

2 Integrating communication in the policy cycle and supporting citizen participation

This chapter explores how public communication supports the development of policies and services, and their effective delivery. It analyses how communicators in UK government departments work alongside policy and service teams to add value throughout the policy cycle. Despite closer integration of the communication and policy making disciplines, evidence points to cultural and structural barriers to effective collaboration. This is particularly true at the early stages, where communication insights have the potential to inform policy decisions. Conversely, policy implementation is where the function's role is most established, as illustrated by the use of evidence-based campaigns for achieving strategic objectives.

The chapter discusses the opportunity for expanding communication's contribution to participative and responsive policy making. Building on evidence that public trust suffers from citizens' perceived lack of say in government decisions, the chapter proposes ways to leverage the function to close the feedback loop between citizens and policy. This includes exploring the emerging practice of organisational listening and means to increase interaction with citizens and stakeholders. The chapter concludes with recommendations for improving public communication's support of participation initiatives and the UK's open government agenda.

Public communication can play a critical role in the successful development and implementation of policies and the delivery of services. It does so by listening to and understanding citizens' needs and expectations in the first instance, and by providing the necessary information to empower them to make informed choices for themselves and society more broadly (as described in the analytical framework in Chapter 1).

However, internationally, the recognition of communication as a lever to both inform and implement public policy has been lagging. The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly raised expectations and awareness of the potential and importance of public communication (OECD, 2021^[1]; Alfonsi et al., 2022^[2]; WPP, 2016^[3]). Data from the OECD's 2020 international survey on public communication indicated that simple awareness-raising was the most common goal for the function, compared with fewer respondents noting service uptake or stakeholder engagement as key objectives (OECD, 2021^[1]).

These dynamics call for a deeper analysis of how communication is used by governments and how it can be integrated into both the development and the delivery of policies and services. This chapter explores these interrelationships in the UK context, highlighting important lessons and scope for further progress.

Communicators in UK government departments and in selected devolved and local administrations interviewed for this study mostly share an advanced view of how they can contribute to policy and services. The Government Communication Service (GCS) has developed sophisticated approaches and models to ensure this support is optimised and measurable according to practices that are often recognised as industry-leading, as described in this chapter. Nonetheless, the degree of integration of communications in policy is not yet homogenous across the board. Efforts are still needed to elevate teams in all departments and agencies to the standards of the more advanced ones.

The opportunity is greatest when it comes to leveraging public communication as a vehicle to improve and complement initiatives for citizens and stakeholders¹ to inform or participate in decision making. In this respect, there is scope to expand and enhance efforts for more open and participative policy making, which was identified as an essential catalyst to build public trust in government institutions in the OECD Trust Survey (OECD, 2022^[4]).

As part of the ongoing trajectory towards innovation and impact described in the previous chapter, this one puts forward recommendations to expand communication's role in facilitating stakeholder participation.² This focus can help maximise the potential for communication's role in government and move beyond dissemination of a policy or programme to instead contribute constructively to its development and continuous improvement with public input.

The role of communication in the policy cycle: From design to implementation and impact

Public communication can support policy and services in multiple ways, as illustrated in this section. The function's potential value-added is likewise expanding as approaches in the field continue to evolve. Several government communicators interviewed for this *Scan* provided a useful lens to understand how this support occurs in practice. They indicated that they see their role vis-à-vis policy in terms of three core responsibilities illustrated in Figure 2.1.

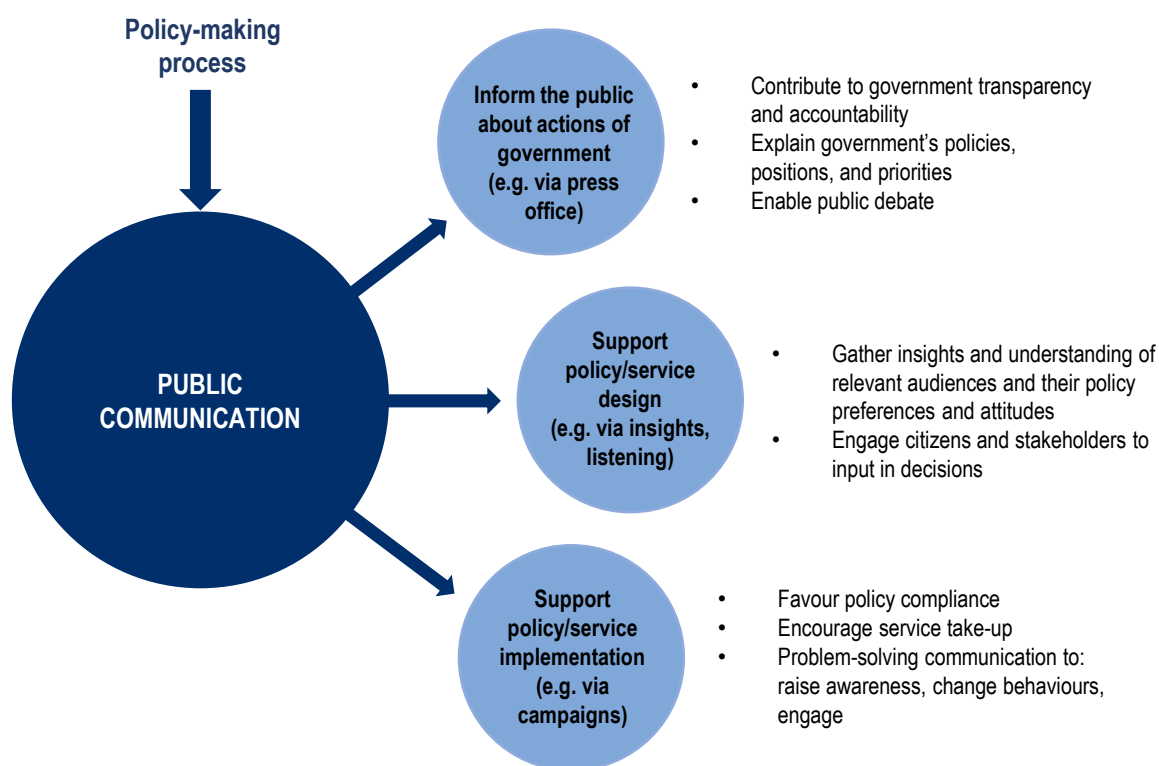
The first is to provide information on the day-to-day actions of government (intended here as both elected and appointed officials as well as the whole public administration), explain its policies, positions, and priorities, and enable public debate around these subjects. This is in large part the work of the press office in providing information and handling enquiries from journalists, as well as the external affairs discipline (or what is commonly referred to as stakeholder engagement). Increasingly, digital communication is involved too.

The second and third core responsibilities in relation to policy, according to interviews, are more operational: they refer to communication's practical contribution to the design and implementation of specific policies, programmes, and public services. This is often understood or referred to internally as "strategic communication" focused on precise objectives and problem-solving, in the language of the Modern Communication Operating Model (MCOM) 3.0.

The second responsibility, as discussed in further depth later in this chapter, concerns the role of communication for informing policy agenda-setting and design via insights, listening and engagement of citizens and stakeholders.

The third responsibility on the implementation or delivery of policy and services is carried out most visibly via communication campaigns. By and large, strategic campaigns based on comprehensive insights and drawing on marketing methods are a major pillar of GCS's work and one of the areas it excels at. Through these activities, communicators across government stressed that they were able to demonstrate impact towards cross-cutting policy goals, as described below in the chapter. The growing focus on campaigns mirrors the gradual shift in the function in the UK, as in many OECD countries, towards a more instrumental understanding of public communication's added value for government.

Figure 2.1. Three core responsibilities of UK public communication



Although still influential for public information and debate, mass media is less effective as a primary channel for the design and implementation of policy and services than in the past. As Chapter 3 argues, the media and information space has grown increasingly divisive, and often tends to favour a more politics-centric lens versus a policy-centric one. With a greater focus on supporting policy, the legacy emphasis on traditional media is bound to give way to a greater use of direct channels (e.g. social media, official website, and other owned channels) that facilitate the delivery of relevant information and, importantly, allow interaction by and with citizens.

This observation can also be inferred from the focus of the GCS 2022-25 Strategy (described in detail in the previous chapter), which emphasises more direct communication with citizens (GCS, 2022^[5]). As one senior communicator put it in an interview, press office work relates to the legitimate democratic function of enabling media scrutiny and holding government accountable, while campaigns are seen internally as how public communication can add value to policy.

This expectation of communication's role and focus is likely to require some cultural adjustment among senior communicators in the UK and OECD countries alike, many of whom have spent part of their career in journalism and who consequently tend to overestimate the influence of news media (Garland, Tambini and Couldry, 2017^[6]). To this end, research has described much of government and corporate communication alike as primarily "media-centric" and called instead for a more "audience-centric" approach (Macnamara, 2023^[7]).

The same adaptation is needed on the part of policy and programme teams – if not also the political level – to acknowledge and exploit the strategic value of communication to their work and leverage the function accordingly. Personal experiences and culture of respective teams and their leadership were noted across interviews as a key factor in policy teams' eagerness to work with communicators and vice-versa. Building shared expectations and understanding of how to collaborate effectively is therefore one of the main ways GCS can help improve how communication is leveraged in policy and services.

Fostering effective collaboration between communicators and policy and delivery teams

The official mandate for public communication to support policy and services in the UK is explicit. The Functional Standards on Communication (UK Government, 2020^[8]), described in Chapter 1, recognise a duty to deliver "responsive and informative public service communication that supports the effective delivery of HM Government policy and priorities, and assists with the effective operation of public services" (p. 6). Going further, it sets out that communication objectives ought to be "aligned to government policy and organisational objectives" (p. 7). These principles are common to equivalent policy documents in a number of OECD Member countries (OECD, 2021^[1]).

Notably, the Functional Standards on Project Delivery (UK Government, 2021^[9]), which govern the processes for managing and executing policy and programmes, are even more expansive in defining the purposes of communications in policy. The document states that communication's purpose is to "ensure interactions with the stakeholders are effective and likely to contribute to the successful delivery of the work", and that it "should be planned to match the *stakeholders' needs* and include *feedback mechanisms* and effectiveness measures" (p. 33, emphasis added).

The above Functional Standards additionally set requirements for stakeholder engagement that include communication, among other means. Communication also features in the Policy Profession Standards (Policy Profession, 2021^[10]) within its section on participation and engagement. This represents a welcome acknowledgement of the function's complementary role alongside other avenues for user-centric design and the collection of insights on citizens' needs.

The above documents broadly synthesise why communication ought to be integrated with policy and services across government. However, they are less prescriptive on what it means for communication and policy to be aligned in practice, the process for ensuring this, or the expectations on outcomes. These are important aspects that require further elaboration to encourage more effective and sustainable ways of working.

Recognising the practical considerations that stand in the way of effective collaboration between communicators and their peers in policy and delivery, GCS has published a set of recommendations on "Working with policy" (GCS, 2020^[11]). The guidance acknowledges some of the common challenges and misperceptions about when and how to collaborate. However, it appears to prioritise policy announcements rather than capture the full scope of how communication can contribute to policy at various stages of

development. This is mentioned briefly in other key GCS documents, such as the Modern Communication Operating Model (MCOM). Notably, this GCS guidance on working with policy does not place a significant emphasis on public insights gathered by communicators. This can be of great value to getting policies right, as this chapter discusses.

Strengthening guidance for communicators and policy teams can foster a mutual understanding of how and when to embed communication for best results. The observations noted in the following paragraphs point to identifying barriers and opportunities for better integrating communication in policy and services.

The inclusion of communication at each stage of the policy cycle, especially early on, indicates how well the function is leveraged to support government objectives. An overview of the value the function brings throughout the process is illustrated in Box 2.1. The same is true of high-level GCS guidance documents, some of which acknowledge the importance of integrating communication early and meaningfully.

For instance, the Functional Standards note that “Strategic communication specialists should work alongside policy, operations, human resources and project delivery colleagues from the outset” (UK Government, 2020, p. 18^[8]). The MCOM further highlights that “to operate at a truly strategic level, government communicators must be part of the decision-making process, rather than a tactical consideration at the end of the policy development process” (GCS, 2019, pp. 13, version 2.0^[12]).

Box 2.1. The role of public communication at each stage of the policy cycle

While recognising that policy advisers and other disciplinary specialists play a central role in policy development, and that the process is not linear or uniformly structured, the important role of public communication needs to be fully identified and utilised. Two-way interaction is fundamental for engagement, relationships, learning, organising, collaboration, co-design, and for democracy to function. In the policy-making cycle (illustrated in Figure 2.2), public communication can make a valuable contribution at all stages.

Stage 1. Definition of policy priorities

Public communication practitioners maintain ongoing monitoring of public opinion and issues through traditional and social media monitoring and other methods such as social network analysis. Many also commission or undertake formal audience research. These research activities help to identify issues of public concern, including emerging issues that can assist in definition of policy priorities. Public communication can contribute to understanding of diverse stakeholder experiences, needs, concerns, and expectations. Public communication units also typically hold such data over a number of years, providing intelligence and insights beyond the policy development cycle.

