



Government  
Communication  
Service

# Our Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Action Plan

A diverse GCS communicating  
brilliantly with all communities





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## FOREWORD

People work in GCS because what we do matters. We provide clarity at times of crisis. We help people access support. We change behaviour for the public good. The ability of GCS to deliver world-class communication makes a real difference to people's lives.

Last year we published a strategy, [Performance with Purpose](#), that set out how to continue to improve the effectiveness of government communications. It focused on three themes: great people, innovation and collaboration. Or to put it another way: having the best people, the best ideas, and the best partnerships, to deliver the highest quality of communications on behalf of the government to citizens across the UK.

To do this effectively we need to improve our diversity and inclusion. You can't have the best ideas without diversity of thought. You can't have the best people if you're not drawing and developing talent from every community. You can't have the best partnerships if you're limiting the reach of your network.

Our goal is to be able to communicate effectively with everyone. We have focused on practical actions and challenged ourselves on whether they will make a difference.

This is not just the right thing to do. It is critical to our operational performance and our ability to continue to the public - every community, in every part of the country - effectively.

## Why is EDI important for GCS?

**Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) isn't a 'nice to have'. It's the foundation of thriving individuals, innovative teams and impactful communications. The [Civil Service Diversity and Inclusion Strategy](#) sets out actions to build a Civil Service that understands and draws from the communities it serves, is visible to everyone, is flexible, and welcomes talent from wherever it comes.**

As government communication professionals we are instrumental to making this a reality, delivering exceptional communications to explain the objectives and policies of the government and provide clarity and reassurance to the public. But, very simply, we will only communicate effectively with people from across the UK when we draw on, and develop, talent from every community and from a wide range of backgrounds.

We will be able to create truly innovative campaigns and communications when our teams have broad diversity of thought, perspectives and experiences, with an inclusive culture in which everyone feels valued and encouraged to share their ideas.

This is why we have developed this action plan. It applies the Civil Service Diversity and Inclusion Strategy to our communications community and outlines clear actions for how we will deliver its ambitions and objectives across our profession.

**'Equality, diversity and inclusion is the foundation of thriving individuals, innovative teams and impactful communications.'**



## What does our data tell us?

**Continuous improvement of our operational effectiveness is driven by an evidence based approach, drawing on internal and external data and insight. This includes the annual GCS Audit, People Survey results, and external insight to tailor delivery and shape our action plan to deliver actions specific to what our GCS members need.**

The GCS community comprises more than 7,000 members in seven disciplines, working across 25 ministerial and 21 non-ministerial departments, and more than 300 agencies and other public bodies. In 2017 the GCS launched its previous Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, aiming to be a diverse and confident Government Communication Service, which is representative of a modern UK where talent thrives.

We're continuing our work, together, from a good position. Our GCS profession-led talent programmes have increased outreach internally and externally while focusing on strengthening the diversity of our talent pipeline. Across the GCS, female representation, representation of those with a disability or long-term health condition, and those from a working class background is equal or above that of the UK working age population.<sup>1</sup>

However, representation amongst those from an ethnic minority background is below the UK working age population, and our analysis shows that representation of those from an ethnic minority background, women, those who have a disability or long-term illness and those who prefer not to declare their socio-economic status decreases at more senior grades.

## What does our data tell us (continued)?

Additionally, individuals from underrepresented groups report in the annual Civil Service People Survey that they feel less valued and safe to challenge, and within central government departments 81% of communication roles are based in London. This limits our ability to reach all audiences throughout the UK and prevents us from harnessing the talent of our professional communications community.

Looking more broadly, understanding our audiences is critical to ensuring communications have the best chance of success, effectively reaching and engaging different communities. ONS data from the 2021 census shows an evolving population that is increasingly diverse. Broad changes since 2011 include: an ageing population; changes in the ethnic profile of the population (as a higher proportion of the population identifies as Asian, black and 'other' ethnic groups); changes in the religious profile of the population (as fewer people identify as christian); an increase in the number of citizens born overseas; and a decline in the proportion of people married or in a civil partnership. As a GCS community we must be representative of the wider population, constantly building on our understanding of our audiences through research, insight and by embracing the views of our colleagues.

The government's [Inclusive Britain](#) plan also highlighted that, despite the strides forward made in racial equality, too many people from an ethnic minority background feel that the 'system' is not on their side. The report committed to delivering 74 actions across government to establish a more inclusive, united and integrated society, recognising that people's experiences are influenced by multiple factors. [One year on from the report's publication](#), 32 of the actions have been completed, including an update on the government style guide on GOV.UK to include a [section on writing about ethnicity](#). As government communicators it is our responsibility to communicate the objectives and policies of the government in an authentic and meaningful way. We can do this by using inclusive language and insight into which channels our audiences use, building public trust in and engagement with government through the communications we produce.

