

CAPABILITY CASE STUDY

Training for resilience and relevance United Kingdom

The Leaders' Report has shown that staying up-to-date with changes in the media landscape remains a challenge for government communicators worldwide. However, the UK Government Communication Service (GCS) has made the necessary transformation by institutionalising a culture of skills modernisation.

"We realised we could not hope to remain relevant and continue to produce top-quality work without training our members of staff," says Michelle Cupples, the GCS's Deputy Head of Communication Profession.

Since 2010, the GCS has been delivering didactical programmes that cater to employees at each level of the profession. The content of the curricula is revised every year to ensure that it tackles the most pressing topics, as identified by an Improvement Board and a survey of communicators. In addition, by bringing together professionals from across government, the initiative encourages cross-practice knowledge sharing.

There are currently three core curricula:

1. The **Aspire** programme offers skills based training to all 4,000 government communicators through a modular structure. It conveys an introduction to government communications and to the frameworks used by GCS. Over 1,600 places are offered each year with satisfaction levels reaching 97%.
2. The **Inspire** programme trains a select group of 40 senior professionals each year and is a core element of the Service's talent management strategy. Courses tackle both personal effectiveness, including leadership and resilience, as well as government communications methods which are delivered in partnership with the University of Huddersfield. The curricula is tailored to each individual through career planning, mentorship and placements.
3. The **Early Talent** programme is the newest addition, having been launched in January 2015. It constitutes an intensive two-year professional development scheme for those showing strong potential of reaching top communication management positions. The programme includes action learning and masterclasses from internal and external experts, as well as opportunities to interact with senior leaders.
4. An incentive system was set up to ensure that staff members take the courses and that the GCS's agility objective is met. While the curricula are not compulsory, employees must complete at least four continuing professional development (CPD) activities a year in order to be eligible for promotion. Since the GCS training programmes are accessible, individually tailored and integrated into regular work patterns, they are often the preferred option among staff.



We realised we could not hope to remain relevant and continue to produce top-quality work without training our members of staff.

Michelle Cupples,
GCS's Deputy Head of
Communication Profession

Training for resilience and relevance United Kingdom continued

A common challenge for many governments is ensuring that training initiatives are sustainable and can be funded each year. In the UK, the GCS reached an agreement with government ministers which ensures that it receives 1% of any budget spent on private communications firms to invest in professional development. The rationale is clear: by building skills of internal communicators, over time the UK government should be able to reduce the amount it spends externally, finding the required skills in-house.

Looking to enhance the programme, the Government Communication Service recently launched **The Modern Communications Model Skills Survey** which allows staff members to assess their capabilities against set benchmarks for their employment level. "As the talent management team, it helps inform our thinking on how the curricula should be modified and also to identify "who would most benefit," says Jacqueline Williamson, head of the GCS's professional development team.

The value of a talent-based approach is that it strengthens core capabilities, while also creating increasing levels of employee satisfaction. "We are conscious that our staff are the most valuable resource in the organization and we therefore help strengthen both their capabilities and morale."

