Contact us

Email: gcs@cabinetoffice.gov.uk
Follow us: Twitter @UKgovcomms and LinkedIn
Visit GCS website: https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/

GCS People Finder

The GCS People Finder is a searchable public directory of government communications teams and key contacts across central government and related public bodies.

https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/people-finder/

The GCS People Finder is not a comprehensive list of all registered GCS members. GCS People Finder is intended (at a minimum) to provide key contacts for communications teams in relevant organisations.

Each organisation is responsible for the administration and accuracy of their organisation’s listings.
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Introducing the GCS</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Working in the GCS</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Professional development induction</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Recruitment</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Membership criteria</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Professional standards</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Codes of conduct</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Guidance</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Foreword
Alex Aiken, Executive Director of Government Communications

Communication is one of the four main levers of government alongside legislation, regulation and taxation. When done well, its contribution to delivering government policies is profound. It should be no surprise that communication is regarded as one of the major professions within the Civil Service.
Skilled, passionate, talented government communicators don’t just inform the public: our work helps build the economy, saves lives, protects the vulnerable, and promotes Britain in the world. The work we do is rarely easy, constantly challenging, and always rewarding.

The goal of GCS is to provide an exceptional standard of professional practice in support of the government, implementing the priorities of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet to build a stronger economy, a fairer society, a United Kingdom and a global Britain.

GCS draws together professional communicators from across the UK to support the work of 25 ministerial departments, 21 non-ministerial departments and over 300 agencies and other public bodies.

Our aim is to be a visible, trusted, strategic partner across government. GCS has expertise in all communication disciplines. We design, plan and deliver world-class media work, public-facing campaigns and stakeholder and internal communications. We partner closely with organisations in the public, private and third-party sectors in pursuit of the greatest cost-efficiency and impact.

This handbook sets out:

How our profession is led

What is expected of government and public service communicators, our code of conduct and GCS professional standards

The tools and training on offer to build successful careers and deliver an exceptional public service

Links to further information and advice.

Whether you work in government communications, work with government communicators or are simply interested in the work we do on behalf of government and the public, I hope you find this handbook a helpful source of support, guidance and advice.

Alex Aiken, Executive Director of Government Communications
Introduction

GCS is the professional body for public service communications professionals working in central government departments, agencies and arm’s length bodies.

The purpose of GCS is to deliver world-class public service communications that support government priorities, enable the efficient and effective operation of public services and improve people’s lives.

GCS delivers world-class communications

We are a community of brilliant communications professionals, serving the public across the United Kingdom and making excellence the standard for our work.

From Whitehall to Whitehaven, Inverness to Cardiff and Belfast - GCS members work in all regions of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The work of GCS International (GCSI) and our members in overseas posts promotes the UK overseas to help boost exports and inward investment and work with foreign governments builds communications capability overseas.
At its core, GCS is one of 25 Civil Service professions. GCS represents the central government communications function (inclusive of Whitehall departments, agencies and arm’s length bodies) and one of 10 specialist functions under the Civil Service Functional model.


**Professional skills to build a better Britain**

The government is committed to building a country that works for everyone – not just the privileged few. Over the next few years this will require the Civil Service to deliver policies which enhance public services, share wealth more widely, enact social reforms, strengthen the Union and our democracy.

This needs highly skilled public servants who lead in a way that creates confidence and delivers results. GCS is using the best commercial, digital and management disciplines to shape the policies and services that will change the country for the better.

The professional functions of the Civil Service will provide the expertise, capacity and challenge to enable this ambitious agenda to be implemented. That means ensuring value for money, clear communication, recruiting and retaining the best people and high quality project management.
100 years of UK government communications

2017 marks 100 years since the establishment of the Department of Information, forerunner to the Ministry of Information, Central Office of Information (COI) 1946 to 2012, The Government Information and Communication Service (GICS) and Government Communication Network (GCN) 2004 to 2014.

GCS apprentices, Giorgio di Tunno and Bonnie Melton have condensed 100 years of government communications into an online museum. Visit the online museum to see the key campaigns that have shaped the way government communicators work: https://medium.com/@History100/celebrating-100-years-of-government-communications-f860181cb5cc#.yaaxlkmg7
GCS was created to support communications professionals employed in central government departments, agencies and arm’s length bodies to deliver exceptional public service communications and uphold the Civil Service’s core values: integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality.

A number of reviews of government communications capability* highlighted the need for:

- Government communicators to be highly skilled across a range of communication disciplines, including internal communications, digital, campaigns and media handling
- Greater efficiency, value for money and strengthened central co-ordination
- A smaller service, one which is less hierarchical and more innovative.

**Capability reviews**

Since 2011 we have have run a programme of communications capability reviews to assess the communications function of individual Whitehall departments, central government agencies and arm’s length bodies, identifying areas of strength and areas where improvement is needed.

Where appropriate we have also undertaken cross cutting, subject specific reviews and have completed reviews focused on digital, defence, internal communications, and regional communications.

Further information about GCS capability reviews is available on the GCS website: https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/about-us/capabilityreviews/capability-review-reports/

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Working in the GCS

Communications professionals across government organisations play a key role in successfully communicating government policies and supporting the effective delivery of public services.

Our responsibilities include:

- Informing people about specific legal or statutory requirements, such as submitting annual tax returns
- Helping the public understand the government’s priorities, such as changes to the benefits system and welfare reform
- Encouraging people to behave in a healthier way, such as by discouraging drink driving and encouraging healthy eating
- Letting people know about public services, such as the reform of electoral registration
- Informing the public in times of crisis, including pandemics or widespread flooding
- Enhancing the reputation of the country by promoting the UK to people overseas to help boost investment from tourists and businesses
- Strategic advisers helping leaders in government departments and agencies inform and engage employees, in a way which motivates staff to maximise their performance and deliver the business strategy most effectively.

