

# Communications and engagement

Strategy 2024-28



 AUDIT SCOTLAND

Prepared by Audit Scotland  
September 2024

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## Accessibility

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# Introduction

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1. Public audit in Scotland has a vision that public money is well spent to meet the needs of Scotland's people.
2. Supporting this is our mission, to provide clear, independent and objective assurance on how effectively public money is being managed and spent.
3. To support [Public audit in Scotland](#) and its intended outcomes, we need to communicate our audit work and our messages and findings clearly, accurately and appropriately to our diverse audiences. We also must have effective and collaborative conversations with stakeholders.
4. Effective communications and engagement can help us to focus on the right priorities; ensure our work has an impact; and strengthen and support our ability to drive improvement and provide assurance to the people of Scotland.
5. This involves making sure we are reaching the people affected by our work and helping them understand and benefit from it, as well as using what they tell us to inform what we do and how we do it. To do this, we must communicate and engage with audiences in ways that work for them.
6. We also need to also maintain Audit Scotland's position and reputation for independence, objectivity and high-quality audit. Our findings and recommendations should add value to public services and have a beneficial impact on the lives and experiences of Scotland's people.
7. This strategy sets out how we will achieve these goals. This is through a blend of continuing existing approaches and of developing and enhancing our work to stay at the forefront of public audit communications and engagement, and to respond to the dynamic environment in which we operate.
8. [Exhibit 1 \(page 4\)](#) shows how the vision, mission and objectives of this strategy fit with [Public audit in Scotland](#) and Audit Scotland's [Corporate Plan](#).

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**Exhibit 1**

**Strategic relationship between PAIS, CP and C&E Strategy**



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# 1. Vision, mission and objectives

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## Vision

- Public audit is trusted and influential, and heard and understood across Scotland



## Mission

- We will communicate in accessible, clear and human ways about the things that impact public services and people's lives, enhancing Audit Scotland's reputation for independence, impartiality and quality



## Objectives

- Reach our audiences in ways that work for them
- Integrate Communications early in audits and projects
- Be equipped to influence and give professional advice
- Provide an efficient, responsive and effective in-house service

All our communications and engagement to achieve our vision, mission and objectives are underpinned by our corporate values.



Equality



Independence



Innovation



Integrity



Respect

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## 2. Context

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- 9.** We operate in a dynamic environment. As an organisation, we have been through, and will continue to go through, significant change and development.
- 10.** Over more than 20 years we have built a reputation for independent, robust and clear messages and communications. We have formed strong relationships with our stakeholders through open, simple and purposeful engagement.
- 11.** To maintain and strengthen this and to support the purpose of public audit, we need to ensure we continue communicating and engaging in ways that work and that keep up with social changes.
- 12.** The ways people consume information and interact with public-facing entities has changed significantly and continues to do so. There is an ever-increasing range of communication channels. People also seek shorter, simpler messages, with an increasing appetite for visually based communication such as video, animations and interactive content.
- 13.** Over the coming years, we will see more advances in animation and video, and both opportunities and threats from artificial intelligence. There are also opportunities to better reach and inform stakeholders through interactivity and use of data, while balancing this with our accessibility commitments.
- 14.** As of now, traditional news media remains our most important external communication channel to stakeholders such as the public, with social media also crucial. In a world where people are unclear which messages to trust, we will play an increasingly important role of providing reliable, evidence-based and objective information on the issues that affect people's lives.
- 15.** Internally, we are balancing the safeguarding of quality and staff wellbeing with the need to both recover delivery timelines and modernise our approaches. At the same time, we will be in changes across the organisation in how we work, in our leadership and in our workforce. We are also embedding and emphasising our agreed corporate values.
- 16.** In a competitive recruitment market, we can clearly demonstrate the values and rewards of working in public audit, along with our strong learning and development offer, and our supportive, welcoming and empathetic culture.

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# 3. Delivering our objectives

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**17.** We will deliver our objectives through the high-level approaches, principles and activities set out below.

**18.** We will support this through our Communications Business Plan 2024-28, and annual Business Plan updates and priorities.

## Reach our audiences in ways that work for them

### What we will do

**19.** We will base our approaches and activities on a clear and shared understanding of audiences' needs, wants and communications behaviours, and on the intended impacts of each specific audit and project, and its link to PAIS outcomes and CP objectives.

**20.** We will tailor our activities to specific audiences, striking an appropriate and efficient balance between broad ranges of stakeholders and specific groups. We will use research to inform our strategic and tactical decisions.

**21.** To support PAIS, we will focus on audit recommendations, and help our audiences interact with key messages from reports. We will also emphasise the objectivity, robustness and accuracy of work.

