

CORE SKILLS FOR GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATORS PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE FRAMEWORK

The specialist Core Skills for government communicators are designed to be used alongside generic departmental competence frameworks which cover the general behaviours and attitudes expected of staff.

This Professional Practice Framework is for use in:

Recruitment and selection

Before advertising a vacancy, line managers use the Core Skills to help determine the person specification for the post they wish to fill. Applicants will be measured against these communication skills as well as departmental competences, which incorporate Professional Skills for Government (PSG).

Performance management

The Core Skills help define standards of performance as well as informing managers and individuals about the level of competence required in their jobs. This enables effective and ineffective performance to be recognised.

Identifying training needs

The Core Skills are useful in helping to identify learning and development needs. Performance reviews can identify gaps in performance as well as identifying areas where further development is required to reach the next level.

There are **six** Core Skill areas which all government communicators are expected to demonstrate:

COMMUNICATIONS – DRAFTING, LAYOUT AND DESIGN: Produces clear, persuasive and accessible communication products

CHANNELS AND TECHNOLOGIES: Uses the most effective and appropriate channels and technologies to deliver communications

BUSINESS KNOWLEDGE AND COMMUNICATION ENVIRONMENT: Understands the organisation’s business and how communication supports it; is aware of the wider communication context and GCN; is fully aware of and applies propriety guidelines

RELATIONSHIP/ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT: Understands, responds to and satisfies the communications needs of diverse audiences – clients, government stakeholder groups, partners, media and employees; builds and maintains constructive relationships and balances different demands

STRATEGIC MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION: Plans, builds and manages delivery of strategies, campaigns and day to day marketing and communication services which are based on audience insight and are effective in getting the organisation’s messages across and delivered to the highest professional standard; promotes coherent and consistent organisation brand(s)

EVALUATION, RESEARCH, EVIDENCE: Gathers and interprets data on the effectiveness of communication strategies, campaigns and services and their impact on audience behaviour and business outcomes; identifies improvement opportunities

The table that follows illustrates each of the six skill areas with examples of how they can be demonstrated at each level – from AIO to SCS. The skills are accumulative so SIOs are expected to demonstrate their own level as well as those at essential level and so on. It is not a definitive or exhaustive list and should be applied according to the communication specialism of the post.

COMMUNICATIONS – DRAFTING, LAYOUT AND DESIGN (page 1 of 1)

Produces clear, persuasive and accessible communication products

	Essential *AIO/IO * entry level	Management SIO	Leadership G7/6	Strategic SCS
PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATOR (elements apply in all roles)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Able to identify and understand internal and external audience needs and adapts style and language to meet them * Writes clearly, concisely and accurately in plain English for all formats *Researches and drafts concise and accurate briefings Demonstrates an understanding of design principles and their application 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Controls, monitors and evaluates content of communication products to ensure quality, consistency and accessibility of messages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sets the standards for quality and drafting and consistently demonstrates these in own work Provides overall editorial control across the team to ensure appropriate content, tone, brevity and consistency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates excellent communication skills both written and oral Confident and able to present in formal, informal and public settings Challenges any communication product not up to standard
Media/Press	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Drafts clear, concise and persuasive copy *Identifies what issues will be of media interest Understands propriety guidance on media issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anticipates the emerging news agenda Displays authoritative, clear and sensitive spokespersonship Gives clear and trusted advice to Ministers and officials Gives clear and trusted briefing to media and other stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates a strong news sense in media relations Demonstrates consistent application of propriety guidance on media issues 	
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drafts effective design briefs and suggests creative ideas to increase the impact of communication products *Understands and applies organisation's corporate visual identity and branding principles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates in depth expertise in design and layout and leads creative input for communication activities 		

CHANNELS AND TECHNOLOGIES (page 1 of 2)

Uses the most effective and appropriate channels and technologies to deliver communications

