrial TV also ensured we were able to provide a steady stream of Church of Scotland ministers to take part in TV services, which was particularly valuable for those not able to get online to join worship while churches were closed.

As well as working to promote the Church through our news stories we also respond to enquiries from the media on a wide range of subjects. This includes managing negative stories and providing a crisis communications response.

Growing demand in media relations activities has led to the team working long hours during the working week to respond to and keep up with requests. This is not a sustainable situation in the long term and needs to be addressed. At present the Communications Department, also provides an on-call, out of hours service for media enquiries and crisis issues, 365 days a year. This service needs to be reviewed and formalised in some way as present arrangements rely entirely on staff commitment and goodwill.

The production of our news stories is designed to fulfil a number of purposes for the Church. It ensures the Church of Scotland's voice is heard on important issues. This allows the Church to influence the debate on public policies, to mobilise action and to demonstrate its continued relevance and role in society.

Our content can also be used by local church in their newsletters and on their websites. It can provide a 'template' for how to write effective local news stories. We have a diverse range of features and news items covering common church activities including stories of faith, youth work, raising money for good causes, political activism, and articles designed to explain some of the more complex key issues facing the Church, for example presbytery reform.

As a department we also provide media training for those acting as spokespeople for the Church including the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. And we support those who may be caught up in a media storm, as has often happened, and help them to deal with the impact of that whilst mitigating reputational damage.

As a team we have an extensive network of media contacts in the mainstream and Christian media and this enables us to secure frequent promotional opportunities and put forward interesting interviewees to talk on behalf of the Church of Scotland.

In 2021 the Communications Department has written 34 news articles (to 8 February 2021) covering a wide range of subjects including:

- Our production of an interfaith video to encourage people to get vaccinated against Covid-19 when they are asked to do so
- A 108-year-old Kirk member receiving her vaccination in her home church
- Features on new ministers, new pioneer ministers, and a new church youth worker
- A detailed review of presbytery reform
- The first meeting of the new Fife presbytery
- A new photography competition launched by the Moderator to mark the start of Lent
- An article on opportunities to volunteer at COP26

Responding to the needs of the media and also providing them with content on behalf of the Church of Scotland is a highly demanding element of our work. But our consistently proactive approach to media relations is designed to enhance the visibility and reputation of the Church and demonstrate how we engage and contribute to the Glory of God's Kingdom as Christians.

Social media

The proactivity of the Communications team on social media and the consistent creation of compelling, high quality content has resulted in growth of our follower numbers in the last year and unprecedented levels of engagement.

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Interaction with Church of Scotland social media channels was overwhelmingly positive and consistently active. In 2020, our Facebook posts were shared 203,000 times and drew 1.1 million reactions (loves, likes etc.) and 89,00 comments. Twitter posts were liked 35,000 times and retweeted 15,000 times.

People choosing to follow the Church's official social media channels (managed by the Communications team) grew significantly during 2020. The Church of Scotland's Facebook pages (Church of Scotland and the Moderator accounts) saw a 24% increase in our fanbase, adding around 9,500 new fans and growing from 33,000 at the end of 2019 to 41,000 by the end of 2020.

The Church's Twitter accounts (Church of Scotland and the Moderator accounts) saw a 15% increase in followers, adding 2,000 people and growing from 13,000 followers at the end of 2019 to 15,000 at the end of 2020.

The number of Instagram followers also grew from 2,700 at the end of 2019 to 3,100 at the end of 2020.

Social media platforms offer a rapid and efficient way to share information and respond to external events and rebut misinformation.

The most popular posts we published on social media included:

- The story of a Harvest Thanksgiving service in a barn organised by a Perthshire parish
- The handover from last year's Moderator to the current Moderator
- The announcement that Prince William was appointed Lord High Commissioner for 2020
- A story about online Remembrance services

It is judged that social media demand will continue to grow as this form of communication becomes an increasingly mainstream way to engage with organisations, especially young people. This will need careful management and recognition of what can be achieved within our resource constraints.

In January 2021:

- Our Facebook posts reached 1.7 million users.
- We had 145k engaged users on our page.
- 92k reactions to our posts.
- 89k video views.
- 18k shares of our content.
- 7.4k comments.
- On Twitter we had 6.3k engagements, 4.6k likes, 1.7k mentions and 1.5k retweets.

The above metrics demonstrate that the team is creating content that is highly engaging, popular and widely shared and commented on. However, this requires the constant creation of compelling and imaginative content, frequent monitoring and a responsive team to react to emerging issues online, including out of hours.