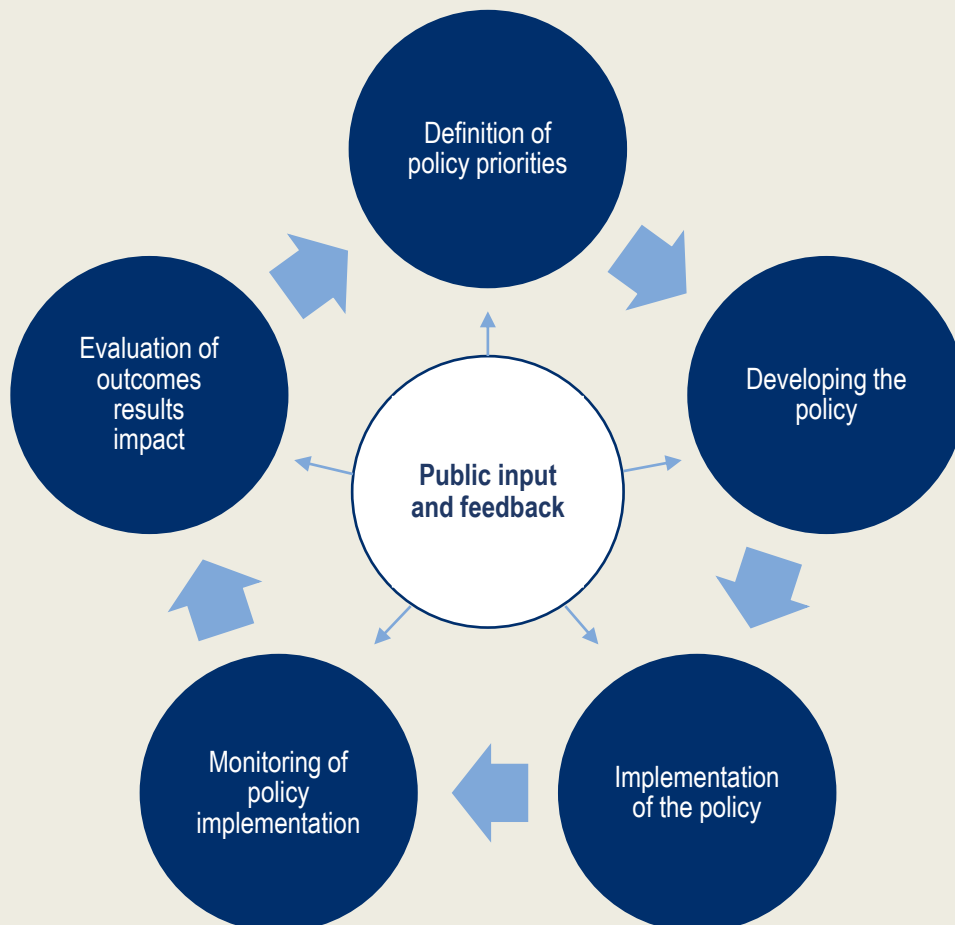
Public communication monitoring and analysis can also identify the media environment and how it is likely to impact policy announcements and implementation.

Stage 2. Developing policy

In addition to the central role of subject matter expertise, and economic and political input, public communication can support policy design, drafting and testing by ensuring it is responsive to current needs and expectations of various stakeholders through its ongoing monitoring and environmental scanning.

Public communication can also contribute to the important testing phase of policy development through ex-ante evaluation based on traditional and social media monitoring, stakeholder engagement, journalists’ feedback gained through media relations, and, if required, interviews with key informants, and/or surveys.

Figure 2.2. The policy cycle



Source: Adapted from OECD (2016^[13]), *Open Government: The Global Context and the Way Forward*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264268104-en>.

Stage 3. Policy Implementation

Policies need to be explained to those they are aimed at or who are intended to comply. This requires information campaigns that typically develop and distribute content through traditional and social media, websites, and publications such as pamphlets, direct mail, and other communication media. Public communication professionals have specialist skills and experience in information campaigns. Explaining policies to ensure they are understood and how and why they were developed ensures transparency, strengthens government accountability, and ultimately enhances support.

Public communication mobilises support and adoption of policy through specialised marketing and promotion techniques such as advertising, media publicity, events such as launches and conference presentations, and a range of other methods in which public communication professionals specialise. This is the most recognised role of public communication in policy development.

Stages 4 & 5. Monitoring and evaluation of policy acceptance and response

Once a policy is announced, monitoring and evaluation of response is important to gauge acceptance and identify whether clarifications are required or adjustments need to be made to implementation. This also extracts learning for the next steps or iterations of policy. Public communication can contribute to

ex-post evaluation through its ongoing media monitoring and analysis, and stakeholder engagement activities.

Integration of public communication insights, monitoring, and evaluation with feedback and research findings gained by policy teams can expand the evidence base, further identify outcomes and impact, and ensure communication effectiveness in relation to policy. The OECD *Recommendation of the Council on Policy Evaluation* points to the need to “tailor the way evaluation evidence is presented and communicated to its potential users, in terms of timing, communication channel, format and messaging, by developing a dissemination strategy”.

Source: Based on OECD (2021^[11]), *OECD Report on Public Communication: The Global Context and the Way Forward*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/22f8031c-en>.

In practice however, the picture is more mixed. Survey data suggest departments use communication most consistently for the announcement and implementation stages of policy when the scope for stakeholders to engage is reduced (see Figure 2.3). Communication is also often used in public consultation stages, although interviews indicate this usually refers to the work carried out by the external affairs discipline (commonly referred to as stakeholder engagement, discussed further in the section on two-way communication to complement actions for greater citizen participation) of engaging with representatives from industry or civil society groups rather than broader forms of participation noted in this chapter.

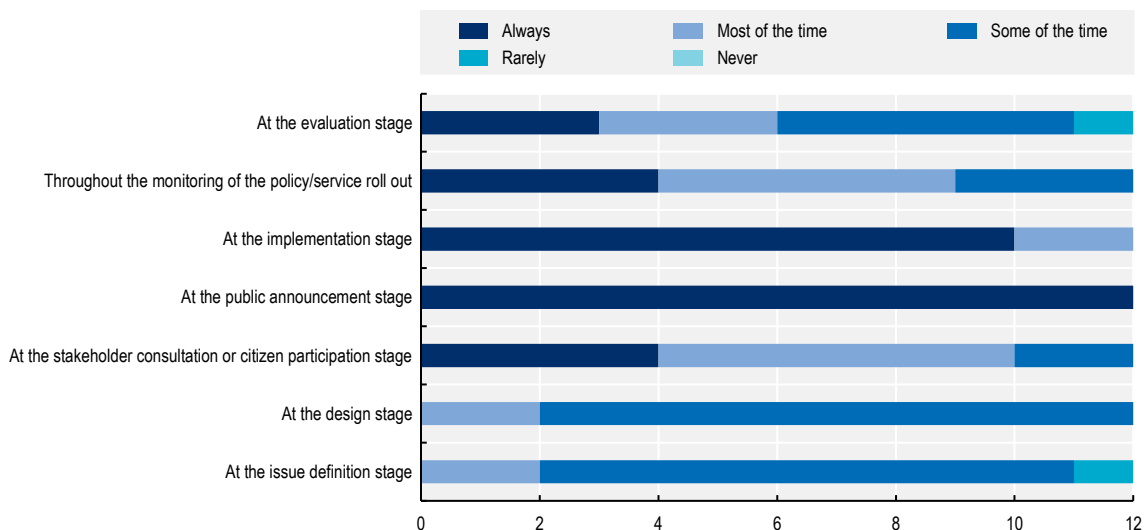
Conversely, communication teams are less frequently involved in the problem definition or design stages, where their insights into public opinion would add value. Interviews and survey data highlighted that the contribution of communication insights to the early stages of policy design happens sporadically and on an ad hoc basis. This finding is corroborated by research noting that policy reversals or backlashes are often a result of the late or non-involvement of communicators early on (Urban, 2023^[14]). A similarly low frequency of collaboration applies also to the monitoring stage of a policy or service roll-out and its evaluation (Figure 2.3), where listening and feedback can help improve outcomes and provide lessons for the future.

There is a strong case for involving communicators in the early stages of the policy cycle. They tend to have a wider understanding of audiences and their attitudes towards a broader range of issues than just those with which a given policy or service is concerned (as discussed further in the next section of this chapter). Several government communicators interviewed for this *Scan* stressed their role within departments as “bringing the public in the room” where decisions are made. They also suggested they provide a realistic and holistic understanding of the intended beneficiaries of a policy or service – which siloed policy teams were said to sometimes lack. Indeed, some research has shown that policy makers’ “deep involvement” with their specific area may cause them to “overestimate how much people will understand or embrace the policy in question” (Hallsworth et al., 2018^[15]).

Conversely, a reliance on communicating only at the announcement stage, once policies are fully formed, carries risks in how they are received. There can even be public perceptions of a lack of government openness and responsiveness. Focusing on securing a positive reception for a policy can misfire and cause distrust or reputational damage, aggravating perceptions that citizens are not being listened to (OECD, 2022^[16]). Contributing early in the process, communicators can be a valuable sounding board to test assumptions. They bring an additional layer of insights to the development of policy that contribute to greater responsiveness to public needs and attitudes, a driver of trust in government (OECD, 2022^[16]).

Figure 2.3. Frequency of collaboration between communication and policy teams at each stage of the policy cycle

At what stages of the policy cycle does the communication team in the department typically co-operate with policy or service teams or are brought into the process?



Note: N=12, multiple responses possible.

Source: OECD survey of UK government communication offices at departmental level, 2022.

Addressing barriers to collaboration and fostering new ways of working

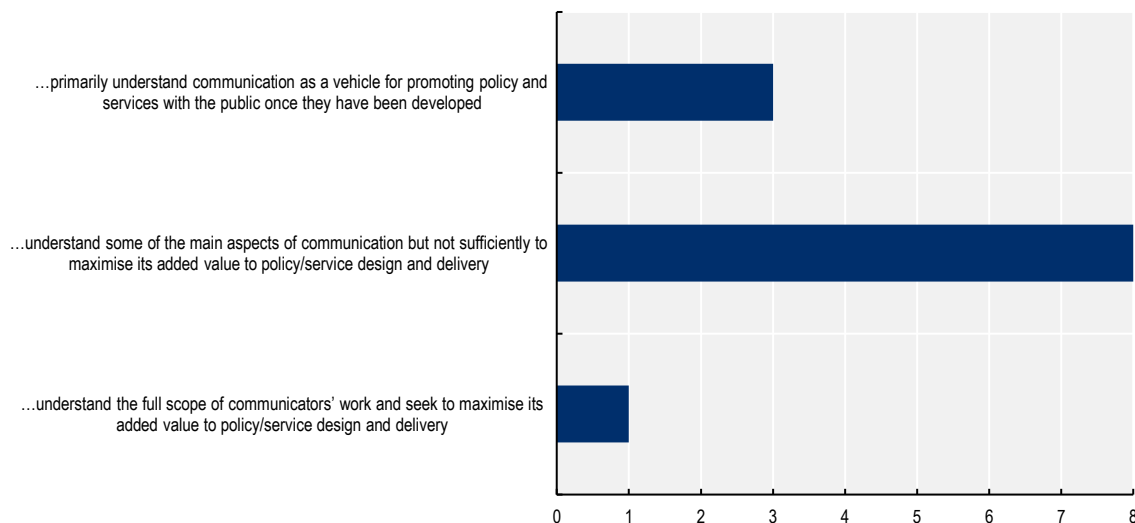
The insufficient collaboration between communication and policy teams is due to a number of barriers that were discussed throughout interviews. These range from limits on resources, siloed ways of working, institutional culture to changing political priorities.

Most communicators interviewed by the OECD Secretariat expressed satisfaction with progress towards the acknowledgement of their value-added by policy colleagues. Nonetheless, 8 of the 12 departments surveyed answered that policy teams “understand some of the main aspects of communication but not sufficiently to maximise its added value to policy/service design and delivery” (see Figure 2.4). Survey responses also feature multiple mentions of communicators being brought in too late in the process as one of the top challenges they face. A recent study supported the finding that policy makers often still do not recognise the value of communication beyond announcement or implementation (Urban, 2023^[14]). Interviews stressed that often the picture is highly varied even within the same department, with certain policy or delivery teams going as far as embedding communicators within projects full-time, and others regarding it primarily as a vehicle for publicity.

One prominent barrier that emerged during interviews is the siloed approach in data governance both within and between departments, as noted in Chapter 1. According to these accounts, UK government departments and public agencies collect vast amounts of valuable research and data that both communicators and policy makers could rely on if they had knowledge of and access to it. Instead, the present system seems to create challenges and additional costs for timely data analysis and limits opportunities for communication and policy teams to co-operate.

Figure 2.4. Policy makers' understanding of communication's role and value

Complete this sentence: "Policy and programme teams in the department..."



Note: N=12, single choice answer.

Source: OECD survey of UK government communication offices at departmental level, 2022.

Where it has worked well, interviewees recognised the sharing of research, data, and insights as one of the most valuable forms of collaboration between disciplines and across departments. Indeed, several officials noted that two-way data-sharing was a starting point for collaboration and an avenue for recognition and value-added vis-à-vis other disciplines. However, departments' survey responses indicate that data on service utilisation or on policy compliance is one of the least common sources of insights used to inform communication.

Reviewing existing data governance practices³ in the UK government would address some of the above-mentioned challenges and capitalise on the vast citizen insights that exist within departments. It would additionally facilitate more responsive policy and communication. Although more comprehensive reforms in this field go beyond GCS's remit, one opportunity to improve current practices is offered by the planned development of a GCS Data Strategy in 2024 as one of the commitments made within its 2022-2025 Strategy. One element of this prospective strategy could concern the versatility of data and analysis gathered by communication teams to meet relevant criteria for interoperability ease of use in policy or service development (OECD, 2019^[17]).