**22.** We will ensure our outputs are accessible, inclusive and diverse. We will work to maintain and strengthen both the recognition of and trust in the 'brands' of the Auditor General, the Accounts Commission and Audit Scotland.

**23.** We will seek to strengthen and build partnerships to better inform our work, our understanding of our audiences and our reach and engagement. Where possible and appropriate, we will aim to extend the life of audits and use them as platforms to further engage.

### What it will look like

- Communications plans and audit outputs clearly setting out target audiences, reach and engagement targets, and evidence-based activity and products.
- Ongoing product and activity development, including bespoke outputs based on audience needs, and exploring opportunities in interactivity and data visualisation.

- More collaborative work with public and third sector partners to better understand and reach audiences, particularly service users.

### **What impact it will have**

- Clearer and wider reach and engagement with stakeholders, thus increasing their awareness and understanding of audit recommendations and messages.

### **How it supports PAIS and Corporate Plan 2023-28**

- This supports PAIS Outcome Four: Our recommendations have a positive impact for people in Scotland.

## **Integrate Communications early in audits and projects**

### **What we will do**

**24.** By embedding Communications early in the audit process, and through timely concept meetings and scoping, we can ensure our approaches and goals are consistent with the audit's aims and target audiences. This also helps us better research and develop bespoke and innovative products and approaches.

**25.** To support this, a learning and development priority for Communications is improving our understanding and knowledge of audit, of other teams' and business groups' work, and of the public finance industry and sector. At the heart of this is a collaborative culture with audit teams.

### **What it will look like**

- Clearer and updated processes for joint development with audit teams on communications strategies and plans.
- Early discussions and agreements about goals, outcomes, approaches and products.
- Communications staff shadowing audit teams and more fully interacting with other teams and business groups.

### **What impact it will have**

- Clearer joint understanding, with smoother projects and fewer surprises and late requests for work.
- Better inter-discipline understanding of priorities, approaches and practicalities.

### **How it supports PAIS and Corporate Plan 2023-28**

- This supports Corporate Plan Priority Three: Enhanced audit approaches.



## Be equipped to influence and give professional advice

### What we will do

**26.** Through learning and development, sector engagement and partnership building, we will continue to ensure that Audit Scotland communications and engagement is up to date with sector trends and developments. We will also use data, technology and industry intelligence to continuously improve and stay abreast of communications developments.

**27.** This is complemented by Communications colleagues continuing to build their knowledge and expertise as Communications specialists. We will also make more use of industry and peer organisation benchmarking.

**28.** We will review impact reporting and address any gaps in data collection and use wider benchmarking and research to set clear parameters and targets. We will continue improving and refining production processes, and look at where standardisation would be appropriate and could improve efficiency.

**29.** We will facilitate genuine and honest two-way conversations with audit and project teams, built on the evidence and expertise of our professional advice and the range of communication and creative services and approaches we can provide. We will lead by example in areas such as quality control and option appraisal of communication and engagement approaches and products.

**30.** We will try new outputs and approaches to better reach and inform audiences, and keep up with technological and social developments and changes, and encourage colleagues to learn from failures. This is supported by protected time to learn and use new technology and create new approaches and products.

### What it will look like

- L&D plans more clearly linking to Communications priorities and plans, and to individual personal development linked to roles.
- Data- and reflection-led reporting on effectiveness and efficiency of existing and new approaches.
- Evidence- and insights-led professional advice to the organisation.

### What impact it will have

- Communications activity and advice based on the latest industry developments, research and evidence, and data-led insights and benchmarking.

## How it supports PAIS and Corporate Plan 2023-28

- This supports Corporate Plan Priority Four: Developing our people and our business, and Corporate Plan Priority Four Five: Insights driving innovation and improvement.

## Provide an efficient, responsive and effective in-house service

### What we will do

**31.** We will maintain and build on our currently strong working relationships across the organisation to inform the development of our service. We will also use management information to monitor, inform and show efficacy.

**32.** To assist audit teams, we will continue to provide and develop templates, and proactively trouble shoot and update as both technology and accessibility requirements change.

**33.** We will support Audit Scotland's leadership in internal communications and engagement through specific strategies, activities and support.

### What it will look like

- More appropriate timing and resource planning for projects and products.
- Ongoing feedback on and research on all external and internal products to inform regular updating to comply with developing accessibility legislation and ease of use, with updated user guidance.
- Internal communications plan templates and support for projects, and annual leadership engagement activity plans.

### What impact it will have

- Simpler and quicker processes and resources for audit teams, with subsequent smoother report and fewer disruptions and delays.
- More efficient use of Communications time and resources, and time found to apply to development.
- Teams able to create own internal communications plans to support projects and programmes.

