



Digital Communication Capability Review

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| Date | 12th November 2013 |
| Prepared by | Policy & Capability team, Prime Minister's Office & Cabinet Office |



Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| 1. Management summary | 3 |
| 2. About the review | 4 |
| 3. Context and background | 6 |
| 4. Top-line findings and areas for improvement | 7 |
| 5. Principles for government digital communications | 11 |
| 6. A manifesto for change for digital communication leaders | 13 |
| 7. Recommendations – areas for development work | 14 |
| 8. Summary | 17 |
| 9. Reviewer recommended action grid | 18 |
| 10. Annex – Feedback | 20 |
| 11. Glossary | 23 |



1. Management summary

The purpose of the review is to assess how the digital aspects of Government communication and engagement are planned and executed, and how can they be improved.

The review was undertaken by three independent reviewers. They brought complementary skills and experience to the review, and a deep knowledge of digital communication.

1.1 Findings

The reviewers saw some inspiring examples of digital content, tools, assets and engagement. They met with some senior leaders who were passionate about helping the civil service keep up with the way technology is used outside of government. Pockets of good practice notwithstanding, the headline finding is that digital communication in government is developing well in specialist teams but less so in the mainstream. The consequence is that it is being outpaced by the best of the commercial and NGO worlds. Too much is 'broadcast' – i.e. one-way – and does not seek to engage. And, crucially, it is still treated by many in departmental leadership positions as an area where the risks outweigh the benefits. In some departments the case for getting more from digital communication and engagement has not been made sufficiently well.

The reviewers found a mix of frustration with, and admiration for, the award-winning, GOV.UK platform, and with GDS, the organisation which runs it. Some of the frustrations revolve around the perception of a mismatch between departments' expectations regarding campaigning needs and GDS' role and resources. GDS and Directors of Communication need to work much more closely and collaboratively.

There was also widespread condemnation of current government IT, both on the desk top but also importantly for mobile. Some of this is due to economic constraints, much is also due to access constraints of disputable necessity.

The reviewers found evaluation to be patchy and inconsistent. In many cases this is because clear-headed planning, objective-setting and targeting is lacking.

1.2 Recommendations

Improving objective-setting and evaluation, making digital communication mainstream and closer collaboration with GDS, would all bring significant benefits. The reviewers' recommendations are founded on a simple set of principles and a 'manifesto', to bring about a pace of change at scale.

The biggest barriers to this are to do with IT, skills and with attitudes to risk. The reviewers believe that these are largely perception-based and can be tackled pragmatically and effectively.



2. About the review

2.1 Objectives and terms of reference

The purpose of the review is to assess the digital communication capabilities across government and make recommendations for improvement. Very little communication does not have a digital aspect. This review came about because digital communication is a fast developing area and one which has repeatedly presented as an area of concern and development focus in the [departmental communication capability reviews](#) (2011-13). Given the potential scale and breadth of the task, the review team needed to ensure that the scope and objectives were manageable. The focus on improvement means that the review is more concerned with finding practical and effective levers for change than with comprehensively auditing capability.

The reviewers looked a wide range of communication, from: internal communication; to news, media relations and announcements; to corporate communications; communication focussing on service provision; information provision; and campaign communication aiming for attitudinal shift and behaviour change.

2.2 Evidence base

- i. Capability reviews (15 completed)
- ii. Project initiation interviews with Digital Leaders by Humphrey Pring (July 2013)
- iii. Digital communications survey (July 2013), completed by each department
- iv. Evidence from cross government communications teams at Cabinet Office and No.10.
- v. Review workshops (two issues workshops, one evaluation workshop and a recommendations-shaping workshop)
- vi. Review interviews (almost 30 completed)
- vii. Reviewers' own experience and knowledge

2.3 Reviewers

- [Richard Bagnall](#) – one of the founders and the Managing Director of Metrica and subsequently Gorkana Group's Managing Director of Global Insights and Analysis post integration of the businesses. He chairs The International Association for the Measurement and Evaluation of Communications' (AMEC) Social Media Measurement Group, is a member of the CIPR Social Media Panel, of the Social Media Conclave working to establish standards in social media measurement, and is a co-author of Wiley Business Publishing's 'Share This' & 'Share This Too', having written the chapters in both books on measuring communications in a digital world. Richard left Gorkana in 2013 and now runs Comms Clarity Consulting where he advises organisations of all sizes the best ways to plan and measure their mainstream media and digital communication.
- [Chris Birkett](#) – has more 20 years of leadership experience in national television, radio and digital news journalism. He is currently Consultant Editor at the Telegraph Media Group, where he is working on the digital transformation of the editorial operation. Previously Chris was at Sky, where as Deputy Head and Executive Editor of Sky News from 2006 until 2013 he was responsible for all the organisation's journalism on television and radio. From 2008-2011, Chris also ran the multi-platform digital production department at Sky News which launched its award-winning iPad and Phone apps. In his earlier BBC career, Chris had senior roles in the launch of BBC 5 Live and BBC



