Government
Social Research

The GSR Strategy: Three Years On

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Government Economic & Social Research Team

HM Treasury

1 Horse Guards Road

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Introduction

Government Social Research (GSR) published the Profession Strategy 2015 to 2020[1] and set out the key objectives to support our members in 2015. As part of our strategy, we have been reviewing our progress each year and highlighting our focus for the future. Three years into our five-year strategy, we have consistently delivered on our objectives, thanks to the excellent work of GSR members across the Civil Service, and I would like to take this opportunity to celebrate our successes as well as to outline how we plan to build on those successes in the coming year.

During the last year, we saw the launch of the Analysis Function strategy "Better analysis. Better delivery"[2]. This is an exciting opportunity for analysts in government as the Function aims to integrate the use of analysis, evidence and research into all policy, finance and operational decisions. In GSR, we have worked ever closer with Statisticians, Economists, Scientists, Data Scientists, Engineers, Operational Researchers and Actuaries to carry out this mission and champion best practice in analysis. In response to the needs, we have revised our GSR membership criteria and the benefits associated with membership to maintain and strengthen the standards in the profession.

In Talent Development, we have continued to recruit, engage, develop and retain talent in the profession. GSR is now one of the most popular streams in Fast Stream recruitment and the enhanced GSR sandwich placement student programme is attracting many new graduates into the profession. Several products have also been delivered to engage members on cross-government issues and facilitate networking, such as welcome and induction events, the annual GESR conference and mini conference, and training courses and events developed with external partners, like the British Academy. The membership website and the new GSR Blog have enabled GSR to communicate these opportunities and share learning directly with the GSR membership. The work GSR has done to build stronger GSR networks across government and promote internship opportunities, job shadowing and the new Ambassadors network, has also been important in connecting GSR members, leading to a more diverse and inclusive community.

In the coming year, we will continue to build a more cohesive and productive relationship with other analytical professions in setting standards. We will implement Success Profiles into the GSR competency framework and continue to develop a more representative, engaged and focused membership.

Delivering the strategy has involved many groups and individuals across GSR and the enthusiasm, dedication and skill shown by the volunteers has been tremendous. Central to this success 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.

As the context in which social researchers work is constantly changing, it is ever more important for GSR to understand our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as a profession. Over the last two years of our five-year strategy, we will continue to review progress, check priorities and respond to emerging developments. Your support to the GSR community will never be more critical in continuing our successful journey.

