



Government
Communication
Service

The Government Communication Service Modern Communications Operating Model

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Aim

1. The aim of the GCS is to deliver world-class public sector communications. The service helps improve the lives of people and communities in the UK, assists with the effective operation of our public services and delivers responsive and informative communications 24 hours a day.

Success

2. The GCS will achieve this by building a more skilled and unified profession; one that is always seeking to innovate and adopt global best practice. The Modern Communications Operating Model (MCOM) report looks at the principles for improving communications team capability, structures, skills and resources. The outcome: more effective, more efficient communications.
3. Successful and modern public service communications changes lives for the better, running campaigns rooted in the objectives of the organisation that provide powerful, timely and relevant information to allow people to make effective choices.

Principles underpinning GCS improvement

4. In order to deliver the step change that is required to build a core cadre of officers with new skills to respond to the huge opportunities presented by an increasingly networked society, and also to meet budget reductions, GCS should adopt the following five principles:
 - All government communications, including Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs), must be insight-driven, digital and integrated by default, and fully evaluated;
 - GCS will audit communications requirements, focusing on audiences first, rather than policies;
 - GCS will pool and move resources to where they are required to deliver the Annual Government Communications Plan;
 - GCS will ensure people have the right skills; and
 - GCS will evaluate and share the outcomes.

Professional Practice

5. We prefer to recruit communication officers with demonstrable skills in: data analysis to understand audiences; the creation of great content; the theory and practice of behaviour change; and building alliances to make a case. They may have a primary specialism in one area – media or internal communications – but must have capability in core areas, particularly marketing, digital skills and evaluation.
6. A key part of our work is also improving the quality of policy and delivery of public services through engagement, with key contributors and stakeholders (internal and external) helping understanding of the Government's vision, priorities and policies.

Core Communications team:

7. The MCOM will provide the right skills and continual learning to deliver communications for the future, and will be led by a Director of Communications or Head of Communications focused on leadership. They should be capable of setting the highest professional standards, inspiring and empowering teams to give their organisation the confidence to translate business objectives into communications activity and behavioural outcomes. MCOM should be built around a central core in each department/ALB (see indicative grade structures in annex A):

- **Strategic Communications:** undertakes horizon scans for the whole department and provides the plotline for the core narrative, and gathers insight and evaluates communications work;
- **Media and Campaigns:** produces publishable content rather than simply distributing press releases; can flex according to the latest needs of a department, for example moving from a media bias to a marketing bias as policy creation shifts to operational implementation;
- **Strategic Engagement:** builds alliances with partners and third parties to disseminate messages and share content;
- **Internal Communications:** works in partnership with leaders to engage staff in delivering the Government's and departmental priorities and supporting organisational and cultural change.

All public sector communications functions should include these core capabilities. Other capabilities such as campaigns, sales or operational marketing, community engagement, customer services, briefing and digital services may be part of the communications function depending on the needs of the individual department or organisation.

Recommendations – capability and structures for the modern communications team

8. In order to deliver public service communications that changes lives for the better, we should work in the following way:

a. Communications intelligence:

The GCS should create an Insight Centre, a single repository and intelligence centre for communications insight for all government departments and ALBs. The Centre's insight dashboards will provide instant data on audience, channels and campaigns, and become the corporate memory of GCS failure and success.

b. **Campaigns:** Marketing campaigns need to follow the OASIS model; but they should be managed more during implementation and not just planned once. This means campaigns should be continually improved and updated by reacting in real-time to feedback data, evaluation and campaign outcomes. Campaigns should be embryonic by nature rather than planned so rigidly they cannot evolve.

c. **Marketing expertise:** GCS should establish or nominate a team of expert marketeers, who can be deployed across departments to assist/advise communications portfolio leads with the launch of any large-scale campaign. Once launched with consistent measurement standards in place, each campaign will be "managed more" throughout its lifespan by the existing departmental team. This GCS team of marketeers will include specific expertise in negotiating commercial partnerships throughout government, building on the experience of campaigns such as the Think! Road safety campaign (Coca Cola), Change4Life (Asda, Co-op, Aldi and most recently Disney) and Business is GREAT (Virgin, Yell and Clipper).

