

UK Government Communication: the Cameron years and their ongoing legacy.

1. Introduction

This paper chronicles in detail the changes in the UK Government Communication Service (GCS) from the period immediately following the election of the Coalition Government led by David Cameron (May 2010 – May 2015), to the point where, as leader of a Conservative Government from May 2015, he resigned following the referendum vote to leave the European Union (EU) on 23rd June 2016. It also covers the legacy-effects and on-going nature of those changes as appropriate.

It sets these events within the broader context of the development of UK Government communication. It looks briefly at its origins, but has a particular interest in the period from the 1956 when the dispersed communication activities in Government were first formally brought together and co-ordinated under a Cabinet Office Minister. The Cabinet Office co-ordinates all cross-government communication activities so this action centralised control.

The theoretical approach to the paper is historiological, but it is not purely descriptive. It seeks to offer an explanatory perspective offering a 60 year periodisation viewpoint (Bentele, 2015) of UK Government Communication from 1956 to 2016 and this, along with the detailed analysis of the Cameron years, is its original contribution.

The Cameron years were ones of change and challenge as the two Governments he led dealt with the aftermath of the economic crisis which was at its height just before the Coalition Government, which he led, came into power. Other touchstone events were the Scottish Referendum on 14th September 2014 where the people of Scotland voted 55.3% against independence and 44.7% in favour. The numbers voting, at 84.6% of those eligible, was the highest recorded for an election or referendum in the UK since the introduction of universal suffrage. In many ways this was a weathervane for the EU referendum, commonly known as Brexit, which divided the nation almost equally with 52% voting to leave and 48% wishing to remain in Europe.

The Cameron years were known as the period of austerity. His Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne who led the Treasury, oversaw major cuts in most Departmental budgets, with just health (Coughlan, 2013) and education being ring-fenced (BBC, 2013) from the worst effects. Welfare budgets were significantly cut, along with funding to local authorities. The impact of this, along with the declining manufacturing and traditional industry base, was particularly severe in the Midlands, North and South-West of the UK and this meant that there were and continue to be, significant and differential social and economic impacts in the various regions of the country¹. The South East of England, especially the more affluent areas in and around London, on the whole saw economic growth despite austerity.

For many years Government itself had been accused of living in a 'Westminster bubble' (Westminster is where most of the main Government Departments and the Houses of Commons and Lords are located), insulated and isolated from the reality of the lives lived by many Britons (Rentoul, 2015). The seeds had been sown for a protest vote by the British people who felt unlistened to by Government and who used the Brexit Referendum as an

opportunity to vent their frustrations, not only against the ‘Brussels Bureaucrats’ and all that was felt to be represented by Europe, including immigration and a loss of control, but against their own political leaders for austerity (Hopkin, 2017). The result of the Referendum itself came as a huge surprise to the UK Government and to others across the world (Lewis & John, 2016) leading to the resignation of David Cameron as Prime Minister who had campaigned for the UK to remain within the European Union.

While this paper is not directly about these events, they indicate the state of the zeitgeist in the UK and provide the backcloth against which Government Communication was and continues to be set. The UK continues to be a deeply divided nation over Brexit with those divisions being reflected in Government itself (Swinford & Maidment, 2018) and among the public (O’Leary, 2018).

2. Methodology

The overall approach taken to this analysis is a descriptive case study (Grix, 2010; Yin, 2018), seeking to uncover rich information using a variety of sources and perspectives with a ‘focus on real events in their real-life context’ (Daymon and Holloway, 2012, p 6). The choice of the UK Government Communication Service as the subject of study has been made because of its intrinsic value which makes it amenable to the case study approach (Stake, 1995). It is of intrinsic value because of its size, with over 4,000 professional communicators in the UK; because of its influence, traditionally UK Government communication has been seen as a model of good practice for democratic nations; and because of the historic importance of the period of time under study, immediately preceding and the point at which the UK decided to leave the EU. Through a case study approach, awareness, and more importantly understanding of what was happening can be uncovered and building on this, a series of insights, discussion points and a periodisation model (Fig 1) are introduced which seek to form the basis for future research. The background outlined above along with the brief literature review below will help to contextualise and develop understanding.

The author has been involved with the civil servant communication community which constitutes the GCS for the last 15 years having served three attachments to Government Departments, acting as a Departmental Communication Reviewer, undertaking research and consultancy projects and providing courses for Government. She is currently co-leading a Masters course which is part of a Senior Talent Programme which aims to prepare the next cadre of leaders in the GCS.

This paper therefore takes a partly ethnographic approach written from a non-participant and participant observer stance. These observations were augmented by in-depth, semi-structured interviews with six senior managers in Government communication. The sample of participants was purposive in accord with the case study method and included the most high-ranking civil servants in the GCS - the Executive Director of Government Communication and (at the time of the interviews) his deputy, two Directors of Communication in large government departments, the Head of Campaigns (based in the Prime Minister’s and Cabinet Office), and a senior manager from GCS professional

development. These individuals were chosen because of their seniority, overall knowledge of the service and their ability to influence its orientation, policies, activities and future. Also interviewed was a former Deputy Director of Government Communication, who now works in the private sector and a senior academic who spent time on attachment in Government. These latter two interviewees were able to take a more detached, but informed view. In addition, five members of the Senior Talent Programme, which is designed to identify and develop the future leaders in the Service were interviewed. They have substantial operational responsibilities and were able to provide a perspective from the implementation level. They are also beneficiaries of the staff development initiatives mentioned later in this paper.

The interviews were semi-open, with the researcher deliberately creating a relatively loose yet structured framework to explore the views of interviewees, all of whom were senior and knowledgeable. The richness of the data collected would have been reduced by placing a tight interviewing schedule on them. An outline interview schedule was created covering a number of key areas with all interviewees being sent the topics for discussion in advance. These were modified according to the interviewee's current and past roles and experience years in the Service. The interviews included discussion on developments in the service pre and post the Cameron Premiership; the specific reforms introduced in 2011; vision of and prospects for the future of the service; effects of budget reductions; introduction of digitally-led communication; the move to a more 'campaigning' emphasis embracing of marketing and behavioural economics; capability and professional development; the professional positioning of the Service vis a vis other professions in Government and with Ministers; challenges facing the service; issues of propriety, that is the need to maintain the independence of the civil service from politicisation, and the orientation of Government communication – that is whether the Service sees itself as being there to serve the Government or citizens primarily. Each interviewee spoke 'on the record', but the responses here are largely anonymised, to ensure confidentiality. Where individuals can be identified because of their role, or where their specific contribution is appropriate, permission to quote them has been obtained.

