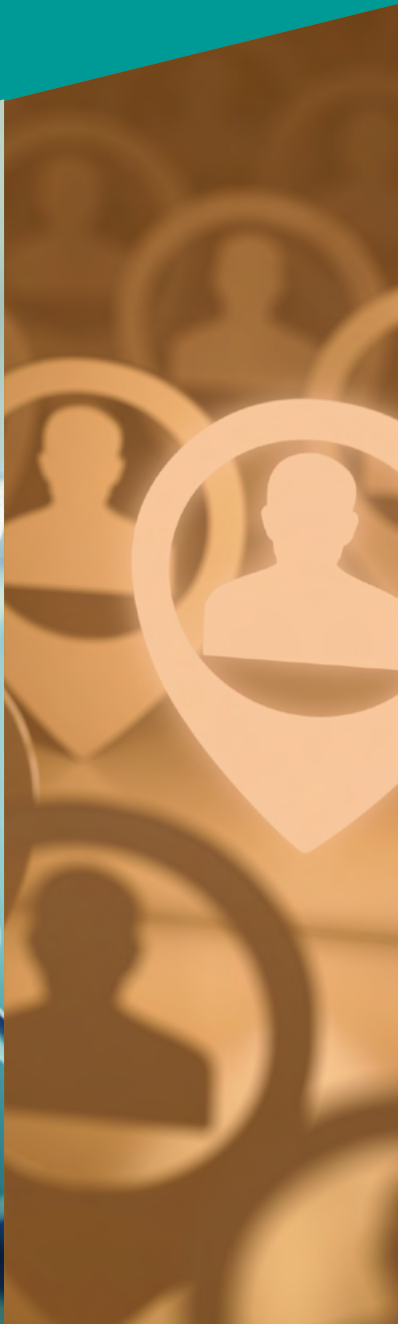




Government
Communication
Service

Business partnering for government communication: a guide



The Government Communication Service (GCS) is the professional body for people working in communication roles across government. Our aim is to deliver world-class communications that support Ministers' priorities, improve people's lives and enable the effective operation of our public service.



© Crown copyright 2018

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3 Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

gcs.civilservice.gov.uk | [@ukgovcomms](https://twitter.com/ukgovcomms)

Contents

Foreword	2
What is business partnering?	4
What is business partnering?	
Benefits	
Responsibilities	
What business partnering isn't	
Organisational structure	7
Where do business partners fit?	
Making the embedded model work	
Recruiting business partners	9
Job description and key competencies	11
Introducing business partners to your organisation	14
The evolution of a business partner model	
Critical success factors	
Case studies	17
A successful move to account management in internal communications	
DfT has created an effective business partner model where talented communication professionals operate from within policy team	
Defence Equipment and Support business partnering in action	
HMRC business partnering in action	
HMRC communications tier 3 and 4	
Further information	

Foreword



**“ Business
partnering brings
communication to the
heart of the business
and improves business
outcomes ”**

Toby Orr, Director of Communication
Department for International Trade



Toby Orr

Director of Communication
Department for International Trade

Communication business partners are critical links between communications teams and the rest of the organisation. They provide expert advice to the teams they work with so that communications is at the heart of planning and decision-making.

This guide:

- explains what business partnering is and its benefits;
- describes the role and typical responsibilities of a communications business partner;
- provides guidance on team structure and recruitment;
- advises how a business partner model can be developed; and
- provides case study examples of business partnering in action.



<https://youtu.be/cWdAEi6v4sA>

What is business partnering?



Why business partnering?

A number of departments and arm's length bodies – including DfT, HMRC and Defence Equipment and Support – have created communication business partners to strengthen links between the communication directorate and key policy or business areas.

Communication business partners work directly with teams to build local, specialist knowledge.

Business partners are expert communicators, ensuring that communication advice is integrated in planning and decision-making from the outset.

Business partners can:

- provide high-quality advice, challenge and support to the teams they work with;
- ensure effective collaboration and co-ordination between the communication team and other teams across the organisation;
- lead the development of integrated communication plans and strategies, drawing on the various communication disciplines;
- enable long-term communication planning and horizon scanning.