"Our work with the MCOM model has shown us that it is a hugely valuable tool for teams aiming to become more agile: I am convinced that its principles are the way forward for successful government communications."

Simon Baugh, Group Director of Communications, Department for Transport
The GREAT Britain campaign seeks to inspire the world to think differently about the UK in order to encourage audiences to visit, study, invest in and do business here. It was launched in 2012 and is active in over 144 countries worldwide and operates across 21 government departments and agencies. To date it has delivered over £2.7 billion of benefit to the UK economy, with a further £2.6 billion awaiting validation.
As the professional body for government communications professionals, GCS leads the communications profession to be a more skilled, capable and unified. Our ambition is to bring all public service communications up to the standard of the best.

**Skills**

GCS provides:

*Membership criteria and assesses professional skills*

*Support for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) through learning and development opportunities*

*Networks for government communication professionals to collaborate across the profession and wider public services, thus enabling increased expertise and innovation.*
In the last 12 months I have worked on campaigns for Magna Carta World Tour, the Supporting Syria Conference hosted by the Prime Minister in London, the overseas voter registration campaign with the Electoral Commission, and the Global Britain campaign.

Sandie McKenzie, Campaigns Officer, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The central GCS team based in the Cabinet Office helps coordinate government communications and provides support to central government departments, executive agencies and arm’s length bodies.
Government communicators need to be agile and constantly adapting to a fast-changing audience environment. In order to achieve this we expect government communicators to demonstrate capability in more than one communication specialism.

The Modern Communications Operating Model (MCOM)

Introduced in 2015, the Modern Communications Operating Model sets out the principles for improving communications, team capability, structures, skills and resources.

https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/mcom/

Government communicators may have a primary specialism in one area such as media or internal communications, but must have capability in core areas particularly media and campaigns, digital and evaluation skills consistent with MCOM.

The operating model is built around central core communications capabilities in each department, agency or arm’s length body.

Strategic Communications
Media and Campaigns
Strategic Engagement
Internal Communications

A typical day involves anything from providing a local paper with a quote about the benefits of organ or blood donation, working closely with external partners to increase the number of registered donors in a particular area, or briefing a director ahead of an interview with a national broadcaster.

Cherry Brown, Senior Corporate Communications Officer, NHSBT
All public service communications functions should include these core capabilities. Other capabilities such as sales or operational marketing, customer services, briefing and digital services may be part of the communications function depending on the needs of the individual organisation.

GCS is committed to supporting our members to broaden their capabilities across all areas of the operating model and provides an extensive programme of career, learning and development, networking, secondment and job shadow opportunities for our members.

https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/professional-development/inspire-programme/
Professional development

To maintain our position as a world-class communications service we all need to develop our skills, build our expertise and plan our careers. To support our members we offer a wide range of professional development opportunities.

Induction

When joining GCS our members will find this induction checklist helpful to get started: https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/professional-development/induction-plan/

Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

GCS members are asked to complete at least four Continuous Professional Development activities each performance year.

Each activity our members complete qualifies for CPD points. Members are required to record a minimum of 20 points each year.
You should aim to complete a variety of different activities. Any development activity that helps you build your professional or leadership skills as a government communicator counts as CPD. Your line manager will support you in fulfilling this development requirement.

To help you plan and record your CPD activities and other general development we have a Personal Development Plan (PDP) template and guidance. This template is designed to complement departmental / organisational objective setting and review procedures and enable you to capture your communications learning and development needs. GCS members may be required to evidence their annual CPD when applying for GCS vacancies on promotion.

Before completing your PDP, set up a development discussion with your line manager. The discussion should be arranged when you start a new job or at the start of the performance year, whichever comes first. You should aim for at least one performance discussion per quarter and regularly update your PDP to provide evidence that you have completed all CPD activities agreed by you and your line manager. It will help you when discussing your development at performance reviews.

To find out more see GCS Professional Development: https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/professional-development/cpd/

"Making professional development a priority is not only good for your career, it's good for GCS."

Léonie Austin, Director of Marketing and Communications NHS Blood and Transplant
# Personal Development Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Development Objective/what I need to learn/do better</th>
<th>What I will do to achieve this</th>
<th>By when</th>
<th>What I have successfully learnt and improved</th>
<th>How I will share this learning to help others</th>
<th>CPD points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E.g. Improve personal impact and build confidence.</td>
<td>Complete personal impact training.</td>
<td>30 June</td>
<td>Used learnings to manage nerves and plan presentation. Delivered a GCS comms exchange event.</td>
<td>Give feedback to a colleague on their presentation skills</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.g. Build knowledge of evaluation in digital campaigns</td>
<td>GCS online evaluation course.</td>
<td>30 Sep</td>
<td>Know how to better evaluate digital campaigns using metrics such as clicks, click through rates, conversions etc.</td>
<td>Coach others in the team</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.g. Understand the principles of internal communications</td>
<td>Read the ICE materials on the GCS website</td>
<td>31 Dec</td>
<td>Knowledge of internal communications objectives, audiences, strategies and evaluation.</td>
<td>Do a briefing at a team meeting</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.g. gain experience in strategic engagement</td>
<td>Volunteer to support colleagues at a stakeholder event</td>
<td>31 Mar</td>
<td>Understand the importance of working with third parties and partners</td>
<td>Apply principles to our next meeting with external colleagues</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.g. Develop my line manager skills</td>
<td>Complete Building Effective Teams training</td>
<td>15 Jul</td>
<td>How to get the best from my team and to overcome barriers.</td>
<td>Feedback to peer group</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quarterly review dates</th>
<th>Q1:</th>
<th>Q2:</th>
<th>Q3:</th>
<th>Q4:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
The GCS PDP template is an essential tool for planning your development.

