Government
Social Research

GSR Professional Skills Framework:

Supporting GSR members in their development

Version Information

Version number	Comment	Date
1	Original version	2012
2	Review and update – new guidance document produced including mapping across GSR Code and GSR Technical Framework	Feb 2022
3	Updated references to GSR Code	Feb 2024

Contents

Introduction

The [GSR Strategy 2021-2025: Social Research In and For Government](#) outlined the professions commitment to support our **Expert and Valued** people to maximise their personal impact, achieve their individual potential and experience a fulfilling career.

One strand focused on empowering members to achieve a fulfilling career. This will be achieved through a range of actions, but one was around completing an audit and gap analysis of the pre-existing GSR Professional Skills Framework to more effectively facilitate career progression and development decisions.

The original GSR Professional Skills Framework was not well known or used. A GSR Strategy Working Group[1] completed a review to identify the current GSR skill set to inform a redesign of the framework, as well as provide recommendations for future GSR Strategy work.

The revised framework:
- Identifies the broad range of professional skills used by GSR members across government
- Supports GSR members and line managers identify skill gaps for development purposes
- Can inform recruiters about the range of skills that departments might be looking for from candidates
- Helps other Civil Servants understand the broad professional skills that GSR members cover
- Has been reviewed and signed off by the GSR Heads of Profession

The Framework

What is the GSR Professional Skills framework?

The GSR Professional Skills Framework (PSF) outlines the broad range of professional skills that a GSR member can have. Members are not expected to be experts in every skill but may gain exposure to the range of skills outlined during their career.

The framework is intended to provide a useful high-level summary. The professional skills detailed are not mutually exclusive; overlap will exist. They are also purposely high-level to reflect the breadth of skill areas across the profession. Some members may have more in-depth knowledge in some of the skills outlined, whilst others might have a broader understanding of multiple areas.

There is no right or wrong approach – it is linked to individual career and development aspirations. For example, some individuals may wish to focus on specific skill areas to become a Subject Matter Expert (SME), whilst others may want broader exposure and experience to support their aspiration to reach to SCS level. There is no one-size-fits-all solution - the framework is a tool to help facilitate and support members thinking.

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[1] Thank you to: Caris Greyson, Hamish Hore, Pontus Ljungberg, Helena Rosiecka and Helen Stinson

How does the Professional Skills Framework differ from the GSR Technical Framework and Civil Service Behaviours?

The GSR PSF provides an overview of the range of professional skills that can be found amongst GSR members across government. It is designed to support members and line managers of GSR members to identify areas for development based on the individual's career and development aspirations. It also has a role in informing line managers, recruiters and other Civil Servants about the broad skill set that GSR provides across government.

The GSR Technical Framework focuses on the behaviours and specific technical requirements for each grade across GSR for recruitment purposes and satisfies the 'Technical' element within the Civil Service Success Profiles approach. The Civil Service Success Profile Technical element refers to the demonstration of specific skills, knowledge and qualifications that are needed for a role. The Technical Framework also has a role in development, specifically around the behaviours and technical requirements deemed as essential for progression through the grades. The GSR PSF and GSR Technical Framework complement each other and align to the GSR Code. The GSR Code sets out specific principles to guide the work and behaviour of government social researchers. See the annex for a diagram mapping the GSR Code against the GSR PSF along with the GSR Technical Framework.