Benefits

Business partnering:

- fosters a trusted partnership between communications teams and the rest of the organisation, improving collaboration and co-operation;
- improves alignment of communications to delivery of key business outcomes;
- enhances the ability of communications teams to proactively manage risks and opportunities, and influence decision-making;
- builds specialist knowledge within the communication team, helping it to be more nimble in response to fast-moving issues and crises;
- increases team resilience and impact evaluation.

Responsibilities



Business partners are not

- a brake on innovative or risky policy work;
- a barrier between the communication directorate and other teams in the organisation – not all communication has to go through them;
- a funnel for all media enquiries;
- a replacement for communications teams carrying out their individual functions;
- a replacement for people talking to one another;
- policy experts with detailed technical or commercial knowledge.

Organisational structure



Where do business partners fit?

A flexible model

Business partners are either embedded in the organisation, co-located with the teams they work with, or part of the central communications team. They are assigned to a dedicated part of the business subject to the needs and culture of the organisation or department.

Where business partners are embedded then they should have a strong professional or dotted line into the communications team and vice versa if they are located in the communications team.

Whatever approach is taken, it's crucial business partners invest time building strong relationships with both teams and are supported by their line managers to do this.

To embed or not to embed?

Embedding business partners has benefits. It creates strong and trusted partnerships, helps communication get more involved in planning and decision-making and means business partners can provide 'real time' strategic communication advice for the teams they work with.

Business partners can be embedded regardless of whether they report directly to the communications team or the team they are assigned to. The objective is the same – close proximity of working helps embedded communicators build relationships and to gain specialist knowledge.

Making the embedded model work

Common challenges and how to overcome them

It is important to ensure the communication business partner doesn't get assigned other non-communication activities which may reduce their ability to deliver necessary strategic communication oversight. It is key that, from the outset, there are SMART communication-related objectives in place that are agreed by both the business area and central communication.

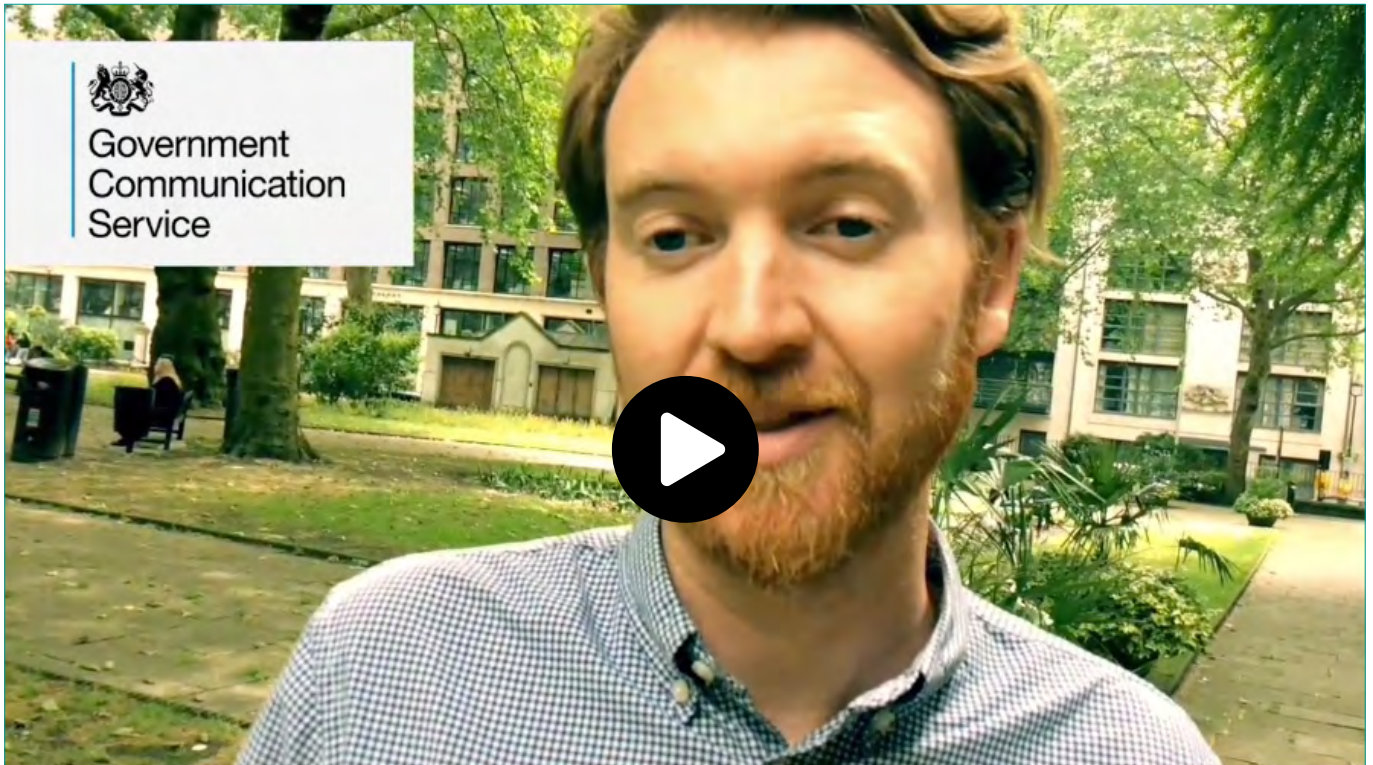
If embedded in a business area, it is likely that the business partner's line manager will not be a communication professional able to