News 24, where he was the first Managing Editor. In 2010 Chris was the recipient of the Judges Award from the Royal Television Society for his role in negotiating the deal which brought about the historic TV Leaders' Debates during the 2010 General Election Campaign.

- [Max St John](#) – Managing Director at social business consultancy NixonMcInnes, where his clients have included the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, BIS and WWF-UK, on projects that range from digital transformation programmes to leadership coaching.

2.4 Review SRO: Anthony Simon, Head of Digital at Cabinet Office & No.10.



3. Context and background

- 3.1 The proliferation and transformative effect of digital technology is well documented elsewhere. Its impact has been extensive, from the opportunities afforded by 'big data' to the role that social media plays, as society shifts 'from the age of deference to the age of reference'. Many organisations offer proprietary websites, digital tools and applications for mobile devices in order to inform and engage customer groups. Many also use third party social media for reputation management, customer intelligence, customer service, and to manage demand. These tools are also becoming more common in internal communication practice.
- 3.2 The civil service has ambitions which are in step with this societal change. [Civil Service Reform](#) sets out to make '*... the Civil Service more skilled, digital and unified*'. The government has a [digital strategy](#) to ensure that its vision for digitally enabled services and information are delivered. Actions 4 and 14 of this strategy are concerned with digital capability and with using digital channels to engage with and consult the public.
- 3.3 The government communication capability reviews were initiated in Autumn 2011 by the Communications Delivery Board (more details [here](#)). At the time of writing (September-November 2013) all but two departmental capability reviews have been completed. There are a number of common themes emerging across these, including the variability of digital communications and how much is still treated as the preserve of specialists.
- 3.4 The reviews and the surveys have revealed that digital communications teams work in different structures in different departments. Departments such as HMRC and DWP have significant delivery responsibilities. Others, such as HMT and Defra have a predominantly policy focus. Departments such as FCO, DECC and DfID have information provision at the core of their purpose. Thus the role for digital communication varies accordingly.
- 3.5 Departments have varying technical and practitioner skills levels in their digital teams and in their wider communication teams. As departments have migrated to the GOV.UK platform, many digital teams have seen an alteration of their roles.
- 3.6 The senior owner of the Digital communications capability review is the Executive Director of Government Communications (EDGC) and his nominated deputy directors SROs, the head of policy & capability and the head of digital at No.10 and the Cabinet Office. In addition the directors of communication (DoCs) are the leadership cadre which will be taking forward the review findings and recommendations supported by Digital Leaders as necessary. They have been involved in the process both in inputs and in shaping the recommendations. However because a key principle of the report is that digital communications is not specialist but mainstream, the ultimate focus for the review is not Digital Leaders or senior communications leaders, though they are key influencers, but the wider government communications community as a whole. Indeed, the communications profession should exemplify CSR (Civil Service Reform) and influence the wider civil service.



4. Top-line findings and areas for improvement

The findings are divided into six areas. There are areas of overlap between these and they are not exhaustive. They serve as a framework for developing recommendations. Findings are set out in note form.

4.1 Setting objectives, developing strategy and undertaking consistent and meaningful evaluation

- Too many communications initiatives lack clear objectives and definition of ambitions (evidence supported by the capability reviews) and this has a corresponding effect on defining the role for digital.
- The reviewers found that much digital communication and engagement is still delivered in transmit mode, following the old 'top-down' one-way broadcasting of messages rather than conducting conversations that modern communications involves. Only rarely is digital a truly integral part of service delivery or policy development, and playing a strategic role in driving efficiency, quality or collaboration with external stakeholders.
- Where objectives are set they tend to be focussed on 'output' metrics such as follower numbers, likes, re-tweets and not on changing perceptions, attitudes and behaviours.
- This leads to a box-ticking approach to digital tools, sometimes with an apparent desire to impress managers rather than achieve worthwhile outcomes.

