



Policy position papers – How the BCS Community works with the Policy and PR team

Decision paper - 26 January 2023

Background

BCS' external profile and influence has grown significantly over the last three years through a strategy of producing original research; deploying expert commentary from members; building relationships with media and policy makers; and joining up our communications and marketing channels.

The relationship between the Community and 'HQ' has been a critical part of this success. A growing range of experts are trusted to speak to media; we achieve credible response rates to members surveys which inform press and policy engagement; ever more members give their time to BCS 'policy jams', to advise on consultation responses and pro-active policy engagement. We also have new specialist groups who lend us added relevance (Pride, Embrace, Digital Divide).

All of the available channels through which members can become involved in, or learn about, our external engagement work are outlined here:

www.bcs.org/articles-opinion-and-research/how-bcs-members-have-influence-and-impact

This paper relates only to how we manage submissions of pro-active policy papers; those which aim to anticipate issues or are taking a strategic view of a long-term challenge. Other forms of external engagement such as media expertise are covered briefly below and will form separate papers.

The issue

The growth of BCS' external relations work has been rapid. Our internal policies, terms of reference and rules to guide members on how they contribute to BCS 'position papers' need

to meet requirements of modern stakeholder engagement and PR.

The Chair of Community Board and Director of Communications are seeking to confirm (then communicate) the process through which groups under the aegis of Community Board support the creation of BCS policy positions with their expertise.

- We need a process for independently assessing and reviewing ideas and draft papers generated from within the membership community itself - for example by Specialist Groups.

- Some constitutions or terms of reference for BCS groups suggest they own responsibility for policy and external engagement; this is not a reasonable or fair expectation and carries reputational risk. These should reflect a consultative and a collaborative relationship between BCS groups and the central team.

Framework for policy engagement

The Policy and PR team has ultimate operational responsibility for managing the publication of BCS' corporate responses externally from media enquiries to government policy consultations.

But it is an enabling service – the team depends on the knowledge of the Community's experts, and channelling that in way that is timely and can be packaged for many audiences.

Our engagement will prioritise the (current) four broad themes agreed by the Trustee Board and Influence Board, which are Professionalism and Ethical Practice; Diversity and Inclusion; Digital Divide; Green IT and Net Zero.

How member groups propose policy engagement papers – a process

Any group beginning work on a pro-active policy paper which aspires to carry the BCS brand, should first submit a brief synopsis (300-500 words). This will be reviewed by the Fellows Technical Advisory Group (F-TAG) and the Policy and PR team.

Before this, an email or call to the Policy and PR team for preliminary discussion is welcome. Submissions and enquiries to come via policyhub@bcs.uk.

Advice from F-TAG and the central team on the synopsis will be given clearly and in timely fashion taking in consideration:

alignment with BCS' current strategic themes; the current interests of government and industry; available resource and duplication (what other public affairs work is being brought to publication currently); strength of evidence base; reputational risk; the potential for partnerships; likelihood of influence with either government, industry, media; resonance with the broader membership and potential to grow and diversify membership.

There will be a strong assumption from F-TAG and the central BCS team that groups submitting papers do so from a position of expertise and knowledge of priorities in their field.

Submissions will be reviewed at least on a monthly basis – but earlier if urgent – and advice will be given on whether submissions have the potential for development as official BCS papers and content.

The review must also ensure the group submitting the policy proposal has sought guidance from any relevant Specialist Groups whose work crosses over. For example, a paper on the annual cost of software failure to UK, submitted by the IT Leaders Forum, was reviewed by the ISSG and SIGIST.

F-TAG Chair and/or Director of Communications and/or Head of Policy will seek further advice from within BCS or the wider tech sector if necessary.

Lead authors may be invited to the next F-TAG meeting to review synopses, expand on ideas and discuss with the group.

Each F-TAG meeting will be supported by BCS Content and Policy advisers to support decision making, as is the case currently. Synopses should be sent to F-TAG seven days before the meeting. If this is not possible, papers will usually be accepted for consideration

via remote means, or at an extraordinary meeting at the discretion of the Chair. Submissions can be considered at a shortened timescale, again at discretion of the Chair. Challenges to decisions on synopses submitted for development can be considered by the Community Board from a process, but not a content, point of view.

NOTE: (Policy position papers that originate within F-TAG itself, will also ensure, reciprocally, that relevant groups are brought into the process where expertise overlaps).

Other options for publication

Papers and concepts that are not immediately suitable for development as BCS-branded positions and research can still be published and shared by BCS groups in a number of ways. For example, as 'discussion papers' or clearly marked opinion pieces. The central PR and Marketing team will advise and support groups to publish and share content on their own pages, or as ITNOW articles, or social posts. The guiding principle is that, unless a proposal is deemed to be reputationally damaging, there should be a suitable 'route to market' for it, on the basis that is not branded as a settled BCS view.

This paper has covered pro-active policy papers which anticipate issues or take a strategic view of a long-term challenge. Two other forms of external engagement are summarised below for clarity:

Responses to government consultations with deadlines

The Policy team lead the co-ordination of all responses to government consultations on behalf BCS, but are bound to bring in expertise from across the organisation where relevant, specifically Member Groups, the Health and Care Executive and F-TAG.

For example, a call for evidence relating to digital health could not be submitted without lead input from the BCS Health and Care Executive.

Media relations and responses to media requests

Media responses, which often require an immediate (say, within 30 minutes) reply, are co-ordinated by the central PR team. A growing group of BCS experts currently support with media enquiries. For example, Dan Card FBCS, of ISSG, spoke to the Daily Mail (Jan 22) about the uses that household tech like smart speakers and baby monitors could potentially be put

to for surveillance. www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11670357/How-household-devices-collect-data-amid-warnings-China-monitor-Brits/

BCS is committed to being credited as a source of insight on these issues in mainstream media.

A further paper on how the Community Board, F-TAG and Influence Board can support the development of this 'experts directory' in a way that maps to key media themes is being prepared.

For decision:

Sign off: 'How groups under the aegis of Community Board propose policy engagement papers' process.

Sign off: Agree that Community Board and Policy/PR team will review (by date TBC) wording of Member Group Rules in collaboration with BCS Member Groups and the terms of reference of other bodies reporting to the Board, to reflect the reality that policy and external relations leadership is a collaborative process.

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Director of Communications

Chair, Community Board

26 January 2023