Government communicators interviewed were generally optimistic about the outlook for communication's role in policy. Several of them credited the experience of communicating policy during the COVID-19 pandemic with the acceleration of a shift towards more effective integration and collaboration. For instance, the COVID-19 vaccination roll-out and its related campaign was noted as one case where communication and delivery teams worked side-by-side from the outset, building on the experience of the crisis management phase of the pandemic. Another such example highlighted was the campaign to accompany EU citizens in obtaining settled legal status following Brexit.

Some departments have also introduced organisational changes with the intent of strengthening the integration between communication and policy. The Department for Education and Home Office have structured their communication teams according to core departmental policy clusters rather than the disciplines set out in the Functional Standards on Communication. This is meant to encourage communicators to build expertise in the core areas that the departments work on to maximise their contribution to the respective policies.

Interviewees from the Department of Education noted that for some large-scale policies or programmes they embed communication staff in all stages of development and delivery (see Box 2.7 further below). This approach is not commonplace, interviews revealed, and may not be suitable in all cases. Yet, piloting it across additional departments could further culture change and collaboration, consolidating collaboration overall.

There is an opportunity to embed communicators more closely in the work of policy teams and disseminate them further across departments. Expanding guidance and frameworks for communication and policy teams can help consolidate positive lessons and correct misperceptions about the function and what it can offer.

GCS guidance could be revised to include practical illustrations of communication's contribution at all stages of the policy cycle, drawing on successful case studies and demonstrating the different approaches to collaboration that suit different scenarios. As part of considerations to develop a more responsive and citizen-centred communication and policy, both practical guidance and the relevant Functional Standards could be revised to add emphasis on integrating citizens' feedback from planning stages to implementation of policies and services.

Communication campaigns as a vehicle for policy delivery

Although the potential of public communication in the earlier stages of policy and service development is yet to be fully realized in the UK, as is also the case in most OECD countries, its role in the implementation stage is well established. This is most visible in the extensive use of communication campaigns. The strategic approach to this discipline, with its emphasis on evidence, customer-focus, and return-on-investment, stands out as one of the main factors driving communication's growing recognition as a lever of government.

Interviewees point out that, in some cases, communication is the primary means to enact a policy. This applies particularly when enforcement is difficult and costly, or where citizens are faced with explicit or hidden choices that can improve their own or their communities' well-being. Such was the case with COVID-19 lockdowns, for example, where compliance often came down to individual choices and values over the ability of authorities to fine those in breach (Alfonsi et al., 2022^[2]). To this end, some internal stakeholders have characterised it as a "relatively low-cost contribution to achieving the government's priorities" (Urban, 2023^[14]).

Recognition of the effectiveness of campaigns as a policy delivery instrument owes much to the considerable investment by GCS to continuously improve practice and raise standards for measurable impact in this domain. Some of its essential guidance on campaign development, such as the OASIS Campaign Framework (see Box 2.2), has also become a reference guide for the profession across borders. The UK's OASIS approach rests on its focus on strategy as a means to pursue a well-defined objective, which is often linked to the objective of a given policy that is achievable through communication.

The UK approach to campaigns emphasises evidence and insights as the basis for their effectiveness, making it closely centred on citizens and on tailoring all campaign tactics around them. Indeed, several communicators interviewed noted that strategic campaigns or marketing (as the discipline is commonly referred to internally) could be distinguished from other communication disciplines as being consistently audience-led, with the explicit intention to produce tangible outcomes in target audiences.

Box 2.2. The OASIS Campaign Framework

The OASIS Framework for campaign planning offers a series of steps guiding the development and implementation of strategic communication campaigns. Relating to each step of the planning process, the acronym refers to: Objectives, Audience Insight, Strategy Implementation, and Scoring and Evaluation.

The Framework focuses on defining campaign objectives grounded in a policy aim. Such objectives ought to fit the SMART criteria, meaning they must be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound. These criteria are also a precondition for the rigorous use of evidence as a starting point for developing the campaign. Beyond objective-setting, audience insights inform the choice of campaign strategy and planned evaluation.

The guide notes that for the purposes of evaluation, objectives must contain a numerical prediction of what would be observed if no communications took place, a numerical forecast of the difference the planned campaign will make, and a reference to the evidence base that justifies the change being targeted.

Sources: GCS (2020^[18]), *Guide to Campaign Planning: OASIS*, 2020, <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/marketing/delivering-government-campaigns/guide-to-campaign-planning-oasis/>.

Behaviour change is a common objective of campaigns carried out across UK government, often to encourage compliance with a given policy or encourage choices that benefit audiences and their communities. This is a core competency that GCS has sought to reinforce through guidance, such as its Principles of Behaviour Change Communications (GCS, 2021^[19]), as well as through the establishment of a GCS Behavioural Science sub-discipline. Whereas behavioural campaigns have been commonplace for some time, the rigorous application of scientific approaches to their design has not always been consistent. For instance, survey responses indicated that departments tend to rely more often on secondary data and evidence on behaviours, drawn from literature or similar cases, rather than conducting behavioural experiments to test their specific interventions. Such practice is not always necessary, but can be valuable to test the efficacy of campaigns to which large budgets are attached, for example. This is one aspect that GCS has been working to improve and codify so as to ensure that behavioural evidence is appropriately informing campaign development.

Behaviour change is also one of the core outcomes against which campaigns are evaluated. As referenced in the first chapter, evaluation is heavily emphasised by GCS as a means to prove the value communication adds to policy and government. Due to their format, fixed duration and benchmarking, campaigns are especially well-suited to proving tangible outcomes and impact towards policy goals. To this end, the new version of the GCS Evaluation Framework 2.0 (GCS, 2018^[20]) reflects a focus on campaigns, particularly paid ones, with guidance on calculating return-on-investment (ROI). Interviews with campaigns specialists also indicate they recently introduced a requirement for the allocation of 10% of campaign budgets towards their evaluation.

Campaign outcomes measured can range widely, but some successful examples demonstrate their tangible contribution to policy goals. For instance, the UK's flagship international investment attractiveness campaign "GREAT" measured the ROI of its drive to attract foreign students in terms of the share of their contribution to the UK economy and individual spend that can be directly attributed to the campaign (UK Government, 2022^[21]). The "It All Adds Up" campaign supported the government objective of a 15% reduction in energy consumption by 2030, by increasing awareness of simple measures for saving energy and money. Drawing on insights identifying barriers to behaviour change, the campaign achieved a

statistically significant increase of four percentage points in the uptake of the energy-saving measures promoted, with a 12 percentage-point increase recorded for reducing boiler flow temperatures. It also calculated a reduction in household energy consumption of 1200 GWh.⁴ Finally, a Meteorological Office campaign to encourage compliance with extreme temperatures mitigation guidance measured its reach in the geographical areas worst affected by the phenomenon and recorded positive behaviour change in 97% of the surveyed public (GCS, 2022^[22]).

Despite the many impactful, state-of-the-art campaigns UK communicators have delivered, there are areas for further progress. A study based on discussions with UK government communicators suggests that there is a large number of less strategic campaigns carried out by departments that do not necessarily contribute to meaningful policy outcomes (Urban, 2023^[14]). These campaigns, according to the study, can sometimes derive from short-lived “pet project” policies of ministers, intended to achieve visibility and political salience (Urban, 2023, p. 13^[14]). Other observers have suggested that evaluation often still focuses more on communication outputs (such as volume of media coverage or reach of a given piece of content) rather than on their outcomes in the audience that matter for policy (Macnamara, 2023^[23]).

One senior communicator interviewed for this Scan stressed the need for better collaboration between departments to create efficiencies and reduce duplication of campaigns with similar objectives and target audiences. Such efforts are underway with the goal to centralise further large-scale campaigns on cross-cutting policies and several communicators interviewed have noted examples of such inter-departmental collaboration. One such notable case is the Help for Households campaign, co-ordinated by Cabinet Office with multiple departments, offering a range of benefits and assistance to alleviate the financial strain caused by the spike in living costs in 2022 (Box 2.3).

Box 2.3. The “Help for Households” cross-government campaign

As in many OECD countries, the cost of living became the biggest concern for households in the UK in 2022 as higher energy bills, rising inflation and tax changes put pressure on household finances. At the time, 48% of people ranked this as one of the top three issues that the government should address. Although multiple government support measures had existed before the cost of living crisis became acute, these often went unclaimed, due to low awareness levels, difficulty searching and navigating schemes by different departments and misperceptions about eligibility criteria. As of June 2022, GCS measured awareness of government actions in this domain as low. Only 29% of people surveyed recalled messages about addressing the cost of living.

The Help for Households campaign was developed to increase public awareness of the government’s actions to alleviate the cost of living crisis and increase uptake of support measures and financial assistance, while encouraging people to maintain their normal spending habits.

The campaign sought to bring the full breadth of the government’s assistance to households under one roof and communicate on these as a single initiative. To do so, it brought together over 40 different types of government support that eligible citizens could potentially claim into one central, easy-to-access online portal. This central website was promoted via an offline and online marketing campaign targeting a wide range of audiences.

The campaign featured paid content across traditional and digital media, and outdoor advertising aimed at general audiences. A dedicated effort went into reaching lower income and vulnerable audiences, which saw the geo-targeted dissemination of content at ATMs, on buses, and during the men’s 2022 FIFA World Cup televised matches. Additionally, information was disseminated via leaflets distributed in food banks, hospitals and doctors’ offices, and job centres. Content was additionally translated in other languages spoken by target audiences for dissemination on multicultural media.

The campaign website has seen consistently high traffic since the campaign launch. As of November 2023, the online website for the campaign had received over 18 million visits. Awareness of the Help for Households campaign and where to go for information was measured as high across all target audiences: metrics for aggregate advertising recognition of the campaign stood at 56%. Population awareness of the support available had climbed to 85%.

Significantly, two-thirds of citizens who became aware of support via the campaign subsequently took action. This entailed an increase in the numbers of people claiming support they were eligible for, such as 87 000 additional claims for pension credit as of March 2023 compared to six months prior.

Sources: Case study provided by Cabinet Office to the OECD Secretariat, March 2023; OECD interviews with Department for Work and Pensions; GCS (2022_[24]), *Speech: "Collaboration, Innovation and Great People: The GCS Strategy"*, <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/news/speech-collaboration-innovation-and-great-people-the-gcs-strategy/>.

Besides creating efficiencies, these joined-up efforts, which often make good use of a single recognisable brand, also cater to the public's understanding of government as unitary (as opposed to associating policies with each department or agency in charge). Nonetheless, interviewees cited issues with ownership, visibility, and co-ordination, as well as budget and staff pooling, which tend to hinder collaboration.

Due to the prominence of campaigns as a public communication instrument and the considerable taxpayer funding associated with them, it is important to ensure their effective contribution to policy and their ROI – whether monetary or other. The trajectory for more integrated campaigns is part of the "Collaboration" pillar of the GCS 2022-25 Strategy, which seeks to use the annual strategy and planning cycle and its spending controls to 'nudge' departments into collaborating more effectively on common governmental priorities (GCS, 2022_[5]). These steps will elevate more campaigns to the high standards achieved by top-performing ones. It will also be important that the same efforts include a focus on strengthening campaigns' measurable contribution to policy outcomes.

Inclusive and responsive campaign design for greater policy impact

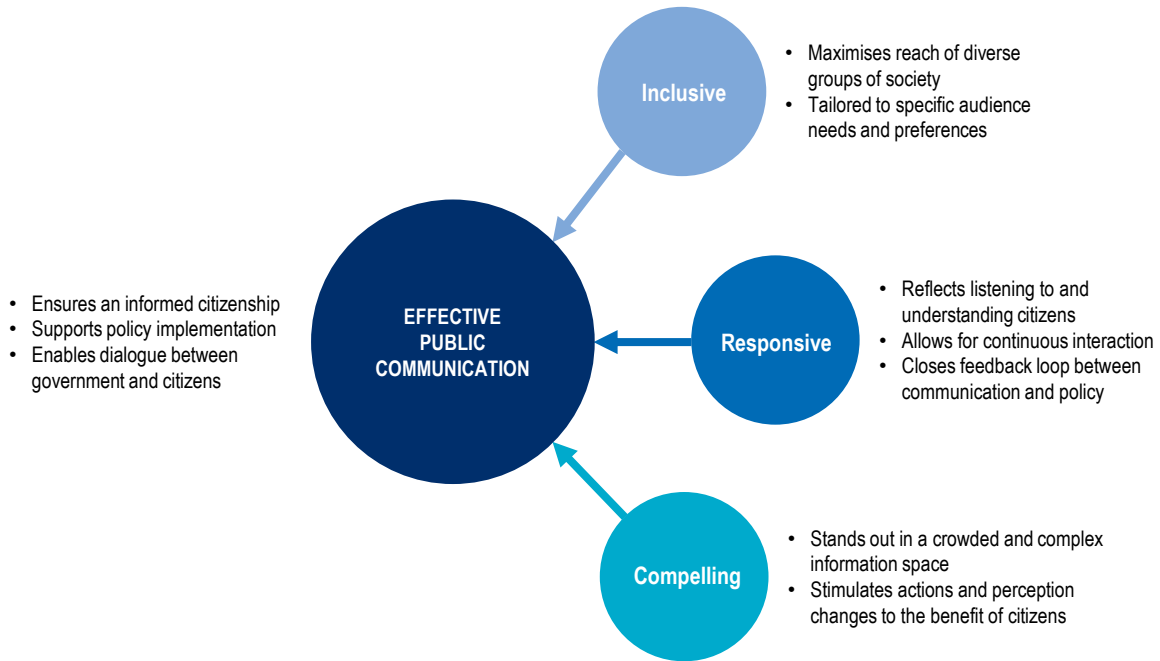
Achieving policy impact via communication campaigns has become synonymous with an audience-centric design focus. The emphasis on more inclusive, responsive, and compelling communication was consolidated during the COVID-19 pandemic response. The crisis accelerated experimentation in the public sector with innovative approaches to get impactful health messages through to even the hardest-to-reach groups (Alfonsi et al., 2022_[21]). These key attributes for public communication, illustrated in Figure 2.5, are an important basis for the function to increase its added value to policy and services.