4.2 Leadership, culture & risks

- There is an over-riding pre-occupation with risks and a pervasive a lack of trust in staff
 - Appetite for risk varies, according to the political cycle and department context.
 - However it seemed that reputation management objectives have a disproportionate influence on the use of digital and social media, and are the key drivers of a risk-averse culture that discourages some people from digital engagement. In some departments there is a general fear of mistakes. Yet digital engagement can't be scaled up without placing more trust in staff.
- Resistance to change
 - Overall, participants observed that there are plenty of meetings about digital but change seems slow.
 - Some colleagues are blockers, wanting to keep the status quo and are concerned with implications of digital for the way business is undertaken. Others have a disproportionate concern about IT security, obscuring the benefits argument (see 'risks', above).
 - Currently the digital communications influencer network is ad hoc and in some cases seems weak at more senior levels. The biggest changes seem to happen through leadership changes.
 - Departmental structures do not fit with networked nature of social media. Internal information cascades feel very one-way, not discursive and interactive.
- IT
 - Communicators have patchy (though improving) access to social media. In many cases this is due to permissions, not technology per se. These restrictions also apply to hand-held devices such as BlackBerrys.



- o In many departments, especially larger ones, large IT contracts and security requirements impair access to social media and in many cases prohibit the use of current web browsers. Older browsers are no longer supported and therefore present security risks. But overall in many cases the data security risks seem over-exaggerated and blocks are in place due to permissions not system constraints. But in many departments the picture is obscure because the IT security rationale is not made simple, clear and accessible.
- o It is paradoxical and frustrating for communications people to be unable to access the milieu in which they are expected to gather information from and engage in.

4.3 Skills and capabilities

- There is some but not nearly enough sharing of ideas and approaches. The heads of digital comms group, the Tea-camps and presentations (such as those hosted by GCN or Defra) are examples of good collaboration. But overall there are poor levels of sharing good practice and learnings, especially at more routine levels. In an interview one summarised it as:
“We’re all finding our own way. Separately.” (Head of news interviewee.)
- Most communications professionals use social media outside of work. Skills deficiencies are mainly to do with confidence and judgement in using technology in a professional context. They include:
 - o practice and familiarity with protocols;
 - o creativity;
 - o marketing content so it reaches the right target groups; and
 - o design and build. This is seen as more specialist and more usually something to be procured or outsourced than trained.
- There are some technical experts unevenly distributed across some departments. There is general uncertainty whether they should be located in communications teams at all. GDS has people who can build off the GOV.UK platform, though there not enough to meet the level and pace of demand across government, leading to frustration and delay. This could be due to the lack of clarities on roles and responsibilities (e.g. what does/doesn’t GDS do and what could or should departments do).
- Internal communications is seen by many as a development opportunity which offers a safer testing & development ground, in particular for departmental leaders. The provision of internal social networks and communications tools is patchy and in many places, seems inadequate.
- Guidelines are long and many respondents said they found them off-putting. Interactive training can be more effective in improving practices. The opportunity and encouragement to put new skills into action are where much professional development and organisational change occurs.

4.4 Content development and marketing

- Though there are some good examples of video, animation, still and digital tools, there is a lack of diversity in types of content and an over-riding focus on Twitter.
- The reviewers detected that there was still an ethos of ‘Build it & they will come’ and ‘sending out stuff’ – thought more in departmental leadership than in communications teams. These mind-sets often result in very low content views and poor levels of engagement and response.



- The reviewers saw some, but not enough, use of digital to engage stakeholder in debate, or social media to make internal communications more interactive.
- The government's website is GOV.UK. This has a user-needs based approach to making information simple, clearer and faster to access. It replaced cumbersome and non-citizen-orientated departmental websites. The GOV.UK design is task focussed and is easy to use if you are searching by issue. But it:
 - doesn't lend itself readily to behaviour-change communications;
 - doesn't encourage sharing or engagement through social channels because it does not include easy sharing buttons (though there are discussions about addressing this via the GOV.UK steering group and GDS reports that Twitter sharing buttons will be trialled by the end of 2013); and
 - is perceived by departments of having a rigid format which ensures consistency but constrains innovation around campaigning.