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
[2] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/742625/P19650_Analysis_Function_Document_landscape_HI_RES.pdf
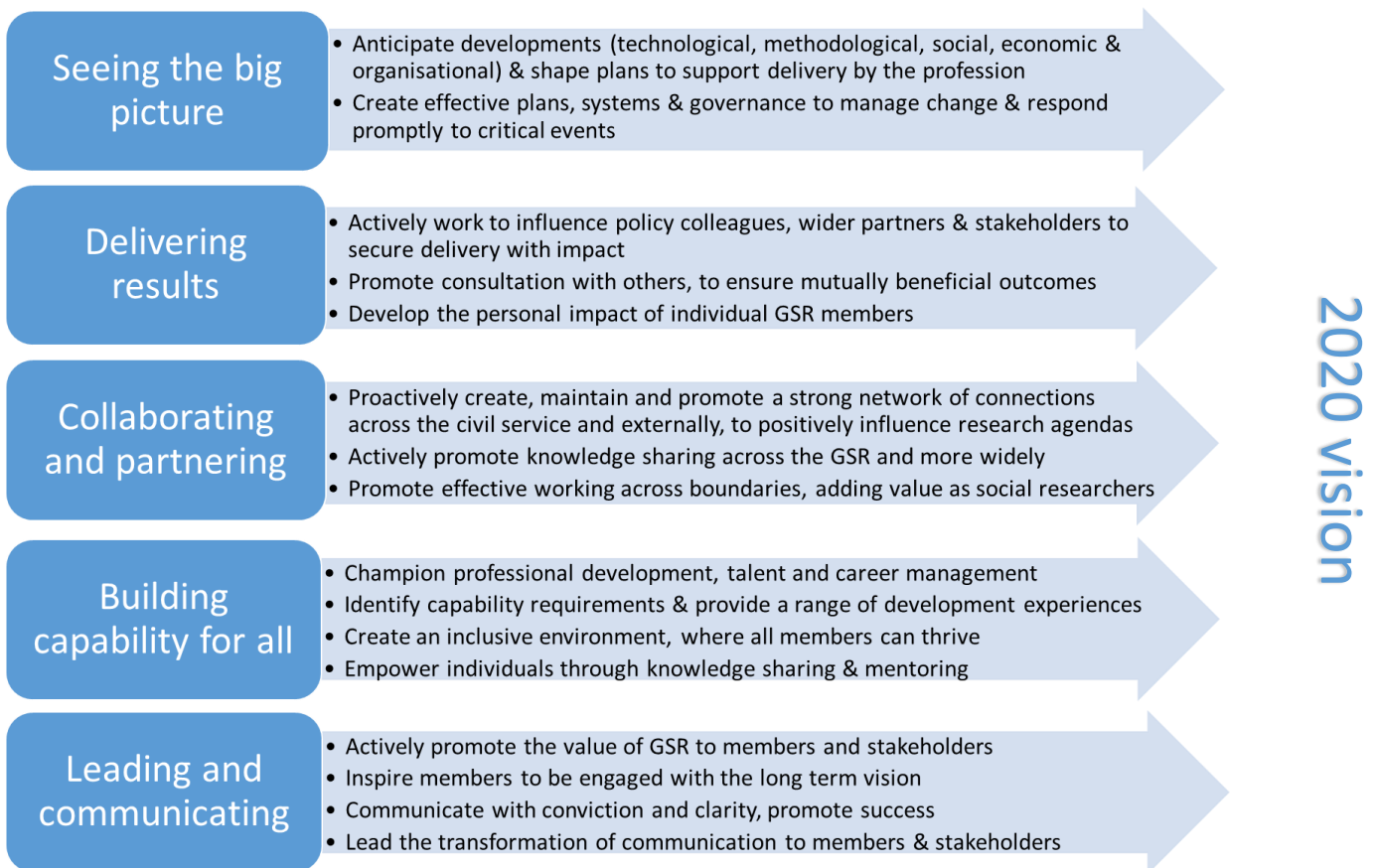
Report Card

For each of the five key objectives in the strategy we set out 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

2020 vision

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

Table 1: A summary of progress three years on

Green = completed 🟢   *Yellow = in progress* 🟡   *Red = little or no progress* 🔴

Objective	What success would look like by 2020	Progress in year 3	Rating
Seeing the bigger picture	Promote development of good quantitative skills in GSR members (new and existing)	• Work has been done on the **assessment material** for new graduate entrants to the social research Fast Stream to ensure quantitative skills are tested across all elements, putting a stronger emphasis on these skills • We continue to provide placements for **Q-step students** across departments, to promote the development of good quantitative skills in social scientists. • With the formation of the **Analysis Function**, there will be opportunities for existing members to access further training to develop quantitative skills, as the cross-Function L&D offer is developed	🟡
	Be proactively anticipating future developments (technological, methodological) & managing change	• **Social Research for non-Social Researchers** – There has been work to develop a social research training course in order to promote the appropriate use of social research among policy and other colleagues. This will be delivered in face-to-face sessions in different departments. The group are currently planning modules and teaching content. • **Behavioural Insights** – A new T&F group has been proposed to examine the ways in which Behavioural Insights/Behavioural Science (BI/BS) are used across different departments, finding out where they are used, '*what works*', and how much ownership of BI/BS GSR has. After formal sign-off, volunteer recruitment and group set-up will begin.	🟡
Delivering results	Case studies to be promoted to showcase the value GSR members add & impact across the government.	• A number of **case studies** have been published internally and externally, and further examples of case studies have been identified. New T&F group volunteers have been recruited and the group are currently working with the GSR Champions to consider the strategic use of case studies in order to publish case studies that have maximum impact.	🟢