We received 3.5k inbound messages and comments to our Facebook page and 1.7k mentions on Twitter during January 2021 – many of these thousands of messages will have required a response or acknowledgement from us. This work is very time and resource intensive but this approach is how we build successful engagement, trust and influence online.

Digital communications

Digital communication is indispensable to most organisations today and demand is very high. The Communications Department is currently responsible for the targeted social media campaigns and promotions delivered on behalf of the Church and the bespoke video messages, news updates and event publicity shared online.

Recently that has included responding, out-of-hours, to post and promote a video made to counter media claims that the Kirk was taking legal action against the Scottish Government over the closure of churches during the latest lockdown. The video, which featured a strongly worded rebuttal from the Moderator, received more than 33k views within hours of being posted. It also generated significant support for our position and an online apology from the Editor of a national newspaper who had misrepresented our position.

We also produced an in-house video to encourage people to join the nominations committee to select the next Moderator to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and an interfaith campaign to highlight the importance of taking the Covid-19 vaccine when the opportunity arises.

Resource constraints limit what can be done to realise the full potential of our online audience and to further grow followers and engagement. The resourcing implications need to be considered before any moves to branch out further into trialling other digital platforms, (e.g. TikTok; most popular with those aged 18-24, or LinkedIn; a platform which would support us to advertise opportunities to work with the Church and grow our professional networks online).

At present based on our resources and the high demand in this area we are committed to maintaining excellence across five well-established Church of Scotland and Moderator accounts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram plus two YouTube accounts.

In the future, if capacity allows, research could be undertaken into how we might use additional platforms to best effect, create appropriate content (which differs in requirements according to platform), maintain regular posts and timely responses (including out of hours) to increased engagement.

There is an ongoing demand to train Church people to use social media and video effectively which is supported as far as possible by communications staff.

Finally, the Communications department took on the task of assessing the approach to electronic newsletter communications being issued from central offices as it was clear there was a very high volume of uncoordinated activity in this area. Quality was extremely variable and a number of distribution platforms were in use. There was no strategic oversight around content, frequency of issue or the management of data associated with the mailings which was in breach of practices required by GDPR legislation on data protection and privacy. Nor was there a clear picture on the time and money being spent on this activity.

Our review discovered around 30 different newsletters being issued, with significant duplication of content and clashes in when the material was issued. The Communications department took responsibility for centralising a planned and professional approach to how newsletters would be issued in future which would streamline the number of communications being issued, use only one, agreed platform, reduce costs and staff time on this activity and improve the overall outcome of communicating in this way.

The number of newsletters regularly issued has now been reduced to nine. This has been achieved through extensive training provided by our team in-house, awareness raising around best practice, careful and consistent negotiation with newsletter owners to improve standards and work to amalgamate content and stop duplication.

The new approach managed by Communications is much-improved and this is reflected in a sustained rise in engagement rates across all newsletters as we have worked to enhance their quality and focus. Furthermore, the frequent complaints about information overload and overwhelm from the sheer volume of communications being issued from the national office has now largely been addressed

Web

The web team maintains and develops the Church's main website whilst also offering advice and support to the owners of associated church microsites. In recent years we have worked with Councils, Foras and central office departments to reduce the number of sites in the web estate. Currently the web landscape makes accessing information more complex than it should be for users, and staff time and costs to maintain them are higher than we would desire. This was recognised by the IT and Communications Task Group which proposed that the Church of Scotland website should be the main focus for externally facing information.

The web team brought the content of the Tomorrow's Calling and Society, Religion and Technology (SRT) sites into the main site through two carefully managed projects. Closing both microsites saved the Church money and made it easier for users to find content and for us to keep information updated; it also released staff to do other work. We continue to identify opportunities to take further action in this area. Traffic to the Church of Scotland site is considerably higher than to all the other sites with more than 600,000 visits each year from more than 144 countries.

The web team within the Communications Department has played a critical role in helping the Church find alternative ways to bring in revenue online and share vital operational and faith-related information in response to the impact of Covid-19 to significant numbers of people in Scotland and further afield.

To mitigate against the loss of income experienced by churches during the enforced closure of their buildings and restrictions on holding services, the web developer, working from home, took on the very challenging task of building an online donations system for the Church of Scotland without external support.

This technically demanding piece of work delivered a bespoke solution (at no cost to the Church) that allows people to select any of our churches, at home or abroad, through our website donation platform to donate money online.

Church members can now quickly and easily contribute to the work and mission of local churches or support the Church of Scotland as a whole with a contribution to the national Church. This donation function has also been extended to The Guild's projects. By the end of 2020, the donations button had raised more than £237,500 in a six-month period.