4.5 Structures – across government, within departments and within digital teams

- Pan-government
 - There is no clear leadership in developing digital communication and engagement. The digital leaders' cadre seems more focussed on other areas such as digitising transactional services. The result is that, for example, different tools are being trialled and bought in different departments, with limited formalised coordination and sharing. (As noted in 4.3 this happens informally.) This could be improved in part by DoCs and Digital Leaders working together more closely in some departments.
 - The Government Digital Service (GDS) is seen by much of the government communications community as operating at a remove from government departments, both physically and in terms of close collaboration. This could be in part due to a lack of collaboration between DoCs and GDS, which is being addressed.
- Within departments
 - There is no natural home for digital comms expertise in departments, mainly because departments are so different.
 - The reviewers were impressed with, among others:
 - The Department of Health, whose Digital Leader has split her team into two parts. One focuses across the departments remit and is occupied with helping the department to use technology across its remit. The other has a closer focus on communication and stakeholder engagement.
 - Defra, which has a horizon-scanning team whose role it is to provide intelligence about immediate and medium/longer term events, predominantly using social media and publicly available intelligence and, critically, uses this intelligence to inform policy, service delivery and resource management.
- Within communication directorates
 - All departments have digital communication and engagement specialists. In many, the digital teams focus on two broad areas of work. The first is providing consultancy advice and expertise and helping the spread of skills and confidence. The second is in providing delivery where required, working with GDS colleagues, using their own resources or commissioning suppliers – whether for larger builds or developing simple info-graphics.



- The reviewers gained the sense that the GOV.UK platform has reduced the amount of time spent on digital publishing in some departments. There seemed to be enormous variation between departments in the amount of digital publishing required.
- o Many specialists remarked to reviewers that digital communication is positioned as the preserve of specialists and that they found themselves too focussed on delivery.
- o There was some evidence of duplication of work – for example web content and a press notice on the same issue being developed by two different people. There were concerns that if they were based in media relations teams they would focus too much on tactics (predominantly with Twitter), and not meet wider needs.
- o Internal communications teams are often not owners of their technology and are not integrated with digital comms teams, meaning that they may not be able to ensure that their department has tools that are fit for purpose and will build digital skills and confidence internally.

4.6 Other main findings

- A great deal of discussion initiated by interviewees was about the GOV.UK platform (see 4.4 above). The reviewers concluded that DoCs and GDS did not have sufficiently close levels of close working, and that this is only now beginning to improve.
- Much of internal communication seems one-way and not discursive. The opportunities for using social media for internal communications are under-exploited. In larger departments this is seen as hard to manage. In many cases it needs little direct management, but guidelines in place to keep dialogue constructive and productive. The potential benefits are for internal digital communications to build digital skills and confidence in a safe setting, to improve collaboration, knowledge sharing and innovation, which will ultimately improve efficiency and effectiveness of teams and departments.



5. Principles for government digital communications

The reviewers worked with interviewees and workshop participants to develop principles to help guide development of the review's recommendations.

We need to keep up with mainstream communication techniques

- 5.1 *Without clear planning and objective-setting what we do is unlikely to be effective* (and how would we know if it is anyway)? Write down your communication objectives, including the audience that you are targeting, so they are unambiguous and can be agreed by leaders and policy clients. It is critical that the objectives for the use of digital are clearly aligned to departmental, policy or service objectives, in order to be efficient, effective and get support from senior teams.
- 5.2 *Intelligent evaluation is essential*. Knowing you will do it provides discipline in activity planning. Providing numbers out of context is not evaluation. Measurement criteria must be clearly aligned to the objective and intended outcomes. 'Marketing' your communications results internally, while understandable, is not the same as providing dispassionate evaluation. Peer evaluation sign off helps to provide credibility. And if your communications initiative (or elements of it) does not achieve objectives, share your learnings so you and others can benefit from them.
- 5.3 *Content is crucial. Thankfully Government is not short of engaging material*. Be creative in developing it. Look beyond Twitter. Use video, info-graphics and widgets, among other things – be driven by what is most appropriate to the audience and what can be done to time and cost.
- 5.4 *Delivering the content effectively is as important as developing it in the first place*. Communicators should decide who they want to reach and what the best way to reach them is while they develop the content, not after. This should include via third party platforms. Getting 1,000 views for a piece that was intended to target the wider population is likely to be time wasted if it took significant resource to develop.