Civil Service Behaviours are part of the Civil Service Success Profiles Framework and refer to the actions and activities that people do which result in effective performance in a job. Behaviours are organised against the Civil Service grades and provides standardisation of what is required across government. Behaviours also have a role in development by demonstrating the requirements for progression more broadly across the Civil Service.
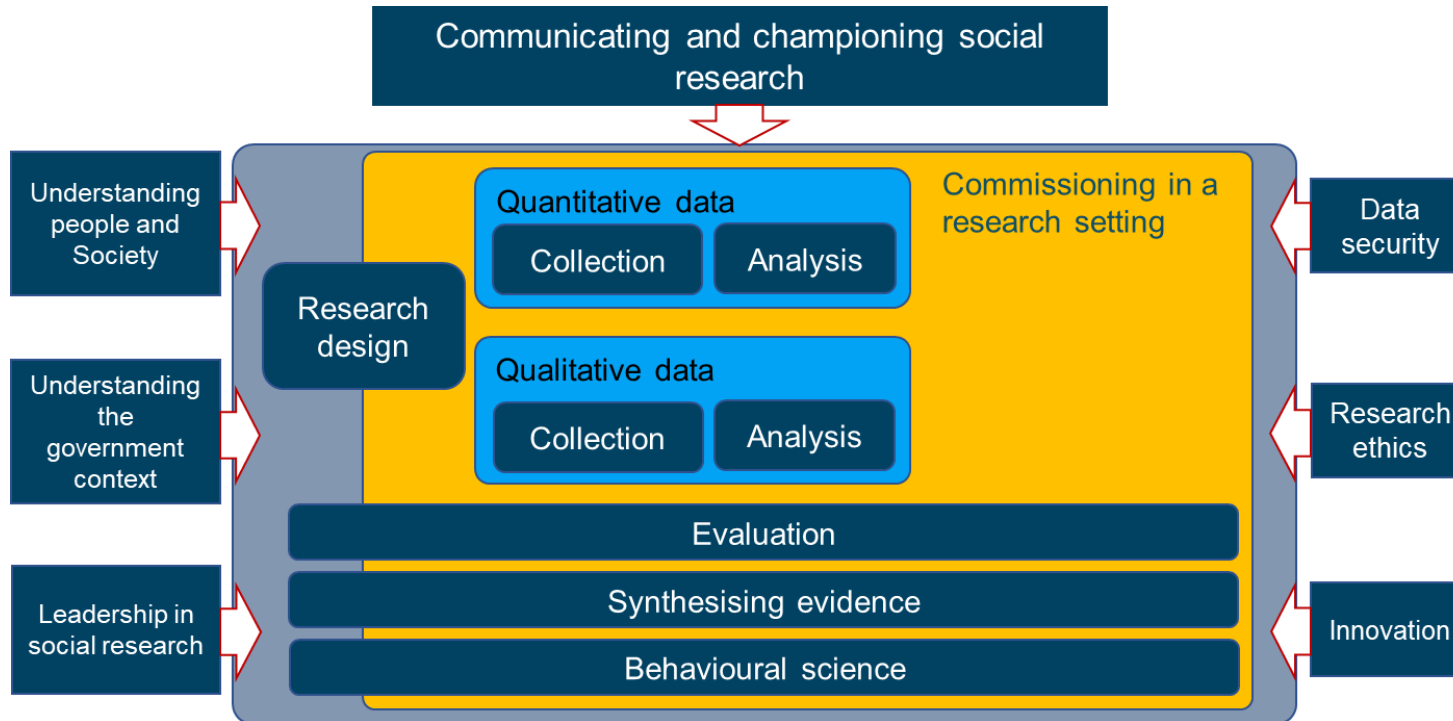
How should these frameworks be used?

The GSR PSF should be used in conjunction with other frameworks (e.g. GSR Technical Framework, GSR Code) to help produce a rounded development plan for individuals. This allows a broader approach to career and professional development, capturing GSR grade requirements, CS grade requirements as well as identifying specific skill areas of interest to individuals.

One requirement for all GSR members is continuing professional development. Use the GSR PSF to identify areas you would like to develop personally, or for your role. You can then use this to identify potential opportunities, be it a course or reaching out to shadow someone else.

You can find the framework on the following pages – there is an overview and then more detail on each section. The examples contained under each area is not exhaustive and is provided to give you a starting point to develop your own thinking and approach to your development.