Michelle Cupples, Deputy Director GCS, Head of Professional Development

Aspire is the free GCS professional curriculum designed to help you build skills in all the following seven capability areas - including the core capabilities of the Modern Communications Operating Model.

Induction/essential skills
Strategic communications
Media, campaigns and digital
Strategic engagement
Internal communications
Leadership behaviours
Personal effectiveness

As well as face-to-face modules you will find recommended speaker events, books, guidance, websites, social media, E-learning, and webinars. It doesn’t matter what level you are currently at as we have support for beginner, intermediate and advanced skills. Find out more at: https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/professional-development/

GCS conducts an annual skills survey of all members. The MCOM Skills Survey is for members to self assess their progress against the core MCOM capabilities and inform development of learning opportunities for the year ahead.
Get involved - networking opportunities

GCS offers professional extensive networking opportunities to members.

The community-led GCS Comms Exchange best practice event programme held 36 events in 2016.

ICSpace internal communications
GCS regional networks e.g. GCS South West #MCOM Monday
GCS and LG Comms Communications Academy #CommsAcad
GCS Lunch and Learn
Leadership roadshow

Build your leadership skills

GCS offers opportunities to all members to develop their leadership skills.

Aspire Future, Engage, Deliver
GCS Spring Leadership Roadshow
Mentoring

GCS mentoring programme

Twice a year we match GCS members into mentoring partnerships to explore and build skills and effective behaviours. In the autumn of 2017 we will integrate our programme with the Civil Service Mentormatch. Find out more at: https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/professional-development/mentoring/

“Being a mentor is a genuine opportunity to learn new things, as well as guiding people through a particular stage of their career.”

Owen Rolfe, GCS mentor, Department for Education
GCS mentoring was an inspiring experience tailored to what I needed - it really boosted my confidence to improve what I do. I encourage anyone seeking support to apply for a mentor through the GCS scheme. Add it to your personal development plan now!

Sophie Palmer, Digital Communications Manager, Nuclear Decommissioning Authority
Managed moves, loans and secondments

Working within department and agency employment policies, GCS support managed moves, loans and secondments in order to:

Develop our people in their careers
Offer stretching and rewarding opportunities and
Meet the current and future needs of the GCS.

If you would like to benefit from one of these opportunities, speak to your line manager and to your Director of Communications, then contact the GCS Professional Development Team to explore available roles.

The GCS central team run a rolling secondment programme through Cabinet Office for ALB colleagues interested in working in Whitehall departments. To find out more contact gcs@cabinetoffice.gov.uk

“ I would thoroughly recommend Inspire to anyone who wants to learn more about themselves, to be exposed to the best and latest leadership thinking and with a desire to become the best leader they can be. ”
GCS talent programmes

Every year GCS runs the Early Talent and Inspire talent programmes designed to support the development of high-potential government communication professionals. They aim to develop excellence in leadership skills and build a strong talent pipeline for the profession. Inspire is targeted at grades 6 and 7 (or agency equivalents), while the Early Talent programme is targeted at IO and SIO (or agency equivalents) level. Both programmes run for two years; the first year is an intensive programme and in the second year the emphasis is on a self-directed approach to embed learning. The curriculum for both programmes is structured around the Civil Service Leadership Statement - Inspiring, Confident and Empowering - and meeting the demands of MCOM to progress a career in the GCS.

The best training experience in my professional career, and likely to remain so. Hard work, but well worth it.

I have found the Early Talent Programme very self-reflective. It has helped to focus my mind on where I want to take my career and how I am going to get there. It has also provided me with an invaluable network of colleagues across government, and has helped me to feel part of the wider GCS community.
By the end of both programmes, participants will:

Show increased confidence, drive and leadership skills

Have improved suitability and confidence to move to the next grade

Have increased self-awareness to understand how to recognise and deploy their strengths and work on areas for improvement

Have a good understanding of their career development goals

Have built a personalised network of peers and key stakeholders across government and arm’s length bodies.

In addition, Inspire participants may go on to complete a postgraduate certificate in strategic communications leadership.

Applicants to both programmes must have a talent rating in the top 4 boxes of the 9-box grid. They must be confident that they can attend all of the relevant modules and have the aspiration to progress to the next grade and beyond, and take on critical roles within government communications.

For more information see the GCS Website

Inspire https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/professional-development/inspire-programme/

Early Talent https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/professional-development/early-talent-programme/
Membership of PRCA

The PRCA (Public Relations Communications Association) is the largest PR association in Europe. Its goal is to raise standards in PR and communications by providing members with industry data, facilitating the sharing of best practice, and creating networking opportunities.

All GCS members are affiliated with PRCA and receive:

- Unlimited use of PRCA’s extensive recorded and live interactive webinars
- Unlimited access to all PRCA’s master classes and expert briefings
- Access to the PRCA’s insight library
- Access to the PRCA’s regional and sectoral groups
- Member discount on all PRCA face to face training.

For more information see the GCS website: https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/professional-development/professional-bodies/prca/
Join us - GCS recruitment

Government communicators are selected on the basis of fair and open competition. Promotion is based on merit, taking into account people’s performance.

Information on current GCS vacancies, secondments and other career opportunities, as well as details about government communications, is available on the GCS website: https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/careers/

Where could a career in the Civil Service take you?

A career in the Civil Service offers you:

The opportunity to make a difference to people’s lives in the UK
Learning on the job and good career development opportunities
Flexible working hours and comprehensive benefits.

More information about jobs across the Civil Service can be found on the Civil Service Jobs website.
https://www.civilservicejobs.service.gov.uk/csr/index.cgi

https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/civil-service/about/recruitment

"I discovered the GCS online and was immediately impressed by the huge variety of communications experiences it offers at the full range of government departments. If you seek new challenges, enjoy working with new people, and aspire to gain new skills, GCS is a great place to be."

