

8 Jun 23

RAF FA Engagement Strategy

References:

- A. RAF FA Business Reset Strategy 2021-24.
- B. JSP 579: Policy and Processes for Non-News Media Projects – broadcast, manuscripts, digital and features.
- C. JSP 745: Digital Publishing Policy.

1. **Aim.** This strategy aims to act as a top-level document to guide the way the RAF FA communicates to its internal and external stakeholders. It is a subordinate document to the RAF FA Business Reset Strategy (Reference A), in that it seeks to exploit communications effectively to deliver the Association's strategic objectives.
2. **Methodology.** Adopting aspects of best practise from Defence Information Operations doctrine, this document will outline the strategic communication effects that the RAF wishes to achieve and will then seek to outline the 'ways' and 'means' by which those 'ends' will be delivered. However, in executing this strategy, it is essential that the RAF FA's limited and volunteer workforce is recognised, meaning that simplicity and efficiency are paramount considerations, with all elements of the RAF FA having a collective responsibility for the generation of articles.
3. **Execution.** This communications strategy will be owned by Dir Strategy and it will be directly linked to the content and cadence of the Association's strategy; it will therefore routinely be issued every 3-4 years. On an annual basis, the Association's Hd of Communications will issue a more tactical 'Comms plan', to add in-year activities and deliverables which connect the ends-ways-means.
4. **Communication Policy.** As a Royal Air Force organisation, the RAF FA must conduct all communication activity in accordance with Defence policy, outlined at References B and C.
5. **Communication Audiences.** The RAF FA's communication audiences can be summarised as follows:
 - a. **Internal:**
 - I.1 Board of Trustees.
 - I.2 Executive Committee and associated sub-committees.
 - I.3 RAF FA HQ Staff.
 - I.4 Representative teams (including Icarus, Vets and Masters).
 - I.5 Leagues and grass roots clubs and players.
 - I.6 Coaching community.
 - I.7 Refereeing community.
 - b. **External:**
 - E.1 RAF senior and Station leadership.
 - E.2 The Football Association.
 - E.3 RAF sports bodies.
 - E.4 RAF Central Fund.
 - E.5 Charities Commission.
 - E.6 RAF FA Sponsors.
 - E.7 Enablers (Station gym staff, Defence Infrastructure Organisation etc).
 - E.8 Potential participation audiences (non-affiliated players etc).
 - E.9 Other Service FAs/Combined Service Football.
 - E.10 All RAF personnel.

6. **Communication Effects.** The RAF FA's strategic communication effects are to:
- a. Encourage participation.
 - b. Inspire excellence.
 - c. Generate support and ensure a license to operate for RAF Football activities.
 - d. Engender a culture of fairness and inclusivity.
 - e. Inform RAF FA decision making and activities to ensure they are safe, compliant, and based on best practice and the needs of the 'customer' community.

7. **Defining the 'Ends' – linking audiences to effects.**

Communication Effects	Audience
Encourage participation	I.1-7 E.8, E10
Inspire excellence	I.1-7 E.8
Generate support and ensure a license to operate for RAF Football activities	E1-7
Engender a culture of fairness and inclusivity	I.1-7 E.8 , E10
Inform RAF FA decision making and activities to ensure they are safe, compliant, and based on best practice and the needs of the 'customer' community.	I.1-7 E.1-7, E9

8. **Approach to communication (the 'ways').** RAF FA Communications will broadly be conducted in one of the following ways:

a. **Pull.** The RAF FA has numerous information requirements, from both internal and external sources, to inform policies, decisions and the way activities are conducted. This includes but is not limited to: direction and guidance from national and RAF bodies; feedback (both quantitative and qualitative) on the Associations performance (inc form the D&I Dashboard); examples of best practise; and information concerning resource allocations and constraints. Passive and active mechanisms for sourcing and distributing this information must be understood. Much of this 'pull' information will come via the RAF FA HQ, but the BoTs, inc FA Councillor, play critical roles. The way the Association gathers qualitative feedback from its customer base is immature and will be an active focus in FY23/24, as the information is judged as key to informing the next Business Strategy, specifically participation work-strands.

b. **Interact.** The most effective form of communication is active dialogue, in person where possible. The RAF FA forecast of events and governance schedule must therefore ensure suitable opportunities for such engagement to meet the needs of the table at para 6.

c. **Push.** A sub-optimal plan to push information to the RAF FA's key audiences' risks 'failing on the final mile'. The most important pillar of this communications strategy is therefore the manner in which information is passed from the RAF FA core (HQ, BoTs, committees and leagues) out to its stakeholders. This activity will be the main effort of the RAF FA Comms Team, and will be conducted in four broad ways:

- (1) Advertising opportunities and events to encourage participation.