## CASE STUDY

## Using audience insight to create powerful communications

**The Home Office's 'ENOUGH.' campaign to tackle violence against women and girls has a clear message: we all have a role to play in stopping violence against women and girls.**

The campaign was launched in March 2022, aiming to shift harmful societal attitudes by challenging perpetrators and highlighting the role we can all play in tackling abuse. In planning the campaign strategy, the Home Office team carried out extensive engagement with over 40 stakeholders and looked at robust audience insight and behavioural science, ultimately drawing on the power of social stigma and the opinions of peers to influence behaviour.

The team's insight highlighted that there was a lack of awareness of the different ways people can intervene if they see violence against women and girls. Consequently, they focused the campaign on highlighting multiple relatable settings where abuse commonly occurs and how to safely intervene.

To increase audience reach, the team's media strategy focused on placing adverts in environments where violent behaviours against women and girls are most normalised: branded beer mats in pubs, text adverts on public transport, and social media takeovers aligned to the Football World Cup. They also worked with Hollyoaks to include campaign branding in a special episode called, 'The Long Walk Home', watched by 1 million viewers. This partnership helped drive a **90%** increase in website traffic, with social media content reaching **5.4m** people, with **2.2M interactions**.

Evaluation shows that the campaign is successfully starting to shift attitudes towards violence against women and girls and prompting people to change their behaviour.



## What will we do as a result?

**Our data shows us that we have a diverse GCS community as a whole, but representation of those from an ethnic minority background, women, those with a disability or long-term illness and those who prefer not to declare their socioeconomic background is concentrated at lower grades.**

There is a particular dip in ethnic minority representation at Grade 6 and Grade 7 (senior management level), and in female representation at SCS (Senior Civil Servants). This highlights potential barriers to progression and will impact our understanding of our audiences and diversity of thought in decision making at the top level of our organisations.

To tackle this we will:

- Ensure that our recruitment standards are well-defined, outlining a clear career pathway for all, and establishing mentoring and sponsorship opportunities for those from underrepresented groups.
- Focus our talent review on improving progression and diversity at senior grades, inviting speakers to share their experiences and leadership journey.<sup>2</sup>
- Strengthen our outreach and partnerships with external organisations to attract talent at entry level and senior leadership roles to build a diverse pipeline throughout the GCS.

Our data from the annual Civil Service People Survey shows that those from underrepresented groups report that they feel less safe to challenge and voice their opinions, and are more likely to say they have faced bullying, harassment and discrimination. This can have a profound effect on an individual's wellbeing and experience, and impacts the quality of our communications, as we do not welcome new ideas and broad perspectives that will enable us to communicate effectively with all communities.

To tackle this we will:

- Hold leaders and managers accountable for creating an inclusive culture in which everyone is welcome, and bullying, harassment and discrimination is not tolerated.
- Tackle groupthink by showcasing examples of where diversity of thought and experience has led to better audience understanding and improved communications, learning from one another about how we engage every community.
- Strengthen our networks within GCS and with organisations which share our values, building strong partnerships and enabling collaboration across the GCS community.

**‘We will be able to create innovative communications when our teams have broad diversity of thought, perspectives and experiences, with an inclusive culture in which everyone can share their ideas.’**



Finally, our research shows that there is huge diversity and difference around the country by region and local area, and the way audiences engage with information moves at pace. We will continue to develop our approach to planning campaigns by using primary research to understand the motivations, barriers and behaviours of our key audiences and how to communicate with them in a meaningful way. Two such examples are the DHSC-led COVID campaign to build trust with the vaccine-hesitant members of communities and the Home Office's ENOUGH campaign that is shifting harmful societal attitudes by challenging the perpetrators of domestic abuse.

To support GCS to continuously improve in ensuring that communications are audience led and accessible we will:

- Establish a clear and consistent approach to evaluating EDI within campaigns and communications announcements.
- Improve understanding of our audiences through insight and the experiences of our GCS members, using our channels to share and learn from what works well.
- Promote and integrate the latest research and guidance on accessible communications and inclusive language into our communications to better connect with our audiences.

## CASE STUDY

### **Accessible communications: British Sign Language**

**To reach all audiences our communications must be inclusive and accessible. That is why we are developing a programme to transform our campaigns and make them more accessible to the British Sign Language Deaf community.**

This will include each relevant government department reporting on what they are doing to promote or facilitate the use of British Sign Language in communications with the public including: any public announcement about policy or changes to the law, which involve plans, strategies, consultation documents, press conferences, social media and website.

