The GSR Strategy: Two Years On

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Government Economic & Social Research Team

HM Treasury

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Introduction

It is now 2 years since the Government Social Research (GSR) Service strategy was published,[1] in it we set out the priorities for GSR up to 2020. In the strategy we made a commitment to review progress and check priorities. Two years into our five-year strategy I want to celebrate the successful delivery of parts of the plan and to note other progress, as well as highlight our focus for the coming year.

Delivering the strategy has involved many groups and individuals across GSR and the enthusiasm, dedication and skills shown by them has been tremendous. Key teams have been the central GESR team, strategy groups directly supporting each objective, the Task & Finish and Working Groups set up to look at specific issues and the departmental Heads of Profession working with their GSR members. Monitoring across all of these groups is coordinated centrally, with quarterly progress reports delivered to the GSR Heads of Profession Board. Progress on specific projects is regularly fed back to members.

Over the past year, a key priority for the GSR profession has been the development of a coherent and strengthened Talent Management strategy, so all members can drive their careers forward in the way they want to. There has been a real push on all fronts to develop clear career pathways through the grades in GSR, and to implement products which keep members engaged and active. The Talent Management, Engagement and Development Board has been set up to help realise this focus, and has since delivered new products including the Leadership Networks, better quality online content and a clearer membership offer. This will continue, and will provide an ever more defined career pathway for all of our members.

Our stated ambition remains to build a workforce that is consistently inspired, confident and empowered as well as being innovative, collaborative, forward-thinking, tech-savvy and diverse. In the coming year, GSR will increase effort to support diversity and inclusion within the profession. Working with the new Analytical Function, we will build a more accurate picture of our diversity statistics, and support cross-analytical development to achieve a more representative, more engaged and focused membership. The new Analysis Function will also help us to achieve a more cohesive and productive relationship with other analytical professions across government, allowing us to support one another in talent, development and strategy.

The context in which social researchers work is constantly changing. Over the coming years of the strategy, we will continue to review progress, check priorities and respond to emerging developments.