GSR Professional Skills Framework – Overview

Communicating and championing social research

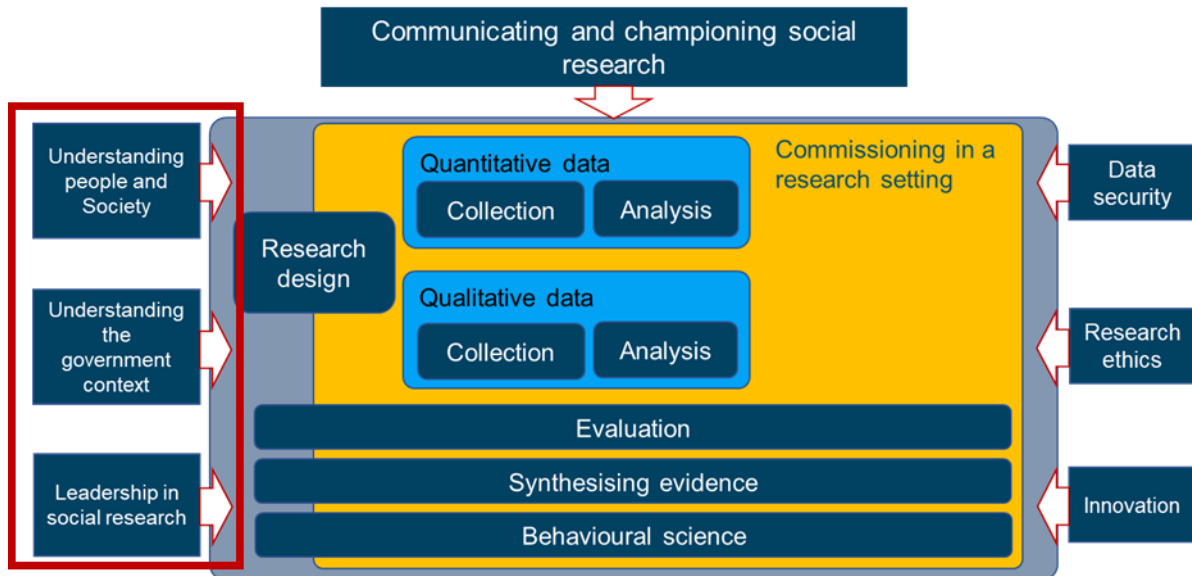| Understanding people and Society			Data security
	Research design	**Commissioning in a research setting**	
		Quantitative data — Collection · Analysis	
Understanding the government context		**Qualitative data** — Collection · Analysis	Research ethics
		Evaluation	
Leadership in social research		**Synthesising evidence**	Innovation
		Behavioural science	

The diagram provides an overview of how the different elements identified in the framework interrelate. The seven boxes on the edge of the diagram – 'Understanding people and society', 'Understanding the government context', 'Leadership in social research', 'Communicating and championing social research', 'Data security', 'Research ethics', and 'Innovation' – are overarching themes that feed into all social research. For example, 'Communicating and championing social research' is something all GSR members have a role in across all their work.

The cluster of overlapping skills in the grey box ('Research design', 'Quantitative data', 'Qualitative data', 'Commissioning in a research setting') represent the different stages of a research program. Some people may focus on a specific phase of this process, such as "Qualitative data analysis", whereas others may have oversight of an end-to-end project. Within a research program, you and your team may conduct the work yourselves, or you may commission out one or more parts of the project to another team or a contracted supplier.

The final group of skills, 'Evaluation', 'Synthesising evidence' and 'Behavioural science' relate to broader skill areas deploying specific approaches. These areas continue to draw on and utilise skills related to developing and implementing research programmes and projects. Each of these areas will be described in the rest of this guidance.

GSR Professional Skills Framework – The Detail

Understanding people, society, government context and leadership

Understanding people and Society	**Understanding people and society:** As a GSR member the focus of our work is understanding people and society. When thinking about this from a skills perspective, you might want to think about your understanding and experience in the following areas:

- Demonstrating that people are at the heart of evidence and policy making
- Demonstrating topic expertise, for example, demography, health, travel etc
- Understanding research applicability
- Demonstrating awareness of diversity and inclusion

Understanding the government context	**Understanding the government context**: Understanding the context within which GSR members work is important, both in terms of understanding government but also awareness and understanding of the range of stakeholders you may interact with. You want to be able to:

- Understand government and how it works
- Work and collaborate with
  - ✓ Other analytical professions
  - ✓ Policy and the policy cycle operations
  - ✓ Other Civil Servants
  - ✓ Stakeholders
  - ✓ Academics/research community
 - ✓ Industry
- Anticipate future government social policy needs

Leadership in social research

Leadership in social research: Leadership in social research is not just reserved for senior leaders. All GSR members have a responsibility to support others. You might want to think about your skill development in these areas:

- Supporting other social researchers and analysts through their career
- Managing social researchers and analysts
- Actively building, shaping and contributing to the wider GSR network
- Be seen as an expert voice, for example shape expectations and needs by helping others understand what social research can achieve

Data security, research ethics and innovation
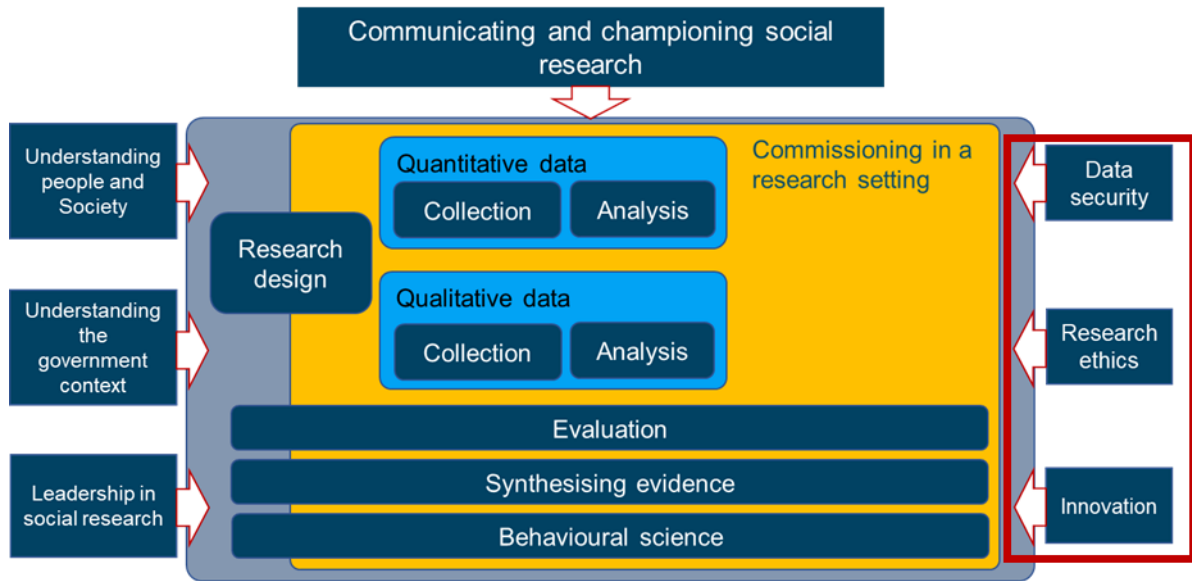
Data security: Ensuring you are aware of your responsibilities for data security is important. This might include:

- Awareness of data management and transfer guidelines
    - ✓ Data Protection Act 2018
    - ✓ GDPR
    - ✓ Data Protection Impact Assessments
- Department specific processes

Research ethics: Ethics are of paramount importance in any research process. GSR members should have:
- A good understanding of Ethical Assurance Guidance for
    - ✓ Social and Behavioural Research in Government
    - ✓ Social Media Research Guidance
    - ✓ Other organisations, for example Social Research Association and Market Research Society
- An awareness of Equality Impact Assessment

Innovation: Part of being an effective GSR member is ensuring continued development and awareness of new processes and methods by:
- Maintaining active awareness of new innovative methods, for example social research methods, evaluation, quality assurance and data science
- Incorporating the latest techniques into work where appropriate
- Sharing knowledge with others around new techniques and innovative methods