	Essential *AIO/IO * entry level	Management SIO	Leadership G7/6	Strategic SCS
PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATOR (elements apply in all roles)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Understands how different channels interact and work best together to achieve objectives *Understands the importance of audience access * Aware of the rapid changes taking place in the media world *Can articulate the strengths and weaknesses of new technology in communicating with audiences. Aware of the key costs and benefits of different media and understands objective ways to measure this effectiveness Understands channels available to reach target audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proactively manages multi-channel communications campaigns Can identify key media trends and their impact on customers and government comms Knows how to measure the effectiveness of messages and can assess the costs and benefits of different media Understands the need for media neutral planning and puts it into practice whenever possible Identifies opportunities to promote departmental messages in a wide range of media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defines channel strategies to meet organisation's overall communication objectives Monitors, evaluates and shapes activity across the organisation to ensure co-ordination, avoid cross-over and make best use of resources Builds team capability in using different channels for maximum impact and efficiency Has a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of different media and their relative roles in a comms campaign 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Able to lead a communications function, along with the ability to demonstrate understanding of all communication channels and strategy development Sets standards and oversees the strategic development and maintenance of channels and implementation of technology

CHANNELS AND TECHNOLOGIES (page 2 of 2)

Uses the most effective and appropriate channels and technologies to deliver communications

	Essential *AIO/IO * entry level	Management SIO	Leadership G7/6	Strategic SCS
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understands the principles of face to face marketing and display 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Segments audience to deliver communications through most appropriate channels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Able to use a mix of media e.g. PR, Partnership, Marketing and engagement Provides strategic advice on channel methodology and implementation based on insight and channel effectiveness 	
Internal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understands organisational channels available to reach target audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has a thorough understanding of employee communication techniques Able to manage and deliver a wide range of corporate channels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports organisational leaders as communications channels of cultural change 	
Digital/social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understands and can apply interactive communication technology Understands and can apply relevant software Oversees content delivery Advises on building, designing and branding channels Knows and demonstrates best practice; accessibility, usability and writing for digital channels and able to provide e-communications advice to colleagues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proficient in sub-editing, design and layout using associated software packages Manages delivery of content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides up to date advice on how to make best use of digital communications channels Delivers digital communications solutions as part of the wider mix and evaluates results Understands new systems and how they are configured Understands interactive design and usability issues 	

BUSINESS KNOWLEDGE AND COMMUNICATION ENVIRONMENT (page 1 of 2)

Understands organisation's business and how communication supports it; is aware of the wider communication context and GCN; is fully aware of and applies propriety guidelines

	Essential *AIO/IO * entry level	Management SIO	Leadership G7/6	Strategic SCS
PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATOR (elements apply in all roles)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Builds in depth knowledge of areas of organisation's business Understands the pressure from and demands of Ministers/Chief Executives and officials Can describe the relevant communication audiences and their requirements *Keeps up to date with industry developments in communication through GCN and other professional networks *Aware of key organisational and ministerial priorities *Understands the Unit's communications strategy and where they fit in Demonstrates an understanding of how other communications disciplines operate *Aware of the elements of the customer experience and the ways in which policy and delivery can positively affect it Makes persuasive and objective case to support communications advice <p style="text-align: right;">See next page</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures a consistent level of business knowledge within the team and that this knowledge is applied effectively Inputs intelligence from the communications network and other sources to help shape the team's strategy and service delivery approaches Understands policy priorities, and the issues driving these Spots the publicity or news values of policy or operational developments Able to draw up clear specification for communications contracts Advises on propriety of communication issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates in depth knowledge of organisation's business strategy Has a comprehensive understanding of policy currently being developed and of underlying strategic issues Works closely with policy and delivery colleagues to ensure that the customer experience is understood and reflected in policy and implementation Demonstrates a high level of understanding and appreciation of the political landscape and wider government communication strategy Works willingly with other government organisations to integrate communications to support policy outcomes Identifies and considers the impact of comms activity on wider organisational and government plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influences, negotiates and robustly defends and champions the communication function Works strategically and imaginatively, linking the news agenda to organisational priorities Able to handle politically sensitive situations Leads on the transformation of organisational communications Experience of a variety of communication disciplines Participates actively in cross government communication delivery Provides sound advice on the application of propriety guidance Uses knowledge of communications and customer insight to influence business strategy and operations Makes communications fundamental to departmental strategy