In the UK, the focus on inclusion and responsiveness in communication campaigns has been established for some time and is grounded in its emphasis on evidence-driven campaign design. In particular, communicators across departments are highly aware of how diverse their audiences are in their information needs and consumption habits. As a result, they have widely adopted a range of practices, illustrated in Figure 2.6, that serve to make communication more relevant and tailored to their audiences. These approaches are also broadly aligned with five principles to make campaigns more inclusive, as described by GCS (Box 2.4).

In interviews conducted for this *Scan*, most communicators stressed their focus on targeting their campaigns narrowly to relevant groups and differentiating their content and channels for specific audience segments. For instance, some departments such as Department for Education, have shifted to an audience-type lens based on core categories of customers for whom each of their policies and services are developed (such as teachers, parents, students, or people in training). The same emphasis on targeting is also articulated in the 2022-2025 GCS Strategy, which sets the direction for campaigns to increasingly use

data-driven methods to deliver an “individual experience, with less use of mass communications” (GCS, 2022_[25]).

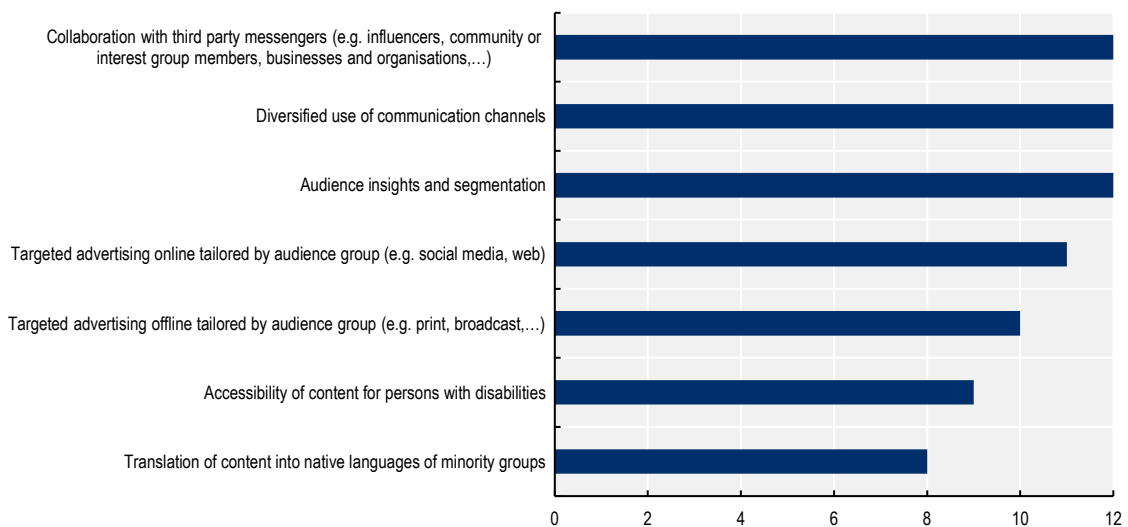
Figure 2.5. Effective public communication



Source: Alfonsi, C. et al. (2022_[2]), “Public communication trends after COVID-19: Innovative practices across the OECD and in four Southeast Asian countries”, <https://doi.org/10.1787/cb4de393-en>.

Figure 2.6. Practices used to tailor communication to specific audiences

Which practices, approaches and/or tactics does the department apply in the delivery of its communication to ensure that it is relevant and tailored to diverse audience groups?



Note : N=12, multiple responses possible.

Source: OECD survey of UK government communication offices at departmental level, 2022.

There is a similar attention given to the challenges of reaching some of the groups in society who are less engaged, less trusting or otherwise vulnerable. Most departments have noted in survey responses that they take dedicated action to understand and improve communication with several of these groups (see Figure 2.7). These steps ensure communication is more inclusive and deliver policy impact for the intended beneficiaries. They can also build public trust among groups that are least trusting of government, such as young people (OECD, 2020^[26]; OECD, 2022^[27]).

The OECD Trust Survey (2022^[4]) (further detailed below) measured that 24% of young people (aged 18-29) trusted government in the UK compared to 31% of adults between 30-49 years old and 41% of those over 50. Women also reported lower trust than men, at 32% versus 38%. Income is another important factor, with 32% of people on lower incomes reporting that they trust government against 42% on higher incomes. A similar gap (roughly 10 percentage points) appears between people who reported personal financial concerns and those who did not, and people who reported a lower social status (OECD, 2022^[4]).

Box 2.4. GCS principles for more inclusive campaigns

To ensure that government communication is accessible and inclusive, GCS has issued a number of guiding principles for campaigns with regard to creative content, channel selection, community engagement, language, and accessibility. When relying on the OASIS Framework (Box 2.2 above), GCS recommends that these principles be considered at the planning stage and subsequently at every step of development and delivery.

- **Creative:** Campaign material should draw on creative content – such as imagery, case studies, and videos – that reflects and resonates with a diverse audience and society.
- **Channel selection:** The selected channels of communication should account for literacy levels and wherever relevant, public communicators should seek to collaborate with local authorities and organisations to reach the targeted audience.
- **Community engagement:** In communities where trust in government is low, public communicators should seek to engage the community, for instance, by co-creating campaign material and sustaining relations with local groups throughout the campaign.
- **Language:** Campaign material should be translated into all relevant languages and local authorities can request that material be translated for their local communities.
- **Accessibility:** All content should adhere to GCS criteria for readability, colour, images, and videos to ensure that campaign material is accessible. Digital resources should be thoroughly tested to ensure that such criteria are satisfied.

Source: GCS (2022^[28]), *Five Principles to Make Your Campaigns More Inclusive*, <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/marketing/delivering-government-campaigns/five-principles-to-make-your-campaigns-more-inclusive/>.

Communicating effectively with these groups ought to ensure they understand and benefit from public policy. Ensuring their needs are met with relevant and resonant information can help to counteract perceptions they are left behind, by demonstrating instead that government institutions are both reliable and fair for all. In turn, this can help drive up trust in government, as this chapter discusses.

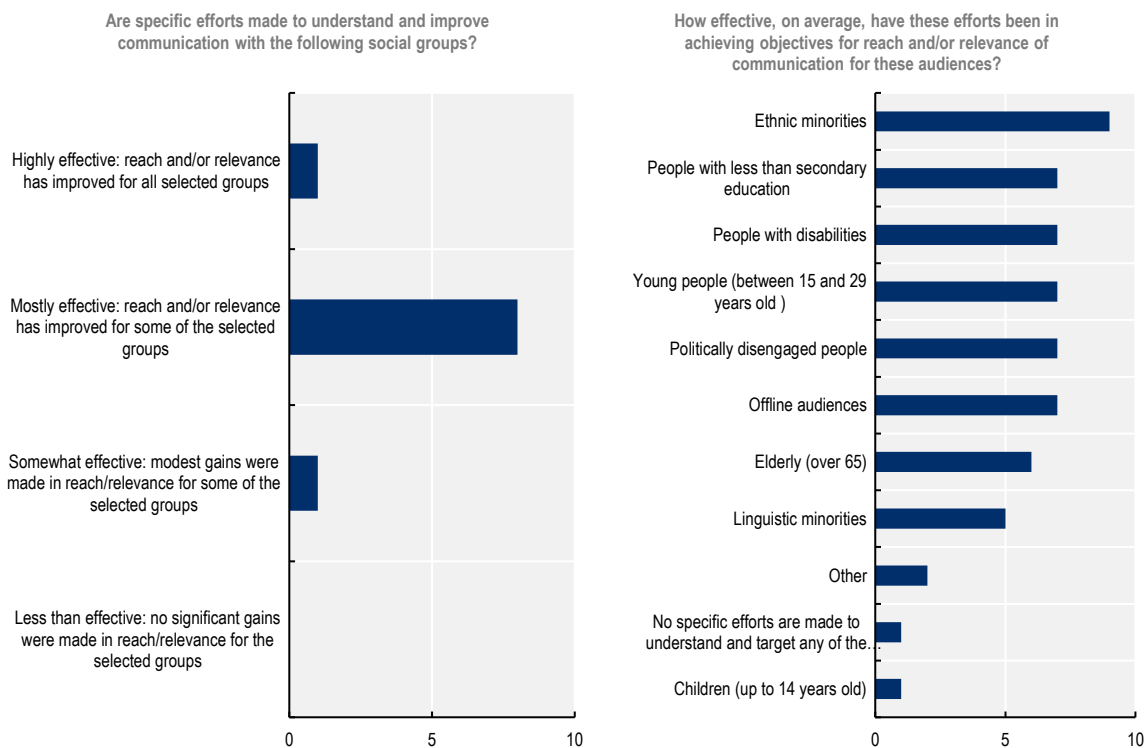
Departments' survey responses provided a positive snapshot that their efforts on inclusion are working but leave some scope for further improvement (Figure 2.7). Audience insights are an important part of recognising where communication needs differ between groups and for informing the course of action. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, audience polling highlighted that business owners from ethnic

minority backgrounds had lower awareness levels of government support schemes for businesses. Communicators in the former Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS)⁵ devised a targeted multi-channel communication campaign that also accounted for the diversity within this audience group and helped drive up visits to the online portal to claim support (Cutting, 2021^[29]).

Notwithstanding the above examples and many more such cases, the ability to acquire and leverage data to develop more precise strategies is a constraint for several departments, as noted in Chapter 1 and above. Interviews revealed that in practice this entails some selectiveness and prioritisation in how the few data analysts in teams are deployed. Efforts to expand the capacity for data-gathering and analysis, also noted in the GCS Strategy for 2022-25, will help enhance the citizen-centred design of campaigns and other forms of communication.

Another dimension where communicators identified further scope for improvement, also based on survey data in Figure 2.6, is the accessibility of their content. Despite ample guidance from GCS on developing accessible social media and web content, as well as video and sign language interpretation,⁶ interviews with communicators suggested some of these measures are not consistently applied. This is the case particularly for steps that can be costlier or more time-intensive. Better compliance with accessibility standards can be encouraged with the assistance of some nudges, as per the example in Box 2.5. A newly-introduced on-demand training in accessibility can help further compliance, while the costs and complexity of measures such as captioning or sign language interpretation could soon be aided by AI solutions.

Figure 2.7. The effectiveness of efforts to reach certain audiences



Note: N=10, left figure: multiple responses possible; right figure: single choice answer.

Source: OECD survey of UK government communication offices at departmental level, 2022

Box 2.5. Accessibility and usability seal to promote application of central guidelines in Portugal

To improve institutions' compliance with its usability and accessibility guidance, the Portuguese Agency for Administrative Modernisation (AMA) introduced a certification model in 2021 for government web pages. The AMA assesses and rates pages with a gold, silver or bronze seal. The seal serves both to inform users about the level of accessibility of a site and as a nudge for webmasters to comply with relevant criteria. AMA has additionally developed a toolkit to assist institutions with meeting each of the criteria for achieving a higher seal.

Source: Government of Portugal (2021^[30]), <https://www.acessibilidade.gov.pt/blogue/categoria-acessibilidade/portugal-pioneiro-nacertificacao-digital/>; Government of Portugal (2019^[31]), *Selo de Usabilidade e Acessibilidade*, https://selo.usabilidade.gov.pt/Selo_de_Usabilidade_e_Acessibilidade_v1_1.pdf.

Finally, some important actions on inclusion are also envisaged for the composition of GCS and communication teams across government. Both interviews and the GCS 2022-2025 Strategy noted the need for communication teams to reflect the diversity of the UK population to communicate more inclusively with a wide range of audiences (GCS, 2022^[5]). The “Great People” pillar of the Strategy makes commitments to increase diversity within the profession and to provide career opportunities outside of London and across the country. A dedicated GCS Locations Strategy 2023-25 (GCS, 2023^[32]) is helping to achieve these objectives.

This effort was welcomed in one interview in which the department praised the value and diversity of perspectives of having a communication team spread across multiple locations. Similarly, other communicators interviewed lamented their limited contact “on the ground” with communities they aim to reach as a constraint to deepening their understanding of audiences.

An outlook for co-creating campaigns with target audiences

While the emphasis on audience and insights in planning and conducting campaigns has allowed a positive focus on their inclusive and responsive design, it is still important to acknowledge the limitations of this communication approach for engendering genuine two-way engagement and interaction with citizens (the next section of this chapter will indeed shift the focus on methods of communication that facilitate these outcomes, so as to help shape decisions on public issues with citizens' inputs).

Literature has recognised the essentially top-down nature of campaigns, based on internal priorities and objectives and where the main purpose of understanding citizens is to be more effective in persuading them to change perceptions or behaviour (Collier et al., 2022^[33]; Macnamara, 2022^[34]). Government campaigns' objectives in themselves tend to be mostly justifiable, especially when they serve policy goals that further society's well-being. Yet the reliance on behavioural and marketing approaches and the relative absence of feedback loops (i.e. mechanisms to obtain feedback on certain outputs and respond on a continuous basis) has raised questions over their legitimacy and concerns about manipulation, as remarked in an interview and raised in recent research (Collier et al., 2022^[33]; Alfonsi et al., 2022^[2]) (ethical considerations are addressed further in Chapter 3).