Digital ownership

- 5.5 *Digital is mainstream. It shouldn't be 'owned' by a particular team*. There is clearly a role for very small digital comms teams to lead innovation, creativity, editorial skills and quality assurance. These should reside in Whitehall departments, to be responsive. But for the mainstream communicator, effective use of the essential digital tools to do your job should be supported and made mandatory as soon as possible. All media relations teams should be able to publish web stories and write 140 character summaries of their announcements without needing to hand over to a 'specialist'. No one should need their digital team to re-tweet. They should be able to engage and where necessary rebut on Twitter, where appropriate and where it will save time by providing clarity fast. All need to understand the much more public and potentially enduring nature of online conversations. This does not mean today's digital comms teams should disappear into press offices, which would make them too tactical in focus. Digital has a key role and brings leading-edge thinking, driving innovation and testing new ideas in internal communications, in stakeholder communications and corporate communication.



- 5.6 *Communications leaders should have a stronger voice in GOV.UK.* The site is an enormous achievement and is still evolving. The reviewers recommend that the [Homelands & embassies](#) approach be adopted, which would position GOV.UK as the natural homeland for communication assets. The reviewers concluded that communications leaders should have more influence in GOV.UK governance and direction. This means playing an active role in the GOV.UK steering group for example.

Attitudes to risk need to be balanced, logical and informed by business need.

- 5.7 Change needs strong leadership, and an intelligent, *realistic approach to concerns about risk*. It requires political sensitivity on the part of civil servants, matched with a wider departmental acceptance of how the world is changing.



6. A manifesto for change for digital communication leaders

- 6.1 To deliver change in line with principles in section 3 and at a pace demanded by CSR requires co-ordinated leadership, firm commitment and a package of support.
- 6.2 It is framed as 'we' – i.e. a set of commitments made by 'we' the leaders of communications in government to you, communications professionals.

Communications leaders' manifesto for change

Digital communication and engagement is an essential part of the modern communicator's repertoire in order to deliver our business objectives. Digital communication and engagement is not just for communications professionals but applies to all civil servants in the way their interactions with colleagues and external stakeholders. Government communication must change to embrace digital more widely to meet rising expectations and to deliver greater efficiencies.

We have set out three guiding principles to anchor change:

- i. To keep up with the way information is accessed, **digital communication in government should be a core skill for all**, not a specialist area, by end of 2014. Digital communication skills must include a firm grasp of planning, objective setting and measurement / insights.
- ii. **Communications leaders, Digital Leaders and GDS must work more closely together** – a more collaborative approach is needed to get the most out of GOV.UK. and other GDS services.
- iii. We mustn't let a risk-averse culture block innovative and impactful digital comms – **attitudes to risk need to be balanced, pragmatic and informed by business need.**

Key commitments to enable this are:

- o **Access and technology.** We will give you access to the sites where our audiences are. We will trust you not to misuse this. We will improve the IT available to you.
- o **Governance and leadership** – senior colleagues will support you in making digital mainstream; to set out its benefits; and make sure it is integrated into communications as a whole and made mainstream. We will provide clarity over roles and decision-making (including that of GDS with respect to communications).
- o **Improve skills training and development** – to embed digital skills many need practice and not just training, to be given the chance to try out what they have learned. This is not a one-off. You will be supported in emerging channels, tools and techniques (and given a 'no question too stupid' amnesty).
- o **Judgement and risk management.** You will get basic social media training if you need it. Internal communication is a relatively safe area for learning and practicing those skills. Staff should feel supported if they make a mistake, so they (and colleagues) can learn from and share from any errors. But all should be able to apply the civil service code to their work.

In return we want a commitment from communicators to put digital skills high on your development priorities, embed digital in what you do and push your colleagues and managers to do the same.



7. Recommendations – areas for development work

To support the manifesto and to achieve change, the reviewers identified six main areas for improvement.

7.1 Culture, leadership, understanding of risks

- Departmental executive teams should set out the ambition, manage risk and champion a digitally enabled civil service (as set out in CSR).
 - This includes moving away from digital communications as a stand-alone concept and towards positioning digital communications as an enabler of business transformation and better ways of working.
 - Benefits case – DoCs to develop, with finance officers, a case which sets out the opportunities for savings in using more digital communications than current model.
 - Leaders should work to create organisation cultures which are open to evaluation. This means missed objectives – as opposed to reputation-damaging errors – should be openly and actively shared so that learning can be productively used, as long as the learnings are used productively.
- Departments to build risk management and crisis management around social media. (See for example [Helpful's simulator](#).)
- Digital teams to run surgeries themed: 'no question too stupid'. Senior leaders to attend!
- Tackle standard objections around security, virus risks and staff time-wasting on social media.
- Crisis management – clarify communications access and decision-making protocols for GOV.UK in the event of a crisis.
- DoCs and Digital Leaders, Chief Digital Officers and security colleagues to work with CTOs to ensure a balanced view of the risks of third party tools. Executive teams to make informed access decisions as a result. (Expert input from the Cabinet Office legal team, the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism and Civil Contingencies Secretariat could be sought to disseminate between real and perceived threats.)