Sandie McKenzie, Campaigns Officer, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
GCS runs centralised assessment and selection centres for new recruitment at Assistant Information Officer (AIO), Information Officer (IO) and Senior Information Officer (SIO) and equivalent grades.

The assessment centres generate quality candidates suitable to be offered jobs across GCS, providing a single channel for candidates to pursue if they wish to gain entry to the government communications profession.

The GCS corporate support service organises this recruitment process, drawing on existing GCS members across the profession to contribute to the interview and assessment process.

GCS does not employ unpaid interns.

**GCS Diversity Strategy**

GCS is committed to recruiting, retaining and developing a workforce that at all grades reflects the diverse communities we serve. We launched our first diversity strategy in May 2016, with a view to improve representation for gender at senior leadership levels, Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups at all grades and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.


We have provided targeted support to those with potential to progress to the most senior levels and we have launched specific apprentice and internship programmes designed to provide entry routes into government for those who would not usually consider it.

**GCS Fast Stream**

The specialist GCS Fast Stream launched in September 2015. It is an annual programme which recruits up to 30 Fast Streamers per year. The programme provides a new entry route to the profession to attract and develop the next generation of communications senior leaders. Through a range of communications and leadership focussed roles and learning opportunities we will stretch and accelerate the development of the cohort.
GCS delivers world-class communication that plays a central role in supporting government policy and the effective operation of public services. To continue doing that, we need to attract and grow the very best of new talent, and the GCS Fast Stream is a vital part of our ongoing recruitment drive.

Kohinoor Meghji, Senior HR Business Partner to GCS

GCS Fast Streamers learn on the job, rotating into new roles and departments every six months for the first two years, before settling down to two one-year placements. They will also complete a professional qualification in their third year.

The successful Fast Streamers have been through a rigorous assessment process. They have been tested via the normal Fast Stream route and, in addition, we have also assessed their motivation for working for GCS, their ability to innovate, as well as their communications skills against the GCS competency framework. The objective is to reach senior management positions in the future. Their performance is closely monitored and evaluated and they will be given the support needed to achieve that aim.
GCS is deeply committed to the development of everyone in the profession. Being a member of the Fast Stream is not the only route to GCS senior leadership roles. Existing GCS members who meet the requirements of the Fast Stream scheme and who wish to apply for this intensive programme are eligible to do so.

GCS Apprenticeships

GCS launched its first specialist communication apprenticeship programme in September 2016. The 18-month development programme provides the opportunity for school leavers and those without a degree to learn and qualify while they work.

The communications-specific apprenticeship is designed to bring talented young people into GCS who would not have previously considered a career in government.

GCS are committed to improving the future diversity and inclusivity of our profession by better representing the communities we serve.

To find out more about GCS communications apprenticeships see the GCS website.

https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/careers/apprenticeships/

“The GCS apprenticeship appealed to me as an attractive career pathway, rather than the traditional university route. My ambitions centred around combining practical learning with the opportunity to earn a salary. Since starting my role I have been involved in high profile programmes at 10 Downing Street and the Cabinet Office.”

Giorgio Di Tunno, GCS Apprentice
GCS Diversity Internship Programme

The GCS Diversity Internship Programme was launched in 2016. This paid internship offers successful candidates a practical introduction to the world of government communications and hands-on experience of a wide range of communications disciplines over a six to nine week period. The programme includes an induction into the GCS, communications training sessions, a careers fair and a closing ceremony.

Flex team

The Flex team is a new GCS function run from the Cabinet Office that helps deliver the annual Government Communications Plan by filling in essential roles for priority communications campaigns. For more information about the Flex team see https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/careers/flexible-resource-pool/
The framework is based around a model of communication called the 'Four Is': **Insight, Ideas, Implementation, Impact**

The framework is used in various circumstances, including:

- Recruitment and selection
- Performance management
- Personal development planning to help you plan your learning opportunities
- Career development.

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**GCS International**

The GCS Knowledge and Capability Unit deploys expert government communicators overseas to support international projects. The team support overseas governments and international institutions to further UK interests by sharing knowledge and strengthening strategic communications capability.

In partnership with the Foreign Office, the work of the unit includes crisis communications, cross-government coordination, campaigns and training to embed communications best practice and to help fellow government communicators to reach their full potential. The team offer secondments of 3 to 6 months to experienced civil servant volunteers. To find out more, contact the team at UKGCS@cabinetoffice.gov.uk

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**Performance management**

Central government departments, agencies and arm’s length bodies are responsible for the performance and appraisal of their own staff. However, all government communicators must be able to demonstrate the relevant skills for their role and grade as set out in the Government Communication Professional Competency Framework: [https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/professional-development/competency-framework/](https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/professional-development/competency-framework/)
Leadership skills and behaviours

Staff are encouraged to develop and practice leadership skills which reflect the public service values and behaviours of the Civil Service Leadership Statement: Inspiring Confident and Empowering: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-service-leadership-statement/civil-service-leadership-statement

This statement of intent takes as its starting point the responsibility of the Civil Service for the effective delivery of the government’s programme and Ministers’ priorities, living its values and serving the public. It highlights the three key characteristics that staff across the Civil Service (including central government agencies and arm’s length bodies) have indicated they expect from effective leaders, and that Civil Service leaders promise to live up to:

- **Inspiring** – about their work and its future
- **Confident** – in their engagement
- **Empowering** – their teams to deliver.
GCS membership criteria

GCS is the professional body for UK government communications professionals working in central government departments, agencies and arm’s length bodies.

There are two categories of GCS membership, GCS Member and GCS Affiliate.

I enjoy being part of a large network of professional communicators. There’s lots of opportunities for career progression including a wide range of training courses, events where you can share learnings with colleagues from other organisations and opportunities to take a secondment in other departments and organisations.

— Victoria Judd, Campaign Manager, Department for Transport

Registration as a GCS member is open to:

Communications professionals employed in the central communications directorate of UK government departments, agencies and arm’s length bodies.

