



Communication Management Standard Accreditation Process & Agreement

Applicable for In house Communications/Public Relations Teams & Public Relations & Communication Consultancies & Agencies

1. Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
CMS	Communication Management Standard is the voluntary accreditation process developed and owned by the PRCA
Glossary	The glossary of terms contained within this Agreement.
CMS Accredited Organisation	PR Consultancy, Agency or in-house Communications department that has attained CMS.
Organisation	<p>CMS is divided into versions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PR Consultancies or Agencies Agencies who are current corporate members of PRCA • In-house: for PR and communications teams <p>For ease of reference, the generic term ‘Organisation’ is used throughout the Rules.</p>
Code of Conduct	<p>PRCA Members Professional Charter and Codes of Conduct available here https://www.prca.org.uk/about-us/pr-standards/professional-charter-and-codes-conduct</p> <p>and the PR Standards available here https://www.prca.org.uk/about-us/pr-standards</p>
Serious Code of Conduct Breach	Any complaint received and being investigated / has been investigated by the PRCA irrespective of the outcome.
PRCA	The Public Relations and Communications Association Limited, registered address 39 High Street, Battle, East Sussex, United Kingdom, TN33 0EE; company number: 00965517
Matchmaker	



Term	Definition
	Matchmaker is the free and impartial agency search and selection service from PRCA for clients (brands and businesses) looking to appoint Public Relations consultancies for a specific project and/or piece of retained business in relation to the client's business.



2. About the CMS

2.1 Overview

CMS is an accreditation process developed and owned by PRCA. PRCA provides the certification. It is not externally certified or verified by any other organisation.

CMS is a voluntary accreditation process. It is not compulsory for organisations to have CMS to be members of PRCA, however if UK Agencies want to join the Matchmaker scheme, they must have CMS accreditation.

Designed specifically for the communications sector, the CMS is the hallmark of PR excellence. CMS recognises best practice specific to a PR and communications consultancy. The PRCA introduced CMS in 1998, and updated it for the modern workplace in 2005 and 2012.

The CMS provides a flexible, supportive management framework to help agencies develop consistent operational efficiencies and client service, manage risk effectively, reduce costs and promote profitability.

Achieving accreditation involves the acceptance of this Agreement and assessment by a PRCA Assessor. CMS accreditation is awarded for one year.

Organisations are required to achieve and maintain the stated requirements in the CMS Standards.

CMS is a self-audited process with the assessment taking the form of a self-assessed spreadsheet and then moderation by the PRCA CMS Assessor using random sampling at an agreed date/time.

2.2 CMS ownership

CMS is owned and managed by the PRCA. This includes developing the Standards, administration and review of all applications, the assessment process and promotion of the scheme.

2.3 Contact details

All communications regarding the CMS should be addressed to: carol.magill@prca.org.uk.

2.4 Matchmaker

Only CMS accredited agencies who comply with the PRCA's Code of Conduct are eligible to be put forward / participate in Matchmaker new business briefs and opportunities.

If a CMS accreditation extension has been agreed, it will be at the discretion of PRCA as to whether the agency can still be put forward for Matchmaker within this extension period.



3. CMS Standards

3.1 CMS Standards for PR Agencies / Consultancies

The nine core areas agencies are scored on are:

- Leadership & Communication
- Business Planning
- Business Improvement
- Financial Management & Systems
- Campaign Management
- Client Satisfaction
- New Business*
- People Management
- Diversity**
- Exemptions to the standards must be agreed in writing with the CMS Assessor. These are rare and directly related to operational requirements.
- (**Agencies completing CMS for the first time do not need to complete the final section on diversity).

For agencies this is :

Section	Overview of Requirements
1. Leadership and Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence that the company is well managed including that the team structure is communicated and understood, that there is core leadership for senior team and that there is an internal and external communication strategy.
2. Business Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That a realistic short and long term programme with a clear view of your direction for the organisation is in place by way of a business plan, which is communicated to team members and has incorporated business and financial objectives and is reviewed regularly.
3. Business Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A programme of continuous business improvement is in place including clear values and vision; information gathering, benchmarking and a process to carry out self improvement projects.
4. Financial Management and Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Checks and balances are in place so you can withstand periods of low growth and that finances are scrutinised by your senior team to support the future of the organisation.



Section	Overview of Requirements
5. Campaign management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Systems are in place for planning and managing programmes against agreed targets, and measuring and evaluating results achieved.
6. Client Satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistent and continuous tracking of client satisfaction to ensure you meet and exceed client expectations.
7. New Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate that you have in place a business development strategy, track the delivery of this and conduct negotiations with new clients and offer service agreements which reflect the high standards and best practice expected in the PR profession.
8. People Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have in place a clearly defined and universally understood system of appraisal, development and training for employees with high standards and investment in people from recruitment onwards.
9. Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Best practice is being followed to ensure a clear diversity and equality policy is in place, alongside tracking of relevant trends and acceptable, reasonable adjustments for people living with disabilities. This section also includes internships and apprenticeships.