## How it supports PAIS and Corporate Plan 2023-28

- This supports Corporate Plan Priority One: Timely and impactful annual audit; and Corporate Plan Priority Two: Dynamic performance audit programme.

## 4. Our stakeholders

**34.** Effective communications and engagement with stakeholders help drive [Public audit in Scotland](#) outcomes by:

- delivering and disseminating our findings, messages and recommendations to those who need to hear and see them
- increasing the impact of our work and helping us better understand and evaluate that impact
- informing our forward work programme so it can ensure that public audit is relevant to the issues facing Scotland's people, communities and public bodies.

**35.** Our stakeholders have been identified through [Public audit in Scotland](#) consultation. Separately, the Accounts Commission has identified its core stakeholders in [its strategy](#). [Exhibit 2](#) collates these groups. It is important to remember that each group can still comprise diverse and heterogenous audiences that communicate in different ways, and effective segmentation is key to taking a successful audience-led approach.

### Exhibit 2 Stakeholders and their key interests

Stakeholder	Their ask	Our offer
The public – taxpayers	Is our money being well spent?	Provide view on public spending
The public – service users	How well are services being managed?	Summarise performance, highlight issues, drive improvement
Public bodies	How do we perform, where can we improve?	Performance assessment Improvement advice, good practice
Scottish Parliament	Do public bodies deliver what we need them to? Link to NPF  Do they have what they need in order to deliver?	Helping SP and committees perform their scrutiny role  Information and intelligence on public sector

Stakeholder	Their ask	Our offer
Scottish Government	How well is the public sector working?  What needs to change?	Sharing information and intelligence on public sector performance and key issues
Third sector	How well do services perform?  Where can we contribute?	Helping the sector to engage with public bodies to inform, improve and help deliver services
Media	What do the public need to know?  Who is accountable?	Summarise performance, highlight issues and help drive accountability to the public
AGS/AC/AS Board	Are we delivering PAIS/AC strategy/CP?	Demonstrate public audit's impact, help inform about organisational performance against PAIS
Audit Scotland employees	What are our priorities and how does my work fit in? What's happening in the organisation?  What are you doing about my wellbeing?	Help inform and update on organisational strategy, priorities and performance  Assist ET and LG to internally engage  Promote wellbeing and social activities, and staff connectivity
Audit profession	What must public audit deliver? What are public audit's priorities?	Provide clear guidance on scope and audit approaches  Set out vision, mission and priorities for public audit

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# 5. Monitoring

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## Inputs and outputs

**36.** Through our new business plan, we monitor the levels of resourcing needed at a programme level for external and internal communications, and at individual project level. As well as helping deliver an efficient service, this helps inform our improvement approaches.

**37.** We also monitor the number and range of outputs delivered. These are reported internally through quarterly corporate performance reporting, and externally through our annual report.

## Measuring impact and effectiveness

**38.** Monitoring of this strategy will be built into the corporate approach to evaluating and reporting on performance. Our communications and engagement targets will align with Audit Scotland corporate plan key performance measures and metrics to ensure alignment and prevent duplication and unnecessary work. We will also benchmark our approach against those of our peer national audit institutions.

**39.** [Appendix 2](#) sets out the monitoring framework for performance against this strategy's objectives.

**40.** Evaluation of progress against the four [Public audit in Scotland](#) outcomes will be reported twice in the period of the current PAIS framework.

# Appendix 1. Communications business plan 2024-28

**41.** This table provides an overview of the activities Communications will undertake over the next four years to deliver this strategy.

**42.** It aligns with the Audit Scotland [Corporate Plan 2023-28](#) and Business Plan by grouping activities and workstreams under the Corporate Plan's five strategic priorities. It also defines them under the three-horizon model used in the plan.

Strategic priority	Assure	Improve	Transform
Timely and impactful annual audit	Production and publishing Accessibility House style management Correspondence Templates	Tailored digital content Improved processes Updated templates	Interactive and citizen-centric reporting New approach to AAR promotion Enhanced digital products and approach
Dynamic performance audit programme	Promotion and media support DTP and outputs Schedule management Supplier management Commission C&E	Refocus on insights over exhibits Tailored digital content Improved processes	Impact and audience-led approach to outputs Stakeholder engagement role Enhanced digital products and approach Interactivity
Enhanced audit approaches	External relationships New PABV process New audit outputs QA and proofing Translation and user-needs outputs Web UX/UI	More people-focused products Experiences-based content Comms understanding of audit, and shadowing	Interactive reporting Animated visualisations Explore data-led opportunities