Communications professionals working in UK government departments and arm’s length bodies in a specialist communications role who are embedded within a policy or delivery team.
Members of GCS have access to a wide range of professional development, networks and career opportunities across the UK, helping to improve the service we provide and to develop our future career prospects. These include:

**Tools** - GCS Professional Standards offer a consistent set of guidelines, models and frameworks to continually raise the quality of practice for government communications

**Networks** - GCS provides members with professional development and networking opportunities through an extensive range of national and regional events, courses and online social networks

**Professional development and skills** - GCS supports members to develop priority skills for more effective government communications and understand emerging trends in communications practice and techniques we offer

**Career** - GCS supports members to develop a fulfilling career, working on some of the biggest challenges in government and public service communications in a modern and inclusive profession.

In return we expect GCS members to:

*Be the best public service professionals they can be.* All active members of GCS must maintain an annual professional development plan and complete a minimum of four pieces of communications related continuous professional development per year.

*Commit to observing the highest standards of communications practice and ethics.* GCS professional standards should at a minimum be applied consistently and rigorously across all communications teams in departments, ALBs, agencies and other organisations employing GCS staff.
Be the best

All GCS members should take part in a formal GCS induction process when joining the profession.

Members of GCS may have a primary specialism in one area and are supported in developing their skills and capability in core areas consistent with the Modern Communications Operating Model.

Members of GCS are encouraged to network with colleagues, learn new skills and share best practice across organisations. GCS offers a host of national and regional opportunities, from our Comms Exchange events to regular networking groups such as GCS South West’s regular #MCOM Monday.

Get involved. Bring your skills back into GCS, for example you might support GCS recruitment by helping with our assessment centres, volunteering to present on the Aspire programme or by joining a cross-government GCS project under the GCS Improvement Programme.

GCS Affiliate

Registration as a GCS Affiliate is open to:

Public service communications professionals outside of UK central government departments, agencies and arm’s length bodies

Affiliate membership is also open to those not currently employed in government communications but who wish to know more about GCS.

As an affiliate member of GCS you will have access to networks, GCS professional standards, tools and guidance helping you improve the service you provide and your future career prospects.
How to register

Please choose your membership type and register online to receive regular, relevant membership information, news and updates from the GCS team.

https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/register/

If you are unsure of your membership category please email gcs@cabinetoffice.gov.uk

NOTE: We collect certain data about you when you register with GCS and use gcs.civilservice.gov.uk to enable you to access our services. For information on our privacy policy, cookies and data see https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/privacy-and-cookies-policy/

Find out what GCS members have to say, watch our video here.
GCS Professional Standards

The purpose of GCS is to deliver world-class public service communications that support ministers’ priorities, enable the efficient and effective operation of public services, and improve people’s lives.

GCS is held to account by the GCS Board chaired by the Minister for the Cabinet Office for implementation of the annual Government Communications Plan. To make this possible, GCS staff commit to observing the highest standard of communications practice, professional development and ethics.

GCS has established a set of guidelines, models and templates to continually raise the quality of practice. The standards below should, at minimum, be applied consistently and rigorously across all communications teams in departments, agencies, arm’s length bodies and other organisations with GCS staff.

**Ethics:** GCS professionals will seek to achieve the highest standards of behaviour, as well as professional practice and leadership. This means, at minimum, they will observe the values of integrity, honesty, impartiality and objectivity set out in the Civil Service Code (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-service-code/the-civil-service-code) and observe its values of integrity, honesty, impartiality and objectivity. They will also uphold and actively promote the Civil Service diversity and inclusion policies (https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/civil-service/about/equality-and-diversity) and the GCS Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/about-us/diversity-and-inclusion/)

**Leadership:** The GCS aims to develop confident, inspiring and empowering public service leaders. GCS members should exemplify through their work the values of the Civil Service values Leadership Statement: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-service-leadership-statement/civil-service-leadership-statement

**Professional Development:** As communications develops, all communicators should continually work to improve their skills, completing and sharing with their colleagues at least four pieces of communications related professional development each year. They should pay particular attention to the conclusions of the Future of Public Service Communication report (https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/6.1048_Cabinet-Office_comms-future-document_v2_print_web.pdf) which says that communicators must master the skills of social marketing, content creation, building alliances and handling data.
The Government Communication Service
Modern Communications Operating Model
Skills: The GCS competency framework ([https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/professional-development/competency-framework/](https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/professional-development/competency-framework/)) sets the standard for individual proficiency, by grade. Communicators should demonstrate their ability to frame campaigns using insight, apply creative ideas and swiftly implement and assess the impact of their work. The framework is used in appraisals, professional development and recruitment.

Operating Model: All GCS communications teams should adapt to meet the needs of a fast-changing audience environment by following the Modern Communications Operating Model ([https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/mcom/](https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/mcom/)) principles and demonstrate their skills in the full range of disciplines: strategic communication planning, strategic engagement, internal communications and media and campaigns.
**Campaigns:** The implementation of effective campaigns is at the heart of our work. For rigorous and systematic campaign development, GCS staff follow the [OASIS campaigns framework](https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/campaigns/guide-to-campaign-planning-2/) and make selective use of other [GCS campaign planning tools](https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/OASIS-Guide-1.pdf) where required.

**Evaluation:** GCS professionals use the [GCS Evaluation Framework](https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/evaluation/tools-and-resources/) for every campaign to improve performance and to take responsibility for the outputs, outtakes and outcomes of their work. Teams should summarise and exhibit these results in an evaluation hub.


**Staff engagement:** A modern internal communications function acts as a strategic partner to enable change and support engagement. GCS standards are set out in [Internal Communications Excellence](https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/internal-communications/the-ic-excellence-project/) including the [Standard Operating Model](https://communication.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/ic-space/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/standard-operating-model.pdf) and the [Job Description Principles for internal communicators](https://communication.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/ic-space/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/job-description-principles.pdf).