The first report is to be published in July 2023. The report will complement the work that departments already do to ensure accessible communications and stakeholder engagement for all audiences.<sup>3</sup>

## Action Plan Objectives and Themes

Good communication starts with having clear objectives. Our ultimate goal is to be able to communicate effectively with any audience on any issue that is important to the future of our country.

Our primary objective is to create: **A GCS that communicates effectively with everyone.**

To achieve that we have three secondary objectives:

- A GCS that draws talent from a range of backgrounds, experiences and locations.
- A GCS where everyone feels they belong and can flourish.
- A GCS that understands every community it serves.

### Action Plan Themes

By analysing our data, running workshops with members from across the GCS profession and consulting trusted external experts for their challenge we have developed our Action Plan under five themes:

1. Recruitment and Retention
2. Talent and Development
3. Culture and Behaviour
4. Collaboration
5. Inclusive Communications

**‘A GCS that communicates effectively with everyone.’**

## CASE STUDY

## Award winning GCS Apprenticeship

**Since its launch in 2016, the GCS Apprenticeship scheme has supported over 230 apprentices to learn as they earn, spending 18 months working in one or more communications teams across the GCS while studying for a Level 4 qualification.**

The GCS Apprenticeship is designed to build the experience and skills that modern communicators need to kick start their career and, with a retention rate of almost 90%, the majority of apprenticeships secure a permanent position in GCS at the end of the scheme. Our apprenticeships have the opportunity to work on issues which have a direct impact on the communities we serve, gaining skills in multiple communication disciplines whilst doing so.

In 2019, the scheme looked at how to improve representation of those from ethnic minority and working class backgrounds. The scheme ran open evenings and application workshops, open to everyone and run virtually to enable people throughout the country to join. The proportion of apprentices from an ethnic minority has since risen from 13% in 2019, to 38% in 2021, over 41% of placements are based outside of London, and the proportion of apprentices from a working class background has risen to 20%.

The GCS Apprenticeship has twice been named Apprentice Employer of Year by the Public Relations and Communications Association, and work has already begun to look at how to support those from underrepresented groups to access the scheme.





## How will GCS feel different as a result?

### **Great People**

People will feel like they can thrive and flourish as members of the GCS community, as we attract and develop people from every background and location. Our people will know that their breadth of experience and talent is valued, an asset for all of our teams.

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### **Innovation**

We will welcome challenges and alternative perspectives at every level, recognising that new ideas about the way we do things will improve how we communicate.

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### **Collaboration**

People will feel empowered as we work together and build strong partnerships with those who share our goals and values, sharing good practice and using audience insight to reach all communities.

# GCS EDI Action Plan

## Immediate Actions: April - September 2023

### Recruitment and Retention

1. Establish a GCS Induction programme for new starters and returners across the GCS community, setting out a clear career pathway from the start and bringing people together to provide networking opportunities from day one.
2. Launch the GCS Location Strategy to better attract and develop talent from across the UK, building communities of communicators to increase our diversity of thought.

### Talent and Development

3. Relaunch our GCS mutual mentorship programme, 'Connecting Diverse Voices', for those from underrepresented groups, encouraging GCS senior leaders to champion and participate in the scheme.

### Culture and Behaviour

4. Hold senior leaders to account by meeting bi-annually to discuss progress against People Survey results, learning from what others have done to improve culture and inclusion and action planning based on employee feedback.
5. Promote Civil Service-wide training for managers on how to create an inclusive culture and tackle bullying, harassment and discrimination where it occurs, as part of the GCS core learning offer.

### Collaboration

6. Develop a GCS Outreach Strategy with volunteers from across the GCS, working with schools, universities and external organisations to attract talent from outside of London and underrepresented groups, with a focus on entry level and Grade 6 and Grade 7 senior management roles.

### Inclusive Communications

7. Use GCS channels to open the conversation on different aspects of EDI, sharing case studies, good practice and resources to discuss where creativity has led to improved outcomes, and engaging internal and external speakers to speak about their experiences to broaden our understanding of different audiences' needs.
8. Work with the GCS Functional Standards, Capability and Efficiency team to ensure that our learning offer on the essentials of accessible communication is up-to-date with the latest in best practice, learning from those leading the way across the Civil Service and in external organisations.
9. Promote the integration of research commissioned by the Race Disparity Unit on the language people identify with into our internal and external communications, recognising that this will evolve and that our use of language will change with time.<sup>4</sup>

# GCS EDI Action Plan

## Medium Term Actions: October 2023 - March 2024

### Recruitment and Retention

10. Be a leader for inclusive recruitment across the GCS, producing an accessible recruitment standards toolkit for vacancy holders.
11. Create a guide to Civil Service recruitment for applicants who do not have experience applying for Civil Service roles.