3.2 CMS Standards for In House Teams

The 8 core areas that In House Teams are scored on are:

- Leadership & Communication
- Business Planning
- Business Improvement
- Budgetary Management
- Project Management
- Monitoring Satisfaction
- New Business
- People Management
- Diversity

Exemptions to the standards must be agreed in writing with the Assessor. These are rare and directly related to operational requirements. For example, if an organisation's in-house team has no remit for HR Management an exemption will apply to people management and diversity.



Section	Requirements
1. Leadership and Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A well managed team with clearly defined responsibilities.
2. Business planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning is based on a clear view of your organisation's strategic plan, marketplace or policy issues, potential and direction.
3. Business Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A programme of continued performance improvement activities in order to achieve long term goals and objectives.
4. Project Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Systems to ensure effective operational budgetary management.
5. Monitoring Satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistent and continuous tracking of satisfaction in order to improve professional competence.
6. People Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A clearly defined and universally understood system of appraisal, development and training.
7. Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Best practice is being followed to ensure a clear diversity and equality policy is in place.

The requirements of the CMS are based on:

- The organisation fulfilling its obligations under the CMS with a commitment to achieving and maintaining the requirements of the Standard.
- Compliance with the application and assessment process.



4. Eligibility criteria

Organisations with an office or offices in the United Kingdom can apply for accreditation if they wish, regardless of the size or type of work undertaken. An international version of CMS is available. Please [contact carol.magill@prca.org.uk](mailto:carol.magill@prca.org.uk) for details. Organisations must be a corporate member of the PRCA to take part.

5. Cost of accreditation

5.1 The cost for In House PR teams undertaking CMS is £250 plus VAT.

5.2

CMS Bandings for agencies / consultancies

Agency fee turnover in the last full financial year	CMS Application Fee
<£500K	£499 + VAT
£500k-£1 million	£699 + VAT
£1-3 million	£899 + VAT
£3-5 million	£1,099 + VAT
£5+ million	£1,650 + VAT

5.1.1 A contact point (name and email) or Purchase order must be provided when CMS is awarded to facilitate renewals

5.1.2 This signed Agreement signifies that the organisation will pay for CMS either in membership subscription or when invoiced after CMS is obtained.

6. CMS process

6.1 The application process

Organisations must sign this Agreement, retain a copy and send a scan of the signed Agreement to carol.magill@prca.org.uk.



If there are multiple members in an Organisation's group, applicants must specify which members are included in the CMS application and fees will be based on the total cumulative turnover.

The CMS Assessor will then email the Organisation's contact an invoice for the Fees and the CMS Assessment Spreadsheet for completion by the Organisation. All sections of the spreadsheet must be completed. The information will be used to administer the application and accreditation process. There is no time limit on how long agencies/ in house teams have to complete the spreadsheet but it is recommended that they do so within 12 months. If a charge has been included for CMS in the corporate subscription then organisations have 12 months to complete the process.

6.2 The assessment and moderation

CMS is a self-audited process with the assessment taking the form of a moderation using random sampling at an agreed date/time.

The moderation is 2.5 hours.

The threshold to proceed to moderation is that organisations complete 75% or more of each of the standards (this is per section and overall.) Agencies must send proof (via completed spreadsheet) that they have reached the threshold a week in advance of the moderation.

CMS is requirement led. The Assessor does not make subjective judgements on the material sent but refers to the guidance and scoring as outlined. For example, if an Organisation scores itself full marks then the evidence should contain all the information as outlined in guidance on the spreadsheet. Evidence must be written or recorded. Screenshots, documents, presentations, emails or videos of online platforms is accepted. Verbal evidence is not accepted in the CMS process as this is open to subjectivity.

During the assessment process no new certificate will be issued, if the Organisation's present CMS accreditation has lapsed. Agencies must have current CMS certificate when engaged in a pitch opportunity via Matchmaker.

6.3 Timing

The moderation is 2.5 hours.

CMS is a timed process and this is an integral part of the assessment.

All Organisations receive invitations clearly stating time slots (beginning and end) and this must be accepted by the Organisation before the assessment commences.

If there is a technical issue (either with the Organisation or Assessor) the clock is paused until this is resolved. The Organisation must however make the Assessor aware that there is an issue as soon as it is apparent. The Assessor will make their email and mobile available for the purpose.



