



2026-2028

Consultancy Management Standard (CMS) & The PR Quality Mark

Guidelines for Users



PR Quality Mark

A modernised standard for quality, integrity and business excellence in Ireland's communications agencies.

As part of our continued commitment to raising standards across Ireland's communications industry, we are pleased to introduce the PR Quality Mark. This will become the new standard of excellence for Ireland's communications industry, integrating the globally recognised Consultancy Management Standard (CMS) with additional criteria designed to the profession in Ireland.

Why this matters

Since its introduction in 1998, the CMS has stood as the global quality mark for PR and communications consultancies. The most recent version, CMS IV (2022), brought valuable updates around sustainability, inclusion, and digital transformation.

As our industry evolves with new technologies and changing client demands, member feedback has made it clear that the CMS must do more to provide value, relevance and impact for Irish consultancies.



Our goal

By introducing the PR Quality Mark the PRCA aims to:

- ✓ **Revitalise the standard** so it remains the trusted benchmark for best practice and ethical conduct.
- ✓ **Localise the framework** to reflect Irish legal, regulatory and market requirements.
- ✓ **Rebrand the programme** to strengthen recognition and understanding among clients and the wider public.
- ✓ **Enhance the audit process** to provide more meaningful and actionable feedback for members.
- ✓ **Expand access** through a new, tiered structure, including a tailored pathway for sole traders.

What You Receive

Upon successful completion of the audit, members are awarded:

- ✓ A dual certification of both the CMS and the new PR Quality Mark
- ✓ An official PRCA Certificate
- ✓ The PR Quality Mark logo and the CMS certified logo for use across the website, proposals, and email signature
- ✓ A detailed findings letter from independent auditors
- ✓ The PR Quality Mark and CMS logo can be prominently displayed as a visible endorsement of your accredited status.

CMS



The **Consultancy Management Standard (CMS)** is an independent audit process through which consultancies are assessed against recognised benchmarks of best practice across the PR and communications industry.

The CMS is developed by the International Communications Consultancy Organisation (ICCO), the global representative body for PR consultancies, and has been adapted by PRCA Ireland to reflect Irish regulations, market practices, and professional standards.

An independent audit is carried out every three years for recertification.



PR Quality Mark



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To compliment the CMS certification the PRCA is introducing the **PR Quality Mark**, a badge of excellence awarded to consultancies that have successfully completed the independent CMS audit.

Accredited by PRCA, the representative body for Ireland's leading PR consultancies, and aligned with global standards, the Quality Mark provides independent, third-party validation that a consultancy operates to the highest international standards. It is your assurance that the consultancy you choose has been rigorously assessed across all core areas of business performance, including leadership, financial and people management, business planning, campaign delivery, client satisfaction, ethics, and sustainability.

The PRCA will be actively promoting the PR Quality Mark and the consultancies that achieve it, ensuring strong visibility across the industry and reinforcing its position as a recognised benchmark of excellence.



Why Achieve the PR Quality Mark?

- ✓ **Gain a Competitive Edge**
Position your consultancy as a trusted, high-quality provider by achieving independent accreditation and earning the PR Quality Mark or CMS certified logo.
- ✓ **Strengthen Public Sector Credentials**
Demonstrate recognised standards that support procurement requirements. The Office of Government Procurement (OGP) acknowledges the CMS accreditation as a valuable qualification in tendering processes.
- ✓ **Build Client Confidence**
Provide assurance to clients and prospects that your consultancy has been independently audited and operates to the highest professional, ethical and operational standards.
- ✓ **Stand Out in the Industry**
Differentiate your consultancy with a recognised mark of excellence in Irish PR and communications.
- ✓ **Drive Business Performance**
Use the CMS framework as a practical tool to assess, benchmark and continuously improve your organisation's operations and performance.
- ✓ **Enhance Team Confidence and Culture**
Demonstrate your commitment to high standards, governance and professional integrity, supporting a strong internal culture of accountability and development.



The Audit & Assessment Process

To prepare for the CMS review, members are encouraged to carefully review the following guidance documentation and compile all required information. This revised **CMS IV** includes updates on sustainability, inclusion, digital transformation and a local annexe. Once ready, members should contact Susan Kelly of KSi Faulkner Orr (Audit & Assurance) Limited to agree on a suitable date for assessment. The CMS review typically takes one day to complete and may be conducted either remotely or in person.

