



Network of Communication Specialists

Interview with Alex Kaufman

Communications Director, Civil Aviation Authority, United Kingdom, and Chair of the ECAC Network of Communication Specialists (NETCOM)

A few words on the importance of communication for civil aviation

Whether you work for an airline, an airport, in ground handling or air traffic control, communication is a crucial and vital part of our everyday lives. Communication – whether it is media relations, stakeholder engagement, internal communication or digital and social communication – is critical to the success of our organisations and industry. It isn't just about what happens in a crisis. Being both proactive and reactive in your communication approaches can make or break a reputation and can really help to build trust and understanding with stakeholders.

What is NETCOM? What are the group's objectives?

We were delighted when ECAC Directors General decided in 2021 to create a working group on communication for civil aviation: the ECAC Network of Communication Specialists (NETCOM). This reflects the importance of communication to our industry. We are very new and have only had two official meetings in 2022, but we already have a really busy work agenda!

Our objective is to foster cooperation and enhance the effectiveness of ECAC Member States' communication capabilities through the sharing of knowledge, experience, and best practices in communication for civil aviation (including, for example, handling media requests and guidelines for spokespersons, crisis communication, intercultural communication, communication training needs, etc.).

What topics is the group currently focusing on?

As we are still establishing ourselves, our focus is to build relationships across the network so that we can share expertise. Specific focus areas include crisis communication, public relations, intercultural communication, cooperation on communication matters, and training needs in the communication field.

Our strategy covers external communication and this includes:

- further defining our objectives taking into consideration the needs expressed by Member States and identifying stakeholder groups;
- identifying principles and key messages that can improve and promote the civil air transport sector;
- recognising the best communication channels and tools that should be used for specific cases and sharing information on these matters;
- identifying communication risks/pitfalls to be avoided;
- fitting communication approaches when dealing with a crisis, as well as ECAC guidelines for spokespersons and handling the media. Just a few, to keep us busy!

What challenges do you see arising in the future?

As technology moves quickly, different approaches and channels will work for different audiences – it is our role as communicators to identify these early and share our learning across the network. Taking into consideration our communication expertise, we can offer input on communication initiatives that have the role of promoting the importance of aviation.

Some final words

On behalf of myself and my co-chair, Loredana Enacheanu, we are really looking forward to showcasing the work of NETCOM across ECAC and we thank ECAC for giving us this wonderful opportunity to really demonstrate the importance of communication across civil aviation. Watch this space! ■

Alexandra (Alex) Kaufman has been communications director for the United Kingdom Civil Aviation Authority since April 2021 where she is responsible for external and internal communication, leading a team of 35 people. Prior to joining the CAA, Alex served as communications director of Crossrail Ltd, the £20bn rail infrastructure project to connect London. Alex was at BAA for six years where she held various roles including head of strategic communications for Heathrow Airport. She then moved to EDF Energy where she held a variety of senior roles including taking up executive level responsibility for communication across their nuclear new build programme including Hinkley Point C, the first new nuclear power station to be built in the UK for a generation. Alex has also worked for a number of public affairs and communications consultancies.