



Government  
Economic  
Service

# The GES Strategy 2021-24

Building a more diverse and inclusive  
profession

# Foreword



The GES continues to grow in strength, with economics and economists right at the heart of policy-making, across nearly every area of Government affecting citizens across the whole of the UK.

We've also made important progress in developing the profession, in particular diversifying our entry routes, with the launch of a new Assistant Economist recruitment scheme ("Main Stream") to complement the Fast Stream, and the ground-breaking Degree Apprenticeship Programme. But we know that there is much more that we can do – and must - to encourage diversity and inclusion in the GES. The whole economics profession needs to do better to harness the full range of available talent and we want to be an exemplar.

The GES's greatest asset is you – our members. You are the ones who make the difference every day, by providing high-quality, influential economic advice. This strategy was developed with your input and its priorities reflect what you said. Ultimately its success depends on you too. Please get involved and help us to build a profession that we can all continue to be proud of.

*Sam Beckett and Clare Lombardelli*

Joint Heads of the GES

# Introduction

The Government Economic Service (GES) is the profession for Economists within the Civil Service. The GES began in 1964 and has steadily grown in size and influence. It has a huge cross HMG presence, with members across more than fifty organisations all over the UK and in HMG offices overseas. GES members provide expert advice across a very wide range of issues, including many of the most important policy decisions of -the day. They constantly innovate, developing new data and adapting methodologies to improve advice and impact. GES members have an incredible peer group to draw from, both professionally and for broader support and career advice.

While the GES does not employ economists directly, it acts collaboratively as a profession to support its members, their employers and the GES leadership. This work includes leading the recruitment of new economists into government, supporting professional development, running events, facilitating the profession's Boards and championing the use of economics in policy-making.

## GES funding and structure

The GES is funded by a per-member fee, paid by their home department. A reduced fee is paid for associate members.

Leadership of the GES is provided by the joint Heads of the GES and the GES Boards. The smaller Corporate Board leads on decision-making related to the development of the profession and is attended by chief economists from all departments with more than 100 members. The larger Strategy Board meets quarterly and focuses on strategic discussions on major analytical issues.

The Boards are supported by the Government Economic and Social Research (GESR) team which provides central support for both the GES and GSR (Government Social Research). The team also runs central recruitment schemes, events, L&D, outreach and marketing. While located in HM Treasury, it works for members and their departments wherever they are located.

The team's vision is that members are proud to belong to the GES and feel supported by an outstanding GESR team that provides a great place to work. Successfully delivering this strategy will be a crucial part of realising that vision. If you have any questions, please contact us at [GESREnquiries@hmtreasury.gov.uk](mailto:GESREnquiries@hmtreasury.gov.uk)

GES members have always played a crucial role in the running of the GES and we all owe a debt to our predecessors who gave their time to build the profession and its standards, to assess new candidates and to shape its growth. Today's members have the same responsibility and privilege, to help deliver change and support future generations of economists.

## The Analysis Function and how we work together

As one of the largest analytical professions in Government, the GES works as part of the Analysis Function and joins up on areas of common interest, including a shared mission to improve the quality and impact of analysis as a whole. The Analysis Function provides a forum for collaboration between analysts across government who deliver research, evidence and advice to a consistent, professional standard. It is open to all civil servants who work in analytical roles.

The GES's contribution to the Analysis Function is guided by the following principles:

1. Disseminate – Where the Analysis Function has an established route for best practice, we will support by championing and sharing this knowledge through established GES channels across departments.
2. Collaborate – We will work together with other analytical professions on emerging issues, ensuring working groups include members from both the Analysis Function secretariat and GESR team where goals are of common interest.
3. Build – We will act as a profession to ensure GES aims are met and where we identify areas that benefit from working across analytical professions, we will support the Analysis Function to establish effective action.

# The GES Strategy 2021-24

This new strategy was developed through discussions with the GES Board and informed by extensive consultation with the membership. It is based on an understanding of where we want to get to, and a diagnosis of the profession's strengths and weaknesses.

