



Government
Social Research

Government Social Research Strategy 2021-2025:

Social Research In and For Government

Impactful & Influential
Expert & Valued
Diverse & Inclusive

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Foreword

Welcome to the Government Social Research (GSR) Strategy 2021-2025. We are delighted to share with you our commitment and plan to improve government strategy, policy and delivery through strengthening GSR's role and ability to put people and society at the heart of government decision-making.

We will do this through focusing on three priorities:

- **Impactful and influential work:** Robust, timely and relevant evidence and advice that has a measurable impact on decision-making
- **Expert and valued people:** A supported, continually developed and empowered membership
- A **diverse and inclusive profession:** Representative of the society we serve through our values, profile and perspectives of our membership

This will enable GSR to continue developing improved people-focused decision-making at the heart of government and allow greater understanding of the individuals and groups affected by those decisions. This will be achieved through developing and supporting GSR expertise and applying this to help influence the decisions and behaviours required to achieve government's priorities.

GSR represents an incredibly diverse skills base: we are made up of individuals from a range of academic and professional backgrounds giving us a richness of expertise and a breadth of approaches to solve problems. We have achieved much: we have led the revision of the [Magenta Book](#) to better reflect emerging methods and improve their usability; we have improved the supply, demand and use of evaluation over recent years; we have responded rapidly and flexibly to inform the UK's response to the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g. [Data & Analysis](#)); supported EU Exit and UK post transition; and brought a person- and group-focus to a diverse range of issues, such as the [Research and Development Roadmap](#) and the Spending Review.

This is a strong place from which to start, but we must go further to meet the many challenges facing the UK in the coming years, notably recovery from COVID-19, the need for rapid decarbonisation and the imperative to level-up opportunities across the whole of the UK. GSR must fully reflect the society our work represents; we must be agile and responsive in developing and using new methods and data sources; and we must work in a way that ensures our evidence and advice has maximum value and impact in all government decision-making.

This strategy is the culmination of the GSR profession challenging ourselves – our members, Heads of Profession and senior leadership – to identify where we need to focus our attention to develop and grow as a profession. Some of this will be as part of the Analysis Function: we need to play a full part in the Function, working with and complementing the other analytical professions, joining-up on areas of mutual priority and working together to improve the impact and influence of all government analytical work. However, we must also focus on GSR-specific issues to ensure we are able to maximise

the role GSR people and evidence play in decision-making; we must build a professional offer and a culture that attracts, develops and keeps the best talent.

To develop this Strategy there have been workshops, working groups, and membership consultation where we have reached out to the whole membership. A core team of GSR member volunteers have worked to ensure we have a strategy that retains GSR at the front of research innovation, knowledge creation and translation into effective policy and delivery. Enormous thanks go to all those who contributed to building this strategy.

The Strategy outlines our vision, mission, and how we intend to achieve these. This is underpinned by more detailed delivery plans which the GSR Strategy Board and individual GSR members will use to drive progress towards 2025. We commit to reporting our progress against our three priorities annually:

- **Impactful and influential** – our work
- **Expert and valued** – our members
- **Diverse and inclusive** – our values

Jenny Dibden

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Head of GSR



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Deputy Head of GSR



Ed Dunn

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GSR Senior Leadership Team, on behalf of the GSR Heads of Profession

Who we are and who we will be

Government Social Research (GSR) is the analytical profession within Government for Civil Servants who generate and provide social and behavioural research and advice. GSR members enable government to understand issues relating to society, groups and individuals; and support policy debate and decision-making through a variety of approaches, advice and evidence. We currently have over 1,800 professionally accredited members across 50+ departments/organisations.

GSR members come from a wide range of professional backgrounds and disciplines covering the breadth of social and behavioural sciences. Our work puts people at the heart of government decision-making by providing expertise in applied quantitative and qualitative design and analysis approaches, evaluation and interventions to solve complex problems. GSR takes a scientific and tailored approach supported by bodies of knowledge and a range of research methods to inform, influence and provide robust and defensible decision-making at all levels.