Jenny Dibden

Jenny Dibden,

Head of GSR

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[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-social-research-profession-strategy-2015-to-2020
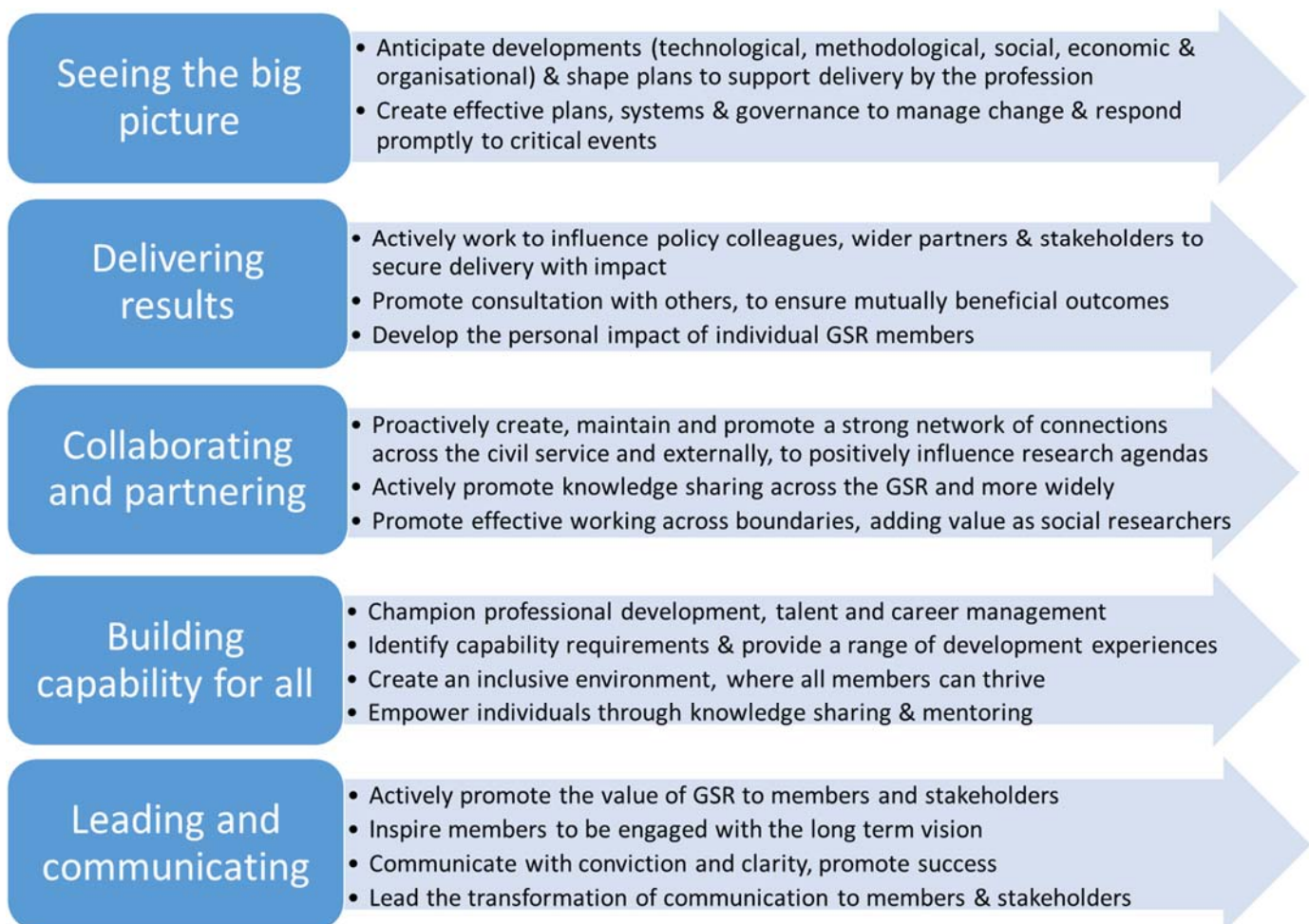
Report Card

For each of the five key objectives, we set out in the strategy what was happening in each area at the time of the launch and what needed to happen over the next five years to achieve success. The five key objectives were:

1. Seeing the bigger picture
2. Delivering results
3. Collaborating and partnering
4. Building capability for all
5. Leading and communicating

Figure 1 summarises the vision behind the five strategy objectives in the Strategy.

Figure 1: The five key objectives of the GSR strategy 2015 – 2020

Seeing the big picture
- Anticipate developments (technological, methodological, social, economic & organisational) & shape plans to support delivery by the profession
- Create effective plans, systems & governance to manage change & respond promptly to critical events

Delivering results
- Actively work to influence policy colleagues, wider partners & stakeholders to secure delivery with impact
- Promote consultation with others, to ensure mutually beneficial outcomes
- Develop the personal impact of individual GSR members

Collaborating and partnering
- Proactively create, maintain and promote a strong network of connections across the civil service and externally, to positively influence research agendas
- Actively promote knowledge sharing across the GSR and more widely
- Promote effective working across boundaries, adding value as social researchers

Building capability for all
- Champion professional development, talent and career management
- Identify capability requirements & provide a range of development experiences
- Create an inclusive environment, where all members can thrive
- Empower individuals through knowledge sharing & mentoring

Leading and communicating
- Actively promote the value of GSR to members and stakeholders
- Inspire members to be engaged with the long term vision
- Communicate with conviction and clarity, promote success
- Lead the transformation of communication to members & stakeholders

The ratings in Table 1 reflect how close GSR is to achieving success, 2 years on. The commentary explains how this has been achieved, or what is being done to achieve future success.