	Set up panel discussion events and a cross departmental group for GSR analysts & academics, to debate and discuss cross-cutting issues and facilitate networking.	- A cross-departmental group of **'GSR Champions'** has been established to help promote the value and impact of GSR within policy development. They meet regularly and although largely successful in promoting GSR across govt, more engagement is required in some departments. - A T&F group has been working to promote a better **understanding of impact** in GSR and has engaged SCS colleagues in defining this. They will be presenting plans for the first stage of this research to HoPs next year. - A joint GSR/British Academy event focussing on Big Data was held on 22nd October. The event was attended by nearly 100 academics and civil servants. Presentations and break-out workshops were held prompting interesting discussions about the role of Big Data in the work of social researchers. Subsequent feedback has been positive and the strand leads and group members are currently working with the British Academy to organise more events.	🟢
	Promote development of personal impact to all	- The Talent Development work within GESR has continued to establish itself as an offer that has growing demand and in 2018/19 a number of initiatives completed pilots and were rolled out to GSR members alongside Economists. - The GESR SCS Development group have delivered three successful SCS Masterclasses in leadership and opportunities for networking since 2017, which have also now been extended to G6s. For example, a Masterclass on 'Building resilience within your teams and yourself' was delivered by DWP's Chief Psychologist David Carew in November 2018. Some GSR SCS colleagues attended this session and initial feedback indicates that it has been a success.	🟠
Collaborating & partnering	Actively build stakeholder networks across departments so GSR develops stronger links with specialists, leading to better informed analysis & advice	- The Analysis Function strategy "Better analysis. Better delivery" was launched in June 2017. The Function aims to integrate the use of analysis, evidence and research into all policy, finance and operational decisions. In GSR, we have worked ever closer with Statisticians, Economists, Scientists, Data Scientists, Engineers, Operational Researchers and Actuaries to carry out this mission and champion best practice in analysis. - The Head of GSR Profession and her deputies have been working in collaboration with other specialists across departments, including the Departmental Directors of Analysis Network	🟠

		(DDAN), Analytical Talent Board (ATB), analytical Function Board (AFB), Cross Government Evaluation Group (CGEG) and the Analysis Function Fast Stream Review Task and Finish Group.	
	Task senior GSR members to be named 'account managers' for specific external stakeholders, to keep momentum in developing these relationships	• For example, Alexy Buck and Rachel Dubourg (the joint GSR Heads of Profession at MoJ) represent GSR on the Economic and Social Research Council "Research methods Task and Finish Group". • Jeremy Vincent (GSR Head of Profession at BEIS) has recently agreed to represent GSR in the SRA/MRS research commissioning group as well as leading on engaging the Crown Commercial Service CCS research marketplace team.	🟠
	Develop & promote an evidence-base of the benefits of internships and secondments, to demonstrate the value this type of partnering delivers to individuals & organisations	• The Internships T&F group has been mapping internship opportunities and promoting the benefits of internships to departments. They have published a summary document on the GSR website and disseminated this across government, including through a presentation and a stall at the 2018 GSR conference. The group has also carried out research (a survey, interviews and focus groups) on the experiences of interns and their line managers, with the aim of developing best practice guidance. Interim findings were presented at the 2018 GSR conference and final outputs will be produced in early 2019. • The Internships T&F group also presented a paper to HoPs outlining the options for centralising internship schemes. The decision was taken not to pursue centralisation.	🟠
Building capability for all	CPD opportunities mapped to GSR & generic competencies, to illustrate learning pathways	• The new Analysis Function is scoping out the Learning Pathway and Career Framework for the members. Different working groups have been set up at the beginning of 2019 to take forward the design and implementation. There will be plenty of CPD opportunities for GSR members.	🟠