7.2 Setting objectives, developing strategy and undertaking evaluation that is more useful

- Ensure the specific role of digital is specified within communication framework. (See GCN [campaign planning framework](#).)
- Evaluation – GCN to work with [AMEC](#) to develop an evaluation framework that is flexible enough to apply across a range of communication objectives and activities, yet provide consistency across government reporting.
- GCN to clarify the difference between monitoring and evaluation tools and services. GCN to provide a recommended resource selection of both free and paid for monitoring tools, clearly indicating which each are best suited for. NB credible and meaningful evaluation can rarely be done purely 'with a tool'; it requires time and judgement, context and relevance as well as shaping and tailoring to differing departmental and specific campaign objectives. Only this way can the evaluation focus on measuring what matters, as opposed to just counting basic outputs.
- GCN to develop case studies – halls of fame and shame – to show what good and not so good looks like.



7.3 Skills and capabilities

- Develop evaluation best practice and a standard framework. (This is now forming a specific work-stream.) Set out simple common standards and publicise which department uses what tool. E.g. Hootsuite is used by eight departments.
- Review and integrate basic digital skills into communication competencies. (Treated in the same way as basic grammar.) To include content distribution.
- Move from linear and lengthy PDF guidelines. They must be succinct and use plain English. Story-telling is a good way to help equip less experienced professionals with more sophisticated judgement. 'Twitter in ten' and video content are also ideas reviewers liked.
- In addition, GCN to:
 - Test and recommend particular digital comms training courses and how to sessions (and insist that all who attend courses review and rate them).
 - Share names of individuals who can advise on best-practice (for example how to engage specific audience groups).
 - Target external recruitment and interchange.
 - Develop a sandbox for social media so participants can play on interactive online training in basics of social.
 - Promote peer to peer learning and sharing in a similar way to [Teacamps](#)
 - Develop a centralised digital asset-management resource for all departments.

7.4 Content development and delivery

- DoCs (Directors of Communications) should develop and lead a centre of excellence for case studies, including story-telling and behaviour change examples.
- DoCs to work with GDS to discuss how a [Homelands & embassies](#) approach might be developed, and how it could support behavioural objectives (this will be part of the proposition review).
- A champion for content excellence is needed, to encourage creativity and boost standards. For example the champion would encourage the use of imagery and interactive tools to break down otherwise lengthy narratives. He/she would lead the drive to make sure information is intuitive and accessible rather than static 'brochure-ware'.
- Skills development is also required to help ensure effective audience reach.

7.5 Structure

- GCN and GDS to clarify their respective roles, responsibilities and how they engage.
- DoCs and Digital Leaders to work together to clarify role of communication in digital strategy.
- Departmental executive teams should sign off their respective social media strategies and access (should not be done at CTO level). They need to be developed by DoCs in consultation with Digital Leaders.
- Mainstream digital in comms by end of 2014. The only remaining digital comms teams will have skills which are technical, research, innovation, campaigning, content management or engagement network management. So 'digital' may not be the right moniker.
- Give internal communications (and others that need it) control over digital communications in their area.



7.6 Additional recommendations

- *Clarify* the role of: the Government Communications Network (for example in setting up departmental working groups to procure evaluation tools); GDS (for example in digital asset investment approval); and Digital Leaders.
- *Directors of Communications* (DoCs) should work with their respective Digital Leaders to attend the GOV.UK Steering Group with respect to communication matters.
- *Work through* the opportunities / constraints that GOV.UK presents to communicators developing campaigns (See GCN guidance [here](#) and [here](#).)
- *Amnesty* for all – from junior to senior people – until end of 2014. Staff will work with people at every level of confidence and experience to make sure they can use digital to do their work
- *Modernise* the default approach to doing an old fashioned, labour-intensive press notice – if it's not needed, don't spend time over-engineering it. Equally, news teams will still need clear, referenced information, details for news crews if sending a camera etc.
- Hold regular '*Church of Fail*' platforms to share campaigns that did not work as well as hoped, alongside the successes and to identify what we can learn from both.
- *Role models* to promote good examples of engagement and champion quality content.