provide appropriate professional challenge and support. Involving a senior manager from the communication team in performance reviews and ensuring the business partner is actively and regularly involved with the communication team's learning and development will keep professional knowledge current.

A communication business partner may feel that they get overlooked for development opportunities or the chance to participate in key projects or events, so all communication professionals should be part of the communication team's performance validation and talent management discussions.

Recruiting business partners





<https://youtu.be/CUBAGsBf6y8>

Key attributes

- broad communication experience and skill set;
- ability to influence at all levels, providing independent advice and challenge;
- a deep understanding of the department or organisation, its strategy and its priorities;
- the ability to translate complex issues into succinct and impactful narratives and messages;
- belief in the power of communication to make a difference to the work of their department or organisation;
- expertise in media relations, stakeholder engagement and communication strategy is often desirable, but skills such as internal communications may also be advantageous depending on the role;
- recruited to GCS competencies.

Job description and key competencies



Example job description

What will you be doing?

As a Strategic Communications Manager and Business Partner to the policy team, you will be at the centre of communication delivery for some of the most high-profile projects in government.

You will be responsible for giving sound and evidence-based communication advice to the directors within the policy group. You will be expected to develop and deliver excellent communication campaigns which align with departmental, organisational and government priorities.





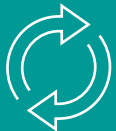

Key knowledge and skills:

- a broad communications skills base, ideally including experience in media, public affairs and/or stakeholder engagement;
- strong influencing skills and ability to advise leaders at all levels;
- able to work effectively independently, as well as within a team;
- able to prioritise and manage competing demands.

You will deliver:

- sound communication advice at a senior level on strategy, programme delivery, presentational risks and opportunities;
- provide professional communications advice and leadership within policy, developing strategies and forward planning of communication activity in a range of issues that enhance partner and public understanding of policy and delivery agenda;
- development and evaluation of communication campaigns and strategies, using insight and thinking creatively to create opportunities to promote policy in a positive light and to meet the organisation's overall objectives;
- effective and proactive working relationships within the department/organisation, across government and with the department's executive agencies and delivery partners, in order to drive efficient and high-quality delivery of communications around projects;
- hold delivery partners to account for their own commitments under promotion, engagement and communications;
- oversee delivery of public announcements for the policy group, with effective co-ordinated working across the group, stakeholders and communication directorate.