No more than 30 minutes grace period will be provided to Organisations to send additional information if it found to be missing during the assessment. So the total period for assessment can be 3 hours:2.5 hours for received material and 30 mins follow up.

The Assessor will phone and email the organisation 30 minutes before the time is up.

6.4 Assessment outcomes

It is the responsibility of the Assessor to evaluate the evidence available and reach a conclusion about the recommendation they wish to make. Assessor

The decision is communicated within two working days of the moderation, unless there are exceptional circumstances beyond the CMS Assessor's control, e.g. sickness or family emergency.

The three outcomes that the Assessor can recommend are:

Assessment Outcome	Description
Borderline pass	In the case of borderline evidence the Assessor will ask if the Organisation is content to facilitate a further subsection sample with the timeline extended by 30 minutes or another slot arranged. Or if the evidence is missing (but can be easily rectified via changes to a process document) for one subsection the Assessor may ask for it to be reviewed and available within one month of the Assessment date.
Assessment is premature	If the evidence is borderline and/or missing for two or more subsections the Assessor will ask the organisation if they wish to reschedule the moderation at no charge to facilitate them more time to prepare. Rescheduling of the moderation can take place on two further occasions (in total three moderations) at no charge to facilitate the organisation in reaching the standard.
Award or renew accreditation	The Organisation has produced evidence to confirm it meets all the requirements in the CMS.

6.5 Assessment reports

The assessment outcome is communicated via email to the nominated representative of the Organisation.

Percentage scores are not made available because it's based on a sample



Feedback is typically a paragraph or two. The Assessor will give feedback to the Organisation in relation to all sections of the CMS which have been moderated.

Where evidence of compliance is lacking - When the Assessor indicates a subsection is not evidenced adequately, he/she must state the CMS requirement and the evidence that is lacking. This is done via email and via a telephone call with the organisations nominated representative.

Assessors must agree with the Organisation the type and level of detail required for the corrective action to be deemed acceptable.

If documentary evidence alone is not sufficient to meet the evidence threshold, a re-assessment may be necessary. This is for the Assessor to decide but clear communication between the Assessor and organisation is essential.

6.6 Duration of accreditation

Accreditation will commence on the date notified by the Assessor and will continue for a period of a year.

6.7 Mergers or de-mergers

New Organisations that have opened as a result of a merger (wherein one or both Organisations are accredited) must undertake the CMS assessment within six months of the lapsed CMS date (which ever agency is latest if both have CMS and they want to retain their accreditation). Any change to the legal entity may result in the withdrawal of accreditation. Organisations must inform the CMS Assessor of any demerger or re-structure as soon as feasible and commercial sensitivities allow.

Failure to notify changes in respect of a merger or de-merger may result in the loss of accreditation.

7. Enforcement and governance process

The PRCA CEO has oversight of the content and design of the CMS with support from the CMS Assessor. Particular standards will have input from the relevant subject area policy committee e.g. relating to equity, inclusion will have input from REEB policy committee.

Complaints will be overseen by the Standards Committee, if they cannot first be resolved by senior leadership and agreement with the complainant.

An Organisation must raise a complaint within 7 days of the source of the complaint.

Stage 1 – Discussion with senior leadership (Assessor line manager) to see if the complaint can be resolved informally.

Stage 2 – consideration by Standards Committee. The process is outlined in the PRCA complaints procedure.



7.1 Assessment cycle

Agencies must have an initial assessment when they first apply for CMS accreditation which lasts for a year. An extension of up to six months is available on request (to facilitate maternity/paternity leave or a merger or other exceptional circumstance) but after six months the CMS accreditation will always lapse.

7.2 Re-accreditation assessments

These follow the same format as Assessments, as outlined.

7.3 Termination

The PRCA reserves the right to terminate this Agreement at any time for any reasonable reason on written notice. The Organisation shall not be entitled to be reimbursed for any sums paid in respect of the application fee. Reasonable reasons shall include (but not be limited to):

- Any breach of this Agreement by the Organisation which are not remedied (if capable of remedy) within 14 days of being required by written notice to do so.
- The Organisation does or omits to do something which, in the reasonable opinion of the PRCA, could be detrimental to the reputation and integrity of the CMS scheme and its brand.
- The Organisation commits a Serious Code of Conduct Breach.

The Organisation shall be entitled to terminate its membership at any time by notifying the PRCA (carol.magill@prca.org.uk) of its intention in writing. In such circumstances, the Organisation shall not be entitled to be reimbursed for any fees paid in relation to the Scheme.