**Communicating, championing and commissioning research**
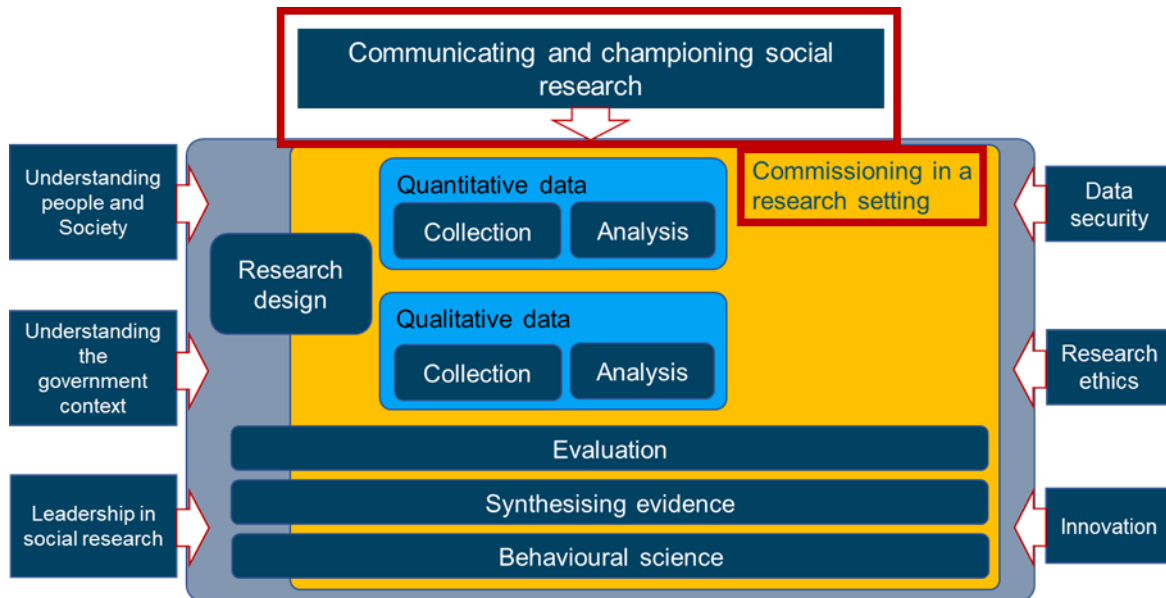
Communicating and championing social research: Social research is not just about the practical application of methods and approaches; communicating and championing social research is also important, including:

- Championing social research, for example promoting awareness and appetite
- Communication of research proposals and results to non-analysts
- Publication/dissemination
- Representing data visually, for example chart design
- Report writing
- Presentation skills
- Building capability in social research skills

Commissioning in a research setting: Quite often GSR members will be involved and/or responsible for commissioning research to support policy decisions. There are a range of skills to consider in this area:

- Commercial awareness
- Writing research specifications
- Departmental procurement guidelines and processes
- Working with budgets
- Working with suppliers
- Management of commissioned research projects
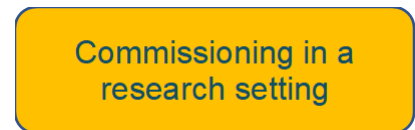
Research design, quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis
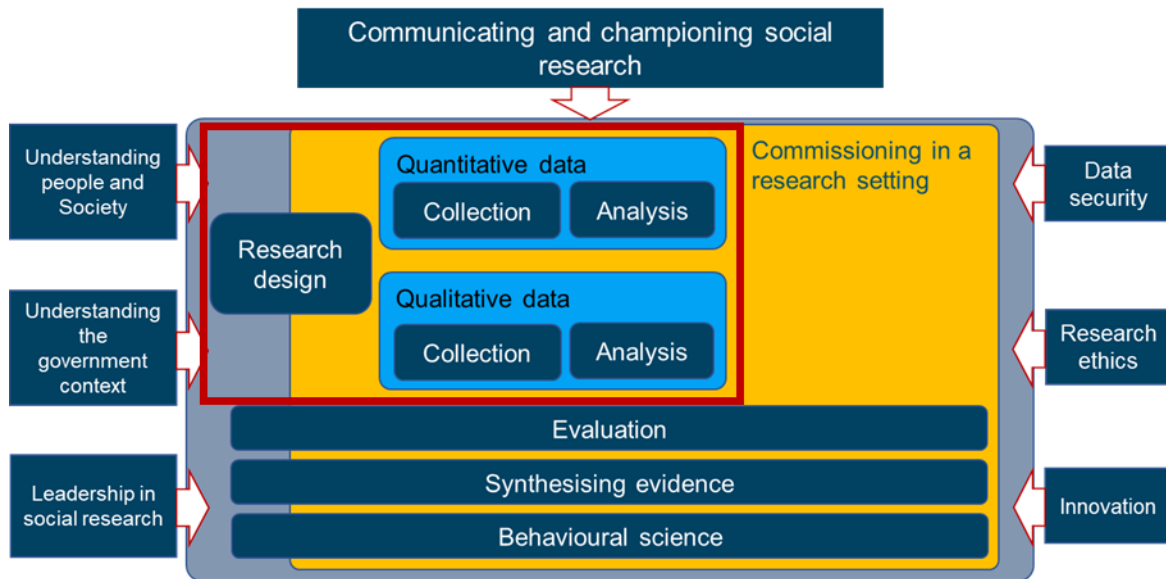
Research design: Selecting and ensuring the most appropriate research design is implemented is important to ensure subsequent evidence is robust and fit for purpose. This includes being skilled at:

- Translating stakeholder needs into research questions
- Communicating options to stakeholders
- Developing research questions
- Understanding and filling evidence gaps
- Scoping and planning proportionate and pragmatic research, for example considering timeframe, resource, budget and risk
- Understanding knowledge of strengths and limitations of different methods and approaches
- Understanding and identifying sources of bias
- Identifying success criteria
- Knowing the uncertainty of evidence
- Managing risks
- Implementing quality assurance processes

Quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis: Data are used to help advise and shape policy decisions. The two broad categories are quantitative and qualitative data approaches. Key areas members can develop their skills include, but not limited to:

Quantitative data - collection

- Survey design, including sampling and weighting
- Questionnaire design and build
- Management and performance information
- Accessing and using secondary datasets, including administrative data
- Data linkage
- Cleaning and working with large datasets, for example coding

Quantitative data - analysis

- Data packages and software tools, for example Excel, R, SPSS, SAS, STATA
- Understanding assumptions and limitations of method
- Descriptive statistics, for example rates, time series
- Inferential statistics, for example correlation, regression
- Modelling and forecasting
- Sensitivity analysis

Qualitative data - collection

- Impact of the researcher
- Development of research instruments
- Sample frame and method
- Data mining and web scraping
- Participatory methods, for example focus groups, depth interviews, case studies, observation research, ethnographic research, dairies, visual methods, deliberative research and media analysis

Qualitative data - analysis

- Data packages, for example Nvivo, MaxQDA
- Awareness of subjectivity
- Theoretical frameworks, for example (but not limited to) grounded theory and phenomenological approaches
- Methods, for example
    - ✓ Thematic analysis
    - ✓ Sentiment analysis
    - ✓ Narrative analysis
    - ✓ Discourse analysis
    - ✓ Content analysis

Evaluation, synthesising evidence and behavioural science
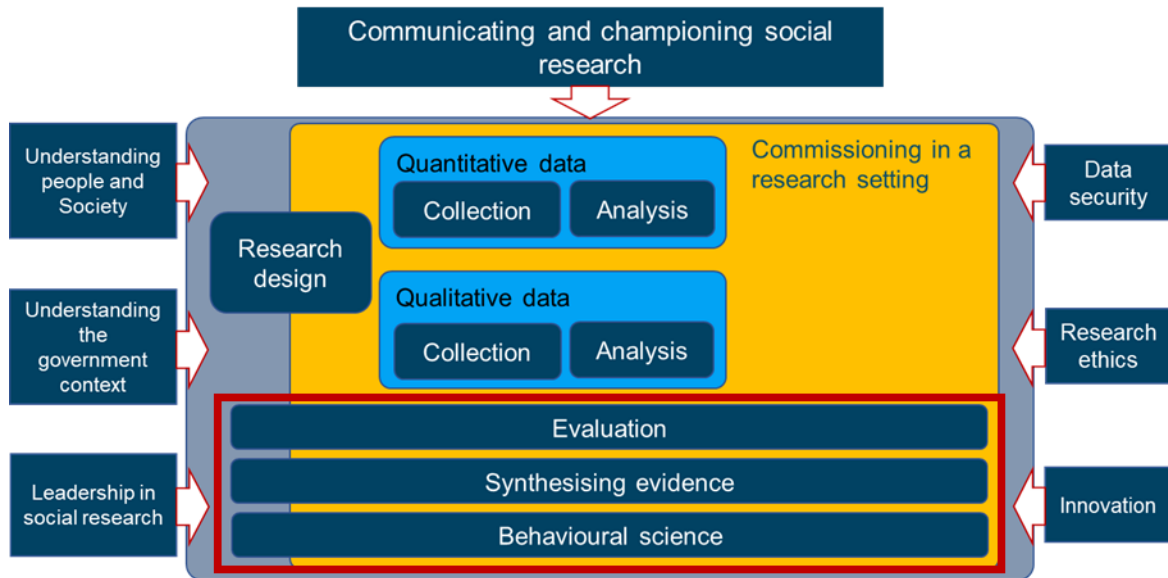
Evaluation