As such, there are opportunities for campaigns to reinforce their legitimacy in the eyes of potential critics by better integrating public input and feedback. One notable way is listed in the GCS principles on inclusive campaigns (Box 2.4) in relation to community engagement. This principle lists some welcome actions for co-creating aspects of the campaign with relevant communities and involving them throughout the process. Emphasising this principle could improve the quality of campaigns and their trustworthiness.

Additionally, as noted above, different groups in society are less trusting of government than others. This makes it more challenging to reach them via institutional voices and channels – but it also makes them priority audiences to engage with (OECD, 2020^[26]). To overcome this barrier, communicators in the UK, as in a growing number of OECD countries, are drawing on trusted third-party messengers such as social media influencers, representatives of communities, youth groups and even businesses (see, for instance, Figure 2.6, all surveyed departments noted collaborating with external messengers). This approach offers another way to co-create and partner on campaigns that is less top-down and even stakeholder-led, such as the example of ethnic minority outreach during COVID-19 described in Box 2.6.

Whereas some of these third-party engagements are paid, as in commercial marketing contexts, there is value in working with previously vetted messengers who voluntarily support policies and other initiatives as this affords authenticity and credibility. Earning (rather than buying) the support of key stakeholders in a campaign who share the campaign’s values and objectives, gives it legitimacy and viability (this is also a responsibility covered by the External Affairs function, as discussed in the next section). In this respect, de-centralising messages and the voices that amplify them can help diffuse ownership and have an almost democratising effect on campaigns’ design and delivery.

In this light, GCS guidance can help encourage communicators across government to lean further into these approaches. As the information ecosystem grows more fragmented and both algorithms and personal networks play a greater role in determining the information audiences receive, focusing on a networked and multi-stakeholder way of communicating will become increasingly important.

Box 2.6. Community-level engagement and collaboration during COVID-19

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Cabinet Office National Resilience Hub’s External Affairs team was notified through community engagement that some ethnic minority and religious communities were less receptive of government public health messages. Sources indicated these groups would need figures from their own communities to endorse messages from central government in order to trust them and validate their compatibility with their communities’ values and beliefs.

COVID-19 health data likewise illustrated that some communities were experiencing higher than average numbers of cases. Collaboration with partner organisations from that group highlighted insights about reasons behind these higher transmission rates, ranging from community mistrust of government guidance to language barriers and digital exclusion. Drawing on these insights, government communicators worked with trusted figures in relevant communities to identify the best channels and trusted voices to reach these groups and collaborated to co-create offline and online COVID-19 safety content in their language.

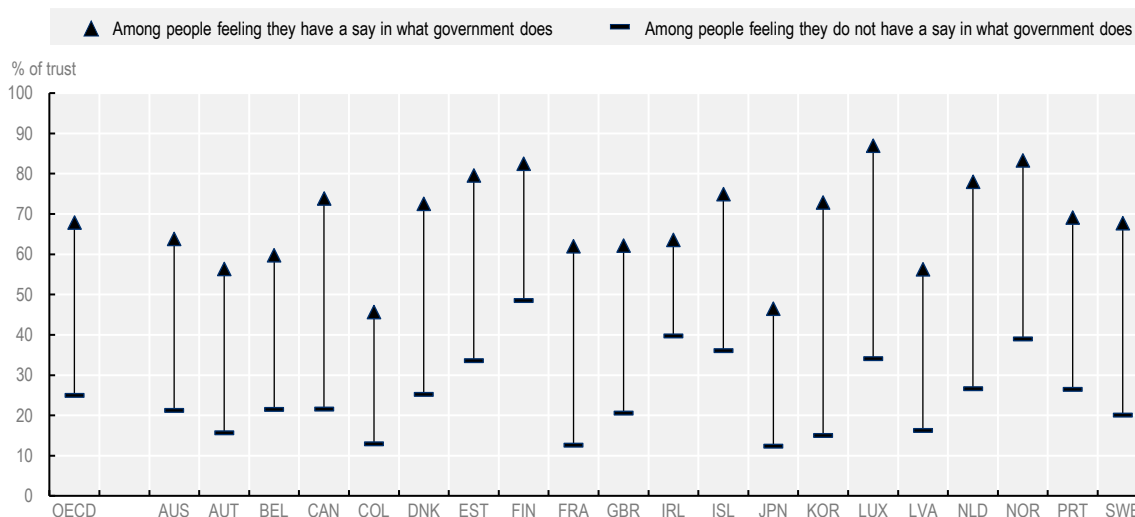
Source: GCS (2021^[35]), “How focused communication benefitted a vulnerable community facing a surge of COVID-19”, <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/blog/how-focused-communication-benefitted-a-vulnerable-community-facing-a-surge-of-covid-19/>.

Two-way communication as a means for more responsive policy making

Against the backdrop of declining satisfaction with democracy and waning trust in many societies across the OECD, governments are reforming and innovating how they bring citizens’ voices into their work (OECD, n.d.^[36]). This is manifested through a wave of deliberative processes, public consultations, citizen engagement platforms, participatory budgeting, and more (OECD, 2020^[37]).

Such opportunities for dialogue and participation are paramount to addressing the underlying causes of low public trust. According to the 22-country OECD Trust Survey (2022^[41]), trust is strongly associated with the perception that government acts on citizens' inputs. In the UK, trust in government stands at 60% among those who feel they have a say in what the government does (22-country average is 68%). Conversely, among citizens who feel they do not have a say, only 21% reported trusting government (22-country average is 25%, see Figure 2.8. More detailed findings from the Survey are included in Box 3.1 in the following chapter).

Figure 2.8. Trust in government is associated with people's feeling that they have a say in what the government does



Note: Figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the questions “On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely, in general how much do you trust the national government”, and “How much would you say the political system in [country] allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?”. Shown here is the proportion of respondents that reported trusting the national government (response categories 6-10) by whether they feel they have a say in what the government does. “OECD” presents the unweighted average across countries. Mexico and New Zealand are excluded from this figure as respondents were not asked about trust in the national government. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at <http://oe.cd/trust>.

Source: OECD (2022^[38]), *OECD Trust Survey*, <http://oe.cd/trust>.

The Survey highlighted that less than a third of citizens across countries feel that the political system lets them have a say. Similarly, only about a quarter believe their government would act on public feedback to change a policy, implement an innovative idea, or improve a poorly performing service (OECD, 2022^[16]). In the UK specifically, 48.5% of citizens thought it was unlikely that a poorly-performing public service would be improved if many people complained about it, and only 30.4% of citizens thought it likely that a national policy would be changed if a majority of people expressed a view against it (OECD, 2022^[16]).

Public communication can be an asset to improve citizens' perceptions that they are listened to and that their voices matter in what the government does. In the first instance, it can serve to raise citizens' awareness of the ways they can weigh in on public decisions, and of how their contributions are used by the government. Along the same lines, the communication profession has long placed emphasis on the *engagement* of its audiences, where this term is often used as a catch-all to refer to anything from a “like” on a social media post to more consequential actions to respond to or act on the message (Johnston and Lane, 2021^[39]).

Today, there is an opportunity for enhanced interaction and concrete engagement across communication channels to complement formal participation processes and act as a bridge between the public and policy makers (OECD, 2021^[1]; 2022^[40]).

This role for public communication is recognised in the OECD Action Plans on Building Trust and Reinforcing Democracy, endorsed by OECD Members in 2022. The Pillar on *Enhancing Participation, Representation and Openness in Public Life* calls on governments to “Promote a more structured and institutionalised approach to participation and deliberation by [...] Communicating with and listening to citizens through online and offline channels, while using the same channels to foster dialogue” (OECD, 2022^[41]).

The following section looks at the role public communication plays in existing and emerging practices for citizen participation initiatives. It explores the concrete ways in which communication itself can complement these efforts, providing an additional channel for citizens to feed back to public institutions and shape decisions.

Two-way communication to complement actions for greater citizen participation

The field of citizen participation in public decision making has been expanding and innovating rapidly in recent years. Many governments across the OECD and beyond are responding to increased citizens’ expectations for a say on public matters while acknowledging the value that such inputs bring to the quality and efficacy of policies. Different forms of stakeholder engagement, such as public consultations or participatory budgeting, are increasingly common. As of 2019 the OECD has compiled an international database of nearly 300 deliberative processes (OECD, 2020^[37]).

However, in many countries opportunities to participate in public decision making are scattered and can lack visibility and political weight. If not purposefully designed to be inclusive, participation initiatives can also fail to reach vulnerable groups who feel they do not have a say and are the least trusting of government. The OECD Trust Survey finds that a perceived lack of say in government decisions is a root cause of low public trust.

The OECD has developed guidance to support its Members in improving the design and institutionalisation of different forms of citizen participation so that they can achieve better impact and scale (OECD, 2022^[42]; OECD, 2022^[43]). These guidelines note explicitly that “quality communication is a prerequisite to organising a successful participatory process. It can help at every step of the way – from recruiting citizens and ensuring transparency of the process to extending the benefits of learning about specific policy issues to the broader public” (OECD, 2022, p. 11^[42]). It is also key at the final stages, to feed back to participants and the wider public about how their inputs in a process were used and to demonstrate their views were valued (see Box 2.7).

Box 2.7. OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes

The OECD guidelines on citizen participation outline a 10-step path to planning and implementing citizen participation in the policy-making process. These guidelines notably differentiate between ways of involving individual citizens as opposed to stakeholders, who are understood as representing an interested or affected party, be it a public, private or non-profit institution or organisation.

The guidelines set out the steps for participation, beginning with identifying a problem that the public can be meaningfully engaged in solving. Once such a problem is determined, the expected outcomes of engaging citizens ought to be defined and a relevant group of people to involve should be likewise identified and recruited.

The choice of method of participation is an essential step. The OECD guidelines consider eight different methods of participation – though new methods are constantly developing and evolving. The selection of which method depends on the type of input sought, the stage of the decision-making process, and potential associated costs. The use of digital tools is also discussed, in relation to the chosen method of participation.

The guidelines emphasise communication in the aftermath of the process where citizens' inputs and the ultimate outcome of their participation must be carefully communicated to participants and the public. This includes cases where certain recommendations are not adopted, for which decisions should be clearly justified and communicated. The existence of this feedback loop is crucial to shore up trust in the policy-making process and ensure that citizens feel encouraged to participate in similar activities in the future.

Sources: OECD (2022^[42]), *OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/f765caf6-en>.

In parallel with these efforts, governments can additionally leverage the communication function as a complement to participation and engagement initiatives. The evolution of digital technologies and the communication field has unlocked unprecedented opportunities for the function to gain an increasingly advanced understanding of citizens' information needs, their concerns with public services, policy preferences, and attitudes towards key public issues. The Internet has given rise to many-to-many communication, with citizens and stakeholders routinely exchanging opinions, preferences, and concerns across online platforms that amount to a virtual public square. These are the same open channels that communicators are tasked with monitoring and analysing on a daily basis with the help of increasingly sophisticated AI-powered analytics software (considerations about ethics and propriety in this field are addressed in Chapter 3).

With the aid of dedicated analytical tools and increasingly advanced practices, communicators are uniquely positioned to interact at scale with specific segments of the population that can be hard to reach. They are trained to regularly analyse vast amounts of data to understand audience perceptions and attitudes on a given issue as well as feedback on specific policies. In turn, the information exchanged via this public square can be harnessed responsibly by governments to both feed into the policy agenda and the design of services, and to engage in dialogue on these channels.

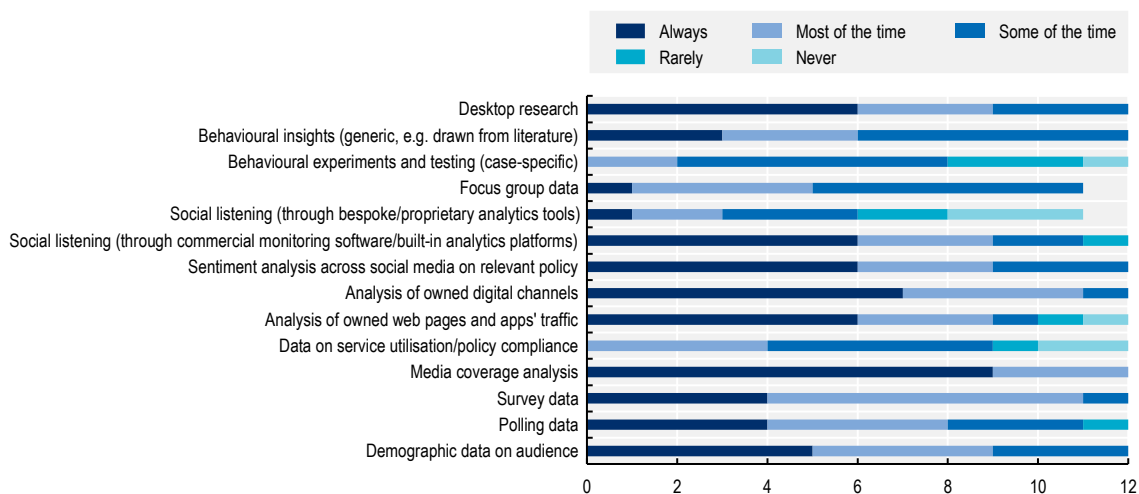
Strengthening and innovating how UK institutions listen to citizens

The emerging practice of *organisational listening*⁷ provides one important way to process and take on board the vast input citizens provide in unstructured ways on a continuous basis. It can contribute to a more responsive policy making, providing ongoing feedback and insights to policy makers and delivery teams. This is an innovative field in communication, and one that offers considerable opportunities for transforming the function and how it contributes to better policies and greater trust.