Strategic priority	Assure	Improve	Transform
Developing our people and our business	MacBook support Changing current tasks Website refresh Website security Internal comms strategy Internal comms templates SM support for corporate Strategic advice Templates Annual reporting Crisis communications	Relationship building with wider organisation Colleague-led events Internal comms research More focused internal comms strategy Using Monday.com to better ID efficiencies & timings Website: staff engagement Design L&D Wider range of applications	Internal comms helping shape hybrid working More internal comms channels & outputs Extend brand and visual impact ReadyMag abacus
Insights driving innovation and improvement	Media and parliamentary monitoring  SM analytics and research  Web analytics and stats	Review impact reporting  Benchmarks and further performance analysis  Support Insights project  Stakeholder feedback and research	New technology formats (eg, augmented)  Internal comms directly influencing org strategy  Link reports and outputs into SQA and Highers

# Appendix 2. Monitoring framework

**43.** Reporting on performance against the objectives of this strategy is undertaken as part of wider corporate performance reporting and, where appropriate, internal Communications monitoring.

**44.** The measures used align with the approaches taken and metrics used in our corporate reporting against our [Corporate Plan 2023-28](#) and our impact reporting on [Public audit in Scotland](#).

## Communications and engagement performance monitoring

### Objective One: Reach our audiences in ways that work for them

Links to PAIS and Corporate Plan	Outcome measures	Performance measures	Target (per quarter)	Reporting/monitoring
PAIS Outcome Four	Reach of and engagement with our work	Media mentions	220	Quarterly corporate reporting
PAIS Outcome Four	Reach of and engagement with our work	Social media reach	10,000	Quarterly corporate reporting
PAIS Outcome Four	Reach of and engagement with our work	Social media engagement	4000	Quarterly corporate reporting
PAIS Outcome Four	Reach of and engagement with our work	Downloads from website	3000	Quarterly corporate reporting
PAIS Outcome Four	Reach of and engagement with our work	Page impressions	100k	Quarterly corporate reporting
PAIS Outcome Four	Reach of and engagement with our work	% open rate of newsletters	26%	Quarterly corporate reporting



Links to PAIS and Corporate Plan	Outcome measures	Performance measures	Target (per quarter)	Reporting/monitoring
PAIS Outcome Four	Reach of and engagement with our work	% awareness in public, MSP and LG surveys	Public: 60% MSP: >90% LG: >90% (note: this is annual)	PAIS outcome impact reports
PAIS Outcome Four	Reach of and engagement with our work	# unique views of SPO top story	150	Communications internal monitoring
PAIS Outcome Four	Reach of and engagement with our work	% open rate of Connected	60	Communications internal monitoring
PAIS Outcome Four	Reach of and engagement with our work	# unique views of Abacus	150	Communications internal monitoring

### Objective Two: Integrate Communications early in audits and projects

Links to PAIS and Corporate Plan	Outcome measures	Performance measures	Target (per quarter)	Reporting/monitoring
CP Priority Three	Application of insights to decision-making and audit delivery	% of meetings with audit teams at scoping stage	95	Communications internal monitoring

### Objective Three: Be equipped to influence and give professional advice

Links to PAIS and Corporate Plan	Outcome measures	Performance measures	Target (per quarter)	Reporting/monitoring
CP Priorities Four & Five	Our people: Right skills and capacity to deliver  Innovation driving audit transformation	# days of L&D per employee	>2	Quarterly corporate reporting
CP Priorities Four & Five	Our people: Right skills and capacity to deliver  Innovation driving audit transformation	# alternative format and bespoke products	2	Communications internal monitoring

### Objective Four: Provide an efficient, responsive and effective in-house service

Links to PAIS and Corporate Plan	Outcome measures	Performance measures	Target (per quarter)	Reporting/monitoring
CP Priorities One & Two	Audits delivered on time and on budget	Actual delivery timelines of agreed plans	>95%	Communications internal monitoring
CP Priorities One & Two	Audits delivered on time and on budget	Actual resource allocation to target allocation	<110%	Communications internal monitoring

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# Appendix 3. Supporting and linked documents

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- [Public audit in Scotland](#)
- [Accounts Commission's Strategy 2021-26](#)
- AC Communications and Engagement Strategy
- Stakeholder engagement programme
- Yearly and quarterly activity planners and strategic grid
- Individual audit communications and engagement plans
- Audit Scotland's [Corporate Plan 2023-28](#)
- Communications Business Plan 2024-28 and annual Business Plans delivery plans
- ET and LG internal engagement plans

# Communications and engagement

Strategy 2024-28



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