



Government
Communication
Service

PERFORMANCE WITH PURPOSE

GCS
STRATEGY
SHOWCASE

Delivering on our promises

Our GCS Strategy

The Government Communication Service (GCS) is the professional body for over 6,000 public service communicators working in government departments, agencies and arm's-length bodies (ALBs).

The GCS Strategy 2022 - 25 set out the vision for the Government Communication Service over the past three years, with 30 specific commitments to be achieved.

We built our strategy around three pillars:

- 1 Collaboration
- 2 Innovation
- 3 Great People

At the centre of everything is the need to continue to deliver for the public while continually striving to be better.

Strategic vision overview:

- World-leading digital capability
- Data-driven decision making
- Enhanced professional standards

"The Performance with Purpose strategy has transformed how we work as a profession. Through collaboration, innovation and investing in our people, we've built a world-leading communications service that truly reflects and serves all our communities.

As we develop our next strategy, we'll build on these strong foundations - continuing to harness the power of our networks, embrace innovation ethically, and develop our people to deliver exceptional public service communication."

**Simon Baugh, Chief Executive,
Government Communication Service**

Building a stronger GCS together - 30 commitments delivered

Partners in delivery:

- 25 Directors of Communication across departments
- 300+ Heads of Communications in arm's length bodies
- 7 Heads of Discipline networks
- 10 regional location networks with 800+ members
- 200+ Connecting Diverse Voices mentors and mentees

How do we know our work was valued? You told us...

"It's clear GCS is a trail-blazer on this in the public sector globally. What you do compares incredibly well with the best frameworks I've seen, especially around AI ethics."

External Innovation Expert

"The GCS frameworks and guidance stand out internationally as an example of sector-leading practice, reflecting its leadership's ambition for excellence."

OECD Review 2023

"I feel as though I have hit a major milestone by 'breaking my AI duck'... The work of the co-pilot is a significant help to this crucial work, it's another 'mind' to help ensure bases are covered." - Asmar Gondal, Health and Safety Executive

"It was a great course - much better than the wider Civil Service ethics/Civil Service code course as specific to comms and the scenarios and multimedia content were more engaging!" - Propriety and Ethics participant

"Teams in regional locations have reported better connection with local audiences and stakeholders due to close proximity of team." - Local Network Lead

"Just wanted to say what a cracking system the new identity system is! Clear, concise and easy to use...can't fault it and absolutely love it!" - MoJ Digital Designer

1

Collaboration

The big challenges facing the country in 2022 were levelling up, building our international reputation, meeting our net-zero targets. This could only be tackled successfully together.

We said we needed:

1. A stronger cross-government communications strategy
2. To design a new central GCS operating model
3. To build stronger networks and improving governance
4. To improve crisis planning and response.

10 commitments delivered

WHAT

- Created GCS Connect, a member platform, designed to connect government communicators
- Established new GCS Board and External Advisory Board by October 2022
- Created enhanced crisis communications toolkit and playbook by March 2023
- Reformed and digitised the PASS process by March 2023
- Developed monthly research and insight reporting for key strategy planks

IMPACT

- Over 6000 government communicators registered on GCS Connect
- Improved cross-government coordination and strategic direction
- Enhanced crisis preparedness across departments
- Streamlined campaign approval processes
- Better sharing of data and insights across 350+ teams



Innovation

The fast pace of technological innovation is profoundly changing our world and opening up new opportunities for how we can deliver world-leading public communications.

We said we needed to :

- Improve digital, data and content.
- Harness technology to improve impact.
- Driving efficiency throughout GCS.
- Maintain public trust through the highest standards of propriety and ethics.

11 commitments delivered

WHAT

- Launched GCS Innovation Lab and Project Spark!
- Published "Innovating with Impact" strategy
- Developed GCS Framework for Ethical Innovation
- Launched GCS Assist - first cross-government AI tool

IMPACT

- 3,500+ communicators using AI tools across 120+ organisations
- Enhanced accessibility in digital communications
- Framework for ethical innovation adoption - first among OECD nations
- Up to 10% of campaign budgets allocated to testing innovative approaches



Great People

Our people are at the heart of GCS and everything we do.

We said we needed to:

- Develop our people and raising professional standards
- Attract, recruit and retain talented communicators
- Build brilliant functional leaders
- Create a diverse and inclusive GCS
- Creating careers across all four corners of the UK.

