

GCS
ADVANCE

Practitioner Level

Your chance to advance!
Call for entries for our new learning
and development Practitioner course



Government
Communication
Service

Welcome to GCS Advance 2023 Practitioner Level Pilot

You are one of nearly 7,000 professionals working in the Government Communications Service (GCS). Every day, what you do matters. You explain the policies of the government of the day. You provide clarity in moments of crisis. You help people access support. You change behaviour for the public good.

To do that successfully, you need the right blend of skills and knowledge, with access to the best learning and development there is. To date, there hasn't been a bespoke offer for communications professionals. **Until now.**

GCS Advance is a complete overhaul of our L&D and talent offer, designed to equip you with the skills you need. It's a multi-layer programme, designed to support your development at every stage of your career – from when you first arrive to wherever you want your career to go; across disciplines, organisations and leadership.

Today we open registrations for the pilot of our Practitioner Level programme.

We are looking for those early in their careers from across GCS to join the pilot, beginning this September, which will provide you with a broad range of skills from across the breadth of the communications disciplines.

This prospectus sets out what you can expect from the programme and how it can benefit you. But don't delay – sign up today for a September start.

Why choose GCS Advance?



Skill yourself up for the future

We know how fast tech is changing the way we live and work.. We want to ensure that you have access to the latest timely training – whether it's in artificial intelligence or the deeper use of insights and evaluation - so that you have the skills and knowledge to be at the forefront of changes to the communications landscape.



Tailor-made for you

GCS Advance is unique to government and public sector communicators. Whether you work in a small executive agency, a large Arm's Length Body or in a Ministerial department, this tailor-made programme is designed to give you the skills you need to excel at the role you are doing now and to support your development.



Designed around your day job

The learning is designed around you. Because we know how busy and unpredictable your day jobs can be, this pilot will be delivered online, giving you high-quality brand-new learning at a time and space that works for you.



Recognition and certification

The learning you complete as part of GCS Advance will be assessed and you'll receive certification to recognise your achievements and support your individual development and career journey.



Build and develop your career and skills

GCS Advance will provide the training opportunities you need to build your career in the communications profession. A new GCS Career Pathway will link directly to the learning we'll provide and help you understand how to progress in GCS.

The Practitioner Level Pilot

The pilot will run over six months, with courses released in modular form to allow you to fit them around your busy day jobs. During that time, you will be expected to complete six core courses.

Core Courses

AI and Communications

In the workplace, as in society, we have only begun to realise the potential of AI. The pace of change in 2023 has been rapid and there are many opportunities and challenges for communicators to understand.

In this course, we will hear first from developers at Google Labs, discussing many of the new technologies that underpin the growth in potential of AI and large language models (LLMs). We will move from theory to applications, hearing from experts in GCS about the ways you can use these tools in your role now. Finally, we will discuss the current limitations of these models, so you can start working effectively and with confidence.

The course will include a final assessment, so you can demonstrate your learning on the topic.

Campaigning Excellence

Delivered well, government communications campaigns can save lives, as well as change them for the better. It is communications that informs citizens about access to vital government services that can help them.

This course will teach you how the UK, a world leader in professional communications, plans, executes, and evaluates all our campaigns.

In this course, we'll look at the key features of effective campaigning, describe how each stage of the OASIS framework works as a practical tool to support government communicators to plan, deliver and evaluate communications activity. We will also find out how you can utilise recent innovations in planning, implementing and evaluating in your own work.

Throughout the course, you will be able to demonstrate how to implement the OASIS framework using a fictional scenario.

Data and Insight for Communicators

The use of data and insights in informing how we, as communicators, plan and evaluate our activity has become more critical than ever before. Data and insights are the key to evidence-based decision-making. They help us understand the needs, concerns, and aspirations of our target audiences, ensuring our messages resonate and our campaigns have maximum impact.

In this course, you will learn about how to adopt a data-first mindset by embedding data in every stage of your campaign planning. We'll look at how you can use insights to inform your objectives and how data can help you target the right audience for your campaign. Finally we'll look at how to monitor implementation of your campaigns using analytical tools, using evidence to identify and communicate your recommendations.

Digital Communications

More people than ever now receive some, if not all of their information online. With this approach being the new normal, it's essential that organisations have digital at the heart of their communication strategies. As communicators, we should strive to be at the forefront of digital communications to ensure we are not left behind.