	GSR Board actively managing talent in the profession	• Work has been undertaken to understand the relative lack of **diversity in GSR**. A literature review has been carried out and evidence gathered about the extent of representation in GSR. The next planned stage of the work is to disseminate a survey collecting data on the experience of GSR members and how this relates to diversity issues. • Working with your line Manager' sessions for new joiners, being delivered to GSR with very good feedback, sessions in Leeds and London (9 in total), since 2017 taking on board feedback to improve the workshops. • Recent starters workshops: piloting a series (6 in total) of workshops Nov-Dec 2018 in London and Leeds on 'Working with Policy Colleagues' and 'Communicating Analysis to Press & Private Office', welcome/induction event, etc. • GSR are working with the GES and GORS professions to agree improvements to all three Fast Stream schemes by April 2019, to improve the leadership learning offer, have a more consistent policy on job rotations as well as end of scheme assessments, bringing these schemes in line with others across the Civil Service.	🟡
	Strengthened role for the GSR North group and promote active engagement with other GSR groups (e.g. those based in Wales and Scotland)	• There have been conferences and newsletters for GSR North, which have received positive responses and we are keen to develop this further. Active reps are now in place in the North and they launched an successful event in February 2019, involving GSR Wales and Scotland.	🟡
	Actively promote secondment and job swap opportunities	• This has evolved from a job swap scheme to peer-to-peer job shadowing due to practicalities and disproportionate resource required for the former. HoPs are supportive of the current proposal and it will soon move to the piloting stage. Advertising of the pilot scheme will begin at the end of November 2018 and it is anticipated that this will be up and running in early 2019. Feedback will be collected from the pilot and used to inform development of a national scheme.	🟡
	Social science students involved in the Q-step programme joining GSR on graduation, with enhanced quantitative skills	• Departments and ALBs across government are involved in the Q-step programme, with students placed in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, including: Audit Scotland, DFID, Food Standards Agency, Home Office, NI Housing Executive, ONS, OFSTED, Probation Board NI, National Records of Scotland (NRS), HM Inspectorate of Probation, NHS England, DfE, MoJ, DEFRA, NI Assembly, Scottish Government, The Welsh Government and HM Revenue & Customs.	🟡

Objective	What success would look like by 2020	Progress towards success in year 3	Rating
Leading & communicating	Strengthen the role of Head of Profession within departments, to lead on the delivery of the GSR Strategy	• A Head of Profession Away Day Action Group has been set up to take forward proposals from the Away Day to ensure a strategic and impactful GSR Board. This includes a greater representation and visibility cross the Government decision-making boards, revising the terms of reference for the GSR Board, etc.	🟢
	Lead on case for a pan-government procurement strategy for social research	• A GSR working group has been set up to work with the Crown Commercial Service and the Cabinet Office on the new Research Marketplace procurement vehicle. This will improve the usability of the Marketplace for social researchers.	🟠
	Deliver the 2015 GSR Communications Strategy	• Work has been undertaken to establish the feasibility and value of a GSR Yammer Group. Progress has been made with promoting the use of Yammer across GSR, for example use by Task and Finish groups to test the platform. Initial feedback was positive and a GSR community is growing on the platform, however we are working to address access issues at a very small number of government departments. Discussions are ongoing with GSR about the potential to share the GSR newsletter on the platform • A **GSR Blog** has been established to communicate directly to GSR members and to provide the opportunity to highlight good work and share learning. • A **review of the GSR websites** is taking place. Progress has been slowed slightly by the Fast Stream review which is currently in progress. The group is awaiting the conclusion of the Review to ensure the accuracy of the contents and information conveyed about opportunities to join GSR. • A **new Task and Finish Group** has been set up to help promote and support the network of **GSR Ambassadors** conducting outreach activities at universities, especially with low application rates, ensuring that this is achieved in a joined-up way across the country.	🟠