8 commitments delivered

WHAT

- Launched GCS Advance learning programme
- Created new location strategy
- Established bi-annual SCS leadership event
- Enhanced induction programmes
- Implemented mandatory propriety and ethics training
- Developed new D&I action plan

IMPACT

- 3,500+ people from 200 organisations on GCS Advance
- 25% of ministerial department roles now outside London
- £1.3 million annual savings on external training
- 56% completion rate of P&E training across Whitehall

1 Collaboration case study

Revolutionising Crisis Communications

When the GCS Strategy launched in 2022, crisis communications across government departments often operated in silos, leading to fragmented responses during critical situations. The development of the comprehensive crisis communications toolkit and playbook marked a significant turning point.

The project brought together expertise from across government, creating standardised protocols and response frameworks that could be quickly activated. During its first major test - a simulated cyber incident involving multiple departments - the new system demonstrated its value. Teams from different departments seamlessly coordinated their response, sharing real-time updates through the new digital platform and deploying pre-approved messaging frameworks.

"The difference was night and day," recalls a Director of Communications from a major department. "Previously, we might have spent precious hours aligning messages between departments. With the new toolkit, we had clear protocols and pre-agreed escalation routes. It transformed our ability to respond quickly and coherently."



The GCS Strategy - delivering on our promises



1 Collaboration case study

Streamlining campaign approvals

Two key changes implemented in 2023/24 saw reforms to government communications planning that significantly improved efficiency whilst maintaining robust standards.

Firstly, the introduction of multi-year campaign approvals transformed long-term planning. In 2023/24, 24% of campaigns received multi-year approval, saving approximately 192 hours of officials' time. This change particularly benefited campaigns operating on specific cycles, like teacher recruitment, allowing for better resource planning and more strategic media buying.

Secondly, the Professional Assurance and Support Service (PASS) process was overhauled with a new RAG (Red/Amber/Green) classification system. Under this system in 2023/24, 40.5% of campaigns received green ratings (requiring no second stage assurance) and 34.65% received amber ratings (removing the need for additional ministerial review). These improvements saved roughly 410 hours of officials' time in the first year.

The reforms were praised across government departments. GREAT HQ noted it as "a real advancement" while NS&I described it as "transformative". Crucially, these efficiency gains were achieved while maintaining effectiveness - 99% of campaign value remained under appropriate scrutiny, whilst enabling closer collaboration throughout the campaign planning and delivery cycle.

Teaching 

Lesson Shapes a Life

1 Collaboration case study

Fostering cross-government collaboration: Monthly insight

The introduction of monthly research and insight reports transformed how government communications teams share knowledge and coordinate efforts. By centralising research and insights across key strategy planks, the initiative reached nearly 350 teams and individuals across government, creating an unprecedented level of shared understanding.

The impact went beyond simple information sharing. The systematic approach eliminated duplication of effort across departments, delivered consistent views of government communications, and enabled deeper analysis of communication audiences and activities. This coordinated approach proved particularly valuable during major cross-government campaigns, where aligned messaging and shared insights were crucial for success.

"The deeper understanding of our audiences that came from shared insights has transformed how we approach campaign planning," noted one department head. "We're no longer working in silos - we're building on each other's learnings and successes."

The success of this collaborative approach has led to its evolution into an even more focused weekly reporting system, supporting the delivery of Mission Based campaigns and demonstrating how shared knowledge can drive more effective government communication.

2 Innovation case study

Leading with innovation: The GCS Ethical AI journey

The GCS Innovation and Data Strategy 'Innovating with Impact' marked a watershed moment in public sector communications. As the first government communications service globally to establish a comprehensive Framework for Ethical Innovation, GCS positioned itself at the forefront of responsible AI adoption.

Within months, 3,500+ government communicators across 120+ organisations were actively using AI tools in their work, guided by clear ethical principles. The launch of GCS Assist - the first cross-government AI-powered communications tool - demonstrated how innovation could be both ambitious and responsible.

"It's clear GCS is a trail-blazer on this in the public sector globally," noted one external innovation expert. "I've recently got very involved in diving into ethics by design principles - especially where AI is concerned and these are some of the best documents I've seen."