(2) Communicating policies, 'know how' and standards to the RAF FA community, so that activity is conducted in a compliant, safe and inclusive manner.

(3) Celebrating success and news, to inspire our people, recognise their achievements, and critically to thank and highlight the support of our stakeholders.

(4) Demonstrating the RAF FA's value and compliance, to both meet formal reporting requirements and to underpin the support of key stakeholders.

9. **Communications Tools (the 'means')**. The RAF FA has a broad range of communication tools, many of which are proven and effective. Others, such as our use of data as a means of quantitative feedback on performance, are embryonic. Some tools (such as the use of surveys) represent relatively new ground. These means are:

a. **Governance regimes**. The Association's governance regimes have undergone notable change in recent years as part of the organisation's journey to conform to the FA Operating Standard (and therefore sports governance best practice). The associated forums (battle-rhythm in military terminology), which include the Inclusion Advisory Group, act as a key vehicle for planned and structured communication. This includes both key external stakeholders such as the FA and RAF Sports Fed, but primarily internally between committee members and associated sub-committees.

b. **Events**. A key tenet of the communication approach is to use a range of events, such as Inter-Service fixtures, Wembley games and annual dinners, to provide platforms for communication, specifically with audiences E1 and E6. The longer-term planning of such interventions is an area where the Association should seek improvement.

c. **Formal Reports and Returns**. The Association produces a number of formal artifacts which are critical to meeting our communication objectives, which include:

(1) The annual report to the Charities Committee (inc our end of year accounts).

(2) Our 3-yearly Business Strategy and annual plans to the FA.

(3) Our 3-yearly strategy to the RAF Central Fund, linked with our in-year financial bid process.

d. **RAF FA Website**. The cornerstone of RAF FA communication, the website is our principal tool for engaging with internal stakeholders, whilst also being accessible to external audiences. Of note, it acts as a platform/repository for several other forms of communication, such as e-publications, minutes of meetings and news articles.

e. **Articles**. Most of our major events/games will be covered by a news style article, which will be communicated to internal and external stakeholders via electronic means (principally the website and social media). Whilst resource intensive, such an approach is a powerful tool for inspiring excellence and engendering support for the Association. Articles are retained in the RAF FA Digital Archive to preserve the history of the RAF FA.

f. **Handbooks and policies**. The RAF FA annual handbook is the primary means by which the RAF FA communicates with its grassroots base and representative teams to ensure football is played in a safe and complaint manner. Similarly, the burgeoning library of policies, as part of the governance reform work, means that there are clear handrails available to guide Association activity.

g. **Social Media (SM)**. The RAF FA will continue to use SM for a range of uses, including advertising opportunities and publishing news articles. Additionally, some football games will

be live streamed using such platforms. All communication activities on SM will be conducted in accordance with Reference C.

h. **Surveys.** A key tenet of this communication strategy is to gather greater qualitative and quantitative feedback from the customer community to influence future plans and decisions. One of the key tools to achieving this will be e-surveys.

i. **Defence communication systems.** Whilst only suitable for MOD stakeholders, Defence communications systems provide an additional means to pass information on systems that the core audience regularly use, and will therefore be a key tool in the delivery of this plan. The exception to this being RAF Galaxy which allows both internal and external communication and is the tool of choice being pushed by Air Media.

j. **External Media.** Where possible, external media sources will be used to amplify the communication means discussed above. Routinely, this will include Defence orientated outlets, such as RAF News and BFBS. However, opportunities to exploit the power of regional and national media should also be explored. However, such engagement with the media must be actioned through suitable RAF Media Ops representative and iaw Reference B.