Evaluation: To develop your understanding and skills in this area, you might want to think about:
- The role of evaluation
- Theory of change/logic models
- Evaluation types
  - ✓ Process
  - ✓ Impact
  - ✓ Value for money
- Impact evaluation approaches
  - ✓ Experimental
  - ✓ Quasi-experimental
  - ✓ Theory-based
- Post-implementation reviews
- Handling complexity in policy evaluation

Synthesising evidence

Synthesising evidence: Being able to bring information together is an important skill. When thinking about your development this might include:
- Evidence mapping and systematic reviews
- Rapid evidence assessment
- Meta-analysis/meta-ethnography
- Realist synthesis

Behavioural science

Behavioural science: About understanding how people behave in different environments and why, using this to enhance the quality of policy decisions. Behavioural science is an umbrella term for a variety of practices intended to support this goal and are informed by a variety of scientific disciplines including but not limited to psychology, sociology and anthropology. At the time of publication, it is still a fairly young and rapidly evolving area. Researchers are often well-placed to spot where these practices can add greatest value and may often apply the tools themselves.

Development here might include:
- Developing materials to support behaviour change
- Knowledge of behavioural science theory
- Knowledge of when to use a behavioural science approach
- Theory and knowledge of behaviour change[2]
    - ✓ Behavioural change wheel
    - ✓ Achieving behaviour change: a guide for national government
- Awareness of frameworks and approaches in government, for example:
    - ✓ COM-B (see Behavioural change wheel link)
    - ✓ EAST
    - ✓ GCS Behaviour Change

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[2] Links worked as of Dec 2021; GSR holds no responsibility for the information associated with the links

Annex – Mapping across GSR Frameworks

Below is an outline of how aspects in the GSR Code, GSR Technical Skills framework and GSR Professional Skills Framework map across to each other. This is just a simple illustration; some aspects, such as 'Learning and Development' in the GSR Technical Framework, could be seen to map across to all aspects identified in the GSR Professional Skills Framework. Use this as a guide only – it is not definitive.

GSR Technical Framework: Technical Skills against the GSR Code and GSR Professional Skills Framework

GSR Code	GSR Technical Framework: Technical Skills	GSR Professional Skills Framework
GSR Code: • Integrity • Objectivity • Impartiality	Knowledge of research methods, techniques and application of these in small scale research projects	• Quantitative data collection • Qualitative data collection • Evaluation, Synthesising evidence, Behavioural science
	Identifying research needs, designing and specifying research	• Research design • Synthesising evidence
	Analysis and interpretation	• Quantitative data analysis • Qualitative data analysis
	Managing and commissioning social research	• Procurement in a research setting • Research ethics, Data security

GSR Technical Framework: Using and Promoting Social Research against the GSR Code and GSR Professional Skills Framework

GSR Code	GSR Technical Framework: Using and Promoting Social Research	GSR Professional Skills Framework
GSR Code: • Integrity • Honesty • Objectivity • Impartiality	**Leading, communicating and championing social research**	• Communicating and championing social research • Leadership in social research
	Understanding government context	• Understanding government context • Includes cross-profession working (e.g. analytical professions, policy professions etc) • Understanding people and Society
	Learning and development	All aspects of the framework can fall under learning and development • Research design • Quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis • Commissioning in a research setting • Evaluation • Synthesising evidence • Behavioural science • Communicating and championing social research • Understanding people and society • Understanding the government context • Leadership in social research • Data security • Research ethics • Innovation