The Board has reaffirmed its commitment to the enduring GES vision, to champion economics in government and to promote the use of high-quality economic analysis provided by excellent economists. The GES is also committed to the [core values of the civil service](#): integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality. We want all our members to identify with our vision and values, to feel proud to belong to the GES and supported in their professional development. We want members to have a clearer understanding of what they can expect from their profession, and what their obligations are in return.

Above all, this strategy is shaped by the recognition that the GES can more actively promote diversity and inclusion, and that the membership demands this. Three critical areas have been identified where we need to improve:

## 1. **Becoming a community of greater diversity and inclusion**

Diversity and Inclusion is the number one priority for the GES in this period and will be taken forward through the 10 D&I commitments set out here. These build on the positive steps made through the GES 2020 strategy, including the establishment of the Gender in the GES and Economists Everywhere initiative and the successful introduction of the GES Degree Apprenticeship Programme. We acknowledge that members have demanded we do better, both during the engagement process and in their response to movements such as Black Lives Matter. We also recognise the energy and ideas already present in our membership.

## 2. **Understanding our members and building our offer around them**

Feedback from the Board and from members has shown that for too long the GES has had a weak understanding of who its members are, what skills they have and how they engage with the profession. Members would like more clarity on what they can expect from the profession and their own obligations, particularly around their professional development and skills they require. Improving this offers the opportunity to make our communications better targeted and the professional development offer more tailored and accessible. This strategy sets out a range of measures to radically improve.

## 3. **Engaging more effectively with external partners**

Economists in every department have built and maintained strong relationships with external partners, often over many years. This strategy aims to build on these foundations, spreading good practice and providing effective forums for discussing cross-governmental analytical priorities. The GES can also be more strategic and coherent when it engages with external experts as a united profession, through the GES leadership, the

Board and member events. One of the upsides of the rise of virtual working is the exciting opportunity to increase the range and quality of engagement. We should grasp it. As the largest recruiter of economists in the UK, the GES can also play a more constructive role in shaping the wider profession. This will form an important part of our D&I commitments.

The strategy will run over three years, from 2021-22 to 2023-24. It has been deliberately designed to have more actions and more detail in the first 18 months, to allow review and evolution to the changing context.

The strategy period will end in 2024, which will mark the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of the GES.

# Becoming a community of greater diversity and inclusion

We will:

## Accountability and Direction

1. **Establish a GES Diversity and Inclusion Working Group, led by a Board level sponsor**, to drive the implementation of our D&I commitments.
2. **Publish an annual report on the D&I profile of the GES, to be discussed and signed off by the Board.** The report will monitor progress against the D&I commitments below and the Board will be required to state what remedial action will be taken where required.

## Better information to diagnose the issues and develop solutions

3. **Improve our understanding of the D&I issues facing the profession building from the data in the GES diversity audit and working with under-represented groups and D&I networks** across the Civil Service and outside. We will explore issues around inclusion, progression and retention in the GES for under-represented groups including ethnic minority groups (and black people specifically), those from a lower socio-economic background, disabled people, women in the GES and economists based outside of London.
4. **Maintain more accurate and up-to-date information on the diversity profile of our workforce** by implementing an improved workforce Management Information system. We will develop a plan for using this data to monitor and benchmark retention and progression rates for members from different groups.

## D&I in recruitment

5. **Continuous improvement in our recruitment, acting on monitoring and evaluation of the success in widening access to the profession.** This includes developing and sharing best practice around marketing, inclusive job descriptions and training and support for our assessors. We will collect and use MI to diagnose the success rate of different demographic groups and actively seek feedback from candidates and assessors. KPIs will be set and monitored in the annual D&I report.
6. **Provide a diverse range of routes for people of all backgrounds to enter the profession.** We will continue to strongly promote the GES Degree Apprenticeship Programme, including sharing learnings with other government professions. We will actively explore the option of internship routes such as the Cabinet Office's summer diversity internship programme (S-DIP), which is only open to underrepresented groups. Board members will commit to continuing to champion and support these schemes.
7. **Design and implement an outreach strategy, harnessing the energy and ideas across the GES network.** The strategy will promote careers in economics to young people from groups currently under-represented in the profession, ensuring we do this early enough to influence their post-18 choices. We will work closely with

external partners where we have shared goals, including Discover Economics. We will focus our efforts by targeting schools and higher education providers with relatively high proportions of groups under-represented in the GES.