In the UK, public communication already plays such a role to an extent, and there is scope to consolidate relevant activities and examples of excellence into a systematic approach. Departments interviewed for this *Scan* stressed that their continuous monitoring and analysis of communication channels, their regular audience research, and the contact with core stakeholder groups via the external affairs discipline provide key resources to understand what people are discussing and their attitudes on any given issue. Figure 2.9 provides a non-exhaustive snapshot of the variety of sources routinely used to this end across departments.

Figure 2.9. Sources and frequency of evidence-gathering on public discourse and audiences

What sources of insights and evidence are gathered to inform communication?



Note: N=12, single choice answer.

Source: OECD survey of UK government communication offices at departmental level, 2022.

There are some intrinsic benefits to several of these evidence sources that are valuable to shape communication but can also support efforts to build citizen feedback into policy. First, public discourse analysed across most communication channels is open-ended, meaning it reflects organically what citizens are saying rather than answers a specific prompt or question. Formal participation processes commonly revolve around obtaining inputs on a defined issue, which is still too often set according to the government's own agenda. Conversely, public discourse analysis can inform agenda-setting by highlighting issues citizens are concerned with and eager to weigh in on. It can offer a more holistic view of perceptions around certain topics and how salient they are compared to others.

The other benefit of these types of insights is that they are gathered on a frequent and even continuous basis. This can facilitate understanding of the evolution of public perceptions and attitudes on a given issue over the course of time and allow adjustment of policy and communication as needed. Communication insights also tend to be more timely and readily available than other official statistics or research outputs, as one interviewee stressed. The timeliness of communication insights can allow institutions to identify potential issues early on or inform decisions on when and how to consult citizens and stakeholders.

The value of both of the above elements is recognised in Macnamara's (2017^[44]) theory of organisational listening. Still, there are limitations to these types of insights that make them insufficient proxies for citizens' voices.

First, this listening is only as good as the methods employed and the data that underpin them. When it comes to the more common evidence sources used in Figure 2.9, these tend not to match the rigour of social research employed in other disciplines. There is often need for more qualitative data to explain the reasons behind public sentiment.

Second, communicators rely on opaque algorithms and commercial software to yield analysis, especially with regard to social media analytics (Alfonsi et al., 2022^[2]; Zerfass, Hagelstein and Tench, 2020^[45]). There is a degree of risk of bias and self-selection inherent to online discourse whereby highly vocal but unrepresentative groups can dominate certain issue areas more than wider but less outspoken audiences

and create echo-chambers. Representativeness is an additional concern with regards to factors such as digital inclusion, language of analysis, or accessibility of channels.

These limitations on communication insights as proxies for citizens' voices point to an opportunity for GCS to develop an innovative, rigorous, and comprehensive model for organisational listening with communicators across government. Such a model or framework could be developed in consultation with experts from different disciplines across data science, social research, and participation, and be based on experimentation within departments. A range of valuable lessons and recommendations to guide this endeavour are already available from a field study whose first phase began in 2014 (Macnamara, 2017^[46]; 2022^[34]).

This kind of exercise could align well with the GCS 2022-25 Strategy commitments on innovation and serve to further its vision for how the function supports core government objectives. Senior communicators interviewed for this *Scan* noted such listening remained an important yet underdeveloped area of their work they would be keen to invest in. As they stay on track with their ambitious commitments for the reform of the function, a focus on the capability to listen and close the feedback loop with policy could be a top priority in the GCS strategy post-2025.

To reflect the importance and value of listening to and acting on citizen feedback, this could be defined as a discipline in its own right within the Functional Standards on Communication or a future edition of the MCOM. This could represent a new frontier for the function internationally since even governments that are most mature in this domain lack a sophisticated approach to listening to and understanding citizens at scale.

The integration of communication with policy, especially at the early formulation and consultation stages, remains a precondition for the efficacy of organisational listening as a vehicle for more responsive policy making and service design. As with the findings in the above section, this role for communication is not yet widely acknowledged or understood.

Efforts by the GCS to consolidate its approach and capacity for listening ought to go hand-in-hand with initiatives to promote this discipline and foster culture change within institutions. It may be even desirable to co-lead efforts in this area with central government teams working to enhance participation and drive open government reforms.

In the absence of full integration between communication and policy, listening to citizens and understanding their needs remains an essential requirement for more responsive public communication. Similar to the emphasis on evidence-based campaign design noted above, survey responses illustrated in Figure 2.10 point to the established role of audience feedback in shaping core aspects of communication delivery.

Building on strengths for listening to and engaging wider audiences

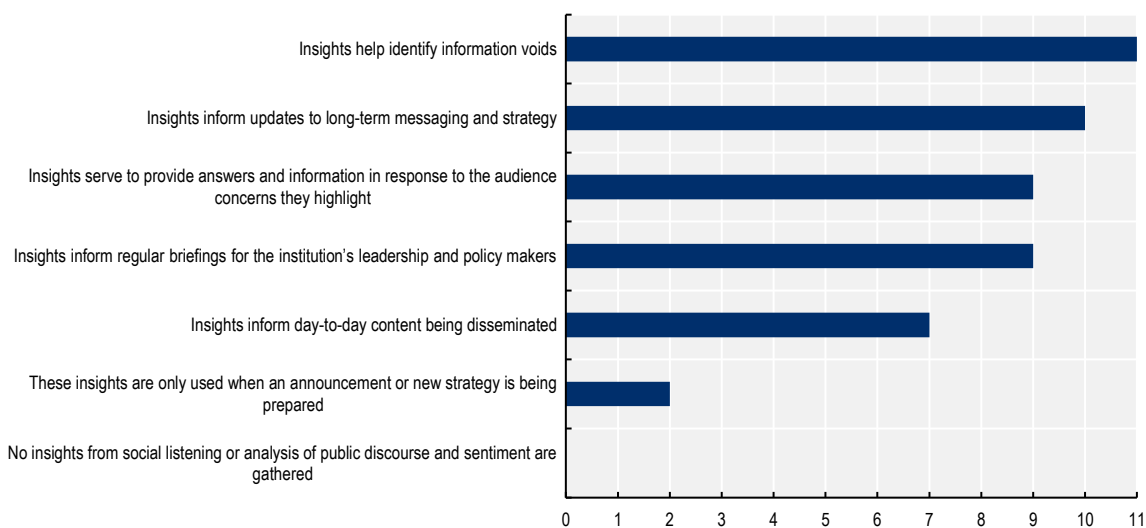
Mass communication channels are not the only sources of listening available – on the contrary, good practice for organisational listening calls for consolidating and analysing all forms of feedback that result from interactions with citizens, whether call centre data, correspondence, or other. Moreover, there is a case to widen opportunities for citizens to interact with public institutions across different channels so that their views and inputs can also be sought out more proactively and purposefully.

In the UK, there are some noteworthy practices that can form core pillars of a consolidated approach to organisational listening if properly integrated with the above activities. For instance, some departments have embedded teams in charge of correspondence with the public in their communication directorates. Some examples, such as in Box 2.8, highlight the potential to enhance listening and inform policy development.

The most established of these practices concerns the discipline of external affairs, which is recognised by MCOM as core to the function and is under the responsibility of communication directorates within departmental structures. It is defined as “building and maintaining relationships with influential individuals and organisations for the public benefit” (GCS, 2018^[47]).

Figure 2.10. Public discourse and feedback inform communication delivery in most departments

How are insights from social listening or analysis of public discourse and sentiment used to inform communication?



Note: N=12, multiple responses possible.

Source: OECD survey of UK government communication offices at departmental level, 2022.

Its core remit, as noted in the relevant GCS guidance document, consists of listening, dialogue, awareness, and co-ordination with relevant stakeholder groups. External affairs is used to consult on and in some cases even co-create policy with representatives of different sectors and interest groups, and to test and secure buy-in for policy propositions (GCS, 2018^[47]).

External affairs teams have contributed to more participative policy making through engagement of and collaboration with stakeholders. As a customer-facing department, His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC), the UK's tax authority, places great emphasis on ensuring its operations are responsive to citizens' and businesses' needs, according to communicators interviewed. It does so by supporting and facilitating co-creation of programmes with key stakeholders, including a large annual stakeholder conference.

The conference serves as an avenue for HMRC to gather representatives of citizen and consumer groups, businesses and organisations of all sizes, and interviewees stressed the event has a practical, workshop-style focus to identify solutions with these stakeholders as equal partners. The conference also results in a set of commitments, which communication teams are tasked with following up on and reporting progress to the stakeholders, a valuable example of closing the feedback loop.

Interviewees stressed that the focus on stakeholder representatives and their role as intermediaries is core to the objective of making policy more participative, due to the practical difficulty of listening to individual citizens and engaging them in such co-creation. Another department, the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA), has bridged this challenge by establishing a large forum of individual stakeholders to engage in agricultural reforms, according to interviews.

The Farming Forum, a group of over 8 000 individual British farmers covering different territories and farm sizes, was set up as a platform for continuous dialogue and co-designing policy. The Forum initiative, managed jointly by policy teams with embedded communicators, was meant as a channel for grassroots engagement compared to other forms of engagement that tended to be dominated by trade unions and other large interest groups. This is indeed a risk linked to engaging narrowly with advocates and stakeholder groups, whose lobbying claims to represent the voices of constituents but can also disproportionately skew the debate (OECD, 2021^[48]). The initiative was regarded as very valuable for generating important insights for policy and catering to the needs of the target group through new forms of engagement.

Box 2.8. Enabling a feedback loop between citizens, stakeholders and policy makers in the Department for Education: The case of School Meal Vouchers

The Department for Education's (DfE) communication directorate has introduced new organisational approaches to better align its work with core departmental policy and delivery areas, and with the different categories of audiences and stakeholders concerned with each area. For instance, communicators have designated topics such as Schools, Children and Families, Post-16 Education and Skills, and even specialised teams for recruitment to build the teaching workforce. According to this model, departmental communication is planned and structured from the perspective of the intended audiences, interviews emphasised.

To operationalise this structure, DfE works both on embedding communicators in policy teams (as mentioned earlier in the chapter), but also on better aligning central-level professional communication (intended as roles carried out by qualified professionals under the GCS competency framework) with operational information teams (civil servants carrying out tasks that do not require specialist communication skills). The latter teams include, for instance, all communication linked to stakeholder information and consultation, correspondence, project- or service-related information for users and similar. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, DfE communicators have worked to bring professional and operational communication in lockstep, reflecting an audience-centric focus on ensuring rapid delivery of information consistently and across all channels and messengers.

Within this approach there is a significant emphasis on analysing and integrating different channels for feedback to the department. Close collaboration with policy and delivery teams means that insights from user research, customer journey analysis, and communication are shared across teams and combined to support decision making. For instance, this includes data from the journeys of around 2.5 million individual users interacting with DfE digital content each month.

As distinct from most other government departments, DfE's communication directorate has oversight of the correspondence function. Correspondence teams manage inbound queries and complaints from the public, as well as consultations and inbound telephone calls. It is therefore a core pillar of public feedback and a key source of analysis for communicators and policy makers alike.

Leveraging public feedback to improve outcomes for the DfE's School Meals Voucher scheme

The example of adjustments to the School Meals Voucher scheme delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates how departmental teams collaborated to improve and extend the service based on citizen and stakeholder feedback. When the pandemic forced UK schools to close in March 2020, children from economically disadvantaged households who had been eligible for free meals in their schools were suddenly no longer receiving these meals. Within 18 days, the DfE changed the national scheme for free meals at the school into a weekly supermarket voucher scheme that eligible parents could claim to supplement their children's healthy eating.

Although the scheme's adjustment addressed the identified needs and new circumstances of beneficiaries, its roll-out by a government-procured administrator suffered from practical challenges that delayed access. Notably, complaints from schools and parents analysed by the DfE correspondence team highlighted that the department had not adequately anticipated the volume and variation of issues that families were encountering when taking up the service. Insights from users and ongoing liaison with schools at the frontline of administering the vouchers helped the DfE identify and address delivery issues and ensure the success of the scheme. By the first extension of the vouchers scheme, 94% of schools were participating and beneficiaries' satisfaction levels peaked.

Interviews indicated again that a high volume of inbound correspondence and queries analysed highlighted that families facing financial stress during the pandemic were eager for the vouchers scheme to be extended beyond its foreseen termination at the end of the school term. Combined with amplification by media and high-profile advocates, such as football star Marcus Rashford, stakeholder and parent feedback relayed to policy makers resulted in a new budget allocation allowing the programme to run through the summer school closure. Based on its previous success, the vouchers scheme was eventually replicated smoothly during the 2021 lockdowns.

This case was highlighted by interviewees to demonstrate the value of close collaboration between professional and operational information teams, as well as the feedback loop with policy makers that brought stakeholder and beneficiary voices into decision making, resulting in improved outcomes.