- d. Media handling:** Each department requires a media operation which will set the external agenda rather than simply follow it; to this end, media teams should concentrate on creating and seeding stories strategically rather than tactically to showcase policy strategy and operational delivery. While a highly-responsive reactive handling capability (which explains policy, but can also spike inaccuracy before publication) will always be important, media teams should regard themselves as campaigners who ensure long-term delivery of government messages. Horizon scanning (which, for example, lists potential coverage in advance to ministers so communicators can be held to account for a “kept promise”) and evaluation of output (with changing sentiment rather than volume of coverage as the most basic measure of success) will be the foundation of any modern media team.
- e. Creating content:** The media industry’s struggle to cope with a declining business model offers the opportunity for government to produce more ‘direct-to-consumer’ creative content. The opportunity is not so much about government pushing native content, rather about GCS creating fully-fledged media production teams, sensitive to the nuances of each channel and audience. Press releases are not dead – in a modern media environment they are merely the core script and reference point agreed with policy colleagues before the content is created.
- f. Audience Focus:** The GCS must consistently implement the move towards cross-Whitehall campaigns based primarily on **audience** rather than policy. This requires government campaigns that are driven by insight, and engage with one of **six key audiences** identified in the graphic below:

Key audience categories



- g. Skills:** The next generation of communicators will be different. An influx of IO digital natives has already begun to transform the service. The GCS expects this to accelerate over the next two years. This talent pool needs to be identified, managed and developed. GCS will review HR recruitment procedures, for example to permit open advertisement for all communications positions as a default; and to ensure competency-based assessments do not bias against external candidates.
- h. Evaluation:** The MCOM commits to industry best practice standards of evaluation in line with the Barcelona Principles 2.0, launched in 2015 by the Association for the Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC). These principles offer a framework which helps organisations assess their requirements and select the appropriate metrics. GCS will present updated guidance to Departments/ALBs based on the relaunched principles. GCS will also promote continuous improvement via the Evaluation Council.
- i. Structure:** The model for the Modern Communications Team will be centred on a core powerhouse of functions: Insight and Evaluation, Horizon Scanning, Partnerships and Stakeholders, Internal Communications and Media and Digital. This will enable each directorate to flex according to whether they focus predominantly on Media or Campaigns. A suggested grading structure would rebalance communications teams to a more pyramidal shape, with fewer senior level staff at G7/Team Leader and above, and more officers at IO level.
- j. Transparency:** Every pound spent on government communications, whether by central Government departments or by ALBs, will be subject to the same stringent standards of accountability.
- k. Closer Group working:** Where an organisation is part of an ALB cluster, duplication should be removed, and closer, integrated working should be the norm (see Annex B for alignment principles). In particular, smaller organisations do not necessarily need every capability in-house, and should look at sharing service opportunities across a group, or across the GCS. Note: the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs group has begun to integrate ALBs into one joined-up communications team within the core department.

9. Recommendation – Futures Council:

GCS should create a Communications Futures Council with public and private sector analysts to ensure that public service communications always stays abreast of emerging trends, i.e. digital, social and technological. This will provide a structured way of learning about innovations sweeping across all the media industries and how they might influence our work.

10. Embedded non-GCS aligned communicators

Undertaking ad hoc communication activity is not the same as being a professional communicator, a role which involves planned and sustained effort to influence opinion and behaviour, using audience-driven strategies and evaluation of effectiveness. Some programme teams continue to employ non GCS staff to carry out communications tasks, but not in a way that is joined up with the rest of the communications team. This usually results in less effective communications and carries risks of duplication and poor practice, while adding to the costs to the tax payer of Government Communications. In Annex C is a set of principles for all communications staff, in particular embedded staff and teams, to adhere to.