BUSINESS KNOWLEDGE AND COMMUNICATION ENVIRONMENT (page 2 of 2)

Understands organisation's business and how communication supports it; is aware of the wider communication context and GCN; is fully aware of and applies propriety guidelines

	Essential *AIO/IO * entry level	Management SIO	Leadership G7/6	Strategic SCS
PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATOR (elements apply in all roles)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ *Keeps up to date with current affairs and is aware of the broader political/government context ▪ Knows what information can and cannot be released ▪ Demonstrates an understanding of propriety guidance 			

RELATIONSHIP/ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT (page 1 of 1)

Understands, responds to and satisfies communications needs of diverse audiences – clients, government stakeholder groups, partners, media and employees; builds and maintains constructive relationships and balances different demands

	Essential *AIO/IO * entry level	Management SIO	Leadership G7/6	Strategic SCS
PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATOR (elements apply in all roles)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Understands key relationships and importance of networks for the organisation's communications Actively engages with a broad range of internal stakeholders from operations, policy, finance and other areas in shaping communication approaches Develops and sustains stakeholder relationships using appropriate channels to keep them informed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps clients define communication needs and advises on most effective communication methods, channels and presentation Oversees and coordinates effective marketing and communication planning for a range of accounts Feeds information from account management into communication strategy to ensure this is built from client perspectives Engages relevant stakeholders early in the development process Can map stakeholders and develop appropriate communications for each key stakeholder group Uses stakeholder analysis tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuously monitors the effectiveness of delivery of communication plans across accounts Is persuasive with opinion formers and actively manages organisation's reputation across all audiences Able to work with other government organisations and No.10 to co-ordinate presentation and policy Establishes relationships with relevant policy and delivery people and acts as key interface with them and external stakeholders Builds stakeholder relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oversees relationships with advertising agencies and external suppliers Able to act as the adviser on all matters relating to communication and support Directorates with their communication challenges Able to build influential networks and to communicate and engage with others effectively in a wide range of settings
Media/Press	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops and nurtures excellent contacts with newspapers and broadcasters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Able to have robust and resilient conversations with any stakeholder 		

STRATEGIC MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION (page 1 of 2)

Plans, builds and manages delivery of strategies, campaigns and day to day marketing and communication services which are based on audience insight and are effective in getting the organisation's messages across and delivered to the highest professional standard; promotes coherent and consistent organisation brand(s)

	Essential *AIO/IO * entry level	Management SIO	Leadership G7/6	Strategic SCS
PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATOR (elements apply in all roles)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ *Understands the basic principles of effective marketing and communication and how they apply in own organisation ▪ Contributes to marketing and communication planning activity and suggests creative and innovative ideas ▪ Understands how communication can contribute to changing behaviour ▪ Understands and applies customer segmentation principles in developing communication solutions ▪ Seeks to make active contribution to insight development process ▪ Builds simple business cases for communication solutions ▪ Demonstrates awareness of political context in making communication choices ▪ Understands the organisation's brand guidelines and key messages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consistently uses a wide range of sources to develop propositions ▪ Translates creative ideas into practical communication ▪ Interprets communications strategies to inform and produce marketing plans ▪ Uses insight to inform decisions ▪ Takes an integrated approach to communication planning and uses channels and technologies to full potential ▪ Builds business cases for communication programmes and services, demonstrating return on investment ▪ Leads development and delivery of targeted communication campaigns to get key messages across and reinforce the organisation's brand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develops overall marketing and communication strategies and plans to meet organisation's goals ▪ Promotes the integration of strategic communication and policy development and delivery ▪ Forms and directs effective cross-departmental teams from an early point in the formulation of policy ▪ Devises and reviews the communications strategy for own policy area ▪ Ensures strategy is built on sound evaluation and evidence ▪ Sets clear, actionable and measurable objectives for comms strategy ▪ Actively participates in debate about communication strategy within the wider government communication network ▪ Leads in actively managing the brand portfolio ▪ Maximises direct and indirect marketing opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Embeds Engage principles/best practice communication throughout the unit ▪ Devises and implements successful large scale marketing and communications strategies for both internal and external audiences ▪ Oversees the development and delivery of an integrated communications strategy ▪ Develops high quality communication products and projects for use at both national and local level ▪ Engages ministers/ board in and approval of marketing and communications strategy ▪ Demonstrates strong brand management and promotion of corporate reputation abilities