Key competencies

<p>Leading and communicating</p> 	<p>clarify strategies and plans, communicate purpose and direction with clarity and enthusiasm</p>
<p>Collaborating and partnering</p> 	<p>actively build and maintain a network of colleagues and contacts to progress objectives and shared interests</p>
<p>Delivering at pace</p> 	<p>clarify business priorities, roles and responsibilities and secure individual and team ownership</p>
<p>Insight (GCS)</p> 	<p>promote and encourage the early integration of strategic communication and policy development</p>
<p>Implementation (GCS)</p> 	<p>develop strong relationships with ministers, policy colleagues and key stakeholders build influential networks to enable communication teams to deliver quality solutions</p>
<p>Impact (GCS)</p> 	<p>evaluate the effectiveness of communication against objectives review lessons learned and compare with industry best practice to identify areas of improvement for future communication strategies</p>

Introducing business partners to your organisation



The evolution of a business partner model

Introducing business partners may require organisational change over a period of time. The table below shows how the model can be developed from infancy to maturity.

Infancy	Learning	Early development	Mature
Embedded communicators are in place but not aligned with the GCS	<p>The principles of business partnering are understood</p> <p>Some proactive measures are being taken to align activities of embedded communicators with GCS</p>	The communication team is actively working with the business to improve alignment of embedded communicators with GCS	One team working – embedded communication staff are part of the central communications team and members of the GCS
Embedded communicators are of mixed ability	Some good practice may be observed e.g. line managers encourage communication-focused learning and development activities	Embedded communicators are having regular meetings with the communication team and the communication team has some responsibility for approvals	<p>Clear reporting lines (dotted or direct) into the communication team</p> <p>Embedded communication teams have a clear structure</p>
There is no relationship between embedded communicators and the central communication team – it provides no oversight for their activities	<p>There is no formal link between the communication team and embedded communicators – it has no control of their activities</p> <p>Improving links is being explored</p>	The communication team has some involvement in recruitment e.g. it provides advice on job descriptions and has some representation on recruitment panels	Business partners are recruited to professional GCS standards and competencies

Critical success factors

Trusting relationships must be fostered to allow the communication business partner to recognise how and when other areas of the business can provide support or information to aid their decision making.

Communication business partners are only as successful as the communication function they work in. There needs to be strong discipline in working to the principles and requirements set out in GCS.

Communication business partners must be given both the responsibility and the authority to influence decisions. They should feel empowered to offer constructive challenge when needed.

The communication business partners should spend significant time interacting in the business area and the communication function to sustain trust and to build and nurture a two-way flow of knowledge.

A culture change must be promoted and supported, emphasising that the communication business partner is the catalyst for recognising and realising opportunities and threats. When they are consulted and involved from the outset, they can offer alternatives to provide the most effective and efficient communication solution.

Case studies

A person's hand is seen pointing at a collection of documents and sticky notes spread out on a table. The documents contain various elements like photos, text, and diagrams. The entire scene is overlaid with a teal color filter. The text 'Case studies' is written in white at the top left.

Case study 1

A successful move to account management for the Government Legal Department's internal communications

Background

The Government Legal Department's internal communication team were previously structured purely around functional specialisms (internal comms, strategic comms, stakeholder comms, digital, publications and design). The department identified a need to become more integrated in the business, engaging with teams from the start of new initiatives and aware of and understanding developments as they happen.

The solution

“Internal communication should adopt a business partnering or account management way of working, clearly focused on strategic drivers and targeting communications based on insight of behaviours, attitudes and needs and on evaluation insight.”

The role:





- first point of contact for legal team for any communication advice;
- regularly attend appropriate meetings with Legal Directors or the SMT;
- gather success stories and human interest stories to communicate;
- bring in the skills and functional specialities available through their comms team colleagues to achieve communication objectives for their legal teams;
- ensure communication activities on behalf of their legal teams are co-ordinated at a strategic level with the communications activity of the wider organisation.