Source: Secretariat interviews with DfE (December 2022); internal presentation by DfE "When policy delivery doesn't go to plan Free School Meals national voucher scheme" (December 2022); GCS (2023^[49]), *Case Study: Working with Embedded Communicators*, <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/case-study-working-with-embedded-communicators/>; Committee of Public Accounts (2021^[50]), *COVID 19: The Free School Meals Voucher Scheme*, <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/4569/documents/46230/default/>; NAO (2020^[51]), *Investigation into the Free School Meals Voucher Scheme*, <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Investigation-into-the-free-school-meals-voucher-scheme.pdf>.

The above examples represent good practices found across departments, although the effectiveness of external affairs teams in supporting participation and their collaboration with policy teams is not uniform across the board, according to interviews the OECD held. The inclusion of stakeholder engagement under the broader umbrella of the public communication function (in the form of the external affairs discipline) represents in itself an opportunity to integrate this source of evidence and listening with other communication insights. However, some interviews suggested that this discipline can sometimes operate somewhat separately from other fields of communication. Some also indicated that, rather than working in tandem, policy teams can sometimes take the lead on relationships with certain groups and on substantive issues, leaving external affairs teams to handle publicity-related aspects of the engagement such as events and ministerial visits.

Interviews also point to political volatility and associated changes in direction as a challenge in managing long-term relationships with stakeholders. Some interviews noted the risk to maintaining stakeholders' trust if their views are not taken on board without relevant justifications. One interviewee suggested that the political climate can cause some policy and external affairs teams to be cautious about seeking policy inputs from stakeholders. Such considerations link to the above findings on government responsiveness and trust, and emphasise the importance of closing the feedback loop with citizens and stakeholders regardless of how their inputs are used.

UK departments can explore more interactive ways to communicate with wider audiences to facilitate the gathering of citizen inputs to inform policy. This is another key area of innovation that GCS could focus on going forward. A noteworthy example to build on is that of the online page, "Ask the government a question"⁸, which was introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic to source and answer public questions

on this subject. A number of questions submitted each day, selected by an external polling firm, were then answered by ministers and government spokespeople during daily press conferences.

According to interviews, over the initial stages of the pandemic, over 650 000 questions were received. They provided deep insights into what information citizens were looking for and their top concerns. With the help of natural language processing tools communication teams in the Cabinet Office were able to identify trends and adjust their messages and delivery. Related to this example are the Lockdown Dialogues held in Finland, another format of public interaction and listening carried out during the pandemic described in Box 2.9.

Although the “Ask a question” page was highlighted as a successful initiative, communicators interviewed caveated that it may not be easily replicable or scalable on other topics that are less salient or prone to be dominated by interest groups. Operating the programme was also resource-intensive. Nonetheless, technologies such as AI are gradually expanding possibilities for this kind of interaction while lowering their costs. For instance, channels such as chatbot-enabled instant messaging are becoming more common and better-performing across countries and sectors (Alfonsi et al., 2022^[21]). They could complement or automate aspects of the correspondence function, for instance, and generative AI combined with content targeting could contribute to the “mass personalisation” of communication noted in the innovation section of the GCS 2022-25 Strategy.

For public communication to grow and consolidate its role in support of citizen participation, it must expand opportunities for citizens to provide more and higher quality contributions. Expanding the use of channels that allow for two-way interaction will be an important step in this direction. This should not be limited to technological solutions, however. Direct human contact on the ground with diverse communities will remain important for understanding their needs and contexts, and building public trust that institutions are listening.

Box 2.9. Lockdown Dialogues in Finland

A series of public discussions were launched in Finland at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic and continued into late 2021 as lockdown restrictions began to be lifted. The discussion brought together a diverse range of Finnish citizens to discuss their experiences and perspectives, and listen to one another, without the expectation of focusing on or solving pre-defined issues.

The dialogues were organised in collaboration with local civil society organisations, and a summary of the topics discussed were compiled and sent to both central and local government, in addition to an open-access publication.

This has been the case in Finland, where the Open Government team within the Ministry of Finance collaborated with local government and CSOs to hold the “Lockdown Dialogues”. These consisted of 232 sessions organised by multiple entities that involved over 1 600 individuals over the spring of 2020 to discuss the effects of the pandemic and connect with communities across the country and abroad (Finnish Government, 2021^[52]). A distinctive feature of these dialogues is that they were open-ended discussions where the goal was to listen, without an intended outcome or a pre-defined policy to deliberate on.

Source: Finnish Government (2021^[52]), “Reopening of society brings joy but polarisation of public discussion causes concern – Lockdown Dialogues recount experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic”, 2021, <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/10623/reopening-of-society-brings-joy-but-polarisation-of-public-discussion-causes-concern-lockdown-dialogues-recount-experiences-of-the-covid-19-pandemic>; Sitra (2022^[53]), *Lockdown Dialogues: Crisis Experiences and Model for National Dialogue*, <https://www.sitra.fi/app/uploads/2022/06/sitra-lockdown-dialogues.pdf>.

The role of communication for a more open government in the UK

While the value of organisational listening for responsive policy making and communication may be evident, it must be noted that this practice does not equal or serve as a substitute for formal participation processes. Concerns and opinions voiced by citizens, whether on open forums or raised directly to institutions, do not amount to deliberation or intentional expression of their position on an issue, which is the case of structured participation processes. For this reason, such listening can be highly informative and span a wide range of policy topics, but enhancing participative and deliberative decision making will remain an essential way to address complex questions and deliver better outcomes that reflect public preferences.

In the UK there is significant scope to expand participative and deliberative processes, especially at the national level. Examples of citizen assemblies, juries and panels are increasing: the OECD Deliberative Wave Database recorded 43 such processes, predominantly at the level of local administrations or devolved nations.⁹ With regards to UK national policy making, consultations remain the more common form of involving citizens and stakeholders in decisions. These are increasingly used to seek feedback and input from stakeholders at the design stages of the policy cycle and have even become a mandatory requirement for policy development in some cases.

Public communicators can make an important contribution to the effectiveness of consultations. Although survey responses indicate that all departments' communicators collaborate with policy teams at the consultation or citizen engagement stage of the policy cycle, interviews downplayed the extent of this collaboration. Notably, interviewees suggested that there is scope to expand the reach and visibility of consultations to target groups and especially individuals who are less likely to otherwise know and participate. One communicator noted the opportunity to reach the "silent middle" of stakeholders to counterbalance the perceived tendency for organised interest groups to dominate and even polarise these processes. This aligns well with the government's principles guiding how consultations are run (Box 2.10).

Conversely, interviews also cautioned on the reputational risks, breach of trust and potential consultation fatigue that can come from promoting consultations without having the adequate capacity for the relevant teams to process a potentially larger volume of inputs. Some noted that this can often be a constraint and discourage such wide dissemination, pointing to cases that attracted volumes of responses beyond what the institutions could process with the available means and timeframes.

Another cautionary factor noted in interviews was the potential for top decision makers to override consultation outcomes. In this regard, interviews tended to validate the finding in previous research that characterised UK consultations as being "more about meeting legal requirements than listening" (Macnamara, 2017^[46]). This speaks to a broader challenge with regards to listening, participation and open government more broadly – that of the organisational culture, identified in the OECD *Recommendation on Open Government* (2017^[54]).

Box 2.10. Principles of Consultation in the UK

In the UK, consultation is legally mandated in some cases, although dedicated guidance encourages consultations to be conducted when issues are "genuinely undecided". To carry out these processes UK departments can refer to the Consultation Principles, which have been periodically updated since their initial publication in 2012. The principles state an intention to use more digital methods to consult with a wider group of people.

Although communication is not explicitly noted in the principles, they refer to the need to target consultations well and design them to suit different groups and categories of stakeholders.

Consultations and responses are published online on the central GOV.UK website. Several government departments and ALBs also have dedicated online “Citizen Spaces”, which publish all consultations specifically related to their policy areas of focus. These are often structured around a tagline of “We Asked, You Said, We Did” to clearly signpost the different stages within the contribution of citizen participation to decision making.

Sources: UK Government (2018^[55]), *Consultation Principles: Guidance*, 2018 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultation-principles-guidance>.

This section has illustrated the potential for public communication to play an important role in enhancing how open and participative government in the UK is. At present, however, this function remains an under-exploited tool to support greater citizen participation and dialogue internationally. Although it is noted in provisions within the *OECD Recommendation of the Council on Open Government* (2017^[54]), there is significant scope to embed the function more formally in efforts to make the government more transparent, accountable and participative.

Given how advanced and sophisticated public communication is in the UK, the country could play a leading role in this domain. At present, however, the UK’s Open Government Playbook falls short of recognising this sufficiently. The document characterises strategic communication as “advancing open government principles”, and “serving as a tool to improve policy-making, service design, and delivery” (UK Government, 2020^[56]). However, the related guidance predominantly focuses on communicating pre-defined policies rather than using communication as a channel and a lever to support the design of policies and facilitate two-way dialogue.

According to both interviews with civil society and the current UK Open Government Partnership (OGP) National Action Plan for the UK,¹⁰ the government has focused more heavily on digital government issues such as open data and algorithmic transparency, as well as transparency and anti-corruption. Citizen participation (and notably communication and dialogue) is less prominent and was also a point of contention for civil society during the Plan’s elaboration process (Open Government Partnership, 2022^[57]). Going forward this will be an important area for the UK to invest in to build public trust, including by leveraging the role of public communication.

Key findings and recommendations

- There are untapped opportunities for communicators, policy makers and delivery teams to collaborate more effectively and improve outcomes for citizens. Presently, communication is mostly used for announcing and delivering policies or services that have already been developed.
- The government could expand guidance for integrating communication throughout the policy cycle to improve outcomes. One way would be to provide more practical recommendations for communicators and policy teams on forms of co-operation at each stage of policy or service development and delivery.
- New guidance for integrating policy and communication, and existing relevant Functional Standards could emphasise embedding public insights and feedback from the outset until the final evaluation of policies and services, with a focus on increasing responsiveness to citizen needs.
- Government departments could promote two-way data and insight-sharing between communication and policy or delivery teams that would inform their respective activities at earlier stages. GCS could lead on developing a template or toolkit for departments.

- Building on successful examples of embedding communicators within policy teams throughout the cycle, departments could establish pilot schemes to widen this practice across government. This would improve mutual understanding between communication and policy disciplines, and offer new ways to improve collaboration.
- Communication campaigns are the most common and advanced way for the function to contribute to implementing policy. By widely applying strategy development and tactics from the field of marketing, government departments have obtained measurable outcomes for perception and behaviour change.
 - The effectiveness of campaigns is derived from their evidence-based, audience-centred design. GCS can further strengthen insights capabilities and adopt more advanced methods so that all departments achieve the same high standards.
 - GCS can also focus on making the inclusive and responsive design of campaigns more mainstream. This would help to serve all societal groups equitably, cater to audiences' diverse needs, and enjoy wide buy-in. This includes encouraging better compliance with accessibility guidelines and promoting practices for collaboration and co-creation of campaigns with key members of target communities.
- Communication can strengthen the feedback loop between government and citizens. This builds public trust, which suffers from the perception that citizens do not have a say in what the government does. GCS could support better two-way dialogue and actions to expand citizen participation in decision making.
- GCS could create a dedicated framework and build capability for organisational listening with an eye to consolidating it as a core component of the Modern Communication Operating Model (MCOM). This will require innovation, experimentation, and skills capacity in AI to gather and analyse unstructured information such as public comments and feedback, and structured data (e.g. surveys and statistics) to inform more responsive policy making and communication.
- GCS could invest in developing and testing rigorous methods of analysis to mitigate factors that might distort its accuracy and ensure organisational listening is representative of society. In particular, GCS could integrate multiple and diverse sources of feedback beyond mainstream communication channels, such as correspondence, complaints, call-centre records, social media comments, and more. However, listening that is representative requires government to reach out to diverse communities and groups on the ground as well. The external affairs discipline offers a key avenue for building a holistic approach to organisational listening and to go beyond this by actively engaging citizens and stakeholders on core issues.
- In line with the outlook for better two-way communication, and as part of the commitments on innovation, GCS could focus on building on practices that enable more direct interaction with citizens and provide ways for them to communicate with public institutions.
- Strengthening and innovating how institutions listen can facilitate closer collaboration with policy and delivery teams. In this respect, GCS could co-create and promote listening across relevant units and departments working on citizen participation and open government reforms.
- Communication could be an asset to UK's open government agenda and serve to further transparency, accountability and participation. Its role in the numerous consultations carried out by institutions could be recognised more formally, expanded to improve their outcomes, and integrated in future commitments to openness.