11. Internal Communications:

Internal Communications (IC) teams will work with HR and Operational colleagues to engage staff in delivering the Government's and departmental priorities and in supporting organisational and cultural change. MCOM IC teams should:

- a. Be responsible for campaigns that encourage engagement across the organisation; connect people and promote collaboration;

- b. Align IC campaigns/activity to organisational goals and external campaigns;
- c. Raise understanding of how the organisation is transforming;
- d. Support behaviour change so staff can deliver services effectively; and
- e. Manage and explore a range of communications channels so colleagues have the opportunity to have their views heard and responded to, and to ensure coherent corporate branding and messaging.

To achieve this IC teams should:

- maintain a long-term strategy which is regularly monitored;
- support leaders to deliver a consistent and regular drumbeat of messages, checking they are received, understood and acted upon;
- adopt the Engage for Success model of people engagement; the [IC Excellence Operating Model](#), the OASIS model of campaign development and consult behaviour change expertise during communication planning; and
- extend their range of influence beyond the traditional HR relationship.

Arm's Length Bodies and Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs)

12. Whilst some Whitehall departments have built leaner and more efficient communication teams, some departments and ALBs have progressed more slowly.
13. ALB teams benefit from a closer engagement with their sponsored department and others in the network (and vice versa), operationally and strategically. These benefits include sharing services and resources, and combining messaging and being more focused on audience. (See point 8k above, closer group working.)
14. Closer working will also benefit the end audience, thanks to pooled insight and shared co-ordinated messaging. This should be achieved by getting specific plans agreed and implemented to embed new structures and practices across ALBs, and adopting the seven principles of department and ALB alignment (see Annex B).
15. A number of ALBs locate their media relations team alongside (or fully integrated with) the sponsor department for all but specialist media. This can result in faster turn-around, greater consistency of response and better out of hours operations. Examples include: MoD; MoJ; BIS (for one major ALB) and Defra. This model should be considered more widely where these benefits can be obtained.
16. The 85 ALBs included in the GCS headcount study employ almost 45% of the 3,650 GCS communicators. They also account for a substantial government spend (DH £108bn; BIS £8.5bn; MoJ £4bn; DECC £2bn; and DCMS £1.7bn); some ALBs account for the vast majority of a department's marketing spend, for example 80% at BIS.
17. Directors of Communications should have tight control of Professional Assurance sign off, requiring a full evaluation of campaigns or engagement with the GCS; review senior (Grade 6/Deputy Head of Division and Grade 7/Team Leader ALB appointments, and – together with the GCS – make a clearer training offer to ALB communication staff, including secondments and quick “immersions” in departmental/GCS culture.

Conclusion

18. The MCOM sets out the skills and capabilities required to deal with the combined demands of the general public, ministers and the changing Communications environment, as set out in The Future of Public Service Communications report (GSC July 2015). While the report recognises the different roles and audience needs facing respective communications teams, there is currently too much variation. Teams need to be smaller, more skilled and more agile.

Selvin Brown

GCS Function Leadership programme director

Background

1. The Modern Communications Operating Model (MCOM) is one of nine projects that support the improvement of the Government Communications Service (GCS) Functional Leadership, established by Alex Aiken, Executive Director, in November 2014. The 2014/15 GCS Improvement Programme built on the 2013/14 GCS Change Programme. Both programmes are part of the Prime Minister's Civil Service Reforms.
2. Three other projects from the GCS Improvement Programme are relevant: the People and Capability Project led by Pam Teare (DoC, MoJ); the Cost Effectiveness Project led by Sam Lister (DoC, DH); and GCS Leadership Project led by Simon Wren (DoC, HO). This paper does not specifically address the issues relevant to those projects, such as the business case for the GCS single employer, nor the measures the GCS is proposing in order to make further efficiencies in the 2015-2020 Parliament, nor the renewed focus on improving the GCS leadership in line with the general focus on leadership in the Civil Service.

Why change?