In this course, we'll cover the role of digital communications for the government and public sector and why it is so strategically important. We'll outline why planning digital communications is integral to a broader communications strategy, and how governments use different channels and tools to deliver effective communications strategy.

Throughout the course, you'll see numerous examples of how digital communications have delivered real benefits to citizens all over the world.

Working with the Media

A well-functioning press office is one of the key components of a successful communications team and a crucial conduit for the relationship between government bodies of all kinds and journalists. Both serve to strengthen accountability and provide a link with the public we serve.

In this course, we will find out about many of the fundamentals necessary in media relations; from reactive and proactive media handling, to using planning grids and message development and, finally, how to improve messaging and relations further with insight and evaluation.

We will also put some of your learning into practice with an engaging scenario exercise before you take this practitioner understanding into the real world.

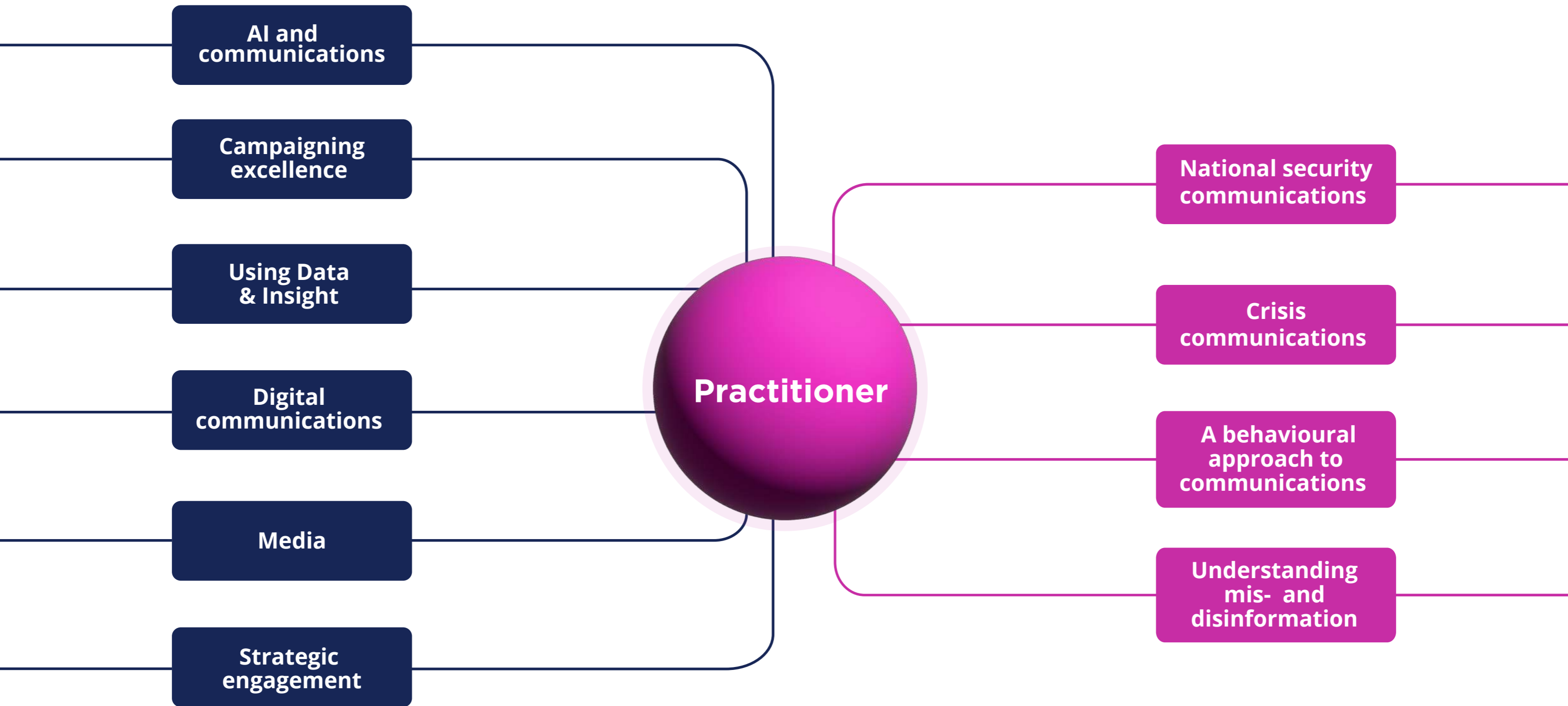
Strategic Engagement

Being able to understand and work with your stakeholders is a core communications skill, whatever your role or grade and in all environments. In this course, we will look at how to identify and map your audience groups, ensuring you can make the key links against your strategic communications objectives to deliver successful events and activities, with maximum impact.