Contact

susankelly@ksifo.ie | +353 (0)1 254 7000

Cost

€1,500 + VAT (Standard)

€1,200 + VAT (Sole Traders)

The CMS guidance is refined for sole traders please contact us for a sole trader version.



The Audit & Assessment Process

Why it matters to clients

- ✓ Choosing a PRCA Quality Mark consultancy means you are working with a partner that has been independently assessed against rigorous international standards.
- ✓ Confidence in quality, governance and ethical practice
- ✓ Assurance of compliance with Irish and EU regulations
- ✓ Proven standards in client service and campaign delivery
- ✓ A trusted, credible partner for your organisation.



Timeline



The Foundation Year (Year 0)	The Pulse Check (Year 1)	Culture & Client Health (Year 2)	The Renewal (Year 3)
<p>Full Audit & Accreditation</p> <p>Action: Complete the independent one day audit with KSi Faulkner Orr.</p> <p>Requirement: Achieve a minimum of 50% in all sections and 75% overall.</p> <p>Reward: Receive the official PRCA Certificate and PR Quality Mark for use in proposals and on your website.</p>	<p>Quarterly Internal Review</p> <p>Action: Conduct internal reviews every 3–6 months to assess business plan adequacy.</p> <p>Requirement: Compare actual performance against financial goals and SMART objectives.</p> <p>Goal: Ensure the consultancy is adapting to changing market circumstances.</p>	<p>Strategic Management Review</p> <p>Action: Perform a deep dive review of client satisfaction across all accounts.</p> <p>Requirement: Verify that Personal Development Plans (PDPs) and training for all staff are on track.</p> <p>Goal: Monitor internal records, GDPR compliance, and effectiveness of supplier relationships.</p>	<p>Recertification Audit</p> <p>Action: Re-engage independent auditors for the three year renewal process.</p> <p>Reward: Revalidate your status as a trusted partner and maintain your competitive edge in public sector tendering.</p>



CMS IV

		Points Available	%	Guidance
Section 1. Leadership & Communication	What we're looking for: evidence that the company is well managed.	27		
Subsection 1	The management structure and responsibilities have been defined and communicated in a way that the wider team will understand.	8		
	Are the management structures and management responsibilities defined?	4		Provide evidence of an organogram or a management structure diagram for management structure and job or role descriptions.
	Have they been communicated to all staff?	4		These should be included in either the Induction, Handbook, ways of working, or team meetings (evidence of meetings required - calendar entries or agendas)
Subsection 2	Have core leadership skills for the senior team.	7		
	Are senior team behavioural competencies included in their job descriptions?	4		What we mean by behavioural competencies: attributes that will help individuals do their job well for example: leadership, organisational skills, communications skills, teamwork, technical knowledge, management skills, influencing, decision making. The Assessor will refer to the job descriptions of the most senior 2 plus ANO (3 if over 50 staff, 4 over 100 otherwise 2)
	Do senior team appraisals and personal development plans refer to the competencies?	3		Assessor will require evidence of appraisals & PDPs for sample already selected
Subsection 3	Have a system in place to ensure effective communication to internal and external parties.	12		
	Is there a communication strategy for sharing information with internal and external stakeholders?	4		Evidence of this may not be formally documented, however there could still be one in use. The type and quality of the strategy needs to reflect the size of the consultancy.
		2		Copy of the strategy to be provided