Green = completed ●   Yellow = in progress ●   Red = little or no progress ●

Objective:	What success would look like by 2020:	Progress 2 years on:	Rating:
Seeing the bigger picture:	GSR Ethics guidance updated to refer to new methods of collecting data (e.g. social media)	GSR Ethics Guidance on use of social media published in 2016. GSR Board proactively working together to share good practice in ethics guidance across departments and ways of working, to learn from each other	● (green)
	Promote development of good quantitative skills in GSR members (new and existing)	New GSR Competency Framework launched in September 2016 to put greater emphasis on the quantitative analytical skills (data science & quality assurance). Social Research Assessment Centre (SRAC) materials updated with greater emphasis on quantitative skills.	● (green)
	Be proactively anticipating future developments (technological, methodological) & managing change	A joint event has been held between SRA and GSR North where they had a presentation on innovative methods. Holding an Innovative Methods Mini Conference, in November 2017. Holding a SRA/Welsh Government social research competition, which includes a category on innovative methods. The prizegiving is in December 2017. Held a GESR What Works Mini Conference 16 February, which introduced the areas which What Works centres focused on, and their link to the wider analytical community.	● (yellow)
	Research and deliver training to policy colleagues on social research, to promote the use of social research techniques and GSR	Gaps in policy-specific training on social research methods and benefits have been identified across different departments. Currently a GSR Task and Finish Group is preparing training modules on social research methods, and looking for best ways to distribute these widely.	● (yellow)

Delivering Results:	Case studies to be promoted to showcase the value GSR members add & updated regularly	17 case studies published internally on the GSR website and 2 case studies published externally on GSR's gov.uk web site. The Task and Finish Group work continuously to identify more case studies to showcase the value GSR members add across departments.	🟡
	Set up more panel discussion events for senior GSR analysts & academics, inviting members to attend and contribute, to engage membership in cross-cutting issues and facilitate networking	We have continued to deliver a broad suite of networking events for GSR members & academics, in collaboration with the other analytical professions, as well as the second GSR annual lecture. In July, the Task and Finish Group delivered a highly successful joint GSR/British Academy event focusing on 'Evaluation: Impact, Challenges, and Complexity'. The event brought together GSR alongside Fellows of the British Academy, and other academic experts, to discuss the frequent pitfalls in designing and delivering robust evaluation. The Task and Finish Group continue to work with the British Academy to identify suitable topics for future events.	🟡
	Set up a cross departmental group to help define and understand the space within which GSR operates and can have impact across Whitehall.	The 'GSR Champions' Task and Finish Group has been established, to demonstrate the value and impact of GSR within policy development, and identify opportunities to strengthen the interface between GSR and other areas of government. The group identifies departmental champions, whose role has been developed as a central point of contact for all departments with a significant GSR presence. Champions will act to demonstrate the value of GSR within their individual departments and work collaboratively to develop and share best practice across GSR. The inaugural GSR Champions meeting is being held in November 2017.	🟡
	Promote development of personal impact to all	The new Talent Management and Engagement Programme began its implementation phase this year, with multiple products which focus on personal impact: These include the launch of the Leadership Network, which has held 6 events since March 2017 in London and Sheffield, aimed at helping to develop a strong leadership pathway for G6/G7s in GSR. Events included a Jobshare event; Applying for the Future Leaders Scheme; Achieving Impact; My SCS Journey. We have also held an annual Student Networking Event to promote the GSR fast stream to current sandwich and summer students. We launched the GSR Fast Stream Leadership Offer in March to strengthen the offer for GSR Fast Streamers and early career researchers. We are currently liaising with departments to see how they can take this offer forward for their staff.	🟢