The strategy's success lay in its 'Test, learn, scale, ethically' approach, which allocated 10% of campaign budgets to testing innovative approaches while maintaining strong ethical guardrails. This is projected to unlock £5 million in annual productivity and efficiency savings across the membership.



2 Innovation case study

Pioneering AI in government comms

When GCS launched Assist in 2024, it marked a significant milestone as the world's first AI assistant specifically designed for public sector communications. What started as an ambitious vision to enhance productivity and innovation has become a transformative tool used by over 3,500 communicators across 125 government organisations.

Assist wasn't just about implementing new technology - it represented our commitment to "test, learn, scale, ethically." The tool was developed alongside the GCS Framework for Ethical Innovation and comprehensive generative AI policy, ensuring responsible AI adoption while maintaining public trust.

Government communicators report increased confidence in using AI tools, with Assist supporting everything from routine tasks to complex crisis communications planning. The tool has been particularly impactful in improving accessibility, with six specialised prompts ensuring communications reach all citizens effectively. Using Assist saves a reported average of 2.8 hours each week, equating to a 7% increase in productivity. Based on current usage, to date Assist has delivered around £1.5m of productivity savings.

The success of Assist demonstrates how government communications can embrace innovation while maintaining the highest standards of public service delivery, setting a benchmark for ethical AI adoption in the public sector globally.



Innovation case study

Modern standards for modern communications

The modernisation of GCS professional standards through MCOM 3.0 set a new benchmark for government communications globally. The framework brought clarity and consistency to how communications teams operate, while embedding innovation and digital expertise at its core.

Two years after publication, MCOM 3.0 remains one of the most-viewed pages on the GCS website, with approximately 2,800 views in Q3 24/25 alone. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) praised the framework as sector-leading.

"GCS guidance and frameworks stand out internationally as an example of sector-leading practice," noted the OECD review. "They raise the bar for public communication efficiency and impact with regard to policy objectives."

The success lay in its practical approach. The "must, should, could" framework provided clear guidance while allowing flexibility, while the incorporation of design principles for digital content teams reflected modern communications needs. Delivered entirely in-house, the project demonstrated how GCS could achieve world-class standards through internal expertise.



Innovation case study

Project Spark: Making digital accessibility the default

In early 2024, GCS launched an ambitious initiative to revolutionise how government communicates with all citizens, regardless of their accessibility needs. Project Spark Wave 2 wasn't just about meeting minimum standards - it aimed to make accessibility the starting point of all digital communications.

The project team brought together communicators from across government, including representatives from the Met Office, Defense and Security Accelerator, and the UK Health Security Agency. They engineered six new accessibility-focused prompts for GCS Assist and pioneered innovative British Sign Language solutions for GOV.UK.

Within months, there were 340 views of the Accessible by Default resource page and 876 engagement events with the new resources. But the real success story was in the cultural shift it created. As one team member from the Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs noted: "It changed how we think about accessibility - from an afterthought to the foundation of everything we create."

