Communications strategy

Introduction

The Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association (UCISA) exists to promote excellence in the application of information systems and services to support teaching, learning, research and administration in higher and further education. It informs and supports policy-making processes, both within institutions and nationally, on the strategic, efficient and cost effective application of information systems and services.

Audiences

The key audiences for UCISA communications are:
1. ICT related staff (existing and new) in universities and colleges.
2. Senior management teams in universities and colleges.
3. Organisations which UCISA needs to influence (UUK, the Leadership Foundation, the HE Academy, funding councils), mission groups (RUGIT, 1994 Group etc.) and regional groups (HEIDS etc.).
4. UCISA partnership relations – SCONUL, ALT, Eduserv, JISC and its delivery agencies (JANET(UK), SCHoMS, HESA, UCAS etc.).
5. Organisations with which UCISA would like to build strong partnerships (BUFDG, AUDE).
6. IT vendors.
7. External audiences (overseas equivalent organisations).

A full list of related organisations can be found on the UCISA website.

Objectives

The Communications Strategy will support the aims and objectives of UCISA, promote the activities that it organises through a network of sub-groups, and assist the efficient running of the Association. The key strategic aims will be to:
1. Promote UCISA and its activities in a coherent way.
2. Maintain and improve, where necessary, communications between UCISA and its contacts.
3. Make it easy for UCISA's audiences to find out about UCISA services and events.
4. Disseminate best practice.
5. Make UCISA an association with which members and organisations want to engage.
6. Consult appropriately with members.
7. Maintain and establish, where appropriate, links with governmental bodies and other organisations.
8. Make effective use of ICT.

Messages

UCISA's key messages are:

1. Sharing relevant news and information.
2. Sharing good practice via events and publications.
3. Maximising cost effectiveness.
4. Developing ideas and informing and supporting policy making at institutional, national and international level.
5. Providing a network of contacts to enable sharing of expertise and experience.
6. Consulting those responsible for delivering information systems and technology services in universities, colleges and related institutions.
7. Representing those responsible for delivering information systems and technology services in universities, colleges and related institutions.
8. Providing a powerful lobbying voice.

Principles

The Communications Strategy has been formulated on the following principles:

1. Communication processes must be clear and known to all members.
2. Communication must be purposeful and timely, particularly in relation to consultation and decision making.
3. Communication must be open, honest and frank.
4. Information will be made available on an open basis.
5. Closed mailing lists or password protected web pages will only be used when there is a good reason for restricting or limiting access, and the reason will be recorded.
6. Communication will be multidimensional – up and down between the Executive Committee and members as well as horizontal communications at all levels.
7. Effective communication often depends on information systems which must, therefore, be easy to use, accessible, robust and reliable.
8. Decision making and organisational structures will support effective communication by ensuring clear accountability for outcomes.
9. All members of the UCISA Executive Committee, including chairs of Groups, are responsible for communication to and from UCISA.
10. Institutional contacts are responsible for communications to and from UCISA within their own organisations.
11. Duplication should be minimised.
12. Information overload should be avoided.
13. Information content should be decoupled from delivery method. Information will principally be available electronically, with printable versions available.
14. Where members have been canvassed for information, the results of the exercise will be summarised and shared with them.
15. UCISA communications should support equality principles and be available in formats for disabled members of its audiences.

Means of communication

The Communications Strategy will make use of a variety of tools and techniques including:

1. Email – via a variety of generic and specialised mailing lists.
2. Website – which must be current, accessible and easy to navigate.
3. Conferences, seminars, workshops, webinars, podcasts.
4. Publications and case studies.
5. Current technology – blogs, wikis, discussion groups, micro blogging, RSS feeds, mobile apps.
6. New and emerging technology, where appropriate.
7. Surveys – both regular (Top Concerns) and *ad hoc*.
8. Networking.

9. Face to face meetings.
10. Regular bulletins delivered online.

Website

The UCISA website is one of the principal means of communication to and from UCISA and its audiences. It is, therefore, useful to note the core principles and objectives in the approach to this, namely:

1. Web services should be accessible, clear, attractive, useful and easy to use for visitors and members.
2. The website will consolidate and promote existing content, stressing its quality and providing easy and focused navigation.
3. As the website is UCISA's main communication point, information on it will be accurate, timely and up to date.
4. The website will be reviewed regularly – ideas for new services will be explored and trialled where there is perceived value and available resources.
5. Authenticated access will be kept to a minimum on the site and will be as transparent as possible. Where authentication is used, the reason for doing so will be recorded.
6. UCISA will enable cooperation between the people who maintain, contribute to and use the website by ensuring appropriate tools, processes and communication channels are available. This will include meetings and training for web maintainers based on demand.
7. The management activities of the website and development plans for it will be clear, documented and will be published as appropriate to keep web service users informed of plans and issues and encourage consultation.
8. The UCISA website will aim to provide open communication and a valuable source of information for members, partners and visitors.
9. The UCISA website must be printer friendly.
10. The UCISA website will provide the opportunity for its audiences to feedback comments and suggestions at appropriate points on the site. Such comments will be monitored by UCISA Operational Support and appropriate actions taken, referring to the UCISA Executive Secretary and/or Executive Committee members as appropriate

Timescales

A programme of tasks to achieve this strategy is contained in a separate Communications Strategy Action Plan.

Evaluation and Review

UCISA audiences should be consulted regularly and appropriately about their satisfaction with communications to and from UCISA; to identify any gaps and overlaps and to inform any amendments to the Communications Strategy. Mindful of information overload, the suggested review frequency is not more than every two years.

The Communications Strategy should be reviewed annually by the Communications Group. In doing so, the process should consider any feedback from the consultation process; any feedback or suggested amendments via other routes; any changes in technology usage.

Document history

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