		Points Available	%	Guidance
		2		Evidence of document is required, in addition to its availability to all staff - e.g. shared drive, handbook etc.
	Are appropriate authorisation levels for sharing information included in the strategy?	2		The Assessor will refer to the document
	Can the consultancy demonstrate that the communication strategy is being followed for internal and external communications?	2		The Assessor will require evidence of emails, team meetings, newsletters etc. in line with the strategy document.
Section 2 . Business Planning	What we're looking for: you have a realistic short and long term programme with a clear view of your direction.	38		
Subsection 1	Have a business plan.	6		
	Is there a documented business plan in place?	4		Physical evidence of the business plan is required by the Assessor
	Is there evidence that it had been approved /signed off by the senior team?	2		Evidence of sign-off or meeting minutes approving the plan is required by the Assessor.
Subsection 2	Have a business plan with clear goals and objectives.	10		
	Does the plan define the business & financial goals and objectives clearly?	4		Both goals should be clearly defined and understandable
	Does the business plan include SMART goals and objectives?	6		Assessor to refer to the business plan. If the objectives are included but not SMART, 2 points will be awarded SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time framed
Subsection 3	Has the business plan communicated to all levels of the consultancy.	6		
	Has the final business plan been communicated to the senior team?	4		Evidence of meeting minutes or emails is required
	Have the goals and objectives been communicated to the wider agency?	2		Evidence of meeting minutes or emails is required



		Points Available	%	Guidance
Subsection 4	Have performance compared to the business plan's goals and objectives.	8		
	Are the financial goals and objectives that are set out in the business plan being compared to actual financial performance?	3		Evidence of meeting minutes, management reports or management accounts is required.
	Is this comparison occurring on a monthly basis?	2		Provide evidence.
	Are the business goals and objectives that are set out in the business plan being compared to actual business goals performance?	3		Evidence of meeting minutes, management reports or management accounts is required.
Subsection 5	Have the business plan reviewed regularly for adequacy.	8		
	Is the business plan reviewed by senior team members for adequacy?	6		Copies of revised plans and/or minutes detailing changes to plan are required as evidence.
	Is the frequency of review sufficient? (every 3m or 6m for 1yr. Every 1yr for 3 yr.)?	2		Dates of review will be compared to the length of the plan
Section 3. Business Improvement	What we're looking for: a programme of continuous business improvement with evidence of your long term goals and steps you're taking to achieve them	14		
Subsection 1	Have a clear vision and set of values shaping the consultancy purpose and long-term goals.	2		
	Does the agency have a vision statement?	1		Assessor to refer to the statement e.g. Handbook, Induction, Business Plan
	Does the agency have key values within or in addition to their vision statement?	1		Assessor to refer to the business plan/handbook/induction
Subsection 2	Have a system to manage internal business improvement projects.	6		
	Is there a documented system to manage major improvement projects?	4		Assessor to refer to the documented system.



		Points Available	%	Guidance
	Does the system include preparation of the plan, sign off to go ahead with the idea and final project plan approval from senior management?	2		Provide evidence.
Subsection 3	Have a system for collecting, reviewing and utilising key information to increase management control and maximise business efficiency.	6		
	Is there a system to collect, review and communicate key information at all levels within the company?	3		The internal communications strategy should identify what information to communicate and who it goes to. Please provide evidence of collating and collection of key information and the communication strategy that describes who the information is shared with and how it is shared.
	What key information is being shared?	3		The following list is considered to be key information (1) business improvement activities (2) review of business plans (3) management accounts (4) review of campaign management activities (5) review of client satisfaction performance (6) service delivery performance - team and individual performance reports
Section 4. Financial Systems	What we're looking for: 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 company	27		
Subsection 1	Have adequate monthly management accounts.	4		
	Are monthly management accounts prepared?	4		These should include things like balance sheet, cashflow, income statement, profit and loss, client fee and profit forecast
Subsection 2	Have a consistent and effective process for calculating fees for client work.	7		
	Is there a standard procedure for calculating fees for agency proposals?	4		Provide evidence including how estimates are made of expected time on work e.g. evidence of discussing the work expected before agreeing the contract or something similar
	Do the senior team prepare or sign off all client proposals?	3		Provide evidence from the system or signed drafts or evidence proposals sent by the senior team.