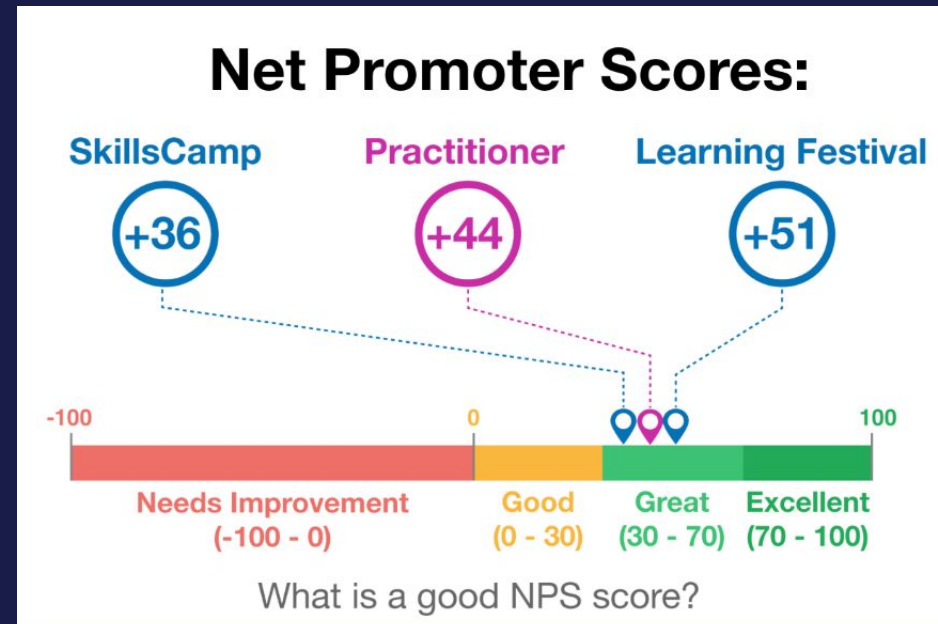


Great People case study

GCS Advance: Transforming professional development

The launch of GCS Advance in September 2023 represented a fundamental shift in how government communicators develop their skills. Moving away from traditional external training providers, GCS created a bespoke learning programme that reflected the unique challenges of government communications.

The programme operates across four levels - Apprentice, Practitioner, Expert, and Leader - and has already engaged more than 3,500 people from 200 organisations. The impact extends beyond numbers: it's creating a new culture of continuous learning and professional excellence.



The success was immediate. The first run of 120 places for the Expert Programme sold out instantly, and all six monthly Practitioner cohorts were fully subscribed, training 1,000 learners per cohort. More importantly, it delivered £1 million in annual savings compared to external training options.

One participant from the Defence Infrastructure Organisation captured the programme's impact: "Great course - really useful and engaging and made me feel more excited about my role." This enthusiasm is reflected in the programme's impressive Net Promoter Score of +45, demonstrating its value to government communicators at all levels.



Great People case study

Building community from day one: The GCS New Members' event

March 2023 marked a turning point in how GCS welcomed new members to the profession. The launch of face-to-face induction events transformed the onboarding experience for government communicators, creating an immediate sense of community and connection that had been missing during the virtual-only years.

The impact was immediate and sustained. Over four events between March 2023 and October 2024, more than 350 new communicators were introduced to our vision, tools, and most importantly, to each other. The events consistently maintained strong attendance, averaging 85 participants per session, with an impressive 68% of attendees at the first event signing up for additional "coffee and connect" networking sessions.

Madeleine Clark from Network Rail. "I've made some great connections with people today that work in different departments and business areas, and I feel really privileged to be part of a wider comms group."

The events go beyond traditional induction formats, featuring panel discussions with senior leaders, skill speed-dating sessions, and interactive introductions to key tools like GCS Connect, which has attracted over 8,000 users.



Great People case study

Building local networks: The GCS Location Strategy

The GCS Location Strategy is revolutionising how government communicators work across the UK. Starting with three regional networks in 2022, the initiative has grown to 10 thriving professional networks with over 800 members, fundamentally changing how government communications operates outside London.

The impact has been transformative. The percentage of roles based outside London has increased from 48% to 50% across GCS, with ministerial department roles outside London growing from 23% to 25%. Importantly, 67% of members report an increased sense of community through their local GCS network.

Teams like Historic England and HMRC demonstrate how regional presence enhances stakeholder relationships. "Being embedded in local communities has transformed our ability to connect with audiences," reported one regional team leader. The strategy has also fostered partnerships with universities, leading to GCS being named 'employer of choice' at Manchester Metropolitan University.

"I was proud to be the opening speaker at the first GCS Live Labs," shared one regional communicator. "I've had lovely feedback from students, particularly as seeing someone like me has helped them understand that public servants can come from all backgrounds."

This is just the beginning, as we continue to improve career opportunities and how we connect with local communities across the UK.