“ we have been able to identify many more good news stories from around the organisation to communicate, and we have developed a better understanding of what our clients are working on and better insight into what motivates them, inspires and scares them. ”



Case study 2

DfT has created an effective business partner model where communication professionals operate from within policy teams

<p>Purpose / objectives</p>	<p>To provide high quality communication advice, challenge and support to policy teams.</p>	<p>To ensure effective collaboration and co-ordination between policy directorates and the communication directorate.</p>	<p>To lead the development of integrated communication plans and strategies, drawing on the various communication disciplines.</p>
<p>Model / approach</p>	<p>All communications business partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • talented communications professionals, recruited to GCS competencies; • aligned to DfT communication campaign priorities; • work to objectives set by the communication directorate, including a cross-cutting campaign objective; • work overseen by Head of Profession for Strategic Communication via a dotted reporting line; • act as intelligent clients for ALBs and delivery partners; • provided with GCS learning and development opportunities; • considered as part of the communication team’s talent management discussions. 		
<p>What we’ve achieved</p>	<p>“The business partner model has built strong working relationships and a deep understanding of our policy area within the communication team. The strong links the with the central communications function, with joint reporting and end-of year reviews, have ensured we have benefitted from the experience, expertise and judgment from GCS.” Cavendish Elithorn, Director, Major Rail Project Development, Department for Transport</p> <p>“Although not common across Whitehall, the establishment of the business partner model - with senior communications professionals embedded within policy teams - has improved relationships and links between communication and policy colleagues, leading to greater understanding from both sides of issues and pressures.” Cabinet Office Capability Review, July 2017</p>		<p>Responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Provide consistently high level of communications support for DG areas  Ensure better links between communications and policy  A more joined up senior management team that is closer to the needs of the Department  Heads of Communication are responsible for advising the DG areas on all aspects of reputation

Case study 3

Defence Equipment and Support business partnering in action

```

    graph TD
      EEM[Employee Engagement Manager] --> DICBPs[Domain ICBPs]
      EEM --> FICBPs[Function ICBPs]
      DICBPs --> Fleet
      DICBPs --> Land
      DICBPs --> Air
      DICBPs --> JE
      DICBPs --> SDA
      FICBPs --> Commercial
      FICBPs --> Resources
      FICBPs --> HR
      FICBPs --> CO[Corporate Operations]
      FICBPs --> GP[General programmes]
    
```

At Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S) the corporate communication team has a team of internal communication business partners (ICBPs).

Their role is to

- be a trusted comms advisor, supporting the business function to improve communication and engagement;
- translate function issues into consistent comms that align to the brand;
- champion the DE&S vision and objectives and support their delivery – including transformation;
- encourage leaders to seek feedback and build an engaged team through collaboration, conversation and celebrating success;
- identified a need to become more integrated in the business, working with teams from the start of new initiatives and aware of and understanding developments as they happen.

Case study 4

HMRC business partnering in action



Samantha Edwards

Deputy Director EU Exit and Tax Policy
HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC)

Background

HMRC is a large and complex organisation with the vital purpose of collecting the money that pays for the UK's public services. Their business partner model was introduced to ensure that communications professionals in the corporate centre could work closely and regularly with specialist areas of the business to deliver the most effective, most informed and impactful communications.