Specifically, GSR's role is to:

- Provide analytical insight to enable decision makers to understand systems, processes and change associated with people, groups, organisations and society – their attitudes, perceptions, behaviours and intentions – to inform and improve the quality of strategy, delivery and policy debate decision-making
- Anticipate and evaluate the impact of government decisions, understand '*what works, for whom, to what extent, in what contexts, how and why/why not?*'
- Provide expert social research advice and evidence to design, challenge, reduce risk, trial, improve quality and implement government strategy and policy
- Maintain and grow social research professional skills, knowledge and expertise
- Represent society through our membership profile and the work that we do

The value of GSR to and within government is clear. However, to reflect developments in the demands from government and the needs of our members, it is important we continue to evolve. We aim to reach out to and provide a voice for the whole social and behavioural community in government, and work together to improve our collective impact and influence. We will continue to listen to and work with networks and groups that share common backgrounds, skill sets and values, to increase collaboration, open out development and progression opportunities and enhance networks.

This strategy sets out where the GSR profession aims to be in 2025, and the priorities we will focus on to get there.

Our Vision

People and society-centred research, advice and design at the heart of Government decision-making

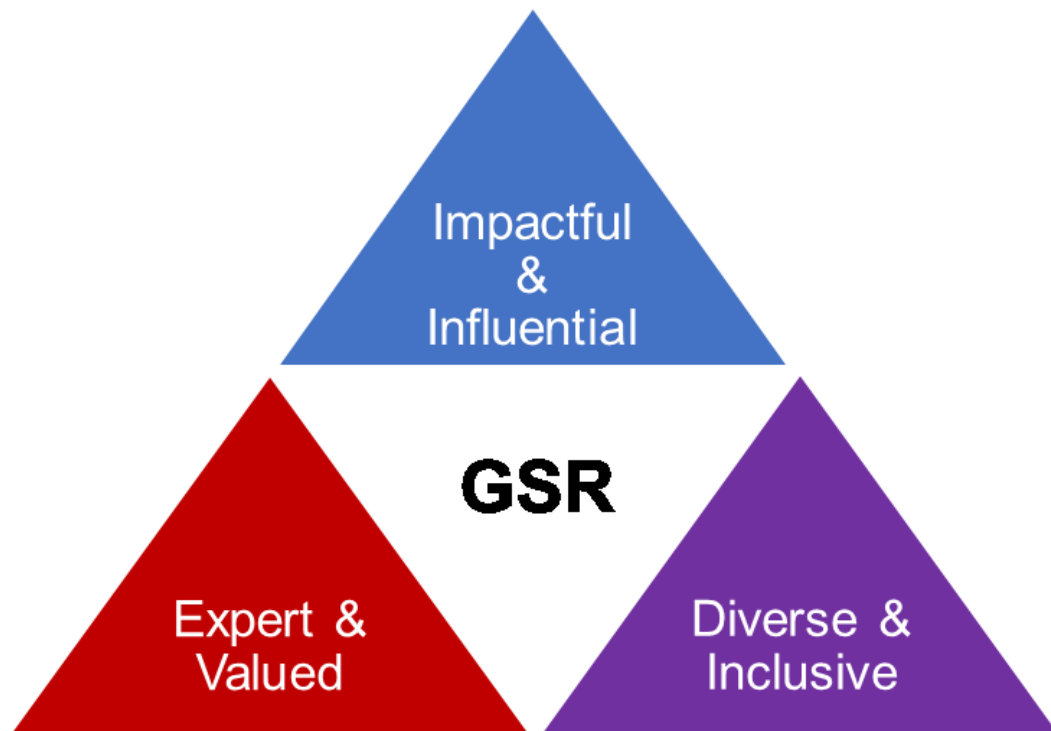
Our Mission

Social and behavioural research and science is at the centre of influencing government policy debate and decision-making (our work); by

Being the best employer of highly skilled social and behavioural scientists (our members); who

Role model an inclusive and diverse approach in all they do (our values)

Deliver the best social science evidence for government



Our Priorities

Impactful and Influential



GSR informs government decision-making and policy debate through impactful and influential input, engagement and collaboration

By proactively contributing and promoting the relevance and use of social and behavioural science in policy, delivery and spending decisions. Achieved through contributing evidence, advice and design, and engaging with relevant stakeholders to create a holistic picture and joined-up response. Diversity and inclusion (D&I) will be championed throughout our work.

