

MEDIA CONTACT POLICY

What's in this policy?

This document provides guidance for all staff on working with the media. It sets out a range of principles and a protocol for:-

- who can interact with the media (local, regional and national print and broadcast media)
- handling enquiries from the media, and
- includes a pro-forma for reporting on media interest in our services as well as requesting media coverage.

Rules regarding media reporting are currently being consulted upon. Once they change this policy will be updated.

Version note

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1 Principles

These principles apply to all Cafcass services, staff and self-employed contractors.

- 1.1 Cafcass will respond promptly and accurately to all media enquiries, as transparently as possible, but in accordance with applicable legislation and with priority given to service user confidentiality, the interests of children and adult service users, the interests of the service we provide and any reporting restrictions made by the courts.
- 1.2 Cafcass will also seek proactive opportunities to promote our work in the media, subject of course to legislative restrictions and the priorities mentioned above . This may take the form of news stories, case studies, social care sector comment and interviews.
- 1.3 All media activity, whether responding to a request from the media or making a proactive approach to the media, must be cleared with the Head of Communications prior to any contact with a journalist. The communications department will provide media training for all managers who may come into contact with the media.

It is proposed that the following staff are authorized to be interviewed on behalf of Cafcass once the communications department has been informed:

Media	1 st Preference	2 nd Preferences
National broadcast and print	Chief Executive	CDG, Head of Communications
Regional broadcast and print	Regional Directors	CDG, Head of Communications
Local broadcast and print	Heads of Service, Service Managers	CDG, Head of Communications

Managers who have not completed media training will not usually be expected to speak with the media.

- 1.4 We will rarely name service users or give out information about the names of our practitioners. There may be occasions when we might make a statement relating to a service user, for example “Cafcass confirms that we are currently working with a family. We regret we are unable to provide further details as this case is the subject of reporting restrictions.” Such statements will only be made in the light of the needs of the service as a whole (including the best interests of the service user) and after advice has been obtained from Cafcass Legal on any legal restrictions that may apply.
- 1.5 The Head of Communications is Cafcass’ principal spokesperson. The Communications Department should be informed of all media enquiries as stated at paragraph 3 above. In the absence of Communications staff, contact the Corporate Director (Partnerships). The role of the principal spokesperson involves briefing the media and arranging on the record comment via statements or interviews.

- 1.6 There will be occasions when it is decided that it is more appropriate for the local manager to act as spokesperson, for example in a local radio interview. Advice on when this applies will be given on a case by case basis.
- 1.7 The Communications Department will always work with practitioners and Cafcass legal (where necessary) to arrive at an agreed approach to dealing with any enquiry relating to specific cases or services, including the wording or any statement to be given to the media. Regional Directors and/or Service Managers will be fully informed and consulted about enquiries on their patch.
- 1.8 Stakeholder partners will be kept informed as appropriate. There may be occasions when it is more appropriate for the Head of Communications or a partner agency (for example DfES, DCA, local authority) to deal with the enquiry and in this instance, Cafcass will seek to arrive at an agreed approach.
- 1.9 Whether an enquiry from the media is in connection with 'good' or 'bad' news, the Head of Communications should be informed. The Communications Department is happy to offer advice and support to staff seeking positive publicity for local services. The media contact form at Appendix 1 should be completed and submitted to allow the communications department time to plan and offer the best advice.
- 1.10 A prompt response to the media could mean the difference between a one sided story or a balanced presentation of Cafcass' involvement in a case.
- 1.11 Where there are issues of interest to national media (for example a high profile report about Cafcass and/or its functions or a high profile public law case) Cafcass will devise a national strategy for responding to media enquiries.

2 Protocol

- 2.1 When a member of staff receives an enquiry from the media they should make a note of the following:
 - Name of the newspaper/magazine or TV/radio programme
 - Name of journalist
 - Telephone number
 - What questions they want to ask
 - What time they called
 - What deadline they are working to
- 2.2 **Do not say "No comment"**, but reassure the journalist that their enquiry is taken seriously and that a Cafcass spokesperson will call them back. Don't feel under pressure – just tell them *"It is our policy that media enquiries are routed through our communications team"*.

When you are off the telephone, process the enquiry using the form at Appendix 1.

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- 2.3 Act promptly. Inform the Head of Communications and ensure line managers are fully informed as appropriate. If the Head of Communications is not available then speak to another member of the communications team. In the absence of the communications team contact the Corporate Director (Partnerships).
 - 2.4 Discuss with the Head of Communications whether it is appropriate to inform partner agencies, and how this should be done.
 - 2.5 Once the Head of Communications has identified who will speak to the journalist we need to develop an agreed line to take. This will include a statement 'on the record' (i.e. words that may be directly attributed to Cafcass) and will also include any background briefing.