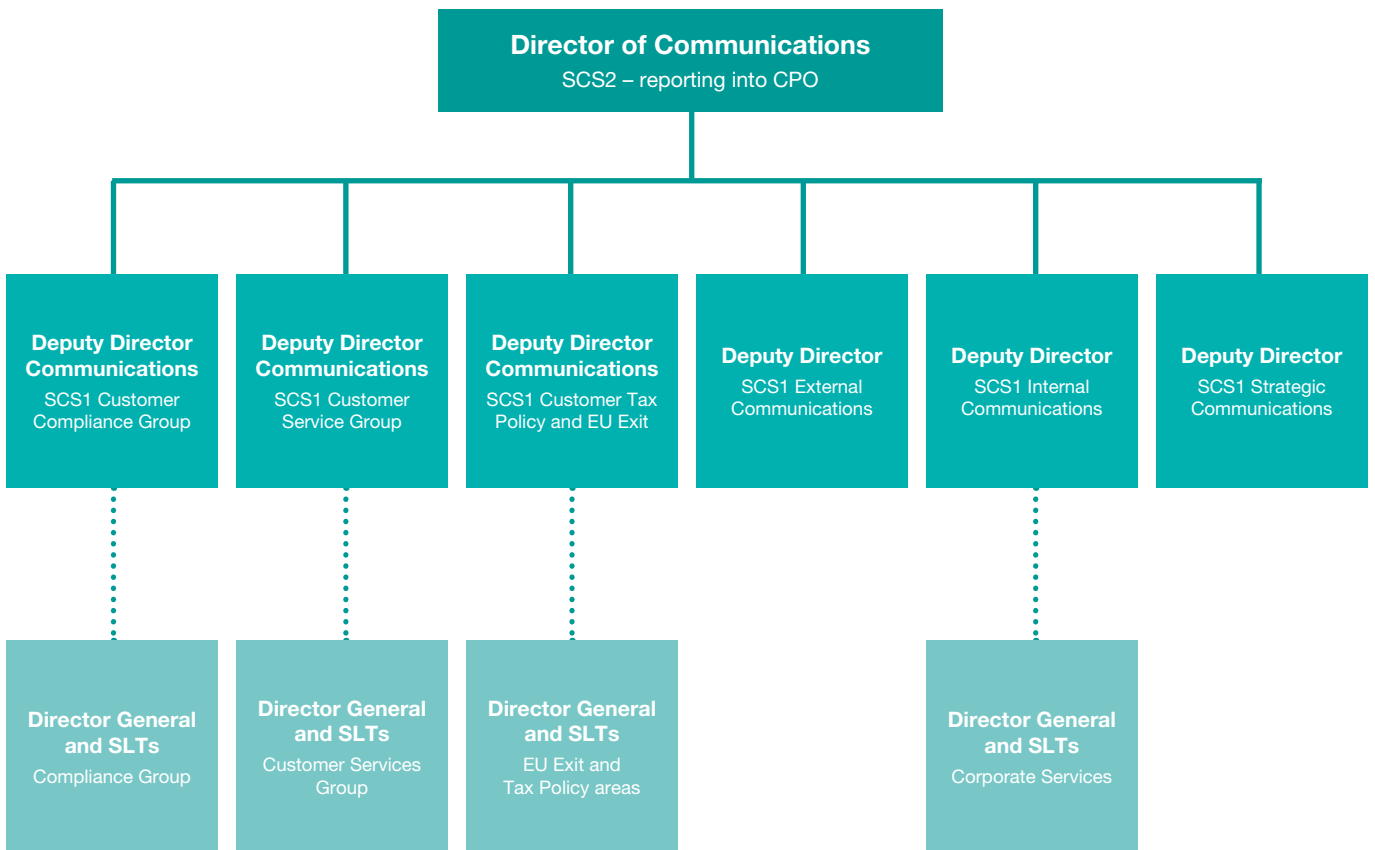
“The business partner ensures that comms strategy is at the heart of all activity, providing a clear line of sight between an individual’s objectives, through to business objectives and government priorities.”

Samantha Edwards, HMRC

HMRC communications tier 3 and 4

The Structure

In HMRC, business partners are managed directly by the communications function. Business partners interface with the business, gaining in-depth knowledge of the business area which enables them to provide advice, support and challenge directly where needed. They rely on the expertise across the rest of HMRC’s communications function such as media, marketing, internal communications and digital activity to bring communication plans to life.



- Reporting line
- Business partnering line

Further information

This guide was compiled by Nicole Perry (Dstl) with support from Kevin McColl (MOD). We would also like to thank Chris Duffy (DfT), Sally Gilbey (Dstl), Sinead Reynolds (MoJ) and Naomi Saunderson (NHS) for their contributions to this guide.

Please contact gcs@cabinetoffice.gov.uk for further information.

Contact us

Email: gcs@cabinetoffice.gov.uk

Follow us: Twitter [@UKgovcomms](#) and [LinkedIn](#)

Visit GCS website: <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk>

Designed by Design102