8. Use of CMS logo and intellectual property rights

CMS accreditation permits the CMS accredited Organisation to use the CMS Logo during the period of its accreditation only solely in connection with its marketing/promotional material, signage, stationary and website, provided that:

- The CMS Logo is used in the form specified by the PRCA in writing from time to time.
- All use is in keeping with and maintains the integrity of CMS and the PRCA.
- The agency shall not use the CMS Logo in any way that that would bring CMS or the PRCA into disrepute or undermine their reputation.

The use of the CMS Logo by the CMS accredited Organisation is exclusive to its accreditation. The CMS Logo can only be used for the duration of accreditation.

At all times, all elements of the CMS brand, and all associated goodwill and derivatives, are the property of the PRCA. Nothing in the grant of the accreditation shall be construed as transferring any ownership interest in such property to the Organisation.



The CMS Accredited Organisation shall not during the period of their accreditation seek to or actually register, use or adopt any domain name, company name, trade name, trademark, logo or the like relating to the PRCA, the CMS, its brand or similar derivative.

9. Confidentiality and information sharing

Commercial confidentiality is a key part of the CMS process. The Assessor has visibility of a “snapshot” of an Organisation’s work and this material is deleted within two business days of the final decision regarding accreditation, if the organisation indicates it is content with the outcome. The evidence is never stored on PRCA sharepoint or on a PRCA laptop.

PRCA preference is that application evidence is sent via a secure platform, however email is also acceptable. Password use for sensitive information is encouraged but is at the discretion of the Organisation.

Organisations are advised to redact any personnel information unless they have explicit written permission to share personal details. Other information, such as sensitive financial information can also be redacted. In some cases, Organisations may decide not to share any information via email or a secure platform and in these cases, video conferencing can be used (with prior agreement.) The Assessor will work with Organisations to respect their confidentiality, while Organisations should also appreciate some degree of visibility is required for the CMS process.

This process will always apply except in circumstances where in there is a complaint, in which case complaint details will be stored by the PRCA in a password protected file. Only information pertinent to the complaint is retained until the conclusion of the process.

10. Data Protection

All personal data shared with the PRCA will be used by the PRCA to perform this Agreement, the UK GDPR and its [Privacy Policy \(https://www.prca.org.uk/about-us/privacy-policy-and-cookie-policy\)](https://www.prca.org.uk/about-us/privacy-policy-and-cookie-policy).

11. Limitation of Liability

Nothing in this Agreement shall limit the Organisation’s payment obligations; nor will it limit any liability which cannot be legally limited, including death or personal injury caused by negligence; and fraud or fraudulent misrepresentation.

The PRCA is not liable to the Organisation for:

- loss of profits;
- loss of sales or business;
- loss of agreements or contracts;



- loss of anticipated savings;
- loss of use or corruption of software, data or information;
- loss of or damage to goodwill; and/ or
- indirect or consequential loss.

All other liability of the PRCA shall be limited to the amount paid by the Organisation to the PRCA in the previous one year period arising from the date of the event that has given rise to the claim.

Unless the Organisation notifies the PRCA that it intends to make a claim in respect of an event within the Notice Period, the PRCA shall have no liability for that event. The Notice Period for a claim relating to an Assessment shall be seven days from the date of the PRCA's communication of the Assessment decision. The Notice Period for all other claims start on the day on which the event happened and shall expire six months from that date. The notice must be in writing and must identify the event and the grounds for the claim in reasonable detail.

12. Changes to these Rules

The PRCA may amend this Agreement at any time in its sole discretion on notice to the Organisation, where such change is to implement reasonable updates to the organisation and administration of the CMS Accreditation Scheme

13. Force Majeure

Force Majeure Event means any circumstance not within a party's reasonable control including, without limitation:

- acts of God, flood, drought, earthquake or other natural disaster;
- epidemic or pandemic;
- terrorist attack, civil war, civil commotion or riots, war, threat of or preparation for war, armed conflict, imposition of sanctions, embargo, or breaking off of diplomatic relations;
- any labour or trade dispute, strikes, industrial action or lockouts;
- interruption or failure of utility service.



If a party is prevented, hindered or delayed in or from performing any of its obligations under this Agreement by a Force Majeure Event (**Affected Party**), the Affected Party shall not be in breach of this Agreement or otherwise liable for any such failure or delay in the performance of such obligations. The time for performance of such obligations shall be extended accordingly. The corresponding obligations of the other party will be suspended, and its time for performance of such obligations extended, to the same extent as those of the Affected Party.

14. Governing Law and Jurisdiction

Each party irrevocably agrees that the courts of England and Wales shall have exclusive jurisdiction to settle any dispute or claim (including non-contractual disputes or claims) arising out of or in connection with this agreement or its subject matter or formation.