This primary research has been supplemented by secondary sources including the academic literature, original Government papers such as Reports from the House of Commons and House of Lords, the Government's Annual Communication Plans, internal briefing documents and other public documents available on the GCS website at <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/>

As mentioned in the introduction, the theoretical lens is historiological (Watson, 2014; Bentele, 2015; L'Etang, 2015)

3. Literature Review

Given space restraints, this review is brief and restricted to the most pertinent sources, but helps set the case within a literature context.

As Sanders and Canel (2013) state in their extensive text on Government Communication:

The quality of government communication matters for human well-being. Governing necessarily involves constant exchanges of information about policies, ideas and decisions between governors and the governed. (p.1)

The 'bargain' implied here is that Government communicates about its policies and on matters concerning well-being, sometimes called the public interest, and that the Government listens to the needs and aspirations of its citizens, who also hold it to account at election time.

Taylor (2000) provides an overview of public information mass communication campaigns and notes that they seek to create awareness or change behaviour on a range of issues, including seatbelt use, heart disease and environmental concerns. At their centre is a persuasion model of communication and they are seen as legitimate because they are clearly perceived to be for social good and in the public interest. A number of authors in the field (Chen, 2009; Menon & Goh, 2005) have likewise examined government campaigns in health crises which are based on information provision to protect the public.

Other authors (Kraaier, 2016; Gelders & Ihlen, 2010) have commented on the role of communication in policy-making and the delicate balance that has to be made by public servants who are there to inform the public on Government policies, but not propagandise on their behalf (Gregory, 2012).

The listening part of the bargain appears to be more problematic. Macnamara (2016), has undertaken extensive research with Governments on three continents, Australasia, Europe and north America and found that approximately 80% of communication resources are focused on speaking and up to 95% of all communication is predominantly one-way speaking.

The seam of writing on nation-building in the public relations literature also provides a perspective that is informative. Communication in nation-building can contribute to a sense of identity and unity. However, as Kent & Taylor (2006) state, traditionally most nation-building communication is top-down and "serves the needs of the governments in power rather than the general public" (p.352). However, when genuine dialogue is undertaken, the needs of a range of publics are satisfied. Ledingham (2001) also notes the transactional nature of government-community relations when public relations is used as a management function and Curtin & Gaither (2007) observe that public relations can be used instrumentally as Government concentrate their efforts to attain domestic and international objectives. Lee (2015) in her research was able to demonstrate that negotiation through dialogue was a powerful way to include marginalised groups in nation-building in Singapore and thereby demonstrated the potential of Government communication that moves beyond managing information campaigns.

Importantly from the nation-building literature as Taylor and Kent (2006) affirm that nation-building does not come to an end once a nation is established and is economically mature: it

is a continuous process of ensuring “that all public voices are tolerated and valued” (p.348). Practiced this way citizens lives can be improved and democracy promoted.

This brief overview of the literature contains a number of important tenets and indicators that will be returned to in the discussion section namely: the two way bargain between government and citizens; the legitimacy of Government information campaigns to promote social good and protect citizens in the public interest; the fine line that public servants have to tread between serving both the Government and the public; the problematic of Governments listening, and the potential for a sense of identity and unity through ongoing nation-building via dialog and negotiation between Governments and citizens.

4. Context

To understand the changes that have occurred in Government communication from 2010 to 2016, it is important to explain the structure of Government and how the GCS fits into it, the history and philosophy of Government communication and wider changes in the civil service. This has to be done at some length, since this paper indicates a developing yet also cyclical narrative which has to be seen in this broader context.

3.1. Structure

Simply put, UK Government is structured into Departments headed by senior elected politicians who are members of the ruling party and supported by permanent, career civil servants (led by Permanent Secretaries) who serve which ever Government is in power. These Departments have significant amounts of autonomy, particularly the larger ones headed by a Secretary of State and with several Ministers such as the Foreign Office, the Home Office, Department of Health and Ministry of Defence. Many Departments have Agencies and/or Arm’s Length Bodies (ALBs) attached to them, who are funded by the sponsoring Department, but have particular functions to perform. For example, the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) sponsors the Environment Agency whose role is specifically to safeguard the physical environment of the countryside, coasts and coastal waters.

Each Department has a formal communication function made up of civil servants who are members of the GCS. The Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 (HMG, 2010) quotes the civil service code requirement that these civil servants must carry out their duties with integrity and honesty and with objectivity and impartiality. Secretaries of State and Ministers in Departments can also employ Special Advisers who may have communication in their remit. These political appointees are temporary civil servants employed for the duration of the elected politician’s or the Government’s term of office only and are not obliged to be objective or impartial.

The Cabinet is the formal and supreme decision-making body in Government. It is chaired by the Prime Minister and most senior Government Secretaries of State and Ministers and their

weekly meetings determine strategy and policy across Government. The Cabinet Office supports the Cabinet and also co-ordinates strategy and policy across the whole of Government. It has its own Ministers who have their Special Advisers and civil servants to support them.

Number 10 is the colloquial name for the Prime Minister's Office and official residence based at 10 Downing Street, just off Whitehall where many of the large Departments are located. The Prime Minister's Office has its own Official Spokesman, a Civil Servant and a Director of Communications who is one of a number of Special Advisers.

The GCS is co-located in the Prime Minister's Office and the Cabinet Office and is led by the Executive Director of Government Communication who is also Head of Profession. While not having direct line-management responsibility for those in Departments, there is a strong functional line between that individual and the leader of communication in each. In addition, since 2015 budgets have been agreed and allocated from this central point and increasingly, recruitment is undertaken centrally too.