3. John Manzoni, the Chief Executive of the Civil Service, issued a challenge to all government leaders which corresponds directly to the ambitions of the GCS and the MCOM project: government should reform itself; it is not joined up and the future demands greater departmental collaboration; government has not been a good client of its suppliers; government should follow business and base decisions on judgement with sharper accountability; we should increase evolution rather than revolution; we need to increase the status of delivery; we need big people doing big things; and leaders should be bold and visible.
4. As we have seen, the aim of the GCS is to deliver world-class communications that support government priorities. The service helps improve the lives of people and communities in the UK, supports the effective operation of our public services and delivers responsive and informative communications 24 hours a day. It will achieve this by continuing to build a more skilled and unified profession; one that is always seeking to innovate and adopt global best practice.
5. Government communication have changed considerably over the last two years. The Government Communications Plan 2014/15 presented for the first time cross-government priorities, with all departments working together on agreed themes. The service has also reduced costs, saving over £1bn during the life of the 2010-2015 administration.

6. GCS should continue to evolve at pace, exploring opportunities to develop its people professionally, testing and creating structures, devising better ways of working together and integrating marketing campaigns. This would help deliver GCS's earliest ambition: "creating a structure so that all of its parts create more value together than they would individually".
7. Despite this good progress, GCS faces a challenge to further increase the skills and professionalism of GCS communicators, and to ensure the right structure is in place to embed best practice and drive down costs.
8. The MCOM will build on this work to clarify audiences, to integrate communications activity and to deliver better return on investment, through building highly skilled and highly motivated teams. This is in response to the dramatic and continuing changes to the communications landscape, and disruptive technology.
9. The future of government communications depends upon our ability to connect with our audiences in a timely, appropriate and relevant way, giving them information, and helping change behaviours, in a way that fits in with their lives. This means communicators must not only listen more to their audiences and master new techniques, including digital technologies, but they must also remain at the forefront of the latest thinking, constantly revising and updating skillsets to keep ahead of the extraordinary pace of change. This evolving, data-rich world offers the opportunity for us to inform our work with highly focused insight. It also enables communications teams to integrate more closely, connecting directly and quickly with influencers and audiences in a well-governed and planned way.

Consultation

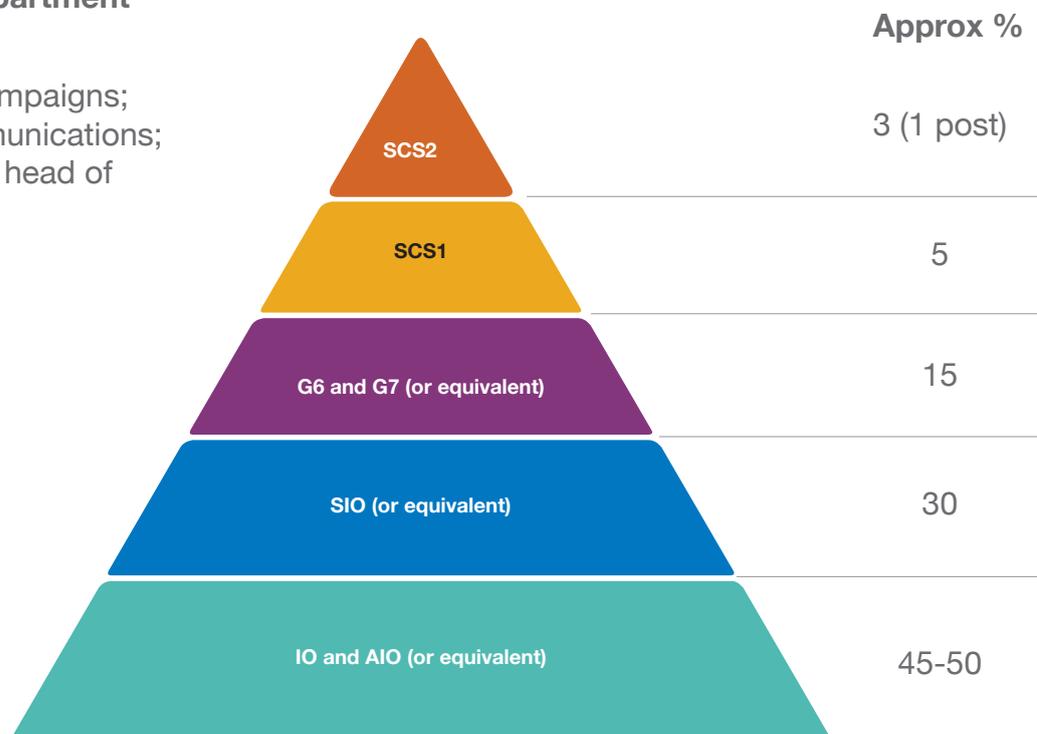
10. We held two departmental sessions attended by most Whitehall departments, consulted with ALBs and held external meetings with Facebook, Google, Ogilvy & Mather, CHI & Partners, News UK, Good Relations, and Westminster Council.