Our commitments

S001	Consider professional assurance approval for campaigns which run across more than one financial year from April 2022
S002	Re-establish GCS Governance Board by June 22 (date changed to Jan 23)
S003	Raise the bar on spending controls to be more assertive in using spending controls to improve the quality of campaigns and join up with other departments from May 2022
S004	Articulate the remit and responsibility of the campaign SRO role by November 2022
S005	Develop a monthly research and insight report for the key planks of the annual Government Communication Strategy by July 2022
S006a	Establish a central Strategy and Campaigns function within GCS by October 2022
S006b	Develop one systematic process for monitoring and reporting on campaigns, including standardised approaches to data collection and consistent measurement, which gives Ministers confidence in delivery and impact
S007	Restructure and reduce the size of the central GCS team at the Cabinet Office with a focus on strategy and coordination, standards and capability, and expert and shared services by October 2022
S008	Establish a new GCS External Advisory panel by October 2022
S009	Draft a Crisis Communications improvement plan including the development of a toolkit to include consideration of crisis contracts and playbook by March 2023
S010	Introduce a new funding model based on the principle that core No10/Cabinet Office activity should come from core funding, mandatory professional development activity should be funded by the marketing levy/a per FTE charge, and GCS should charge for discretionary expert/ shared services by April 2023
S011a	An annual data collection across GCS community to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FTE/role data
S011b	An annual data collection across GCS community to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location
S012a	Review and refresh of propriety guidance, to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarification on how to raise a concern by October 22
S012b	Review and refresh of propriety guidance, to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual mandatory training by April 23
S012c	Review and refresh of propriety guidance, to include guidance on ethical use of new technology by October 24 (date changed to Dec 23)
S013	Reform, simplify and digitise the PASS process by March 2023
S014	Use our data to target and support departments and ALBs to drive efficiencies through functional standards starting in 2022/23, and completing by March 2025 working with Gem Walsh on capability review framework and standards
S015	Develop a secondments action plan by March 2024

S016	Establish a virtual 'GCS Innovation Lab' by October 2022
S017	Publish a GCS Innovation Strategy by October 2023 (date changed to Dec 23)
S018a	Assisting No10 where possible to create an enhanced No10 digital communications hub to provide strategic direction by June 2022
S018b	Set best-practice for GCS digital communications by December 2022
S019	Update the GCS evaluation framework to include stronger standards for evaluating digital content by April 2023 working with Ed Bearryman and with Gem Walsh on standards & training and Conrad Bird on insight & evaluation
S020	Update the Modern Communications Operating Model and Government Communications Service Functional Model by March 2023 so that it includes design principles for digital content teams
S021	Publish a GCS Data Strategy by March 2024 (date changed to Dec 23)
S022	Develop a new GCS and SCS induction approach by March 2023
S023a	Review and consolidate core professional frameworks and guidance by March 2023, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all leadership and capability frameworks for GCS SCS Leaders to align with L&D expectations
S023b	Review and consolidate core professional frameworks and guidance by March 2023, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Modern Comms Operating model, competency framework and Functional standard
S024	Review and publish a new D&I action plan by March 2023
S025	Create and publish a GCS location strategy with a target for one-third of GCS roles to be based outside of London by March 2023 (strategy to be published by March 2023, one third target by end of 2025)
S026	Enhance the GCS curriculum in line with outputs from the Future Communicator project, wider skills data, create an accreditation model, establish the feasibility of putting in place an online learning management system by December 2023, with the model fully implemented by March 2025
S027	Develop a model leadership objective for GCS leaders aligned with their role in delivering this strategy (for use in Perf yr 22/23) by May 2022
S028a	Develop a bi-annual SCS leadership event - with the first event focussing on the delivery of this strategy from Summer 2022
S028b	Second bi-annual SCS leadership event aim for early 2023
S029	Develop a new GCS people brand and articulate the GCS people offer to include a new outreach programme by March 2025
S030	Review existing talent programmes (including diversity programmes) and develop a new talent and succession planning strategy by March 2024
S031	Deliver the annual Government Communications Plan

Taking it many steps further

Building on our successful Performance with Purpose strategy, we're now looking ahead.

The Government Communications Strategy 2025-2028 represents an ambitious evolution in how we deliver world-class public service communications. We'll be focusing on three transformative pillars:

1. **Trusted by all:** We will revolutionise how government builds authentic connections with communities across the UK, tackling misinformation head-on while fostering transparent, honest dialogue with all our audiences. Our commitment to openness, even during uncertainty, strengthens public trust and social cohesion.
2. **Connected by mission:** Through innovative partnerships and strengthened networks, we'll create a more agile, responsive communication profession. From enhanced crisis preparedness to seamless collaboration with local government and international partners, we'll break down silos to deliver unified, impactful communications.
3. **Expert by design:** We'll develop tomorrow's communication leaders today, embracing cutting-edge technology while maintaining our ethical foundations. Through diverse talent development and AI integration, we're building a workforce that truly reflects and serves our communities.

This new strategy will empower GCS to deliver exceptional public service communication that makes a real difference.

The Government Communications Strategy 2025-28

Coming soon...