From this it can be seen that the sources of communication from Government are multi-layered and complex. There can be communications from Departments via Special Advisers and/or civil servant communicators, likewise from the Cabinet Office about cross-government policies and issues and also from the Prime Minister's Director of Communication and/or Official Spokesperson. To coordinate this, Government operates The Grid, which is a constantly negotiated and updated schedule which seeks to control and synchronise Government announcements and responses.

3.2 The philosophy and origins of Government Communication in the UK

A previous paper by the author (Gregory, 2012) has given a relatively full chronological history of government communication, so that will not be repeated here, but a brief summary helps to contextualise communication in the period under examination and is necessary for the historiological analysis at the end of this paper.

The origins of organisational communication in the UK are usually identified as being in the public service in 1809 when the UK Government's Treasury Department employed a press spokesman. Probably the first specialised information unit in Government was in the Board of Education in 1895: the Office of Special Inquiries and Reports. However, as Ogilvy-Webb states (1965) before World War One, "some information services existed, but they were carried out patchily and piecemeal in various odd corners of Government Departments" (p.49).

In 1917 a Department of Information was set up to coordinate propaganda for the war effort, but was dismantled when peace was declared. A few Departments developed press functions shortly after the war, but progress was slow except for the seminal activity of the Empire Marketing Board set up in 1926 to 1933 to promote the production and marketing of British and Empire products and led by the innovative Sir Stephen Tallents. It was not

until 1932 that a Chief Press Liaison Officer was attached to the Prime Minister's staff – a post shared with the Treasury for 10 years.

When the Second World War commenced in 1939 the Ministry of Information was recreated to coordinate central publicity and propaganda efforts. Departments too ran their own campaigns, notably, the Ministry of Food who developed publicity on the best use of food, with the result that at the end of the War, despite rationing and lack of certain foodstuffs, the nation was better nourished than before (Ogilvy-Webb, 1965).

After the war in 1946, the Ministry of Information was abolished yet again, but interestingly the Prime Minister Clement Attlee declared that:

“These services... have an important and permanent part in the machinery of government under modern conditions. It is essential to good administration under a democratic system that the public shall be adequately informed about the many matters in which Government action directly impinges on their daily lives.” (Deb, 1945-6, p.417).

Throughout the 1950s and 60s, the Government Information Services gradually developed. A seminal date for this paper was 1956 when Dr Charles Hill, the Post Master General and a member of the Cabinet, took charge of all Government communication and put in place a system to coordinate activities between departments and central Government (Ogilvy-Webb, 1965).

At this time, Marjorie Ogilvy-Webb, in her book outlining the history of Government Communication (Ogilvy-Webb, 1965), stated the duties of the Chief Information Officer towards the public in unequivocal terms:

“First, the duty to tell them what the Government is doing in their name and how their money is being spent – to explain to them the general activities and policies of their Department. Second, the duty to make clear to the citizen his, the citizen's rights and obligations as set out in law, government regulations and so on – this is essential for efficient and fair administration, as well as for the citizen's own convenience. Third, the duty to persuade the citizen to some course of action which is not a matter of political controversy, for his own or for the community's good, e.g. to have his children immunised, not to drink and drive, to enrol in the army or to return to a teaching career”

The next developments of note were in the 1970s when in 1974 when the government of Harold Wilson formalised the current system of Special Advisers (House of Lords, 2010). Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister in 1979 and appointed a civil servant, Bernard Ingham, as her Chief Press Secretary in Number 10. While recognising the potential for civil servants to become politicised because of his proximity to the heart of Government, Mr Ingham accepted Mrs Thatcher's offer to become Head of the Government Information Service (GIS) as it was then called, with an agenda to begin to professionalise the service in response to criticisms of its quality.

Government communication took a radical philosophical turn in 1997 when Labour won the General Election with a landslide and Alistair Campbell became the Prime Minister's Director of Communications, a Special Adviser post, based in Number 10. Campbell, along with Peter Mandelson, who ran Labour's Election Campaign, saw the role of Government communication as vital to furthering and enacting the Blair Government's policies. The Government passed an Order in Council, so that Alistair Campbell had the authority to instruct civil servants. This bringing together of civil service communicators and Special Advisers under one Director of Communications was fundamental to securing their purpose. The view of the new Government was that the GIS was not well equipped in news and media management in particular, and that the service overall needed upgrading to deal with the modern world of communication. The Mountfield Report, as it became known (Cabinet Office, 1997) identified a number of weaknesses including significant variation in practices and effectiveness of the press function across Departments.

In response the Government set in train a number of reforms and the GIS was re-named the Government Information and Communication Services (GICS) in an attempt to indicate a renewed focus on two-way communication with the public (House of Lords, 2009). Membership of the GICS was restricted to those who satisfied a number of entry requirements. However, events in the early 2000's brought significant change. A number of scandals and improprieties were investigated by the Public Administration Select Committee (House of Commons, 2002). Amid mounting clamour about the politicisation of the civil service, spin, inappropriate use of Government services and an increasingly adversarial relationship between the press and the Government, the Government set up 'An Independent Review of Government Communications' chaired by Bob Phillis which reported in January 2004 (Phillis, 2004).

The Review led to far reaching changes in government communication, the most relevant for this paper being a) the appointment of a civil servant of the most senior rank – a Permanent Secretary - who would lead the civil service communication profession. Thus, the authority of Special Advisers to direct civil servants was rescinded; b) the renaming of GICS to the Government Communication Network (GCN), open to all civil servant communicators; c) a redefinition of the role and scope of Government communication since the Review found that on the whole, the civil service and not grasped the potential of modern communication as a service for citizens; d) a greater emphasis and investment in regional and local communication.

In March 2004, Howell James was appointed as the first Permanent Secretary, Government Communications. The appointment was highly symbolic in signalling the independence of the civil servant GCN from political control. During James' period of office many of the propriety issues were dealt with and relations with the media repaired to an extent. He also instigated a number of co-ordinated training and guidance initiatives with the aim of embedding standards and injecting some consistency of approach. The focus of the second Permanent Secretary Matt Tee (2008 – 2011) was very much on the professional development of civil servant communicators (Gregory, 2012).