		Points Available	%	Guidance
Subsection 3	Have effective client billing and credit controls systems.	4		
	Is there a standard procedure for raising client invoices?	2		Email/report evidence.
	Is there a standard procedure for credit control?	2		Email/report evidence - perhaps credit controller job description.
Subsection 4	Have effective systems and processes to manage staff time and to report on utilisation and over/under client servicing.	8		
	Is there a resource management system that allocates work to staff weekly/ monthly?	2		Provide a copy of your resource management process/system. Or other evidence of how you allocate work.
	For client work, is work allocated according to the agreed fee levels?	2		Provide evidence.
	Is actual time recorded on a regular basis against each client?	2		Provide evidence from the previous month.
	Is over and under servicing information prepared monthly?	2		E.g. client profitability report.
Subsection 5	Have an effective system for control of capital.	4		
	Is there a standard procedure for controlling overhead expenditure?	2		If there is a standard procedure for controlling spend 'in advance', that is not documented, then evidence of its use is required.
	Is there a standard procedure for controlling capital expenditure?	2		This may be the same as overheads but may require higher levels of authorisation - it may include a cost/benefit analysis.



		Points Available	%	Guidance
Section 5. Campaign Management	What we're looking for: that you've got systems in place for planning and managing programmes against agreed targets, and you're measuring and evaluating results achieved.	27		
Subsection 1	Have an effective system for capturing agency requirements	2		
	Is there a system in place to capture agency requirements?	2		Standard way of working or process that is carried out (may include a briefing form) - it need not be properly documented to gain these 2 points.
Subsection 2	Have an effective planning system to ensure delivery to clients' expectation.	3		
	Is there a system in place to plan the delivery of work to the client?	3		Standard way of working or process that is carried out (may include details on client proposals), but it need not be properly documented for these three points. May# be things like : pre campaign research, planning, allocation of resources, development of strategy, communication processes i.e. points of contact for day to day feedback on progress/meetings with client, flowcharts/timelines with campaign journey et.
Subsection 3	Have effective information control.	6		
	Is there a system for filing critical client and consultancy information? (critical info being; email/paper correspondence, approvals, photography, logos, proposals, plans, complaints, reports, invoices etc.)	4		Standard way of working or process that is carried out, i.e. consistent network or paper filing system - but it need not be properly documented for these four points. Provide evidence that copyrights (pictures, movies etc.) are being verified and handled legally.
	Cyber security : Is there a back up and data security system (i.e. antivirus/firewall system) and does this include crisis management/continuity system?	2		Clarify back up system (name,, frequency) - provide details of antivirus/firewall software and provide copy of continuity policy Provide evidence that the management of data reflects international legal requirements and standards (such as GDPR)
Subsection 4	Have ensured the consistent delivery of services by suppliers that it uses.	6		
	Is there a process for evaluating and reviewing new suppliers?	4		E.g. a preferred supplier list with ratings etc. If there is no review but only initial evaluation then 1 point. Performance Indicators & Credit Checks.



		Points Available	%	Guidance
	Is an approved existing supplier overview prepared and communicated to all staff?	2		1 point for the databank/list, 1 point for its communication.
Subsection 5	Monitor campaign performance and take appropriate actions.	10		
	Is campaign performance measured against original plan agreed with client?	4		Provide evidence of actual results vs. the plan (i.e. the Client KPI's established at the start).
	Is there a system for following up changes in campaign performance internally and with the client?	4		Provide evidence of the system, even if there have been no changes and it has not been put into practice.
	Is there evidence that changes in campaign performance are followed up internally and with the client?	2		Provide evidence that actions from minutes/ reports have been followed up - e.g. contact reports confirming action carried out, internal notes.
Section 6. Client Satisfaction	What we're looking for: consistent and continuous tracking of client satisfaction to ensure you meet and exceed client expectations.	17		
Subsection 1	Have a system to measure client satisfaction.	8		
	Is there a system or method in place to measure client satisfaction?	4		Provide evidence.- things like regular review meetings, informal meetings/lunches, annual or six month formal reviews, surveys, questionnaires, complaints system etc.
	Does the system identify the frequency of review activities with the client?	2		Provide evidence
	Does the system include a set of KPIs for the consultancy to achieve?	2		Provide evidence of achievement of measurable, target-based, innovative and creative objectives for the client – involving properly trained staff members, permanently adhering to the ethical guidelines
Subsection 2	Have the client satisfaction measurement effectively implemented.	2		
	Is action taken where client satisfaction targets are not met?	2		Emails/ contact reports.
Subsection 3	Have the consultancy periodically compare client satisfaction across accounts.	7		



