

ACCESS communications plan

August 2020

For decision

Introduction

The following outlines a proposed communications plan for ACCESS. Officers request JC sign off on:

1. **Communications priorities:** Sign off on the proposed areas of priority for ACCESS to focus on in relation to communications
2. **Confirmation of ASU Director acting as spokesperson for ACCESS in the first instance:** There will be constraints and protocols, including: a) communications must conform with an agreed communications policy including messaging proposed by the OWG which will be signed off by the JC periodically; b) the JC Chairman or nominated JC deputies to sign off ASU Director specific communications when required; and c) JC Chairman or deputy to front communications when appropriate
3. **The mandate to proceed with finding external support to implement a communications plan:** Estimated spend to deliver on priorities could be £60-100k per annum (likely to be higher in year one then it's likely to decrease)
4. **Interim communication messages:** Agreement to communication messages set out in this paper as an interim position pending further review and recommendations to be made within the next 3-4 months.

Why address ACCESS's communications?

We recommend that this communications plan is adopted and implemented as the impression of ACCESS perhaps compares poorly to some of the other pools; and the perception could fall short of the reality.

Addressing communications now will give ACCESS:

- **Greater control on the narrative and perception of ACCESS:** A void in quality or consistency of communication invites others to form or shape opinions of you. That can hinder your progress or worse, lead to criticism or action that could be avoided
- **More ability to influence the direction of pooling:** Effective communications can have a significant role to play in enabling you to influence the direction of the pooling project
- **A more professional and accessible persona:** With close to £50bn AUM and being responsible for the pension savings of c1 million members ACCESS is a significant player in the UK investment landscape. This leads to reasonable expectations of communication and transparency among stakeholders.
- **Greater confidence and communications competence in times of greater scrutiny:** The pooling project is still in its infancy, with detractors as well as proponents. There will be times when ACCESS and its model comes under greater scrutiny. Similarly, ACCESS, like all other major asset stewards, is increasingly likely to have the spotlight shone on its record in relation to responsible investment. Having well-prepared messages and having spokespeople who are practised and at ease with conveying these will be invaluable in those times.

Communications priorities

While addressing ACCESS's communications should be relatively straightforward, it requires a plan and resource to deliver. Resource requirements are likely to be greater at the outset, then should lessen as communications becomes an embedded, business-as-usual part of ACCESS's operations.

The following outlines a proposed sequencing of priorities, with more details on the scope of each below.

Area	Urgency	Hymans support	External agency support
1. Confirmation of ASU Director acting as ACCESS spokesperson in the first instance	High	Yes	
2. Messaging	High	Yes	
3. Search for communications agency	High	Yes	
4. Website refresh	High		Yes
5. Leadership profiling	High		Yes
6. Engagement with government	High	Yes	Yes
7. Review conference programme	Medium		Yes
8. Press engagement	Medium		Yes
9. Annual report	Medium		Yes
10. LinkedIn	Low		Yes
11. Logo/brand update	Low		Yes

1 Confirmation of ASU Director as spokesperson in the first instance:

There will be constraints and protocols, including:

- a) Communications must conform with an agreed communications policy including messaging proposed by the OWG which will be signed off by the JC periodically;
- b) The JC Chairman or nominated JC deputies to sign off ASU Director specific communications when required; and;
- c) The JC Chairman or deputy to front communications when appropriate.

A necessary next step is to update the existing communications policy to outline procedures for:

- i. Updating ACCESS messaging;
- ii. Signing off on communications activities;
- iii. Signing off any copy in relation to communications;
- iv. Who should act as spokespeople for the pool and in which instances;
- v. Reporting back to OWG and the JC on activities.

Our recommendation is that this process should be as straightforward as possible, with a limited number of steps and individuals involved in sign off to allow for the communications strategy to be effective.