On 26th of January 2009, the House of Lords Select Committee on Communications (House of Lords, 2009) reviewed progress on the Phillis Review (2004) and made recommendations for further improvements. It noted that the number of communications staff employed by Government Departments had risen from 795 in December 1998 to 1376 in September 2008 and that the Press Officer corps in central Whitehall Departments had risen from 216 in December 1998 to 373 in September 2008.

This brief history brings Government communication to the point where three pertinent propositions can be made which help with a historiological analysis.

First, up to the 1970s the growth of Government Communication was relatively slow, steady and largely amateur, with undoubted pockets of excellent practice and people. However, there was little systematic about processes, practice, structures or systems. Its philosophy to that point was about information provision with the purpose of telling the public about government policy and activity so that citizens could make informed judgements at the ballot box; making clear to citizens their rights and responsibilities; persuading them to act in a responsible manner for individual or community good. In sum, the philosophical orientation was about informed democracy, citizenry, reciprocity and common benefit.

Second, there was a change in the mid and late 1970 when Harold Wilson introduced Special Advisers instead of relying on the civil service. Later in the decade, Bernard Ingham set about professionalising the communication service by introducing rigorous recruitment and promotion procedures, developing career pathways and training programmes, and laying down standards and propriety rules in a systematic manner in a document called the Red Book. At this point, the philosophy of the service began to change. There was still a public service ethos, but the balance began to shift towards communication being there to serve the government agenda rather than being there so that 'the people' could be provided with information that would help them make informed and enlightened decisions, either about the Government's performance, or about their responsibilities to themselves and their communities. The Government's voice, rather than the citizen's choice became more dominant. In many ways, what was happening in Government reflected the times. The professionalization of the news industry, the dominance of certain broadcast news channels, rising consumerism and the political and industrial power struggles between government and organised labour meant the relationship with citizens was changing.

Finally, a third change came with the advent of the Blair government. It was clear (Phillis, 2004) that civil servant communicators were regarded as being there to serve the political purpose of Government and the political line-management arrangements meant that this could be enforced. The interests of citizens and representation of their views and voice were marginalised as the government and the media battled for an ascendant voice. The purpose of the battle was to pursue a political end with a largely right wing press in opposition to a left wing Government. The Phillis Review (2004) sought to redress the balance, re-asserting the importance of the Civil Service Code of independence, proposing the further up-skilling of the service to allow for more and new ways of engaging with the public, and appealing that the public be heard and served.

It can be concluded from this overview that up to the point of the election of the Coalition Government of 2010, a continuum was being traversed. At one end was a position where the orientation of government communication was seen to be one of service to the public for the benefit of a society based on notions of a social contract between Government and citizenry which implied reciprocal rights and responsibilities on both sides. At the other it became service of the political purpose of government where politics was consumerised and its selling was seen to become the job of communication.

In addition to developments in Government communication there were changes in the wider civil service in the 1980's and 90's that need to be factored into consideration.

3.3 Changes in the Public Service Bargain

Much has been written about managerial reforms in the UK public sector (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004; Burnham & Horton, 2011), but for the purposes of this paper the typology of public service bargains (PSB) as developed by Hood and Lodge (Hood, 2000; Hood and Lodge, 2006) is helpful. The UK public service bargain is traditionally regarded as Schafferian (Schaffer, 1973). In this kind of bargain civil servants give up an open, public political life and high remuneration in exchange for comparative anonymity, a role at the centre of government, job security, good pensions and honours for public service. Ministers, in exchange, give up any right to hire, fire and blame civil servants and in return they expect loyal service and impartial policy advice. The Schafferian bargain also holds that civil servants can be directed by Ministers, but that Ministers take public responsibility if civil servants make mistakes.

Van Dorpe and Horton (2011) argue that in the public management reforms of the 1980's and 1990's, the administrative model based on bureaucracy, process and top-down directives began to change into a managerial model (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2002). The literature suggests four phases of reform that re-configured the senior civil service into a managerial cadre (Van Dorpe & Horton, 2011). Phase one (1979 – 1982) was focused on cutting public expenditure: phase two (1982 – 1987) concerned itself with efficiency, effectiveness and performance: phase three (1988 – 1990's) was designed to bring cultural change and phase four (1997 -2007) embraced an inclusive approach to public services. This latter involved the private sector in the provision of services, market testing and benchmarking against private sector standards, processes and pricing and outsourcing of what had been regarded as core services such as recruitment. This move to managerialism is reflected by changes in structure to the civil service itself, for example, in 1996, the top five grades of civil servants were combined into a Senior Civil Service (SCS), which had over 5000 members in 2016 (ONS, 2016). This innovation introduced formal and time limited contracts, centrally laid down terms and conditions, common competencies and job evaluation and performance management. In 2006 the 'Top 200' was created to bring a sense of corporate identity and to lead and champion new initiatives and policies (Van Dorpe and Horton, 2011).

These reforms, and particularly the terms and conditions of employment of the SCS grades which is now individualised, tightly performance managed and with performance related pay, has led Lodge and Rogers (2006) to conclude that the role of Permanent Secretary has changed from 'steering, instead of rowing' and that the SCS now has strategic not just functional management in its remit. Interestingly since the 2010 Constitutional Reform and Governance Act (HMG, 2010), civil servants are no longer servants of the Crown, but of the state, with the Prime Minister, as minister for the Civil Service, having statutory power rather than prerogative power. According to Van Dorpe and Horton (2011), this has fuelled debates about whether civil servants have a primary loyalty to a minister, or to a higher power such as the public interest or to public service.

These changes are significant because they indicate a change in the PSB which imply that senior civil servants could be potentially less likely to 'speak truth to power, or to act in the public interest. Indeed Rimington (2008) goes so far as to state that senior civil servants have become instruments in the hands of government.

Again, it is important to note the broader context. The civil service is not alone in its managerial 'turn'. This is typical of management in much of the private sector and indeed has been the concern of organisations such as the World Economic Forum (2017) and academics such as Freeman (1984), who have bemoaned the short-termism, self-interest and instrumentalism that this has encouraged.