Directors of Communications and Heads of Communications are accountable to the Executive Director for Government Communications for their departments’ or arm’s length bodies’ adherence to these standards. They will obtain regular feedback from senior stakeholders to assess client satisfaction with government communications. This will assist the GCS in its work to assess the adoption and impact of these standards and to keep them under review.
Codes of Conduct

Central government departments, agencies and arm’s length bodies are responsible for the behaviour of their own staff. However, government communications and the Government Communication Service operate within a professional context that is set by existing formal and informal codes of conduct, including:

- The Civil Service Code: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-service-code/the-civil-service-code
- Vision statement for government communications
- Purpose of government communications
- Public Expenditure Committee PEX(ER) delivery principles
- GCS Propriety Guidance
- Queen’s Regulations for Armed Forces personnel.
Civil Service Code

All GCS members (central government departments, agencies and arm’s length bodies) must follow the Civil Service Code which sets out the Civil Service values of:

**Integrity** – putting the obligations of public service above personal interests

**Honesty** – being truthful and open

**Objectivity** – basing advice and decisions on rigorous analysis of the evidence

**Impartiality** – serving governments of different political parties equally well.

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-service-code/the-civil-service-code

Vision statement for government communications

Members of the GCS represent a community of public service communications professionals that help central government achieve its policy objectives through effective and efficient communication by pioneering and sharing best practice, increasing collaboration and coordination and eradicating inefficient and unnecessary spend.

GCS members will deliver, across organisational boundaries, effective communication in the most transparent, accountable and responsible way.

Purpose of government communications

Government – including its departments, agencies and arm’s length bodies – may legitimately communicate where the activity:

**Fulfils a specific legal or statutory requirement**, for example, the need to submit tax returns to an annual deadline

**Helps the public understand the government’s programme**, for example, changes to entitlements and welfare reform

**Influences attitudes and behaviours for the benefit of individuals or the wider public**, for example, discouraging drink driving and encouraging healthy eating

**Enables the effective operation of services to the citizen**, for example, the reform of electoral registration
Informs the public in times for crisis, for example, a terrorist attack, pandemic or widespread flooding

Enhances the reputation of the UK, for example, promoting the UK overseas to attract inward investment.

**Public Expenditure Committee (PEX(ER)) delivery principles**

GCS will work with departments and their agencies to ensure that government communications are delivered in line with the delivery principles identified by PEX(ER) in 2011, that government communicators should:

- Deliver communications rather than procure externally
- Focus on behavioural insights
- Use digital by default
- Use owned and earned before paid-for media
- Work in partnership
- Ensure value for money through effective evaluation
- Adhere to propriety guidance
- Adhere to GCS professional assurance process for approval of expenditure on communications of over £100,000.

**GCS propriety guidance**

GCS members will work at all times within the framework of propriety set for government communications which mandates that government communication must be:

- Relevant to government responsibilities
- Objective and explanatory
- Undertaken in an economic and appropriate way
- **Must not be party political.**
The framework also mandates that GCS members may not:

- Justify or defend policies in political terms
- Advance any policy as belonging to a particular party
- Directly attack the policies and opinions of opposition parties and groups
- Oversell policies, re-announce achievements or investments, or otherwise mislead the public.

For further information on propriety for government communicators see: https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/propriety/

In addition to the areas above, government communicators are bound by any existing standards as set out by their employing organisation.

Armed Services personnel working in government communications additionally remain bound by Queen’s Regulations, a collection of orders and regulations in force in the Royal Navy, British Army, and Royal Air Force, forming guidance for officers of these armed services in all matters of discipline and personal conduct.
Social media guidance

GCS members must adhere to the Civil Service Code online as well as offline. Social media is a public forum and the same considerations apply as would to speaking in public or writing something for publication, either officially or in a personal capacity outside of work. For further guidance see the GCS propriety guidance and checklist for social media: https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/propriety-in-digital-and-social-media/

Top 5 things to remember when using social and digital media, either at work or in a personal capacity:

**Common sense:** Social media helps us work openly and connect with the public we serve – just remember to apply common sense!

**Adhere to the Civil Service Code:** Apply the same standards online as are required offline, whether acting in an official or personal capacity

**Accuracy:** Check the accuracy and sensitivity of what you are posting before pressing submit

**Permanent:** Remember that once something is posted online, it’s very difficult to remove it.

**If in doubt, don’t post it.**

Social media guidance for civil servants is intended to help civil servants to use social media to enhance their work whilst maintaining the highest levels of integrity: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-media-guidance-for-civil-servants

For further guidance see the GCS propriety guidance and checklist for social media: https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/propriety-in-digital-and-social-media/

Follow the GCS on Twitter at @UKgovcomms, Linkedin
GCS Guidance

The GCS provides information and guidance to help government communicators deliver exceptional public communications that change and improve lives.

Campaign planning

Campaigns are at the heart of government communication. A campaign is a planned sequence of communications and interactions that uses a compelling narrative over time to deliver a defined and measurable outcome.

The OASIS campaign planning guide outlines the five steps needed to create a campaign:

- Objectives
- Audience insight
- Strategy/idea
- Implementation
- Scoring/evaluation

Review and refresh the approach after each phase of the campaign.

Use real time feedback to optimise implementation.

Behaviour change

Behaviour change is one of the primary functions of government communications, helping change and save lives, as well as helping the government run more effectively and save taxpayers' money.

Our approach is to use a mix of awareness raising, persuasion, practical help and behavioural theory to demonstrate why changes in behaviour are important and to make these changes easy for the public to adopt.
The GCS guide to behaviour change and communications provides a common framework, EAST, devised by the Behavioural Insights Team for all government communicators wishing to apply behavioural approaches to their work.