#### D&I in the GES

- 8. Support the progression, retention and inclusion of groups currently under-represented in the GES.** Key activities will include establishing a **GES Shadow Board**, reviewing the diversity of GES Boards and Working Groups and exploring how we can provide support career development and mentoring programmes. We will regularly review induction and welcome materials for central GES schemes, learning from amplifying best practice in departments. We will implement the recommendations of the Diversity and Inclusion audit, which will provide suggestions on how best to support progression, retention and inclusion of under-represented groups.

#### D&I in our analysis

- 9. Promote diversity and inclusion in the production of GES analysis.** This will include identifying, sharing and showcasing good practice in analysis of D&I impacts (eg distributional impacts and the Public Sector Equalities Duty), considering the inclusion of relevant analytical skills within our refreshed technical framework and providing information for professional development. We will work with the Royal Economic Society and others to help provide members with tools to identify a more diverse pool of economists.
- 10. Act as a positive role model to promote D&I in the wider profession.** We will promote D&I through our events programme, covering topics relevant to members of all backgrounds, monitoring the diversity of speakers in our events programme and maintaining the 2018 GES rule on panel diversity. We will provide guidance for members in understanding and broadening the diversity of their analytical stakeholders.



# Understanding our members and building our offer around them

We will:

1. **Improve the system for management information (MI)**, enabling us to better understand the profile of our members and to track their progress. In the longer term, this will help us to explore the choices of members and the barriers they face.
2. **Launch a simpler, clearer and better supported members website**, which will be an attractive and effective first port of call for members on all profession matters. This will include a clear welcome, signposts to key resources and learning, L&D opportunities, career pathways, testimonies of GES members, our commitment to and progress around D&I, resources on broader themes such as wellbeing and connections to other government networks that may enhance members overall career experience. To enhance transparency the website will publish Board minutes, up-to-date profiles of the GESR team, and will include an up-to-date member directory that helps foster an inclusive and accessible network.
3. **Complete a Priority Project on how members engage and identify with the profession, including with other members**. We will develop our understanding of what members of all grades and backgrounds want from the GES and how they would like to engage with the leadership, the support team and with other members. We will compare this against the current reality and develop a suite of actions to close the gap between the two.
4. **Develop and consult on a Membership Compact** that clarifies what members and departments can expect from the profession, and what is expected in return.
5. **Communicate more effectively with members through a regular newsletter, emails on our events programme and a monthly update to chief economists**. This will also enable a refocusing of the GES Strategy Board as a forum for genuinely strategic analytical discussion
6. **In consultation, refresh the GES technical standards to support the roll-out of a skills assessment tool and a profession-wide skills audit**. This will allow us to provide better definition of the profession against the new and ever-changing demands of the external environment we service.
7. **Make our L&D and events programmes more responsive to member needs**, drawing on a coherent view of analytical priorities and the information provided by the skills audit. We will also work with the Analysis Function where it can help provide appropriate learning for our members.
8. **Ensure that our events programme supports members wherever they work and whatever their working patterns**. We will run more events outside London and will make 100% of our events accessible online, to enable professional development to take place at anytime and anywhere. We will design our annual conference to promote effective member networking whether it takes place in a physical or virtual setting.

9. **Provide greater support for members on career development**, including events to showcase career stories and exploring buddying schemes with economists in the private sector and academia.
10. **Conduct an annual members survey and explore options for gathering better information from both new joiners and members who are leaving the GES**, to embed our commitment to seeking regular feedback from members and acting on it.
11. **Be responsive to the challenges that members face beyond the profession and examine our role in broader support**. This might include responding to movements such as Black Lives Matter at a time when we knew our membership were deeply affected. We want to build a caring community where routes to support from peers and networks are clear.