Having set the communication and broader context, it is now appropriate to turn to the focus of this paper – Government communication during the period from May 2010 to June 2016.

5. The Coalition Government

From the beginning of his tenure as leader of the Coalition Government in May 2010, reducing the country's deficit was a priority for David Cameron. In the same month, a freeze was placed on all Government marketing and advertising activity. The annual volume of communication activity commissioned through the Central Office of Information (COI), the Government's marketing arm, fell from £540 million in 2009/10 to £125 million. The COI promptly reduced staffing numbers by 40% from 737 to 450 and operating costs by 43% from £63 million to £36 million (Tee, 2011). The post of Permanent Secretary was declared redundant and the post holder, Matt Tee, left government service in March 2011 after having completed a "Review of Government Direct Communication and the Role of CIO".

Tee's report was discussed by the Public Expenditure Committee (PEX(ER)), a Committee of the Cabinet Office consisting of Ministers and chaired by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in the Spring of 2011. After further work PEX(ER) agreed six recommendations to be implemented by April 2012. As a result, a new model for government communication was developed and implemented (Cabinet Office, 2011) and the essential structures remain in place. The main structural elements are laid out in Table 1.

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Alongside these structures, seven delivery principles were identified, which were that government communicators should: deliver, not just procure; focus on behavioural insights; use digital by default; use owned and earned before paid-for media; work in partnership; ensure value for money through effective evaluation, and adhere to propriety guidance.

A new Executive Director of Government Communication, Jenny Grey, formerly Director of Communications in the Cabinet Office, was appointed to oversee the implementation of these changes. She left the civil service in September 2012.

6. A turning point

December 2012 saw the appointment of Alex Aiken as Executive Director of Government Communication. His vision was to create a Government communication service that was 'exceptional, efficient, effective and educated' (personal interview, 2015).

Under Aiken's leadership a major reform, change and improvement programme has been implemented in four phases. Phase One, begun in October 2013, saw 11 key reforms (see Table 1). The service was renamed the Government Communication Service (GCS) and a number of initiatives aimed at demonstrating and facilitating efficiency and effectiveness put in place. Notable among these was the mandatory evaluation of all communication activity, formalised business planning for communication, the development of a corporate centre for communication and a major push to integrate social and digital media in all communication functions.

Phase Two, initiated in the Autumn of 2014, focused on nine improvement projects (see Table 1), some of which were developments of earlier projects, some were new, including a focus on leadership and on the shape of the modern communication team.

The third phase (see Table 1), begun in September 2015, comprised five projects and saw a renewed emphasis on professional development and standards and more work on structures.

After the end of the Cameron Premiership developments continued in the same vein with Phase Four (see Table 1), launched in August 2016 again majoring on capability, strengthening GCS cohesion and best practice, and a review of the campaign approach.

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The impact of these initiatives has been profound. As the GCS website states, Phases One and Two alone resulted in over 100 improvement actions (GCS, 2016a). While there is not

enough room, nor is it germane to this paper to outline the effects of all these initiatives, those that are most pertinent are covered below under five headings.

5.1 A new sense purpose.

According to the current Executive Director of Communication (personal interviews, 2015, 2016) when the coalition Government came to power, three questions were asked of the Government communication community: how many people work in Government communication? How much does Government spend on communication? What impact does this have? There were no ready answers to these questions. Since taking over in 2012 he has worked to ensure these questions are answerable and the loosely constituted GCN quickly became the GCS whose membership is tightly defined (GCS, 2015a) in three categories, core, associate and affiliate. Spending became centrally administered and evaluation mandatory. These actions have helped to provide a renewed sense of professionalism and identity to the service.

In addition to this, the purpose and role of Government communication were more precisely defined. The GCS Handbook (2015b) asserts its vision that members of the Government Communication Service should:

“represent a communications community that help central government achieve its policy objectives through effective and efficient communication by pioneering and sharing best practice; increasing collaboration and co-ordination; and eradicating inefficient and unnecessary spend” (p.11)

The aim of the service, according to the GCS introductory handbook (2015c) is to:

“Deliver world-class communications that support Ministers’ priorities, improve people’s lives and enable the effective operation of our public services” (p.2)

Both the publications mentioned immediately above and the last three Annual Communication Plans make the powerful claim that communication is one of five levers of Government, along with legislation, regulation, taxation and spending.

Interview respondents all agreed that the GCS has become a much more focused and confident profession than it was in 2010. Indeed, the austerity cuts had made them critically examine their purpose and professionalism and this had led to a clear understanding that they had to be able to demonstrate they were adding value. To do this required them to go through a process of radical change, structurally and in ways of working.

5.2 Changes in structure and ways of working

The view of interviewees was that the service had become more business-like both in the way it prioritises work and organises itself, as exemplified through annual planning, and the Modern Communications Operating Model (see below for more detail). They believe that GCS has delivered on efficiency and effectiveness, by taking its share of Government

expenditure cuts, but also by streamlining its own activities to remove waste. Taking out duplication in campaign activity and more cross-Government working were cited as good instances of efficiency. Evaluation and being able to demonstrate a contribution to policy delivery was regarded as crucial to demonstrating effectiveness.

The move to delivering rather than procuring communication activity was seen as central to a change in attitude and culture in the service. Media relations has always been handled largely 'in-house' and has been regarded as the main function of communication, but campaigns in particular, had generally been out-sourced. That they are conducted by GCS members themselves was a source of pride: this was a positive indicator of competence, especially since a number have won awards in national and international Award competitions. The drive to delivery also means that other functions such as strategic communication, stakeholder engagement and direct (including digital) channels have taken on more importance. Internal communication has been transformed as the need for large-scale culture change in Government, particularly during the period of significant cuts and the need to work in different ways came to the fore in 2012 to 2016.

All this has led to a re-balancing of communication specialisms, with media, although still dominant in many Departments, being less so than before. Furthermore, the changes in ways of working have led to greater integration of all the communication specialisms which is seen not only to have resulted in a more flexible and capable workforce, but to bring enhanced career opportunities and greater job satisfaction.