References

- Alfonsi, C. et al. (2022), "Public communication trends after COVID-19: Innovative practices across the OECD and in four Southeast Asian countries", *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*, No. 55, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/cb4de393-en>. [2]
- Collier, B. et al. (2022), "Influence government: Exploring practices, ethics, and power in the use of targeted advertising by the UK state", *Big Data & Society*, Vol. 9/1. [33]
- Committee of Public Accounts (2021), *COVID 19: The Free School Meals Voucher Scheme - Forty-First Report of Session 2019-21*, Committee of Public Accounts, House of Commons, <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/4569/documents/46230/default/>. [50]
- Cutting, N. (2021), *Case Study: Communicating with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Business Leaders*, Government Communication Service, <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/media/media-case-studies/case-study-communicating-with-black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-business-leaders/> (accessed on 30 May 2023). [29]
- Finnish Government (2021), "Reopening of society brings joy but polarisation of public discussion causes concern – Lockdown Dialogues recount experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic", Ministry of Finance, <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/10623/reopening-of-society-brings-joy-but-polarisation-of-public-discussion-causes-concern-lockdown-dialogues-recount-experiences-of-the-covid-19-pandemic>. [52]
- Garland, R., D. Tambini and N. Couldry (2017), "Has government been mediatized? A UK perspective", London School of Economics, http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/70662/1/Garland_Has%20government%20been%20mediatized%20a%20UK%20perspective_author_2017%20LSERO.pdf. [6]
- GCS (2023), *Case Study: Working with Embedded Communicators*, Government Communication Service, <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/case-study-working-with-embedded-communicators/>. [49]
- GCS (2023), *GCS Locations Strategy 2023-2025*, Global Communication Service, <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/gcs-locations-strategy-2023-2025/> (accessed on 24 July 2023). [32]
- GCS (2022), *Campaign Showcase: Extreme Heat Communications*, Met Office, Government Communication Service, <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/marketing/delivering-government-campaigns/campaign-showcase-extreme-heat-communications-met-office/> (accessed on 30 May 2023). [22]
- GCS (2022), *Five Principles to Make Your Campaigns More Inclusive*, Government Communication Service, <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/marketing/delivering-government-campaigns/five-principles-to-make-your-campaigns-more-inclusive/>. [28]
- GCS (2022), *Government Communication Service: Our Strategy for 2022 to 2025*, Government Communication Service, <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/about-us/government-communication-service-our-strategy-for-2022-to-2025/> (accessed on 14 February 2023). [25]
- GCS (2022), *Performance With Purpose: Government Communication Service Strategy*, Government Communication Service, <https://strategy.gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/gcs-strategy-2022-25.pdf> (accessed on 10 January 2023). [5]

- GCS (2022), *Speech: "Collaboration, Innovation and Great People: The GCS Strategy*, Government Communication Service, <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/news/speech-collaboration-innovation-and-great-people-the-gcs-strategy/>. [24]
- GCS (2021), "How focused communication benefitted a vulnerable community facing a surge of COVID-19", Government Communication Service, <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/blog/how-focused-communication-benefitted-a-vulnerable-community-facing-a-surge-of-covid-19/>. [35]
- GCS (2021), *The Principles of Behaviour Change Communications*, Government Communication Service, <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/publications/the-principles-of-behaviour-change-communications/> (accessed on 4 April 2023). [19]
- GCS (2020), *Guide to Campaign Planning: OASIS*, Government Communication Service, <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/marketing/delivering-government-campaigns/guide-to-campaign-planning-oasis/>. [18]
- GCS (2020), *Working with Policy*, Government Communication Service, <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/working-with-policy/>. [11]
- GCS (2019), *Modern Communications Operating Model: A Blueprint for Government Communication*, Government Communication Service, https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/GCS-MCOM_Blueprint_for_government_communications.pdf. [12]
- GCS (2018), *Evaluation Framework 2.0*, Government Communication Service, <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/publications/evaluation-framework/>. [20]
- GCS (2018), *External Affairs Operating Model*, Global Communication Service, <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/External-Affairs-Operating-Model.pdf>. [47]
- Government of Portugal (2021), . [30]
- Government of Portugal (2019), *Selo de Usabilidade e Acessibilidade*, https://selo.usabilidade.gov.pt/Selo_de_Usabilidade_e_Acessibilidade_v1_1.pdf. [31]
- Hallsworth, M. et al. (2018), *Behavioural Government: Using Behavioural Science to Improve How Governments Make Decisions*, The Behavioural Insights Team, <https://www.bi.team/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/BIT-Behavioural-Government-Report-2018.pdf> (accessed on 6 April 2023). [15]
- Johnston, K. and A. Lane (2021), "Communication with intent: A typology of communicative interaction in engagement", *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 47/1, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2020.101925>. [39]
- Macnamara, J. (2023), "A call for reconfiguring evaluation models, pedagogy, and practice: Beyond reporting media-centric outputs and fake impact scores", *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 49. [23]
- Macnamara, J. (2023), "How do you do evaluation when effective public communication is the difference between life and death?". [7]

- Macnamara, J. (2022), *Organizational Listening in Public Communication: Emerging Theory and Practice*, University of Technology Sydney, [34]
<https://opus.lib.uts.edu.au/bitstream/10453/158330/2/Organizational%20Listening%20-%20Emerging%20Theory%20%26%20Practice.pdf>.
- Macnamara, J. (2017), "Creating a 'Democracy for everyone'", London School of Economics. [46]
- Macnamara, J. (2017), "Toward a theory and practice of organizational listening", *International Journal of Listening*, Vol. 32/1, pp. 1-23. [44]
- NAO (2020), *Investigation into the Free School Meals Voucher Scheme*, National Audit Office, [51]
<https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Investigation-into-the-free-school-meals-voucher-scheme.pdf>.
- OECD (2022), *Action Plans on Building Trust and Reinforcing Democracy*, OECD, Paris, [41]
[https://one.oecd.org/document/GOV/PGC\(2022\)27/en/pdf](https://one.oecd.org/document/GOV/PGC(2022)27/en/pdf).
- OECD (2022), *Building Trust to Reinforce Democracy: Main Findings from the 2021 OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions*, OECD, Paris. [4]
- OECD (2022), *Compendium of Financial Instruments that Support Subnational Climate Action in OECD and EU Countries*, OECD, Paris, [16]
<https://www.oecd.org/regional/compendiumsubnationalrevenue.htm>.
- OECD (2022), "Eight ways to institutionalise deliberative democracy", OECD, Paris, [43]
<https://www.oecd.org/governance/innovative-citizen-participation/icp-institutionalising%20deliberation.pdf>.
- OECD (2022), *OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes*, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/f765caf6-en>. [42]
- OECD (2022), *OECD Regions and Cities at a Glance 2022*, OECD Publishing, Paris, [40]
<https://doi.org/10.1787/14108660-en>.
- OECD (2022), *OECD Trust Survey*, OECD, Paris, <http://oe.cd/trust>. [38]
- OECD (2022), *Recommendation of the Council on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People*, OECD, Paris, <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0474>. [27]
- OECD (2021), *Lobbying in the 21st Century: Transparency, Integrity and Access*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/c6d8eff8-en>. [48]
- OECD (2021), *OECD Report on Public Communication: The Global Context and the Way Forward*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/22f8031c-en>. [1]
- OECD (2020), *Governance for Youth, Trust and Intergenerational Justice: Fit for All Generations?*, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/c3e5cb8a-en>. [26]
- OECD (2020), *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/339306da-en>. [37]
- OECD (2019), *The Path to Becoming a Data-Driven Public Sector*, OECD Digital Government Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/059814a7-en>. [17]

- OECD (2017), *Recommendation of the Council on Open Government*, OECD, Paris, [54]
<https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0438> (accessed on 27 April 2021).
- OECD (2016), *Open Government: The Global Context and the Way Forward*, OECD Publishing, Paris, [13]
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264268104-en>.
- OECD (n.d.), *OECD Public Governance Reviews*, OECD Publishing, Paris, [36]
<https://doi.org/10.1787/22190414>.
- Open Government Partnership (2022), *United Kingdom Action Plan Review 2021-2023*, [57]
<https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/united-kingdom-action-plan-review-2021-2023/>.
- Policy Profession (2021), *Policy Profession Standards: Our Competency Framework for Professional Development*, [10]
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1065808/UPDATED_PP_Standards_main_v5_acc.pdf.
- Sitra (2022), *Lockdown Dialogues: Crisis Experiences and Model for National Dialogue*, Finnish Innovation Fund, [53]
<https://www.sitra.fi/app/uploads/2022/06/sitra-lockdown-dialogues.pdf>.
- UK Government (2022), “GREAT campaign drives growth across the four corners of the UK”, [21]
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/great-campaign-drives-growth-across-the-four-corners-of-the-uk> (accessed on 30 May 2023).
- UK Government (2021), *GovS 002: Project Delivery - Portfolio, Programme and Project Management*, [9]
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1002673/1195-APS-CCS0521656700-001-Project-Delivery-standard_Web.pdf
 (accessed on 13 March 2023).
- UK Government (2020), *Government Functional Standard - GovS 011: Communication*, [8]
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1015077/GovS-011-Communication-Version-2.0-2.pdf (accessed on 13 January 2023).
- UK Government (2020), *Open Government Playbook*, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [56]
 UK Government, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/open-government-playbook/open-government-playbook-html-version>.
- UK Government (2018), *Consultation Principles: Guidance*, [55]
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultation-principles-guidance>.
- Urban, J. (2023), “Government communications in 2023 and beyond: How to make government communications more effective”, Institute for Government, [14]
<https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/government-communications> (accessed on 4 April 2023).
- WPP (2016), *The Leaders' Report: The Future of Government Communication*, [3]
<https://govtpracticewpp.com/report/the-leaders-report-the-future-of-government-communication/>.

Zerfass, A., J. Hagelstein and R. Tench (2020), “Artificial intelligence in communication management: A cross-national study on adoption and knowledge, impact, challenges and risks”, *Journal of Communication Management*, Vol. 24/4, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCOM-10-2019-0137>. [45]

Notes

¹ The OECD uses the following definitions to distinguish between citizens and stakeholders, based on the OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes (OECD, 2022^[42]):

- “Stakeholders: any interested and/or affected party, including institutions and organisations, whether governmental or non-governmental, from civil society, academia, the media, or the private sector.”
- “Citizens: individuals, regardless of their age, gender, sexual orientation, religious, and political affiliations. The term is meant in the larger sense of ‘an inhabitant of a particular place’, which can be in reference to a village, town, city, region, state, or country depending on the context. It is not meant in the more restrictive sense of ‘a legally recognised national of a state’. In this larger sense, it is equivalent of people.”

² Participation is defined as “all the ways in which stakeholders (including citizens) can be involved in the policy cycle and in service design and delivery” (OECD, 2017^[54]). The OECD *Recommendation of the Council on Open Government* identifies three levels of participation linked to the degree of citizen involvement:

1. “Information: an initial level of participation characterised by a one-way relationship in which the government produces and delivers information to citizens and stakeholders. It covers both on-demand provision of information and “proactive” measures by the government to disseminate information.”
2. “Consultation: a more advanced level of participation that entails a two-way relationship in which citizens and stakeholders provide feedback to the government and vice-versa. It is based on the prior definition of the issue for which views are being sought and requires the provision of relevant information, in addition to feedback on the outcomes of the process.”
3. “Engagement: when citizens and stakeholders are given the opportunity and the necessary resources (e.g., information, data, and digital tools) to collaborate during all phases of the policy-cycle and in the service design and delivery. It acknowledges equal standing for citizens in setting the agenda, proposing project or policy options and shaping the dialogue – although the responsibility for the final decision or policy formulation in many cases rests with public authorities.”

³ Data governance refers to diverse arrangements, including technical, policy, regulatory or institutional provisions, that affect data and their cycle (creation, collection, storage, use, protection, access, sharing and deletion) across policy domains and organisational and national borders.

⁴ Presentation given by James Staff, UK Department for Energy Security & Net Zero, at the meeting of the OECD Experts Group on Public Communication held on 14 June 2023.

⁵ BEIS was reformed in 2023, with policy areas under its mandate reorganised under the new Department for Business and Trade (DBT), the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) and the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT).

⁶ See for instance: GCS (2021), *Planning, Creating and Publishing Accessible Social Media Campaigns*, <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/digital-communication/planning-creating-and-publishing-accessible-social-media-campaigns/>; GCS (2021), *Planning, Creating and Publishing Accessible Website Content*, <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/digital-communication/planning-creating-and-publishing-accessible-website-content/>; GCS (2021), Adding an audio description to your videos, <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/digital-communication/accessible-communications/adding-an-audio-description-to-your-videos/>; GCS (2003), *British Sign Language Act: A Guide to BSL Translating and Interpreting for Public-Facing Communications*, <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/news/guidance-published-on-delivering-british-sign-language-content/#:~:text=The%20British%20Sign%20Language%20Act,is%20devolved%20in%20Northern%20Ireland.>

⁷ Organisational listening is defined by Macnamara (2023^[23]) as follows: “Organisational listening comprises the creation and implementation of scaled processes and systems that enable decision makers and policy makers in organisations to actively and effectively access, acknowledge, understand, consider, and appropriately respond to all those who wish to communicate with the organisation or with whom the organisation wishes to communicate interpersonally or through delegated, mediated means.”

⁸ The page is available at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ask-the-government-a-question> (accessed on 30 May 2023).

⁹ Consult the OECD Deliberative Wave Database at <https://airtable.com/shrHEM12ogzPs0nQG/tbl1eKbt37N7hVFHF/viwxQgJNyONVHkmS6?blocks=hide> (accessed on 12 June 2023).

¹⁰ The current Open Government Partnership National Action Plan is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-national-action-plan-for-open-government-2021-2023/uk-national-action-plan-for-open-government-2021-2023#introduction> (accessed 30 May 2023).



From:
Public Communication Scan of the United Kingdom
Using Public Communication to Strengthen Democracy and Public Trust

Access the complete publication at:

<https://doi.org/10.1787/bc4a57b3-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2023), "Integrating communication in the policy cycle and supporting citizen participation", in *Public Communication Scan of the United Kingdom: Using Public Communication to Strengthen Democracy and Public Trust*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/e2d2d981-en>

This document, as well as any data and map included herein, are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area. Extracts from publications may be subject to additional disclaimers, which are set out in the complete version of the publication, available at the link provided.

The use of this work, whether digital or print, is governed by the Terms and Conditions to be found at <http://www.oecd.org/termsandconditions>.