**EAST – making it Easy, Attractive, Social and Timely**

**Making it Easy** – if you want someone to do something, make it easy

**Making it Attractive** – it is important to attract an individual’s attention in the first place, and ensure that desired behaviours are rewarded

**Making it social** – we’re all social animals and heavily influenced by what those around us do

**Making it timely** – timing impacts on how we act in any given situation.

Public Health England’s Change4Life healthy eating campaign, launched in January 2017, urges parents to ‘Be Food Smart’ and take more control of their children’s diets. An app has been developed to highlight just how much sugar, saturated fat and salt can be found in everyday food and drink that their children consume. The free app encourages families to choose healthier options and works by scanning the barcode of products allowing parents to compare brands, and features food detective activities for children and mini missions the whole family can enjoy.
Digital and social media

Digital and social media has grown to be part of how we live our lives today.

**Facebook is the largest social network service in the UK.**

In April 2016, it attracted a digital audience of 38.9 million (more than three-quarters of active internet users) ahead of LinkedIn (21.8 million) and Twitter (20.9 million).

The GCS Digital Centre of Expertise brings together digital experts from across Whitehall to advise and support on cross-government campaigns, insight and evaluation, digital skills and capability across GCS.


**Government Digital Service - Social Media Playbook**

The Playbook outlines how the Government Digital Service (GDS) use social media and what GDS have done to understand as best practice for the channels used.

The GDS approach to social media, is the same as the overall GDS approach: simpler, clearer, faster. GDS focus remains fixed on meeting user needs.

[https://gdsengagement.blog.gov.uk/playbook/](https://gdsengagement.blog.gov.uk/playbook/)

Follow the GCS on [Twitter at @UKgovcomms, Linkedin](https://twitter.com/UKgovcomms)

**Internal communications**

Internal communicators are strategic advisers. They help the leaders in the organisation inform and engage employees in a way that motivates staff to maximise their performance and deliver the organisation’s business strategies more effectively.

Effective internal communications will:

* Help the organisation to deliver its objectives
* Help staff see the connection between their job and the organisation’s vision
* Understand employee engagement and what drives it
* Help managers communicate better with their teams.

Internal communications help leaders in your organisation inform and engage employees, in a way which motivates staff to maximise their performance and deliver the business strategy most effectively. It is not about ‘sending out stuff’.

Russell Grossman, Head of Profession for Internal Communications, Director of Communications, Office of Rail and Road

GCS have developed an internal communications Standard Operating Model (https://communication.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/ic-space/strategy-and-internal-communications/creating-a-consistent-standard-for-internal-communications), Internal Communications Competencies (https://communication.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/ic-space/snapshot-of-gcs-internal-communications-competencies/) and a suite of tools and resources hosted on The IC Space website (https://communication.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/ic-space/) providing internal communicators with the skills and support required to be excellent in their job.

Strategic Engagement - Collaboration Toolkit

Working with local partners is one of the most effective ways of ensuring your campaign cuts through to local audiences, however it is important to approach this in a systematic way.

The Collaboration Toolkit has been developed with partner organisations representing public sector communications teams from Local Authorities, Fire and Rescue, and the Police. It gives a step-by-step approach to working with local partners on campaigns of common interest.

Evaluation

The communications we deliver contribute to public service goals. Government communicators need to demonstrate the impact of everything they do by evaluating their work and ensuring that their campaigns, media relations, internal communications and other activity are as effective as possible.

GCS Evaluation Framework

The GCS Evaluation Framework is for use by all government communicators during the planning stages of communications activities and campaigns.

The Framework builds on the latest industry best practice to provide a set of valid evaluation measures - outputs, outtakes and outcomes - to collect, analyse and report on for each type of communications activity.

https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/evaluation/tools-and-resources/
I have been a member of the GCS Evaluation Council for over a year and am very impressed with the incredible commitment to sound communication measurement in the UK government. And, even for this year alone, the rate of improvement has been impressive. Evaluation is hard to do well and is a journey focused on continuous improvement. GCS has made great progress, and these campaigns are testimony to its ability to develop, execute and evaluate important and high-profile campaigns.

Dr. David B. Rockland Partner/CEO and Managing Director, Ketchum Change and Global Research Chairman, International Association for Measurement and Evaluation

GCS Evaluation Council

The Evaluation Council was established in 2013 to support the government’s continuing commitment to the development, understanding and implementation of evaluation best practice across all government communication activity.

The Council brings together expertise from the commercial sector, non-governmental organisations, academia and public services. The Council meet every two months to act as a sounding board for new GCS evaluation thinking and to review evaluation plans and outputs from government communicators. Their advice helps GCS improve evaluation practice and to optimise campaigns.

https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/evaluation/evaluation-council/
DESIGN102, the GCS Design Centre, is a shared design service which provides a wide range of creative design, animation, filmmaking and photography services across government.

We work with communication, policy, operations and corporate-services teams delivering intelligent creative solutions. By using our services the government has saved over £3 million in the last three years.

The team deliver hundreds of projects every year (like those on the right), and you can find more examples online at www.design102.co.uk

If you work in central government you can access DESIGN102’s services directly. For more information contact design102@justice.gsi.gov.uk
Procurement - buying external communications services

When seeking to engage an external agency to deliver a campaign or provide a specific service as part of your communications, there are two communications frameworks that must be used.

Frameworks are mandatory for central government departments and are open to the whole of the public sector including local government.

**Campaigns Solutions** is for end-to-end campaigns. This means that any agency on this framework can deliver your entire campaign, from developing a strategy, suggesting your channels, implementing the plan through to evaluating its impact.

**Communications Services** is for specific services that are part of a campaign or for a one-off project.

For more information on buying communications support and working with external agencies see the GCS website: [https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/buying-communications-services/](https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/buying-communications-services/)

We are transforming the way we, and the wider public sector, buy communications support – making sure we are getting the best possible value for the taxpayer and have an increasing amount of flexibility and expertise.