		Points Available	%	Guidance
	Is trend analysis prepared across accounts and account teams?	4		Provide evidence.
	Does management review client satisfaction across the consultancy, at least 6 monthly?	3		Evidence of meetings or surveys (oral or in written)
Section 7. New Business	What we're looking for: that you conduct negotiations with new clients and offer service agreements which reflect the high standards and best practice expected in the PR profession.	13		
Subsection 1	Have a strategy for business development to achieve its goals and objectives.	9		
	Is there a documented business development strategy?	2		Provide evidence (eg. system for innovation management, tools, methods, involving co-workers or incentive measures)
	Is it derived from the goals and objectives of the business plan?	2		Provide evidence
	Does the business development strategy include details of:			Provide evidence for each point.
	How new client leads are generated?	1		
	How additional work will be generated from existing clients?	1		
	Responsibilities and targets?	1		
	Analysis of market or sector opportunities?	1		
	Performance monitoring?	1		
Subsection 2	Have an effective system for the management of its enquiries and sales.	4		



		Points Available	%	Guidance
	Is there a process in place for handling enquiries and sales?	2		Provide evidence. Includes things like: logging and following up enquiries and proposals, issuing contract to new clients, analysing successful and lost client pitches, briefings to new business.
	Is the process documented?	2		Provide evidence.
Section 8. People Management	What we're looking for: a clearly defined and universally understood system of inclusive appraisal, development and training for employees with high standards and investment in people from recruitment onwards.	23		
Subsection 1	Have a selection process for prospective employees determined according to the needs of the position.	5		
	Is there a documented system for reviewing the needs of the position for new recruits?	2		Handbook, ways of working document, recruitment process.
	Do you have a formal process for recruitment?	3		Evidence of selection methods used in the last recruitment. Things like: review of qualifications, relevant experience, personality profiling, relevant skills, structured interviews etc. This should also include a diversity and equality policy and details of how this is practiced in recruitment (see gender and/or ethnic pay gap, accessibility, support for staff with hearing impairment etc.)
Subsection 2	Have a general induction conducted for new employees and exit interviews conducted when staff leave.	3		
	Is there an induction process in place for when an employee joins?	2		Provide evidence of Induction 'pack' - preferably last employee recruited. Ensure induction includes health and safety including any home working / virtual working considerations (if applicable).
	Is an exit interview carried out when staff leave?	1		E.g. by HR or someone unconnected to line manager(s).
Subsection 3	Have a formal appraisal system.	10		
	Is there an appraisal system in place?	2		Provide evidence.
	Does the appraisal system include written feedback to the employee?	2		Provide evidence.



		Points Available	%	Guidance
	Is the system documented?	2		E.g. in a WIKI, handbook, ways of working, induction.
	Are personal objectives/targets set for each employee?	2		Provide evidence.
	Are appraisal follow up actions reviewed?	1		Provide evidence.
	Do the appraisals feed into the recognition and rewards system?	1		E.g. evidence of senior management input into rewards/ recognition, such as through minute notes/emails.
Subsection 4	Have training needs analysed and personal development plans prepared based on the training needs.	5		
	Is there a documented process for carrying out training needs analysis and preparing personal development plans for all staff?	2		Provide evidence - this should be based on what is needed for the individual to meet business needs and their role, not necessarily what the individual wants to be trained in. This should also include a diversity and equality policy and details of how this is practiced in recruitment.
	Do the training needs include a review of staff competencies (both technical & behavioural) comparing to the job description?	1		Is there a training matrix for each role? Technical & behavioural - what are the competencies, and how are they reviewed.
	Are training needs analysis carried out for all staff?	2		Does the matrix cover all staff/departments? When was this last reviewed? Provide evidence of exit interview, and the employee's individual matrix.
Subsection 5	Have employee personal development plans and training courses consistent across the consultancy.	6		
	Is training carried out in line with personal development plans?	6		Provide 3 PDPs (2 if you are a small agency) to evidence training being carried out.
Section 9. Ethical & Sustainable Practice	What we are looking for is an ethically acting organisation, respecting the key ethical guidelines of our industry and looking after its people, the environment and creates an inclusive positive culture.	24		
Subsection 1	Does your agency follow ethical guidelines?	11		