The matter of 'on' and 'off' the record is a question of trust, which is why the Head of Communications will frequently work with journalists directly. It is important to remember that even if a conversation is "off the record", the person who is speaking to the journalist must not provide information which would have been unlawful if it was "on" the record.

- 2.6 The person responsible for speaking to the journalist should make it a work priority, and ensure that statements are made in time to meet the journalist's deadline, if at all possible.

3 Practical advice and planning ahead

- 3.1 Staff should be aware that media enquiries may be conducted in a covert manner. Be alert to unusual enquiries, such as long lost relatives, unexpected requests for appointments to visit or requests for confirmation of a service user's details.
- 3.2 Some enquiries may be aimed at establishing whether an individual is receiving a service from Cafcass. We are unlikely to be able to give this information. Again please refer the media to the Head of Communications as described above.
- 3.3 Staff and SECs should take pro-active steps where their work with a particular service user may provoke media attention. Inform your line manager and Head of Communications where appropriate.
- 3.4 Cafcass is a large and complex organisation with opportunities for generating positive coverage. Some of our work is extremely interesting to the media. With the correct planning and preparation we can increase Cafcass' visibility which can offer benefits to the organisation and the children and families we work with.
- 3.5 Please inform the communications department of any activity that could positively (or negatively) impact upon our reputation as far in advance as possible. Examples of positive news events include service openings where the communications department can advise on the best date for the opening as well as provide a high profile VIP to open the service. A good opening event typically requires four months planning time.

4 Follow up

- 4.1 Make sure you get a copy of the publication, or (if possible) make a tape of the radio or television programme. Discuss it with all concerned within Cafcass.
- 4.2 Consider any follow up action. For example, if we feel Cafcass' position was not fairly represented, communications may consider writing a letter to the Editor.
- 4.3 Don't lose your temper. The way a journalist sees things is never likely to be exactly the way we see them. We must simply aim for the most positive coverage we can achieve under the circumstances.
- 4.4 If the story is fair, telephone the journalist and thank them. Whether it was fair or not, send the journalist follow-up information about Cafcass.
- 4.5 Follow up actions must of course be approved in advance with the Head of Communications.

5 Service users and media enquiries

- 5.1 You may be asked by a journalist to participate in an event or to ask a service user to participate.

Examples:

"I'm from the BBC's Inside Out programme. We would like to give your service users the chance to appear on a programme about family breakdown."

"I'm a freelance journalist working on a story about the experience of young people in public care. Can I talk to any of your service users about their experiences?"

- 5.2 Always discuss this with the Head of Communications and your manager before putting a service user forward for an appearance or interview. If a service user is approached directly, and comes to discuss it with practitioners, then staff and SECs should telephone the Head of Communications for advice.
- 5.3 Much of the work we do involves complex family relationships and vulnerable young children. The courts sometimes place restrictions on what can be reported, and in addition legislation places restrictions on disclosure of information relating to proceedings. If a family wishes to make a case public where such restrictions apply they should be advised to seek legal advice and you should seek advice from Cafcass Legal as it may be necessary inform the relevant court,. Where no such restrictions apply practitioners should ask family members to be mindful of the impact of media exposure on other family members, including children. Again, advice should be sought from Cafcass Legal.

- 5.4 Rules governing media reporting, transparency and accountability are under consultation through the DCA. This policy will be updated to take account of any changes.

6 National office contacts

The National Office switchboard number is **020 7510 7000**

First point of contact: Head of Communications - **Takki Sulaiman**

Direct Dial: 020 7510 7036; Mobile: 07778 419218 (including out of hours cover)

If the Head of Communications is not available, speak to another member of the communications team.

In the absence of the communications staff, contact:

Anthony Douglas, Chief Executive, Tel: 202 7510 7063 or, in his absence, contact one of the Corporate Directors.

Appendix 1: Media contact form

This form should be completed if you are approached by the media or if you require proactive local or national publicity.

Date

Name of publication/programme

Name of journalist

Telephone No:

Fax No:

E-mail

Deadline for comment

Summary of the story and questions they are asking/Summary of publicity required and target audience (delete as appropriate):

Staff contact

Telephone No.

Who has been informed?

✓

Head of Communications/Comms team

Service Manager/Head of Service

Chief Executive/Corporate Director

Who is to make the statement to the press/participate in the interview

Agreed statement:

Continue overleaf if necessary