There was view that more needs to be done in up-skilling the workforce, particularly in digital and in the confident handling of data. Integrating the specialist functions in Departments was a work in progress as was embedding more inter-departmental and departmental/ALB/Agency working.

Overall, interviewees believed that the GCS was held in greater regard by Ministers and Senior Managers where it is now viewed as one of the more dynamic recognised professions in Government. One interviewee stated, it is now 'baked in' to departmental life, no longer an add-on, although another believed there is still variation in Departments terms of influencing decision-making and policy as opposed to communicating them.

A number of respondents pointed to specific initiatives and/or documents which they regarded as seminal in changing structures and ways of working. Three were of particular note:

The Annual Government Communication Plan. This has been significantly refined since its first iteration under Jenny Grey and is now a turnkey document for the GCS. The process which leads to its production is rigorous. First, Government determines its policy priorities for the year, categorised under a small number of key themes. The Annual Communication Plan then describes planned communication activities aligned to support these themes. For example, in the 2018/2019 Plan (HMG, 2018), the overarching narrative is "Building a country that works for everyone: a Britain fit for the future" (p. 6) and under that heading are four key themes: a stronger, fairer economy; a more caring society; a truly global Britain and Northern Ireland, and a strong, new relationship with Europe. Under the more caring

society heading, campaigns from several departments were described, including those to support workers' pay entitlements, promoting the employment of disabled and people with health conditions and sexual health campaigns aimed at young people.

To arrive at this position Directors of Communication present plans for each of their Departments, aligned to Government priorities and co-ordinated with other departments. They also present plans for campaigns and activities that might be within their sole remit and which are required for the delivery of specific priorities for their individual Departments. For example, Her Majesty's Revenues and Customs (HMRC) runs an annual campaign encouraging people to submit their tax returns on time. There are then a series of iterative discussions which are designed to maximise cross-departmental working in the interests of efficiency and effectiveness and to prevent citizens from being subjected to multiple campaigns from several departments about the same or similar topics. Once agreed the Departmental Plans are aggregated into the Annual Communication Plan, signed off by the GCS Board and made publicly available under the signature of the Executive Director of Government Communication and all Directors of Communication who have contributed to the Plan. The agreed plans are funded from the centre (Prime Minister's Office and Cabinet Office) and additional funding for initiatives outside the plan have to be negotiated individually.

The Future of Public Service Communications Report (GCS, 2015c). This report examined changes in the external environment that will dictate how Government communication should change. It noted technological developments that should be embraced such as the use of data, both for information about 'audiences' (sic) and evaluation, the increasing number of digital channel which in turn require content to be developed in new ways, teams to acquire new skills and for communication to be centred on the needs of the individual. The report also commented on broader trends such as the rise of 'values-based politics', the clashes in ideology this generates and on the need to build trust. In response, a greater focus on campaigns that use specified planning templates and use neuro-science techniques and insight was recommended, along with the in-built capacity to be agile in response to change: the aim being to 'drive behaviour change'. There was a desire to approach content generation in a new way that builds trust in the Government brand. Also highlighted was the need to focus on capability development and continuous improvement.

The Modern Communication Operating Model (MCOM) (GCS, 2015d). This document focuses on 'the principles for improving communications teams' capability, structures, skills and resources' (p.2). In summary it provides a blueprint for organising a communications team: its scope, grade structure dependent on size, areas of work and recommended capabilities mix. It also lays down ways of working which include using insight, campaigning, being marketing and audience oriented, creating content and integrating the work of ALBs and Agencies with their Department to save resources and maximise expertise. It identifies 'a core powerhouse of functions' (p.5) which comprises insight and evaluation; horizon scanning; partnerships and stakeholders; internal communications, and media and digital. Crucially it envisages multi-skilled teams able to deliver a full range of communication activities for their department, without the need to turn to external agencies except for highly specialised work for which the procurement roster caters. Even more far-reaching is the need for individuals to be multi-skilled. This is a new and demanding requirement, since

most Departments have encouraged functional specialisation in, for example media and internal communication for decades.

One respondent stated that MCOM does not fully recognise the differences between the communication demands laid on Departments. 'Delivery' Departments such as The Department of Work and Pensions and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs require direct, process-driven communication with citizens on issues such as pensions and income tax, whereas policy-led Departments have communication that is more about informing and persuasion on policy, often involving third parties.

5.3 Capability and Professional development.

Since the days of Bernard Ingham in the 1980's there have been varying attempts to 'modernise' the Government communication service and professional development has been seen as key to this. During the time of the two Permanent Secretaries and in response to the seminal Phillis Report (2004) there was a more concerted effort to organise professional development and equip communicators with the skills required to perform well in a changing communication environment.

However, most important was a series of communication capability reviews undertaken in 2012 and 2013 which systematically appraised the communication function of every Government Department and the large Agencies and ALBs under three headings: strategy and planning, people and resources and implementation. They provided an overview of Government communication activity at a depth that had not been done before. These reviews, which have continued since instigation in a series of re-visits, alongside other initiatives such as annual appraisal, an annual Leadership Roadshow and a major Skills Audit undertaken in 2016, provide an ongoing and calibrated picture of the capability of GCS. As a result, the professional development offering developed significantly to include both a Senior and Early Talent development programme, over a hundred short and e-learning courses covering a range of topics from campaign planning to evaluation and change management, Masterclasses, placements, mentoring, coaching and leadership training. Supporting this is a GCS Competency Framework launched in February 2016 (GCS, 2016b) and a set of GSC Professional Standards laying out the levels of capability and performance GCS members are expected to fulfil.

In addition to this and since 2016 all lower grade recruitment (up to Information Officer) is done by GCS centrally. GCS is also responsible for the Apprenticeship and Graduate recruitment initiatives.

These developments are designed to fulfil not only the Executive Director's ambition to demonstrate world-class communications (personal interview 2016, 2016), but also enables the service to deliver on the principles outlined by PEX(ER) in 2011 and referred to earlier, that government communicators should 'deliver, not just procure'.