This course will cover both internal and external strategic engagement. In this course, you will learn about the unique challenges of internal communication, managing stakeholders effectively and how to manage your organisation's reputation successfully. We will also look at how building effective relationships with stakeholders of all kinds, both in and outside of government, can be a key ingredient to successful delivery.



Practitioner Level Skills Map



Key: Core Elective

And when you've completed Practitioner, there's more....

The Practitioner level programme is designed for those early in their career to give you a strong grounding in a range of professional communications skills. This pilot will run from September with the full programme rolling out in April 2024, so if you don't get onto the pilot don't worry; you will have the opportunity to enrol next year.

Electives

From April, we will also be adding four 'elective' courses to go alongside the core programme. You will be able to tailor your individual learning plan with two of the following:

- Understanding Mis and Disinformation
- A Behavioural Approach to Communications
- Crisis Communications
- National Security Communications

If you take part in the pilot this year, you'll be able to choose two follow-on electives when they're available in the spring.

Core skills for all communicators

There are some skills that it is important for all communicators to have, across all disciplines and in all roles. We have created a set of short courses available online and on demand that you can complete at any time and refresh when new guidance becomes available.

The topics included are:

- Propriety and Ethics for Communicators
- Digital Accessibility: best practice
- Understanding Parliament

Developing expertise

In 2024, we will launch the Expert Level programme, designed for more experienced professionals who want to become real experts in their chosen specialist area. This programme will be a mixture of learning formats which will allow you to focus on your discipline and become an in-depth expert.

Leadership

Finally, we will roll out the Leader Level programme in late 2024. This will be for senior managers and leaders who want to move to the next level of leadership, focusing on the wider skills needed to be an agile, innovative and motivational leader.

More details will be with you soon and we will keep our website updated on when you can sign up to these:

[GCS Advance webpage](#)



Registration

Registration is simple, follow this link and sign up online before the end of July so you can start the Practitioner pilot programme in September:

[Register here](#)

There is no additional per person cost for this programme and you don't need line manager approval to register, though you should be discussing your L&D with your manager on a regular basis

Practitioner Programme FAQ

How long will the pilot last?

We expect it to last around six months from the start of the first course, to the end of the sixth core course.

And how much time will it take me to complete?

Around 4-5 days in total over the six month pilot period.

Will it cost my organisation to put me through it?

No, there is no additional per person cost for communications professionals in departments, ALBs (including embedded communicators) and devolved administrations.

Do I need my line manager to formally approve this in order to register?

You don't need line manager approval to register but you should discuss and agree your L&D with your line manager.

Will I have to attend any courses in person?

No, this pilot will all be online learning.

What do I get when I complete the programme?

You will get a certificate to demonstrate the learning that you have completed.

Do I have to complete all the core courses to get a certificate?

Yes.

If I take part in the pilot can I do the electives another time?

Yes, you'll be able to access the electives when they're available from April.

How do I access the GCS Core modules?

The core modules, which are available to all GCS members, will be available in the autumn from our GCS Academy webpages.

Do I need to have passed the Practitioner programme to get a promotion?

No, though we recommend it as it will ensure you have undertaken the appropriate skills training to help you prepare for the next level.

Is this linked to my pay?

No.

How many people are going through the pilot?

Around 400.

How will you decide who gets on?

We want to ensure that there is a good spread of people from across all the organisations that make up GCS. If you don't take part in the pilot, we will ensure that everyone has an opportunity to access the programme over the next three years.

What if I don't make it on?

You can sign up to be part of the first cohort of the full programme when it goes live in April 2024.

What is the assessment and can I fail?

Each course has a quiz, which allows you to demonstrate your understanding of the topic. The pass mark is 70%, but quizzes can be retaken. You will need to pass all these assessments to receive your certificate.





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