The web team also created a new section of the website in response to the pandemic featuring 30 new pages of information with updates including the Covid-19 restrictions on buildings use, worship, HR and employment advice, and the implications for gatherings including ordinations, baptisms, weddings and funerals.

The section is regularly updated, often on a daily basis, and to meet tight deadlines to ensure local churches have access to the latest, accurate information and signposting of where they can find out more or ask questions.

In partnership with the IT department, the web team also developed a new feature to the Churchfinder application, which allowed local congregations to find out quickly how Covid-19 restrictions applied to their local area.

To ensure worshippers had access to a range of church services and worship opportunities, the web team created and continues to maintain a ‘Kirk Services Online’ page, which details which churches are livestreaming or posting video services and when and how people can participate online.

The website played a key role in helping us take our activities online in response to Covid-19, allowing people to join in from home with the installation of the new Moderator, a Commission of Assembly and General Assembly, Heart and Soul and Church-wide webinars and worship services.

As well as responding to the pandemic with critical updates the web team continue to provide support and advice on web content to key stakeholders across the Church, ensuring it is accessible, GDPR compliant and performing well. They update Weekly Worship and our extensive catalogue of resources, and redevelop the site to reflect the changes to our Church structures.

Design

The design team receive more than 300 ticket requests a year for print work, web graphics, forms, diagrams, typesetting and layouts for publications and online promotions. In the last year they have also taken previously third-party work producing General Assembly documents in-house, saving the Church money and delivering a more responsive turnaround time.

The design team ensure that the work we produce on behalf of the Church, whether in print or online, upholds our brand guidelines and style guides to ensure the Church is recognised when it communicates.

In an uncertain world our brand can convey great strength and reassurance to others. Our brand also helps us communicate who we are and what our values stand for. Failure to use the Church of Scotland brand appropriately can mean opportunities are lost for our work and initiatives to be acknowledged, identified as our content and shared effectively.

The designers play a key role in assessing how we have commissioned print resources in recent years. Identifying that a lack of strategy and collaboration in how work was planned meant that we were sometimes producing content that was not delivering the outcomes we desired.

The significant volume of printed material being produced was also very costly. At the instigation of communications staff, we were able to set in motion a review of existing resources with the designers' support. We instigated a temporary moratorium on printing further publications during this period which has been extended through Covid-19. Whilst print collateral plays a vital part in our work and is highly valued; we have highlighted to the Assembly Trustees and the Chief Officer that a more carefully planned ‘whole-Church’ approach to this work is needed in future to ensure we are communicating externally as effectively as possible.

We propose that this will be fulfilled by the creation of a Communications Strategy Board comprising of an Assembly Trustee, the Chief Officer, Principal Clerk, Moderator, Editor of Life and Work and the new Head of Faith Action Programmes to support the Head of Communications and agree on a strategic approach to corporate communications activities which make most effective use of our

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collective and finite resources. Consideration should also be given to an additional member of the Communications Team and a second Assembly Trustee joining the Board. If this proposal is accepted, we will produce an agreed remit for the board.

Design has won a series of awards over the years for its artwork in publications including the popular Learn series and Ascend magazine.

To support the Chief Officer's work on Church of Scotland staff values, the design team delivered artwork for use in print and on digital platforms.

They also produced weekly Covid guidance updates, General Assembly publications, the annual report, and two externally funded publications in support of congregations welcoming asylum seekers and refugees.

To help churches manage opening their buildings during the pandemic and while observing strict hygiene and distance requirements the design team developed a collection of signage templates which were made available on the Church of Scotland website. These proved very popular and we were approached by the Church of England who asked if they could have permission to use our designs as they felt they were excellent. It was very gratifying to be able to provide them with our templates and see them being used in a setting outwith Scotland.

Design staff are also champions for accessible forms of design and have played a key role in addressing poor production values which both reflect badly on the Church and result in low engagement.

Conclusion

The Communications department is professionally led by experienced communications experts. Our external communications activities span a vast area of work and support the activities of the Church of Scotland and a significant number of associated agencies. Some of these associated agencies, for example CrossReach and the General Trustees, have complex operational areas of work in their own right requiring sustained specialist communications help and advice.

To manage the complexity and diversity of subjects we cover, the significant demand for our services and the varied mechanisms for communicating in a modern world requires considerable strategic oversight, an integrated and consistent approach and a deftness for managing a high volume of work during work hours and frequently out of hours.

Though it is not all about the statistics, our exceptionally high level of media coverage which grows year on year, coupled with high engagement through our website and social media channels, shows the success of our communications output and the engagement it creates on behalf of the Church.