8. Summary

The reviewers would like to thank all participants – including those who engaged online, in meetings, workshops or interviews – for their positive contribution to the report. Although the reviewers found an enormous level of variation in standards and practice in digital communications across government, the positive attitudes, the openness about weaknesses, and the desire to improve were consistent. This was enormously appreciated and made the tenor of the review extremely positive.

This appetite for improvement is exactly what is needed to tackle the challenges that face government communicators. Although they are considerable, they are shared with other organisations, public and private sector alike. They include:

- Cultural challenges to do with attitudes to risk and confidence in empowering staff to interact in a public medium;
- The need to build basic skills and proficiency to give staff the confidence in their ability to anticipate, identify and mitigate against risks;
- The need to measure what matters across the communications channel mix, and not just counting basic outputs; and
- The need for much closer levels of collaboration. This applies: at senior levels in departments; between communications leaders and GDS; between practitioners – for example in sharing good practice in evaluation and working with agencies; and also with external partners, for example in developing alliances.

As a closing point, although digital communications can dramatically increase the permeability of boundaries between government and the citizens it serves, and in so doing enable instant and large-scale conversations; many of the core communications principles remain the same. These include a rigorous focus on objectives, a deep understanding of the end audience that communicators wish to reach, and creative thinking about how to make the message relevant and memorable to that audience. This applies to all communications whatever the channel mix.



9. Reviewer recommended action grid

9.1 To deliver change the reviewers have some specific suggestions and indicators for implementation in six and 12 months. These are based on the manifesto and the six areas for development and improvement.

| Item | Action in six months | Action in 12 months |
|---|--|---|
| <i>Launch Manifesto</i> | <i>All DoCs to develop departmental response to manifesto</i> | <i>Assess change Vs manifesto commitments</i> |
| Manifesto includes the following elements | | |
| 1. Culture, leadership & risks, including reputation and security risks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Working group to develop benefits cases using examples from transactional services and from policy-orientated departments. To involve Cabinet Office Chief Digital Officer and Chief Operating Officer ● Working group to report to CSR board and GCS board with findings and recommendations | (Actions dependent on decisions of boards) |
| 2. Skills | GCN and departments to develop mandatory digital skills professional development | All communicators to pass competency level (by end 2014) |
| 3. Objectives, strategy and evaluation | Evaluation framework developed by working group with AMEC for adoption and integration across government (including GDS) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All departments to showcase use of evaluation framework ● Procurement framework for approved evaluation tools. |
| 4. Content development and delivery | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Content champions group to showcase government content on GCN website. ● To include third party developed content using Govt data ● Assessment of evaluation results from all 17 departments showing content reaching and impacting key audiences | Teams to enter awards to compare government digital content with the best of the private sector. |



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| 5. Structures | DoCs to decide what information they require on different structural options. | Evidence structural changes to ensure digital is more mainstream and less silo-ed. |
| 6. Additional recommendations | DoCs active engagement, working with their digital leader on the GOV.UK Steering Group | GDS collaborating closely with HoD and DoCs |



10. Annex – Feedback

Summary of feedback on digital capability review

10.1 About

This Annex summarises the feedback on a draft review report which was posted on the GCN website, comments were received until the 11th October. It also takes into account some written feedback supplied directly to the team. Some of this has already been incorporated into the revised draft. There were many comments posted across the different recommendations, culture and leadership and content development and delivery had particularly high levels of interest and debate.

What follows below is a succinct high-level summary. We have grouped all the feedback under the recommendation headings.

10.2 Feedback

10.2.1 Culture, leadership, risks....and IT

- Culture and leadership
 - o There was general consensus that strong leadership is required to drive the digital agenda, and this includes forcing skills improvement, more joined up working and collaboration and attention to risk management.
 - o Leadership can also act as an inhibitor to change “...leadership and removing barriers is the key to having an effective digital communication...”
- Risks
 - o Feedback acknowledged that this is a complex issue. Although there was majority support for devolving the use of digital communications to people outside specialist teams there was recognition that this ‘risk’ needed to be managed carefully though carefully planned content strategies staff adhering to other guidance such as the civil service code, and ensuring staff are fully aware of the political context they are operating in.
 - o Trust is an important issue, there needs to be a two way approach to trust at the highest levels and autonomy to help teams realise the potential of channels.
 - o “Risk avoidance is one of the most profound obstacles to digital uptake....criticism/negativity from the public in commenting functions and on social media...it's part and parcel of engagement...”
- IT
 - o Volume of feedback and significant frustration with government IT. Recognition that some of this is due to cost constraints but much is due to: “permissions”
 - o Much of this is driven by attitudes towards corporate reputation risk and trust barriers need to be addressed.
 - o ‘Often security restrictions seem wholly disproportionate and it's unclear why they're imposed’
 - o Access to software and technology is a problem for a number of organisations.