		Points Available	%	Guidance
	Which measures have you taken that your co-workers can address unethical behaviour by agency members?	2		Provide evidence (eg. Specific whistleblowing policy or external neutral advisor in charge)
	How do you prevent unethical business practice (such as unpaid internships, structural salary differences between women and men etc.)?	2		Provide evidence that you respect the national association standards and international codices
	Does your organisation have a policy on ethics in place when using technologies (including digital marketing, artificial intelligence and automatization)	3		Provide 2 points if you have best practice in relation to use of accessible language and devices; Score a further 2 points if you have a policy governing how you address and manage the risks of new technology.
	How does the agency ensure that the internationally valid Codices of Ethics are known to all employees, clients and suppliers?	2		Provide evidence (eg. Proof of reading the codices); Has the agency a system that only those suppliers and partners can become "preferred partners" who undertake to comply with the Codices of Ethics (in writing)?
	Which measures does the agency take to ensure that staff receive sufficient training and to control their knowledge?	2		Provide evidence
Subsection 2	How do you live and address diversity in your organisation?	5		
	What actions does your organisation take to promote an inclusive culture in your organisation and throughout your supply chain?	5		Relates to equality on gender, age, ethnicity and disability (mental and physical) provide D & I policy (including anti-harassment) and examples of practice (training, events, campaigns); detail how this is monitored and promoted. For example via having accessible offices or venues, use of reasonable adjustments, accessible online tools, mental health resources and training, room and new work settings
Subsection 3	Does your organisation have a sustainability policy?	8		Provide evidence
	Does your organisation have a regularly updated carbon footprint calculation?	2		Provide details of policy and efforts to monitor sustainability (e.g. carbon footprint, recycling, etc)



		Points Available	%	Guidance
	How does your company manage its greenhouse gas emissions for at least Scope 1 and 2?	2		Potential answers: We do not currently monitor and record emission We regularly monitor and record emissions but have not set any reduction targets We regularly monitor and record emissions and have set specific reduction targets relative to previous performance (e.g. a 5% reduction of GHGs from baseline year) We regularly monitor and record emissions and have set specific science-based targets necessary to achieve global goals to address climate change We have met the specific reduction targets set during this reporting period We have achieved carbon neutrality
	Does your company have any programs or policies in place to reduce the environmental footprint caused by travel/commuting?	2		Provide evidence
	Does your company monitor, record, or report its energy usage?	2		Provide evidence



Local CMS Annex for PRCA Ireland

Section		Pass/Fail
Section 1. Legal & Regulatory Compliance		
Subsection 1	Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015	
	Is the agency registered on the Lobbying Register (where applicable)?	
	Evidence of timely returns?	
	Internal policy outlining identification, logging and approval of lobbying activities?	
Subsection 2	Data Protection and Privacy (GDPR)	
	GDPR-compliant data protection policy in place?	
	Procedures for consent and data breach management?	
	Evidence of regular review/training on data protection?	
Subsection 3	Employment Law & Workplace Policies	
	Written contracts for all staff?	
	Policies covering equality, dignity at work?	
	Clear documentation provided to team outlining rights for statutory leave, working time and pay regulations?	
Subsection 4	Health, Safety & Welfare	



Section		Pass/Fail
	Written Health & Safety Statement?	
Section 2. Ethical & Professional Standards		
2.1 PRCA Ireland Code of Practice	Has the organisation signed and adopted the PRCA Ireland Code of Practice.	
	Have the Codes been communicated to all employees?	
2.2 Transparency & Disclosure	Are sponsorships, paid partnerships and client relationships clearly disclosed in public communications?	
	Are influencer or third-party relationships managed in line with ASA and consumer protection law?	
2.3 Conflict of Interest Management	Is there a written policy for identifying and managing potential conflicts of interest?	
	Can the organisation demonstrate how a conflict of interest has been handled in practice?	
2.4 Integrity & Truthfulness	Are there internal procedures to ensure the accuracy of information before publication?	
	Can the consultancy evidence that it communicates fairly and truthfully on behalf of clients?	
2.5 Ethical Use of Technology	Does the organisation provide guidance or training on responsible technology use?	



Further information

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