For more details visit
<https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/>

Annex A: indicative organisational structures

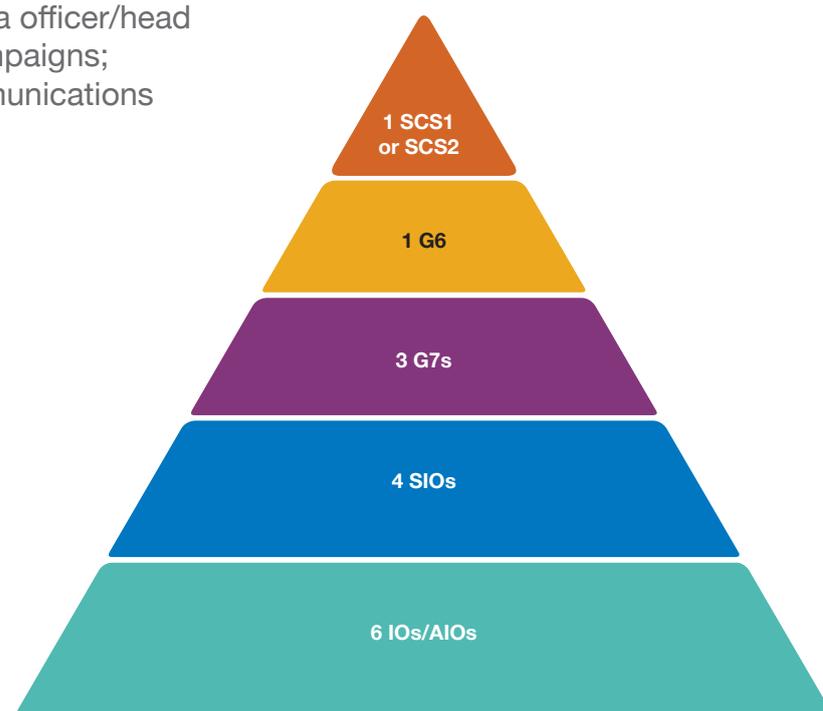
Possible grade structure for Modern Communications Team large operational department

Key roles: head of campaigns;
head of internal communications;
head of media/digital; head of
strategy



Possible grade structure for medium/small communications team

Key roles: chief media officer/head
of digital; head of campaigns;
head of internal communications