2 ACCESS messaging (interim)

We propose the following core messages ACCESS ought to convey through all communications channels for an interim period of 3-4 months. This will provide a framework for the ASU Director and other spokespersons while you appoint a communications agency (see later) to work with the OWG to refine messaging for review and sign off by the JC this year or early in 2021.

2.1 About ACCESS:

We're a collaboration of 11 like-minded LGPS Funds, committed to creating a world-leading investment manager platform.

2.2 Size

Overseeing the investment of [£49.7bn] of pension assets on behalf of [1 million] members & [3,250] employers.

2.3 Benefits of model

Able to make good progress against pooling objectives: We are proud of our progress to date on pooling and speed in delivering pooling benefits. To date we have pooled almost half of our funds under management. Savings already significantly exceed establishment costs. Up to 31 March 2020 we have delivered £ 20.6m in gross savings against total costs to date of £8.4m.

Superior investment management: Using our platform, Funds can make use of the best investment managers in the world in the most cost-efficient way. We can access the best performing managers, and equally we have the power to hold them to account and switch if there are performance issues.

Strong governance framework: With an efficient and flexible operating model, we can switch suppliers to improve the cost effectiveness and/or performance of our underlying infrastructure at any time.

We are set up to do what's best for local pension scheme members: Our fiduciary responsibilities to the local members of our Funds is at the heart of our approach and is why we are set up the way we are. The pool is a platform that enables us to achieve the benefits of pooling investments while retaining local decision-making and control for the Funds. This ensures we don't lose sight of what is best for local members, while ensuring they benefit from collaboration.

2.4 We're well advanced in our pooling journey

It is our objective to become a world-leading investment manager platform. The first task was a detailed assessment of the investment managers held by the Funds pre-pooling. High performing managers that passed that assessment moved on to our platform. The second, which is an ongoing process, is to rationalise the number of managers as we increasingly pool our investments.

Proof point: Consolidation of passive investments with UBS. Where there are obvious benefits of collaboration and hard decisions to be made, they will be made.

2.5 Stewardship

ACCESS is adopting a proactive approach to Responsible Investment/ ESG matters. *[This requires further articulation and potentially further action before it would be appropriate to use this messaging.]*

2.6 Democratic and accountable

As a democratically accountable body, delivering value for money for taxpayers and members is always front of mind.

Proof point: Our pool governance structure is designed to ensure that the pool's service suppliers are (i) delivering services to meet the specification and objectives of the constituent local authorities; and (ii) held to account by officers and democratically elected councillors representing the administering authorities and the funds' stakeholders.

3 Execution plan: next steps on recommended priorities

3.1 Search for communications agency

We recommend that ACCESS appoints a communications agency rather than hiring a Head of Communications. An agency will be able to support you on the full range of activities recommended (from press work to website design to engagement with government). At some point in the future, you might consider hiring communications professionals and bringing this function into the ASU.

ACCESS will need to agree a budget for the next year (see below). We suggest that more weight be given to quality than price in the procurement process.

Subject to the JC's agreement on the recommendations in this paper, Hymans will draft a brief which can be used to specify your requirements for the purposes of the procurement process.

The ASU is investigating procurement process options. It is important that the appointment is made soon. One option is a non-OJEU process based on a contract with a duration of 2 years and a value of circa £160k.

Hymans Robertson has had preliminary conversations with several reputable agencies who understand the pensions and investment sector well. We can provide a list of possible candidates for the procurement process.

3.2 Website refresh

Refreshed messaging will be core to this. The extent to which the website is reviewed will be resource dependent and requires further discussion.

3.3 Leadership profiling

It would be hugely beneficial to the Pool to have clearly identifiable leadership. The spokespeople for ACCESS should undergo media training ahead of external activities. This is to ensure each spokesperson is well versed in the messaging and adept at speaking on the behalf of the pool with confidence. A communications agency will support here; and will put in place a programme to increase profile.

3.4 Engagement with Government

ACCESS has done a good job with Government engagement on some specific matters (the matter of fiduciary responsibilities in particular). However, ACCESS has not undertaken regular or sustained engagement on other important matters such as the benefits of its pooling model.