STRATEGIC MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION (page 2 of 2)

Plans, builds and manages delivery of strategies, campaigns and day to day marketing and communication services which are based on audience insight and are effective in getting the organisation's messages across and delivered to the highest professional standard; promotes coherent and consistent organisation brand(s)

Media/Press	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drafts media strategies for launches and other media events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Handles high profile and sensitive media issues Initiates and leads proactive media and public affairs campaigns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrates proactive media relations into overall communication strategies 	
Internal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understands the importance and key principles of internal comms Applies insight to engage internal customers Creates and co-ordinates corporate internal communication plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops integrated internal communication strategies drawing on the whole communication mix Demonstrates an excellent understanding of internal communications as an employee engagement tool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sets clear, measurable internal communication objectives that deliver against organisational performance targets Applies Engage principles to ensure strategies have maximum impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leads teams capable of delivering long-term employee engagement strategies, which are appropriately resourced, based on Engage principles, integrated with HR and Organisational Change initiatives and increase organisational performance
Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is aware of the need for a clear media-neutral comms strategy, and the process for developing this, including the role of audience insight Understands the need to identify, co-ordinate and prioritise themes as part of the strategic planning process Is able to map out departmental activities and events in support of clear communications themes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops integrated communication strategies drawing on the whole communication mix Demonstrates an excellent understanding of the role of communications as a strategic business tool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sets clear, measurable communication objectives that deliver against policy and delivery targets Applies Engage principles to ensure strategies have maximum impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leads teams capable of delivering long-term communication strategies which are appropriately resourced, based on Engage principles and demonstrate clear benefits to audiences and organisational business performance and PSA targets

EVALUATION, RESEARCH, EVIDENCE (page 1 of 1)

Gathers and interprets data on the effectiveness of communication strategies, campaigns and services and their impact on audience behaviour and business outcomes; identifies improvement opportunities

	Essential *AIO/IO * entry level	Management SIO	Leadership G7/6	Strategic SCS
PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATOR (elements apply in all roles)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understands the importance of consistent, objective evaluation and research in informing the whole communications agenda Knows how to embed evaluation in all communication activity Understands basic research principles and methodologies Uses standard processes to collect audience feedback and evaluate the effectiveness of communication activities Able to design simple feedback questionnaires Analyses standard research data against defined objectives to produce summary reports Measures results against communications goals/objectives Understands the data sources that could contribute to a market segmentation Understands what's needed for a good research brief and can draft with some help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates in depth knowledge of market research Identifies underlying issues from complex data and proposes improvement actions from analysis of evidence Feeds evidence into communication strategy and planning activity in organisation Can write a research brief and commission research against specified objectives Implements measurement criteria as part of a communication plan Can identify the best data source for a particular task; understands relative strengths and weaknesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures evaluation is in place across all communication activity and links with wider departmental evidence gathering Uses quantifiable evaluation to direct and refine strategies as appropriate Ensures research data is used to inform all communication activity and the overall strategy Monitors the effectiveness of research across the team ensuring it delivers a good return on investment Shares key intelligence, research and evidence with the wider network to ensure joined up strategies Produces full market reviews and complex analysis Has a wide knowledge and deep understanding of the full spectrum of data sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Able to define and deliver market research, including analysis of customer requirements, behaviour, demand, expectations and satisfaction Able to work with a variety of research methods and techniques