10.2.2 Setting objectives

- Objectives and strategy
 - o Strategy development and objective setting for digital must take place within the context of overarching objectives and in collaboration with other teams responsible for delivery

- Evaluation
 - o Evaluation is seen as a crucial part of digital development
 - o Proper evaluation will allow successes to be shared across government for future planning, as long as the evaluation methodology is action-focused
 - o There is recognition that evaluation should include developing the most appropriate metrics, benchmarking, and building dashboards that give a view of performance across digital channels.

10.2.3 Skills and capabilities

- o There was agreement that whilst there will always be a need for digital specialists within Government, these specialists need competences in other areas such as press, marketing and internal communications to ensure that there is a two-way exchange of knowledge across these areas
- o The embedding of individuals with specialist skills needs to be balanced against a need to up skill more staff outside of communications such as policy professionals. Through ensuring that there is an acceptable level of knowledge across a broad base, digital skills and knowledge will become mainstream.
- o 'All our staff should be digitally competent, understand the digital environment and feel confident working in it'

10.2.4 Content development and delivery

- o Widely recognised that content creation within digital channels requires specific skills and resource, but that training can help to build these skills across a wider body of people
- o The potential for sharing tools, software and equipment, and for sharing and repurposing content across Government is requested.
- o Some respondents called for a central Content Champion to help drive this, but opinion was divided about whether this individual would be responsible for content development at a strategic level, or would be in essence a content producer, responsible for the generation of content for dissemination.
- o This viewpoint was extended by some respondents to include a central content development team, or a social media centre to provide assets across government
- o Many respondents focused on the need for content development and delivery to be driven by audience insight and understanding.



10.2.5 Structure

- Cross Government collaboration
 - o Several comments were made about the possibility and benefits of joint procurement and collaboration e.g. cloud based shared tools.
 - o “Huge opportunity for Digital leads to share and collaborate across depts and teams. ...and feed into 'mainstream digital by end 2014'.”
 - o “The integration of the ICT and front end delivery is what digital is. Publishing content through digital channels is communication - they are different things.”
- GDS
 - o A number of people fed back on the GOV.UK. website, it was felt that departments should have a stronger voice in GOV.UK governance and the time was right to look more closely at how the site could meet ‘the spectrum of user needs’ (including government needs)
 - o There was also debate on how the site could become part of the mix of channels for teams to communicate with and engage their audiences, e.g. behaviour change campaigns, and how it could become more relational and less transactional to help teams achieve their communications objectives.
- Within Departments
 - o There was agreement that digital should not be owned centrally, but it can be facilitated and co-ordinated centrally for it to be successful, common standards, toolkits and competencies are also important to achieve this
 - o ‘Digital isn't just about central teams, or even just about communications teams’
 - o It was felt that channels and silos shouldn't be mixed up, communicators need to be good at talking to people, regardless of the channel;
 - o And that the communications profession benefits from specialists, they can share expertise, advise, champion best practice and ensure consistency in the wider digital arena

10.2.6 Additional recommendations

- o We should articulate a “vision for what 'good' digital communication looks like” and good practice should be celebrated and shared.
- o To achieve the manifesto there should be “a single department, or individual, with whom government department heads can consult to ensure training and mitigate risks.”
- o A single area on GOV.UK for national or high impact emergency e.g. "swine flu" or a terrorist attack would be helpful.



11. Glossary

AMEC - Association for the Measurement and Evaluation of Communications

CDO - Chief Digital Officer

COO - Chief Operating Officer

CSR - Civil Service Reform

CTOs - Chief Technology Officers

DECC - Department of Energy and Climate Change

Defra - Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

DfID - Department for International Development

DLs - Digital Leaders

DoCs - Directors of Communications

DoH - Department of Health

DWP - Department for Work and Pensions

EDGC - Executive Director of Government Communications

FCO - Foreign and Commonwealth Office

GCN - Government Communication Network

GDS - Government Digital Service

GOV.UK (The U.K government services and information website)

HMRC - Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

HMT - Her Majesty's Treasury

IT - Information Technology

NGO - Non Governmental Organisation

PDF - Portable Document Format

SRO - Senior Responsible Officer