Proactive engagement should be ongoing. Having a planned programme of activity with pre-agreed messages would be beneficial. Communications agencies can provide worthwhile support in preparation and in engagement. Given ACCESS's existing links our expectation is that any agency's role will be limited to the former.

3.5 Review conference programme

While ACCESS is already present at many of the LGPS conferences, having a deliberate plan around which to have a more prominent presence at would be useful.

3.6 Press engagement

Time spent proactively briefing industry journalists on ACCESS's approach and progress to date will pay dividends. It allows you to control the agenda and lay strong foundations in terms of their understanding of your

position and objectives. Ultimately it will lessen the resource burden when there are reactive requests for commentary.

A communications agency will design a media briefings programme for you and support you in executing this. They can also do the heavy lifting in terms of drafting and preparing commentary.

3.7 Annual report

This is an opportunity to reinforce and bring to life the positive messages about ACCESS. With the support of a communications agency, this should be actively promoted through all communications channels to bring a greater awareness and understanding of ACCESS's progress to date amongst stakeholders.

3.8 LinkedIn

Of all social media channels we would recommend that LinkedIn is prioritised and used to share ACCESS-related content. Establishing an ACCESS LinkedIn page will provide a hub for those linked to ACCESS to share and communicate on issues with their own professional networks. This is an easy channel to reach many stakeholders including employers, local government, fund managers and other pools.

An agency will be able to support you with set-up and training. They could also manage the ACCESS account for you. The key to success, however, is for those involved in ACCESS to expand their LinkedIn networks and share information from the central ACCESS account.

3.9 Logo/brand update

The existing brand design is flat and unengaging. We would recommend a basic update of the existing brand to inject more personality and to bring in a more accessible tone of voice. This does not need to be a full scale 'brand review' project; instead a basic update of the logo, some principles on brand style and tone of voice for communications should be sufficient. Again, an agency will be able to support you.

3.10 Update communications policy and review messages

The ACCESS governance manual contains the current "Communications Policy". This should be updated to reflect the 2020 review of communications policy and key messages. Related to this, the OWG should work with the communications agency when appointed to review and refine the interim communication messages with a view to key messages being signed off by the JC in 3-4 months from now.

Budget

The year one budget is likely to be greater than subsequent years. Depending on the scope of activities, the degree to which you lean on a communications agency (and how long for) and the costs they quote, the total annual budget could be in the region of £60-£100k (if website refresh, media training and retained communications services are included).

The best way forward would be to agree a budget then explore what is achievable for that.

At the end of year two, when the communications programme is reviewed and assessed, at that point it may be worthwhile considering whether to bring on board in-house resource (as this may be more cost-effective once the foundations have been laid and all that is required is ongoing management). We believe the expertise of a communications agency would be more cost effective and effective in year one when there are multiple areas to address.

Proposed timelines

Dates	Action	Responsibility
September 2020	Sign off on communications	JC

	<p>priorities</p> <p>Confirm the ASU Director has the authority to act as the ACCESS spokesperson in the first instance</p> <p>Agree communications budget</p> <p>Permission to invite formal tenders from communications agencies</p> <p>ASU to outline appropriate procurement process e.g. non-OJEU</p>	<p>JC</p> <p>JC</p> <p>ASU</p>
Q4 2020 – Q1 2021	Update communications policy	OWG
	Review proposals from communications agencies and select partner	OWG/ASU
	Onboard communications agency	ASU Director
	Set up media training for spokespeople	ASU Director / agency
	Review and refine communication messages	OWG / agency proposal JC to sign off
	Recommend communications programme for 2021	OWG / agency proposal JC to sign off
2021	<p>Implement communications plan</p> <p>Review effectiveness of communications (late 2021)</p>	ASU Director in conjunction with communications agency

Prepared by:-

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For and on behalf of Hymans Robertson LLP