Annex B: aligning ALBs – seven principles for departmental groups

A PROPOSED MODEL FOR THE ALIGNMENT OF ALBs

- 1) This paper sets out an approach for aligning the communications function of ALBs and Whitehall departments. This is one of 11 government communication reform projects undertaken under the Civil Service Functional Leadership Programme that will establish the new Government Communication Service (GCS).
 - creating a flexible structure that is more capable of responding to changing or competing communications pressures.
 - 2) Government communication is changing at great pace, driven by the need for more effective, efficient, educated government communicators. The GCS must deliver a profession better equipped to tackle the challenges of a rapid changing communication environment and address the specific issues identified in the capability reviews.
 - Education by:
 - facilitating the consistent implementation of best practice and GCS standards;
 - building capability, encouraging the pooling of knowledge, resources, expertise and greater networking across the organisation; and
 - improving career opportunities by providing development and progression across the department and its ALBs.
 - 3) The objective of the alignment project at Phase 1 is to create a robust, yet flexible operating model for the professional communication function across a number of aligned organisations (most typically a central Government department and its arms-length bodies (ALBs) such as executive agencies).
 - 4) The operating model aims to achieve:
 - Efficiency by:
 - identifying opportunities to reduce operating costs; and
 - reducing waste and avoiding duplication of effort across the organisation.
 - Effectiveness by:
 - improving the quality and consistency of communications for the organisation, including ministers, chief executives, external audiences and stakeholders;
 - delivering better communications outcomes in support of policy or service delivery objectives; and
 - 5) Directors of Communication (DoCs) across Whitehall are working towards collaborative communications models within their organisations and wider group. While they all share broadly the same objectives, no two models are the same. There is no common timetable for completion and each organisation is at a different stage of alignment.
 - 6) A number of directors of communication have been consulted in the course of preparing this model. All were at differing stages of the alignment process and drew upon their experiences to design a common model.
- ### THE PROPOSED MODEL FOR ALIGNMENT (PHASE 1)
- 7) The alignment model proposed is based upon a set of core principles. If fully adopted, the principles would create increased alignment and a framework to explore reduced duplication and increase consistency, with the corresponding benefits to operating efficiency.

CORE PRINCIPLES

8) The core principles for the model use the authority of the GCS to set some clear and consistent goals in three key areas: strong financial controls; better co-ordination of communications to achieve value for money; and building the professional capability of communications staff in ALBs. The principles are:

	Core Principle	Success Criteria
1	<p>Government department directors of communication agree the scope of the Group with the Permanent Secretary and agency heads of communication i.e. agreeing which ALBs/agencies fall within the Group or out of scope. Some independent bodies such as regulatory bodies and government companies will be out of scope; however, an MoU may be acceptable so that out-of-scope agencies can benefit from professional development opportunities and professional communication standards. A rule of thumb is how the ALB receives its annual financial settlement. If this is via the central department, it is likely to be within scope of the Group.</p>	<p>Each Group has agreed a statement of scope or there is a written memorandum of understanding in place.</p>
2	<p>DoCs are head of profession / Group head of communications. The model proposes that ALB/agency heads of communication have 'dotted line' responsibility to the departmental DoC. This might involve setting one or more performance objectives in agreement with relevant CEOs and a role in recruitment of staff at senior levels such as Grade 6 (salary) level and above in Agencies/ALBs. This reflects the dotted line responsibility that DoCs have to the Executive Director of Government Communications, and the subsequent responsibility DoCs have for ensuring communications adhere to the professional standard expected in the GCS.</p>	<p>Objective setting and ongoing contribution to performance review to be visibly evident.</p> <p>Role in recruitment to be visibly evident.</p>
3	<p>DoCs and agency heads of communication establish a Group communications board and a governance structure that sets clear objectives, terms of reference, and responsibilities as necessary, and underpins the new way of working.</p>	<p>Board up and running, with visible governance framework and evidence of meetings and outputs.</p>
4	<p>Agreeing and implementing a standard operating model, where detailed models are not currently in place this should be based on the agreed GCS campaign framework.</p>	<p>Visible standard operating model and evidence of compliance.</p>