We also wanted to open up this framework to give more SMEs the chance to work with government and I’m very pleased to see that we have achieved that.

Chris Skidmore MP, Parliamentary Secretary at the Cabinet Office, Minister for the Constitution
Leadership and governance of GCS

The GCS is led by Alex Aiken, Executive Director of Government Communication in the Cabinet Office. He is the Head of Profession for government communications operating under the ‘coordinator’ model of ‘functional leadership’.

Under this model, government departments decide their communications priorities and have their own Directors of Communication. Directors of Communication also have ‘dotted line’ accountability to the Head of Profession. The same principle applies across a range of government professions including Human Resources and Legal.

**The Head of Profession is also responsible for:**

- Overseeing funding and professional assurance for communications activity across government
- Influencing or vetoing spending on advertising, marketing and communications in accordance with government spending controls
- Agreeing the recruitment process for GCS senior leaders. Where appropriate, the Head of Profession sits on the recruitment panels for all Director of Communication posts
- Providing advice and guidance on promotion.

**GCS Governance bodies**

Governance of the GCS takes place at three main levels:

- Government Communication Service Board
- Directors of Communication Group
- ‘Heads of’ Groups.
The Government Communication Service Board

The Government Communication Service is overseen by the GCS Board which is chaired by the Private Secretary at the Cabinet Office and Minister for the Constitution. Its membership comprises:

Ministers
Chief Executive of the Civil Service
Non-Executive Directors
Executive Director of Government Communication, Cabinet Office
Representatives of the Whitehall departmental Directors of Communication
Senior communications representatives from central government agencies and ALBs

Terms of Reference

The Board is accountable via the Minister to the Civil Service Board / Senior Oversight Group, which will review performance against delivery of the annual Government Communication Plan.

Permanent Secretary Representative (Government Non-Executive).

The GCS Board ensures that:

The Government Communication Service (GCS) develops and delivers an annual Government Communication Plan
The plan contributes to the delivery of government policy priorities
Government communications are delivered in an effective and efficient way
GCS can respond appropriately to risks and crises
GCS operates within the Civil Service Professions Best Practice Framework.
The Board collectively:

Identify and agree high-level objectives

Approve the annual Government Communication Plan

Challenge performance and activity against the plan and government narrative

Advise departments and the wider government communication community, including ALBs and agencies

Mediate, where necessary, on cross-government communication issues

Provide assurance to Cabinet that the GCS is delivering against all objectives and targets set.

Directors of Communication Group Senior leadership expectations

Forum for governance and decision making is the central government Directors of Communication (DoCs) Group, which is responsible for:

Setting the overall direction of government communications, providing visible leadership of the profession and communicating key decisions

Contributing to and finalising the draft annual government communication plan

Ensuring effective use of communications resources across government, delivering cross-government priorities and the annual government communication plan

Agreeing and building professional skills in the GCS in a manner consistent with the Modern Communications Operating Model, championing professional development and cultivating talent management

Providing feedback and direction to the Heads Of groups and other parts of the GCS as required

Using a variety of audience research analysis and intelligence sources to horizon scan.
The DoCs group meets monthly and decisions made at the meeting are cascaded to the group Heads as follows:

- Heads of Media
- Heads of Internal Communications
- Digital Centre of Excellence representing digital communications specialists
- Heads of Communications
- Heads of Strategic Engagement
- GCS Insight and Evaluation Forum

Each group is responsible for:

- Ensuring that each specialism contributes to the development and delivery of the annual Government Communication Plan
- Ensuring that each specialism operates in a manner consistent with the implementation of the Modern Communications Operating Model
- Working with GCS professional development team to identify future professional development activity within each specialism
- Capturing and considering insight and ideas from government communicators and other stakeholders
- Collating and disseminating learning and best practice across the GCS.
The GCS aims to help every government communicator perform to the best of their potential. Senior leaders have a critical role in inspiring great performance, providing visible leadership and direction, and nurturing talent and creativity.

Senior leaders provide visible leadership of the government communications profession and their organisation that includes setting the directorate’s objectives to support the government’s business strategy and building partnerships that set standards across government.

Senior leaders contribute to the annual Government Communications Plan, setting communications objectives for each of their departments that provide value for money and meet business requirements. They make recommendations to the GCS Board on communications priorities.

At least every quarter, Directors of Communication report to the Head of Profession on progress on campaigns in the annual Government Communications Plan.

Performance is also reported against:

- Marketing budgets and expenditure
- GCS diversity strategy, talent management, recruitment
- Staff numbers and roles in the department and its executive agencies
- The GCS annual profession-wide staff skills survey
- Staff Personal Development Plan targets
- The Civil Service People Survey for measurement of staff engagement.
Every six months, Directors of Communication provide management information to the Head of Profession.

Collectively these measures ensure an assessment of the profession’s performance can be made.

Expectations and objectives for Directors of Communications

1. Leadership

Objectives: To lead the function and contribute to the success of the department or business that is confident in advice, empowering in implementation, and inspiring in its results.

Expectations: Take risks, facilitate creativity, support others if things go wrong, be the change you wish to see; use clear language, demonstrate honesty and integrity, show empathy, respect differences, thank your people.

2. Successful campaigns

Objectives: To deliver communication campaigns that execute the objectives of the department as set out in the Government Communications Plan.

Expectations: Make effective decisions, see the big picture, build capability so everyone in the profession can develop to their full potential.
3. Professional improvement

Objectives: To commit to continuously improve and unite the profession by developing and promoting diversity, aligning the department / ALB to the standard operating model and embedding the GCS Improvement Programmes.

Expectations: Incentivise activities that assist the development of the profession as a whole, demonstrate passion for developing GCS, be visible outside of the profession and department.