But more satisfying are the results our external communications deliver in making positive changes whether that be through bringing people to faith, raising money for good causes, helping to support the poorest and most vulnerable or influencing change in public policy. The examples of where we have done that are many and most meaningful. Attached as a case study at the end of this report is one award winning example of this type of work.

In reviewing the external communications, it is clear that the proposals made by the IT and Communications Task Group remain extant and need to continue to be progressed with some urgency during 2021.

Finally, it is recognised that a more carefully planned ‘whole-Church’ approach is needed in future to ensure we are communicating externally as effectively and efficiently as possible and also takes account of the other significant communications provided by Life and Work and the Faith Forums.

This will be fulfilled by the creation of the Communications Strategy Board, as described earlier, chaired by the Chief Officer, and the further development of the associated Communications Strategy.

Case study – Communications campaign to support the Umeed Bakhsh family who faced deportation from Scotland

Background

Teenage brothers Somer and Areeb Umeed Bakhsh and their parents, Maqsood and Parveen, fled Pakistan in 2012 because they were persecuted for their Christian faith and sought sanctuary in the UK.

Members of Possilpark Parish Church in Glasgow, the family's plea for permanent leave to remain in the UK was repeatedly rejected by the Home Office.

Lawyers for the family informed them that they had exhausted the appeals process and faced imminent deportation. The family's then minister, Rev Linda Pollock, turned to the Church of Scotland Communications department for help.

The team took the decision to launch a communications campaign, persuading an MP and MSP to pledge their support and raise the case in the UK Parliament and Scottish Parliament with the Prime Minister and First Minister.

The campaign was fronted by Rev Linda Pollock with support from Very Rev Dr Susan Brown who secured the support of other church leaders.

The Church of Scotland Communications department also launched an online petition, fronted by Rev Linda Pollock, and to date it has 89,417 signatures. A second online petition launched by a pupil at Springburn Academy has just under 5,000 signatures.

Over the course of 2018-2019, the Communications department produced more than a dozen news articles, social media posts and a video which secured and sustained extensive UK-wide media coverage – print, broadcast and online. The video interview with the two brothers has been watched nearly 15,000 times on YouTube and Facebook.

The campaign was a success in that the family were granted leave to remain, albeit only until 2022 with an option to apply for an extension, and the Church of Scotland won a 'Campaigner of the Year' award at the Herald Society Awards.

Timeline of media activity

11 June 2018

Maqsood Umeed Bakhsh appeals to the Prime Minister to grant him and his family asylum because they fear their lives would be in danger if they are thrown out of Scotland.

20 June 2018

Somer and Areeb say they fear they will be killed if they are forced to leave Scotland – the country they love - and deported to Pakistan.

29 June 2018

An online petition is launched by the Church of Scotland Communications department and fronted

by Rev Linda Pollock to try and persuade the UK Government not to deport two teenage brothers to Pakistan.

16 July 2018

More than 43,000 people have signed a petition calling on the Home Office not to deport two teenage brothers from Scotland.

8 August 2018

Somer Umeed Bakhsh overcame the stress and trauma of living with uncertainty to get six As and a B in his National 5 exams. The news was used as a hook to highlight the case and make the point he has much to contribute to society.

22 August 2018

Former UK Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn visits Possilpark Parish Church in Glasgow and meets the boys and publicly backs the campaign. The visit was arranged by former Labour MP Paul Sweeney at the suggestion of the Church of Scotland Communications department.

29 August 2018

The petition, which has nearly 85,000 signatures, is handed over to Home Office in Glasgow by Rev Linda Pollock and Very Rev Dr Susan Brown. The handover is done at a press call attended by print and broadcast media. Family and campaigners joined by dozens of supporters. The boys feature on BBC Reporting Scotland and STV News at 6pm that evening.

13 September 2018

The family's case is raised at First Minister's Questions at the Scottish Parliament and Nicola Sturgeon backed the campaign.

12 October 2018

Church leaders in Scotland unite behind Dr Brown and sign a letter to the Home Secretary in a bid to stop two teenage brothers living in Glasgow from being deported.

24 October 2018

The family's case was raised at Prime Minister's Question Time in the House of Commons and Theresa May said the Home Office would review the circumstances.

6 August 2019

UK-wide coverage of the news that Somer gets six As in his Higher exams.

16 August 2019

Family granted leave to remain in the UK until February 2022.

7 November 2019

The Church of Scotland wins a 'Campaigner of the Year' award for its tireless work to prevent the deportation of two teenage asylum seeker brothers.