Interviewees confirmed that considerable strides had been made in improving the capability of the GCS, underpinned by the professional development outlined above. There was overall

satisfaction in the progress being made and this is supported by the fact that Government is winning a number of Awards for its work and is being asked by other Governments internationally to help them develop their services. Senior managers believe there is still work to be done on the leadership capabilities of the service and note that there are still issues with confidence, especially courage to argue and negotiate for their professional position. This was seen to be based on a lack of experience, courage and lack of familiarity with the body of knowledge (evidence) from which to draw and make a case. They also note that retention is an issue, citing as reasons some cultural problems, particularly with the promotion to senior levels of women and ethnic minorities, and issues with what is seen to be “a macho culture” from politicians and some senior managers in GCS.

From those who had experienced significant investment as participants in the two year Senior Talent Programme, there was a renewed sense of purpose and an acknowledgement that they had benefited from a structured programme that helped them in a number of ways: understanding themselves and their motivations; understanding how others saw them and the importance of ‘consciously positioning myself’; appreciating the need to adopt different styles; empowering others and delegation; focussing on those things that add most value and developing their negotiating and influencing skills. All commented on their growing confidence and the value of a peer network that had developed over the two years of them being together and which could be influential within the service.

All interviewees agreed that there was more to be done in the areas indicated under structure and role mentioned above and most believed that there were challenges ahead, particularly around what was perceived to be a very lean service facing ever increasing demands. There was also concern expressed by some about the integration of Departments and their ALBs/Agencies, some of whom had very different cultures and ways of working which were appropriate to their specific remits.

5.4 Campaigning

All interviewees confirmed that there has been a significant shift towards campaigning from the Cameron years. Since their initiation in 2012, the Annual Communication Plans all feature campaigns and the emphasis has been increasing over time. The executive summary of the 2016/2017 Plan (HMG, 2016) states that it

“Sets out the commitment of Directors of Communication and the GCS to produce campaigns and other communications to support the Government’s priorities in the year ahead” (p.7)

Campaigns are developed according to a recommended template known by the mnemonic OASIS: Objectives, Audience insight, Strategy, Implementation and Scoring – evaluation (for further details see <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/OASIS-Campaigns-Guide-.pdf>). The purpose of using the template is not only to gain consistency in the way campaigns are planned throughout Government, but to focus on impact. As one respondent put it:

“Campaigning is a mindset: it is about achieving objectives, it crystallises outcomes.”

Key requirements in developing campaigns are setting objectives which are aligned to the annual priority policy areas, evaluating their achievement and demonstrating some change in the ‘target audience’, whether that be in awareness, opinions or behaviours. Audience insight is important because it not only establishes a benchmark for where any particular audience is at the start of the campaign, but helps to identify what should be done to achieve the desired change.

Generally interviewees were comfortable with campaigning, although two interviewees were conscious that there were risks, including maintaining the proper balance between acting in support of Government policies and listening to what the population was saying in order to provide feedback on potential and actual policies. They did not see any ethical issues with campaigning as long as the rules of propriety were maintained and campaigns were for social good, although one did have some issues about some behavioural techniques that were seen to be hidden and manipulative rather than about gaining informed consent. Another interviewee went so far to say he hated the word campaigning since it implied transactional and instrumental communication. All concurred that co-ordinating campaigns so that the public were not confused by multiple approaches by different departments on the same issue was sensible and there was some support for the view that Government should do fewer and more sustained campaigns in the future.

There was a nuanced opinion about the limits of Government work. Given that Government affects all areas of people’s lives, what should be the focus? The Annual Planning process meant that focus was given to policy priorities, but was that correct? The majority verdict was that this was correct given the Government was elected on a declared Manifesto for which the majority had voted, but also a view that something might be being missed. For the Delivery Departments the feedback from the ‘front line’ was not being given as much attention as it merited given this is an intelligence source that could be more readily utilised, not just for campaigning, but to judge public opinion more widely. This view was strongly supported by an interviewee from a non-delivery Department.

Linked to the focus on campaigning has been a shift towards those that are intended to change behaviours as opposed to providing information so that people can make informed choices. It is of note that the *Future of Public Service Communications Report (2015a)* states that two of the three communication skills of the future will be ‘marketing, and behaviour change communications’ (p.14). Analysis of the Government documents cited in this paper and the author’s own first hand observations confirm that the language of communicators is more oriented towards behaviour change than information provision.

7. Discussion

This section seeks to draw together in discussion some of the threads that have been generated so far. It will do this under three headings.

6.1 Structural change

As has been noted, structural change in the GCS during the Cameron premiership years was profound and is having ongoing effects. Positively, there is little doubt that these changes have made the service more strategic in its approach, it has become more efficient in its use of resources both financial and human and the service is evidentially more effective in reaching the objectives it sets. It no longer suffers from the criticisms made in earlier years about being non-strategic and of being outmoded in its use of up to date communication channels and tools (see section 3.2).

A potential danger of these structural changes is the recurrent one of politicisation. As Gregory has noted (2012), the cycle of politicisation, then de-politicisation is never static. The potential for this can be seen from a number of 'adjustments', which in aggregate signal warning signs. As previously noted and of more than symbolic significance is the modification introduced in the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 (HMG, 2010) where civil servants are now servants of the State, rather than the Crown with the Prime Minister having statutory power over them. Then there are the changes in SCS terms and conditions of service introduced in the 1990's leading to individualised contracts and them being performance managed. The GCS 'Centre' is now co-located in the Prime Minister's Office and the Cabinet Office. In addition, since 2012, the work of the GCS is overseen by the GCS Board, chaired by the Minister for the Cabinet Office. It has to be noted that the GCS operates within the rules of propriety and of the Civil Service Professions Best Practice Framework, but it is clearly stated that this Board

"Provides assurance to Cabinet that the GCS is delivering against government aims and profession specific objectives. It challenges our performance and advises – or mediates, if necessary – on cross government communications issues". (GCS, 2015a, p. 25)

Departments in turn are appraised quarterly against their performance on the areas of the plan that they are responsible for and against the 'government narrative' (GCS, 2015a, p.14). Agencies and ALBs are now being more tightly managed by their parent departments and their communication plans are approved by the latter.