# Engaging more effectively with external expertise

We will:

1. **Provide all members with membership for the Royal Economic Society in 2021-22, including access to the Economic Journal and the RES directory.** We will review membership for future years depending on the success of the pilot.
2. **Run a Priority Project on external engagement,** which will identify and amplify good practice and develop a more strategic approach to how we communicate and engage externally. It will also review existing links and networks in departments and on Boards.
3. **Develop and maintain strong relationships with a small group of strategic partners.** In 2021-22 this will include close collaborations with the Royal Economic Society, the Society of Professional Economists and the Economic Observatory.
4. **Develop guidance for members on how they can easily access academic expertise.**
5. **Explore new ways for GES members to share insights with economists and others outside the GES,** to support policy making, learning and professional development. We will trial novel approaches and learn from their effectiveness.
6. **Continue to work collaboratively with the Analysis Function and other professions to improve the co-ordination and impact of analysis.** We will regularly review the effectiveness of our relationship with the AF and the principles that underpin it.
7. **Agree analytical themes to shape our L&D and events programme** and to inform central GES engagement with academia. **These will be informed by member views and agreed by the Board.**
8. **Promote GES values through our external engagement,** including by engaging with a diversity of voices throughout the profession and asking all organisations that we partner with to operate in line with GES diversity values.
9. **We will professionalise our engagement with alumni,** using our links to increase the exchange of ideas and to provide development opportunities for current GES members.

# Delivery and next steps

This strategy can only be delivered through its members: by GES working groups. Sub-boards, networks and the GESR team, with oversight provided by the GES Board. A delivery plan is published alongside this strategy setting out milestones and respective roles. The GES Board will be regularly updated on progress, with quarterly updates and an updated delivery plan made available on the GES website.

In Summer 2021, the GESR team will begin a rolling programme of engagement with GES member departments, aimed at keeping members engaged with the strategy throughout its life.

# Recent milestones in the GES

The GES has continued to make important progress over the last few years, driven by the membership at large as well as through the Board and the central team. Positive steps include:

- A significant increase in GES numbers, a signal of the value that members add to policy-making. The number of GES members in post increased by over 50% between 2017 and 2020.
- Reforming the GES Fast Stream to make it work better for members and compliant with Cabinet Office principle for all Fast Stream schemes
- Introducing a new Assistant Economist recruitment scheme (“Main Stream”) to complement the Fast Stream, which has grown rapidly into a popular entry route, with 163 postings in 2020. The scheme was evaluated in 2020, with improvements now being embedded.
- Launching GESDAP, the first degree-level economic apprenticeship, developed by the GES in partnership with the university of Kent. More than 125 apprentices have joined the GESDAP over two cohorts, with the third due to join in September.
- Enrolling 128 people on the new GES Level 7 Masters apprenticeship.
- Increasing the proportion of females in the GES Fast Stream intake – in 2018 34% of our GES FS Intake was female. This rose to 42% in 2019.
- Rapidly moving all GES recruitment, and assessor training online in response to covid restrictions. Over 1,000 GES interviews have now been delivered online. GES events were also moved online, driving a whole new vision for accessible events and participation.
- Streamlining and accelerating decision-making by introducing a two-Board structure, with key decisions being taken by a smaller Corporate Board made up of the largest employers of GES members.
- The establishment of the Gender in the GES initiative and the Economists Everywhere network to represent the interests of different elements of our membership.
- The launch of the Next Generation Economics Schools Competition, which asks students across the UK to write to FCDO Chief Economist Rachel Glennerster with their ideas on the economic policies needed to tackle two defining challenges facing their generation: climate change and global inequality.