5	<p>Create functional leads where appropriate. The functional leads (in most, but not all cases) would sit in the central department, but report into the Group communications board, chaired by the DoC. Each functional lead would:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be the recognised subject matter expert in that function for the Group; • be the link between central government (Cabinet Office and GDS) and the Group to drive reform, share messages and represent the function; • promote the professional development of those working in that function in the Group; • recommend the best deployment of resource across the Group for that function to meet Group business priorities; • promote best practice and maintain standards and consistency across the Group; and • escalate quality or resource issues relating to that function through the Group communications board. 	<p>Functional leads are in place, with evidence of achievement against the areas listed (the bullet points).</p>
6	<p>Ensure central department DoCs are accountable for all advertising, marketing and communications expenditure subject to Professional Assurance (Cabinet Office) spending controls. DoCs will be expected to scrutinise and approve ALBs' bids above a threshold of £100,000 prior to submission to the Cabinet Office for approval.</p>	<p>Audit trail to demonstrate compliance with ERG spending controls.</p>
7	<p>Develop a Group communications plan (required for the annual government communications plan), and a common planning approach and/or communications grid, in order to help identify Group communication and resourcing priorities, areas to share expertise and mutual support etc.</p>	<p>A shared communications approach is adopted and/or a shared communications plan is in place.</p>

Source: GCS Improvement programme, phase two, 2014.

Annex C: operating principles for GCS staff, including embedded communicators

Context

- All Civil Servants need to be communicators to some extent. However, undertaking ad hoc communication activity is not the same as being a professional communicator, a role which involves planned and sustained effort to influence opinion and behaviour, using audience-driven strategies and evaluation of effectiveness.
- Government communications is recognised as a profession, and this paper argues that all who undertake systematic communications to a professional standard should be Government Communication Service (GCS) members.

Definition of professional communications

- Government communications support the delivery of Ministers' priorities, improve people's lives and enable the effective operation of our public services.
- We deliver world-class communications that is focused on the citizen, ensuring that the right messages reach the right audience at the moment that matters.
- All our work is aligned with the Annual Government Communications Plan (AGCP), which flows into departmental communications objectives.

1. Principle

- a) The Civil Service aspires to the highest professional standards in each functional area across all agencies and departments.
- b) The GCS is the professional body for government communicators, communications practice and standards.

- c) Communications staff should be part of the central communications team, whether directly managed or not (HMRC model is slightly different but all of its communications staff are accountable to the director of communications).
- d) Communications professionals are defined as all staff with communication delivery outcomes included in their objectives, which underpin the delivery of the AGCP and departmental communications objectives. They are members of the GCS whether part of the central communications team or not.
- e) All other staff engaged in communication activity must nevertheless follow and be subject to the GCS code of practice in their communication activities and work with the corporate communication team.
- f) Where embedded communication support is resourced through an agency contract, they should adhere to the operating principles set out; however they are not part of the GCS.

2. Recruitment

- a) Any new communications roles at any grade must be approved by the Group Communications Director. Where this is in an ALB or NDPB, who has a degree of independence, the Head of Profession in that ALB or NDPB is responsible for headcount and recruitment, and for feeding this back to their departmental Director of Communications.
- b) The relevant Head of Profession must be informed or directly involved in the recruitment of communications staff (Grade 7 and above).
- c) Recruitment of all communications staff must be to the GCS professional competency framework using the four I's as the guiding principles.

3. Reporting lines and objectives

- a) Best practice requires that all communications staff are part of a corporate team and assigned roles delivering the agreed departmental business plan, to focus resources on the priorities of the department and execute coherent public service communications.
- b) Any embedded communications professionals must have a minimum dotted reporting line into the relevant communications Head of Profession.
- c) All communications professionals should have a Group communications objective. This includes embedded GCS communications staff.

4. Reviews, talent management and learning and development

- a) All communications professionals should attend communications team meetings regularly and take part in regular communications learning and development opportunities.
- b) All communications professionals must be part of the communications team's performance validation process at year end.
- c) All communications professionals must be considered as part of the communications team's talent management discussions.

- d) Embedded communicators should work on a minimum of two communications projects a year, and at least one these should be working alongside the central communications team.

5. Practice: principles and standards

- a) All communications programmes must be developed using the OASIS planning model.
- b) All programmes must be evaluated in line with departmental communications performance centre requirements.

All government communicators must complete at least four pieces of continuing professional development (CPD) each year. In order to be classed as a communications professional, all CPD needs to be communications-related.

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