Collaborating and Partnering:	Actively build stakeholder networks across departments so GSR develops stronger links with specialists, leading to better informed analysis & advice	Since 2016, we have been engaging with stakeholder networks across departments so GSR plays an active role in cross-disciplinary and cross-government initiatives to improve the demand, supply and use of high quality research and analysis. Examples include chairing the multidisciplinary Cross Government Evaluation Group, and contributing to the Social Impacts Task Force. 2017 also saw the formation of the cross-government Analysis Function, which brings together all of the analytical professions. As this Function develops, this will facilitate even greater collaboration on issues such as learning and development, talent management and engagement.	🟢
	Task senior GSR members to be named 'account managers' for specific external stakeholders, to keep momentum in developing these relationships	Senior GSR members have continued to be actively involved with external stakeholders over the past year, with engagement being increasingly more targeted and effective.	🟢
	Develop & promote an evidence-base of the benefits of internships and secondments, to demonstrate the value this type of partnering delivers to individuals & organisations	Over the past year, we have published case studies to promote the benefits of internships and secondments to GSR members onto the GSR members' website. These include blogs posts and day in the life profiles, so that members have access to tools which can help them make informed decisions about roles in other departments.

We have also increased intake on the GSR Summer Placement scheme, so that more students have contact with GSR before they finish their degree. | 🟢 |
| **Building Capability for all:** | CPD opportunities mapped to GSR & generic competencies, to illustrate learning pathways
GSR Board actively managing talent in the profession. | We have mapped CPD opportunities to GSR & generic competencies, illustrating learning pathways, and published this on the GSR intranet site.

We have developed and implemented the Talent Management Programme for GSR building on existing activities, and have published several products on the GSR intranet site such as Top Tips Guides, blog posts and career profiles. | 🟢 |

	Strengthened role for the GSR North group and promote active engagement with other GSR groups (e.g. those based in Wales and Scotland)	GSR North have delivered a database of contacts across GSR in the North; a format for communications that works across all versions of Outlook in operation across departments and agencies; and have also worked with the SRA to ensure shared communications, inviting their members to GSR North activities. GSR North has supported colleagues in DfE to deliver a one day conference on 19th May, on the theme of researching mental health. Approximately 50 people attended, including GSS/GORs/GES to encourage cross-profession working. - The first planned quarterly seminar delivered on 19th July in Bootle on the topic of online research methods. There were speakers from YouGov, ONS, DFE, HMRC, and over 30 attendees. GSR Scotland and GSR North are planning a joint event in early 2018, and are also in the process of discussing joint training, to reduce travel costs to London.	🟠
	Actively promote secondment and job swap opportunities	Regular notifications of secondment opportunities are circulated across GSR via the bi-weekly L&D newsletter. The GSR Shadow Board has set up Job Swap Task and Finish Group, which is currently working on a pilot scheme, and will be presenting their work to the GSR Heads of Profession at the December Board meeting.	🟠
	Social science students involved in the Q-step programme joining GSR on graduation, with enhanced quantitative skills	15 universities now have Q-Step programmes, and Q-Step placements have taken place in 18 Government departments or agencies (since 2015). An interim evaluation of the Q-Step programme is due for publication imminently. The Q-Step programme is viewed positively across GSR participant departments, with students delivering good analytical work. To date Q-Step graduates are employed permanently in analytical professions in four government departments. GSR HOPs will monitor this over the coming years.	🟠
Leading and Communicating:	Strengthen the role of Head of Profession within departments, to lead on the delivery of the GSR Strategy	Since the strategy was launched, GSR Heads of Profession have been actively involved in evaluating the success of the strategy, and in supporting researchers within their departments to get engaged with the profession.	🟢
	Lead on case for a pan-government procurement strategy for social research	The GSR Board are actively working with Crown Commercial Services to support them in delivering a pan-government procurement framework for social research that works for both government and suppliers.	🟠

	Deliver the 2015 GSR Communications Strategy	In 2016, we delivered the 2015 GSR Communications Strategy capitalising on new technology e.g. new GSR intranet and external internet sites, redesigned the Learning & Development update and developed the GSR Blog. This work continues. In 2017, the "customer journey" for potential fast streamers has been reviewed, looking at available information online on the two main official websites. These changes are being worked through changes and next steps agreed. GSR also have a new Task and Finish Group to develop guidance for GSR members on best practice in communicating with policy colleagues, which presented their findings to HoP's in September and will disseminate their final product before the end of 2017.	🟢