# The GES in numbers

Figure 1 - GES Membership by department or agency, January 2021 (all members)<sup>i</sup>

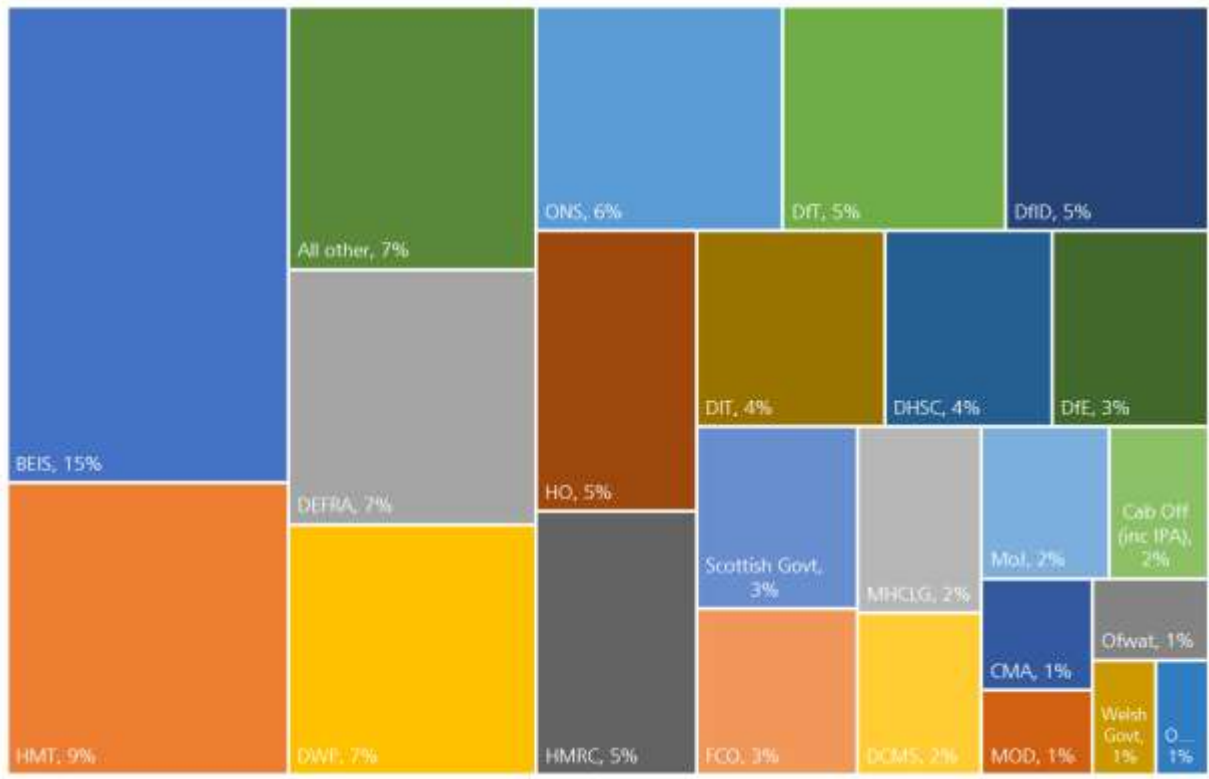


Figure 2 - GES Members in post, 1964-2020 (full members only)<sup>ii</sup>

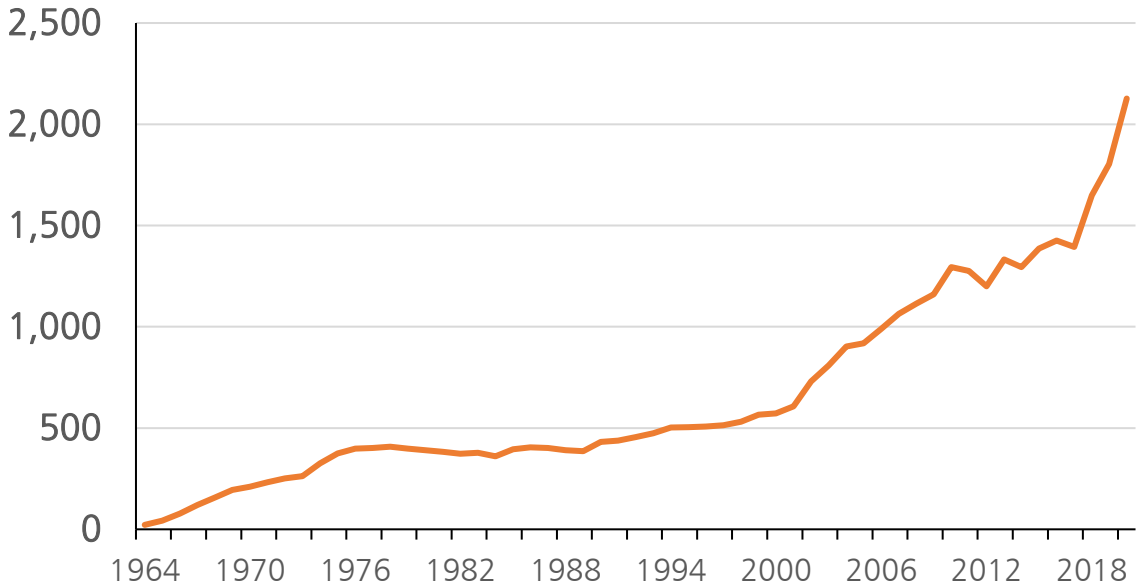
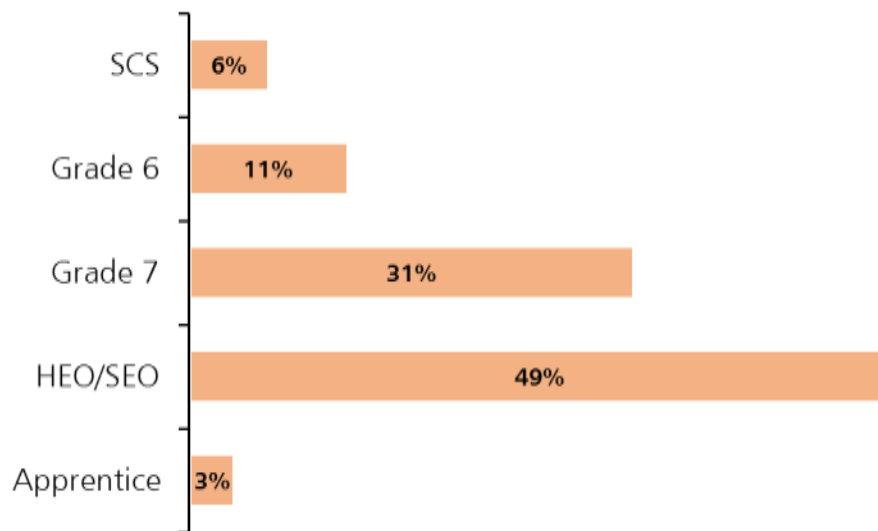


Figure 3 GES members by Grade, January 2021<sup>iii</sup>



### Building the Strategy

The strategy process began with a GES Strategy Board workshop to consider the achievements of the previous strategy and what they would like the GES to look like in 3 years' time. These ideas were developed into the underpinnings of the strategy.

The strategy was put through a 3-month consultation period from November 2020 to January 2021, publicized in the newsletter and an open offer from the GESR team to run bespoke sessions on the strategy.

Consultation sessions were run with senior leadership meetings in several departments and with diversity focused groups such as Gender in the GES and Economists Everywhere. To ensure the broader membership view was captured the draft paper was shared with AE reps and Grade managers. In addition, there were two sessions open to all members.

All comments were collated and discussed with the wider team, and the project was rescoped to accommodate additional asks. This process was helpful not just in building the new strategy but also in communicating and engaging with members about work that is already underway. As a result, we have recognized that there is value to be added from better communication and more regular engagement with members. This is being built into our plans for the future.

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> The *Other* category combines approximately 40 employing organisations who employ 1% or less of total GES Members. Figures are based upon User Profiles held on the GES Members Website as at the end of Jan 2021. Figures include Apprentices but excludes any placement Students.

<sup>ii</sup> Data in figure 2 relates to GES members in an Economist Post and do not include GES Members who, at the point of data capture, were reported by their employing department as not being in an Economist post. The data should be considered estimates due to the to the nature of historical data holdings.

<sup>iii</sup> Figures are based upon User Profiles held on the GES Members Website as at the end of Jan 2021 and should be considered as estimates. HEO/SEO includes all Assistant Economists. Figures include Apprentices but excludes placement Students. 95 User Profiles with no grade information have been removed.