Maintain and promote stakeholder engagement both internally and externally, continuing to build on strong foundations to champion the expertise, evidence, advice, value and reach across the broader social research agenda. We will:

- Identify gaps and bring in evidence to guide Areas of Research Interest (ARI)
- Engage with internal and external influencers (e.g. SAGE, SPI-B, UKRI, academia, research organisations) to increase visibility, influence and coordination in emergency, strategic and high-priority decision-making
- Effectively publish robust and impartial work and underlying data to inform public debate

Influence and collaborate with analytical, strategy, policy and delivery colleagues, ensuring analytical insight about people, society, resources and spending are at the forefront of the consideration of core issues facing government (e.g. Green recovery, Covid-19, UK post transition). We will:

- Anticipate future areas that would benefit from GSR input
- Facilitate GSR access and involvement through leadership, collaboration and engagement on cross-government cross-cutting initiatives (e.g. Analysis Function, R&D Roadmap, Decarbonisation, Green Book)
- Evaluate evidence informing Spending Reviews and ongoing spending decisions
- Increase collaboration with allied disciplines across the social and behavioural community to increase collective impact and influence

Be at the heart of decision-making and advice both internally and externally demonstrating the breadth of knowledge, experience and skills the profession can bring to a multitude of issues. We will:

- Ensure Ministers and Senior Leaders know why and how to seek GSR expertise
- Identify GSR Champions at a senior level
- Work with the breadth of the social and behavioural community across government to grow our collective impact
- Maintain, build and communicate the skills, expertise and knowledge GSR provides internally and externally, including through relevant and up to date GSR guidance that is recognised, embedded and respected cross-government

Model excellence in the generation and use of diversity and inclusion data by supporting, advising and improving data collection methods and the use of existing sources across government through effective collaboration and training. We will:

- Work with Public Sector Equality Duty leads, D&I leads, Chief Analysts and others to establish principles for when/how diversity, inclusion and equalities analysis should be embedded in work
- Create a cross-government GSR Inclusive Research Network, guidelines on when/how to embed diversity, inclusion and equalities analysis/considerations into work, programme of events to promote good practice in inclusive research for all analysts and policy professionals
- Embed inclusive research leads within departments to provide advice and expertise on D&I friendly research

Expert & Valued

GSR supports all members to maximise their personal impact, achieve their individual potential and experience a fulfilling career



Expert &
Valued

By ensuring members are at the forefront of new methodological developments and are equipped with the skills and experience necessary to be effective social scientists, and by providing access to opportunities to be effective in current and/or future roles and all grades across the Civil Service

Develop skills and experience through professional development opportunities, both internal and external, to enable all GSR members to have the skills necessary to be effective and innovative and be at the cutting-edge of their profession. We will:

- Develop resources to identify, support and facilitate the professional and skill development offer for all analysts in the social and behavioural community (e.g. methods, data science, management skills, interpretation, behavioural science, confidence to influence/demonstrate benefit of work, educating others)
- Explore career opportunity models such as academic placements, private sector secondments
- Identify and exploit both Civil Service (e.g. high potential schemes) & external development opportunities (e.g. UKRI, SRA, AcSS)

Empower members to achieve a fulfilling career by ensuring relevant career related support and guidance is accessible and professional communities of practice are available to facilitate individual potential within grade/role and promotion up to and including SCS level. We will:

- Set up GSR communities of practice (e.g. methods group, qualitative practice, evaluation)
- Create recognition schemes including GSR awards/performance awards, collaborations with academia, international groups etc
- Update GSR governance (e.g. refreshing the GSR Code, technical framework)
- Join up with the GSR D&I Strategy 'Embedding and Retaining an Inclusive Culture' strand to improve representation across the Civil Service
- Work with the Analysis Function to best utilise the leadership offer for members

Embed a learning culture so that identification of career aspirations and continuing professional development are at the forefront of goals for all members, and achievements are understood, recognised and championed by default to ensure the best social and behavioural scientists are retained in government. We will:

- Develop the GSR 'community' through a programme of shared seminars/events, activities, informal support & engagement, communities of practice
- Embed goals/objective setting within departments that support individual aspirations
- Improve awareness and collaboration with analysts and policy colleagues through relevant workshops within and across departments

Confident and capable leading inclusive research by promoting and developing inclusive research skills and being a leading voice in providing advice and guidance on D&I data collection and analysis across government in collaboration with other professions. We will:

- Use existing initiatives within and outside government to develop relevant training and skills
- Develop inclusive research methods training for GSR members

One of the linked priorities in the GSR D&I strategy focuses on 'Retaining and embedding an inclusive culture'. This includes equal opportunities, creating progression pathways and developing with the needs of the profession. More details of this can be found in the [GSR Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and Delivery plan](#)



Diverse & Inclusive

GSR is as diverse in our profile and perspectives as the society we serve, across all levels of the profession, through our culture and the careers we offer



To have a diverse membership and culture that is positive for all, where members are supported, developed, respected and appreciated for their unique characteristics and who feel proud to be part of the social research community. This will be achieved through attracting a diverse workforce, ensuring fair selection, and embedding and retaining an inclusive culture. It will be demonstrated and monitored through accurate data and metrics

This priority has been developed as a [separate strategy](#) to demonstrate our commitment to improving diversity and inclusion. We are committed to improving our diversity across the range of characteristics related to ensuring we have a diverse profession. In the first year of the four-year GSR D&I Strategy we will be focusing on ethnic minority and lower socio-economic representation; this will be reviewed annually allowing us to give adequate focus to the needs of different groups. The strategy will complement the [Analysis Function D&I strategy](#) whilst focusing on GSR priorities of:

Attracting a diverse profession by targeting and developing outreach activities, engaging with cross-government networks and wider research sector, and exploring alternative application routes into the profession

Inclusive and fair recruitment and selection by ensuring there is no overt or unconscious discrimination during recruitment processes, thereby reassuring potential candidates they are entering a fair and unbiased process, through improved guidance, training, materials, assessments and processes, resulting in a more diverse workforce

Embedding and retaining an inclusive culture by providing positive action and tailored support aligned to need, ensuring everyone can reach their full potential without any barriers, to include improving GSR SCS representation and diversity at all levels across the profession

Accurate monitoring of GSR data to support all strategic priorities of the GSR Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and GSR Strategy by working with the Analysis Function to ensure relevant and appropriate data are collected and used to monitor career progress and any emerging issues across the protected characteristics and other diversity characteristics

Delivering the strategy

Our strategy indicates our ambition to take action and be held to account for how our profession develops and the impact it has. It sets out our aspirations for GSR over the next four years and our vision, mission and priorities to achieve these. We outline how we will achieve these through our [Delivery Plans](#). This will include our top-level objectives and annual actions and timeframe.

We will deliver our priorities drawing on a number of resources. This includes:

- Drawing on the expertise of our membership
- The profession's central support team
- GSR Heads of Profession
- Oversight and accountability by the GSR Strategy Board
- Other analytical professions and external influencers

We will report on our progress annually to encourage accountability and show our commitment to achieve our priorities including outlining the plans for subsequent years.

Where we will be in 2025

GSR is a growing, energetic profession, essential to tackle the profound social and practical challenges over the next four years. This Strategy ensures we will be well prepared and uniquely placed to provide the analytical insights on people and groups behaviour, what drives it and how to influence, and advise on the design and delivery of social and behavioural interventions. We will continue to build on our strengths and:

- Our work: Government analysts, Policy Professionals, and Senior leaders will understand the skills and value of GSR and seek out GSR support at the beginning of processes
- Our work & our members: GSR will have visible and engaging representation at senior levels across government
- Our work and our members: GSR will visibly demonstrate influence at every level and stage of the government policy and delivery cycle and be central to departmental and cross-government prioritisation and decision-making (e.g. UK Transition, Covid-19 recovery, decarbonisation, levelling up)
- Our work: Be the go-to place for social research advice and guidance both internally and externally
- Our values and our work: Be the advisor for the Civil Service on D&I data collection and use
- Our members and our work: Members will be at the forefront of rapid changes in social and behavioural research methods and approaches, applied across a broad range of policy and delivery areas
- Our work: Have a greater central support function to support and deliver the development opportunities for the profession
- Our values: Have the diverse and inclusive membership we need to be fully effective at understanding and reflecting the range of views and perspectives held within the communities we serve

GSR – our members, work and values – will represent a strong and inclusive profession with influence and impact across government.

Mapping GSR Strategic Impact