### Talent and Development

12. Review whether the GCS Apprenticeship attracts and retains individuals from underrepresented groups, tailoring how we promote the scheme to reach those who we currently do not.
13. Reshape GCS talent programmes to include targeted interventions and sponsorship for those from underrepresented groups, building a strong, diverse pipeline of GCS leaders.

### Culture and Behaviour

14. Establish community pages on GCS Connect, so that members from across GCS can connect, share ideas on how to communicate with under-represented groups, and champion diversity and innovation of thought in how we communicate.

### Collaboration

15. Work with Heads of Discipline across the GCS community to explore how they use audience insight and innovation to improve campaign planning and consequent outcomes, providing a time - to which members from across GCS teams can contribute - to discuss learnings and how they can be applied to future communication.

### Inclusive Communications

16. Establish a clear and consistent approach to evaluating EDI within campaigns and comms announcements, building it into our Modern Communications Operating Model and GCS evaluation frameworks so that we can measure how we engage with audiences across GCS.
17. Ensure all relevant government departments are aware of and understand the requirements of the British Sign Language (BSL) Act and have a consistent and clear approach to BSL in communicating policy and changes in law.

# GCS EDI Action Plan

## Long Term Actions: April 2024 - March 2025

### Recruitment and Retention

18. Create engaging and standardised job descriptions for GCS roles, starting at SCS level, mapping them against the GCS career framework, and working with Heads of Discipline so that there is a clear understanding of how roles in central government departments and Arm's-length bodies interact.
19. Work with departments and Directors of Communication to advertise GCS roles as available on alternative working patterns, working with the GCS Resourcing Group to understand how alternative working impacts progression and removing those barriers so that progression is available to all.

### Talent and Development

20. Ensure an equality assessment is completed when considering accreditation for communication professionals, so that introduction of accreditation does not negatively impact the progression of those from underrepresented groups.

### Collaboration

21. Strengthen diversity of thought and skills through a new Secondment Action Plan to facilitate the movement of communications professionals between departments, Arms Length Bodies, the private sector and voluntary or charitable organisations.

### Inclusive Communications

22. Build on the innovative work of 'Project Spark' to reach and build trust with diverse audiences through new channels, using audience insight and ideas from within our teams to inform who we work with - e.g. influencers - and which media channels we know will have a wide reach.
23. Build insight from the annual review of our GCS EDI Action Plan into the GCS curriculum so that our ability to understand audiences and use insight in an impactful way is constantly evolving.



## How we will measure progress against our actions

We will continuously test progress against our actions, targeting interventions for maximum impact.

### A GCS that draws talent from a range of backgrounds, experiences and locations.

- Increase of applicants from underrepresented groups to GCS roles by March 2025.
- Increase in applicants from underrepresented groups who are successfully offered roles vs the number who apply by March 2025.
- One-third of GCS roles in ministerial departments are outside London by the end of 2025.

### A GCS where everyone feels they belong and can flourish.

- The 2025 People Survey response to 'I feel valued for my work', 'My organisation respects differences' and 'I feel safe to challenge' is above the Civil Service benchmark across all underrepresented groups.
- Representation of individuals from underrepresented groups reflects the UK working age population across all grades by 2026.

- GCS members can access and share EDI resources, best practice and case studies via GCS membership channels by Autumn 2023.

### A GCS that understands every community it serves, communicating effectively with everyone.

- There is a consistent approach to evaluating EDI across GCS campaigns by March 2024, enabling us to benchmark and measure progress on communicating with audiences with which we have previously struggled to engage.
- All GCS members can access and share EDI resources, best practice and case studies via GCS membership channels by Autumn 2023.
- Enhanced collaboration leads to the continuous improvement of our GCS training offer, online resources and understanding of EDI within communications; case studies demonstrate how teams have used audience insight and team members' experience to understand their audiences better, leading to an increase in audience reach as a result.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> This action plan uses the three categories of National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) - 'professional and managerial', 'intermediate' and 'working class' - which is the official socio-economic classification of the UK as set by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

<sup>2</sup> When engaging external speakers, departmental guidance and due diligence checks must be completed in line with the Civil Service Code.

<sup>3</sup> The BSL Act refers to the inclusion of British Sign Language in communications. The government previously issued guidance against the translation of documents into foreign languages: see [here](#).

<sup>4</sup> The Race Disparity Unit previously published [guidance on writing about ethnicity](#), explaining why the government does not use the terms BAME and BME. This latest research (to be published spring 2023) builds on the update, so that the government can communicate more effectively on race and ethnicity issues.

## WANT TO FIND OUT MORE?

Click this link to the [GCS Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Page](#), where you can find a HTML version of the Action Plan, useful resources and GCS mentoring opportunities.



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