Budgets are held centrally and expenditure outside annually approved budgets has to go through a process that is centrally controlled. Structural changes in recruitment means that the centre is responsible for the recruitment of significant numbers of GCS employees and admission onto the various talent schemes is also finally approved centrally.

These changes means that 'the Centre' is much more powerful and managerial than it was when Departments operated more independently. The benefit is this means that government communication is more focussed and, because it is more co-ordinated around identified themes, able to demonstrate its contribution more readily. However, while there are safeguards in place to protect those working in the GCS, there were interviewees who were conscious of the potential for undue political influence by Government and some were explicit that they felt this to be the case.

In context of the literature (Gelders & Ihlen, 2010; Kraaier, 2016; Sanders & Canel, 2013; Taylor, 2000), it is clear that much progress has been made on co-ordinated and systematic communication of Government policy priorities and that communication is now seen as a vital element in delivering those priorities – one of the levers of Government.

6.2 Operational change

There are three areas identified for discussion under this heading. First: the Annual Communications Plan. There is little doubt that the Annual Plan has brought discipline and coherence into Government communication. It has been singularly successful in bringing together what was a set of disparate, overlapping, duplicating and sometime conflicting communication activities into a comprehensive, rational and consistent whole that is impactful and intelligible. It provides focus and helps to ensure resources are deployed effectively in the service of Government.

These Plans are also available for all to see on the public Government Communication Service website (see <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/communications-plan/>), so it is apparent who is the initiator and driver of the policies and this helps with accountability.

Second: campaigns. As with Annual Plans, so with campaigns. Based on the OASIS model, there is a consistent approach to campaign planning that, as the numerous reports on government campaigns show, yield results in line with their objectives (see <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/campaigns/case-studies/> for examples of campaigns). As mentioned earlier in the paper, these campaigns are always aligned with Government priorities and fall under the agreed themes of the Annual Communication Plan.

While it is clear that the Annual Plan and individual campaigns are designed to deliver policy objectives and changes in attitude and behaviour for the benefit of individuals and society, these are as defined by Government and under prescribed themes set by the GCS Board. As noted earlier, not all civil servant communicators were convinced that all these policies were mainstream to the public interest or for citizens well-being (Sanders and Canel, 2013), but more aligned to promoting Government policies per se. The author has searched the Annual Plans and the campaign documents available and cannot find any campaigns, objectives or statement which indicates that planned activity has been in response to citizens' concerns, or that policies have been developed as a result of public demand and created to satisfy citizen-informed communication needs. The traffic is essentially one-way. It is about the Government telling the population about its policies and persuading to them to the Government's point of view as Taylor (2000) observed. The word 'information' is rarely used, although information is provided about, for example how and when to vote in a General Election. However, the overall orientation is about using communication, as explicitly stated, as a lever in the service of Government which, when put together with taxation, regulation, legislation and spending has the whiff of coercion and compliance. Citizens are being 'driven' (documented and observed language) rather than listened to. Furthermore, the interview and documentary evidence indicates that even when audience insight is sought, this is usually done very narrowly and for instrumental purposes i.e. to benefit the Government by identifying the leverage points that can be acted upon to

persuade the population, a view supported by Macnamara's (2016) research. Their opinions are not being sought for their own sake and to guide public policy, rather their levels of awareness, opinions and behaviours are being investigated in order to change them. Listening to the population in a respectful and collaborative way appears to be absent. There were some instances cited in the interviews where genuine intelligence had been gathered from the public to inform policy, but even when this occurred, this was rejected if it did not suit a policy end.

The nation-building and other public relations literature about Government communication (for example Ledingham, 2001; Kent & Taylor, 2006) identify potential issues concerning 'top-down' Government communication in which the needs of the Government in power are served rather than the needs of a range of publics. Curtin & Gaither (2007) also warn about the potential instrumentalisation of communication when Governments focus their efforts on domestic and international objectives. In the case of the changes in Government communication instigated for efficiency and effectiveness in the Cameron period, it appears that a consequence has been to intensify the 'top down' approach. The Annual Communication Plans and the move to campaigning focus explicitly and systematically on communicating policies which are centred on the Government meeting its objectives. A consequence of this, whether intended or not, means that the opportunities for systematic listening to citizens for its own sake and as part of the democratic bargain is squeezed and a continuing communication process that ensures "that all public voices are tolerated and valued" (Kent & Taylor, 2006, p. 348) is not readily facilitated.

Third: digital communication. The move towards 'digital by default' is clearly in line with practice in the commercial world, where digitalisation has led to significant efficiencies and the ability to gather huge amounts of data. However, there are still significant numbers of citizens who are digitally deprived and some of these are the most vulnerable: the elderly, the poor, those with disabilities including visual impairment and those in rural areas where broadband access is limited. While this may be dismissed as a generational issue, Government has the responsibility to remain accessible to all citizens and with cuts in other Government services, including physical offices and helplines, there is a danger that these groups will become disenfranchised and that Government will not be able to hear these voices. Furthermore, as one interviewee observed, the move to digital by default is creating a backlash, where citizens are becoming resentful of the amount of time they have to spend on line doing those things that they feel should be done by civil servants. Another interviewee claimed digital by default is problematic for two reasons: first digital, like any other channel, should be used where appropriate. Second 'the dots are not joined if we communicate only digitally'.

6.3 Culture change

There has undoubtedly been a significant change in culture since the reforms of 2012. The requirement to 'deliver not just procure', to 'work in partnership' and to modernise practice, along with the major and strategic investment in capability has led to an

observable difference in the service. It is smaller, but because it is more efficient and can evaluate its contribution, it is clearly delivering more for the same cost and can demonstrate impact. Direct observation shows it is more responsive, works at speed and employs the latest communication channels and techniques with skill. The changes in working practices, including utilising standardised processes, procedures and templates have introduced consistency of practice. Government communication campaigns are leading edge and of a high standard as evidenced by the Awards they are gaining. Internally their contribution is being valued more highly as interviewees confirmed and as the more recent Capability Reviews show. There is a level of pride and confidence in the Service which is new.

However, as indicated above, there have been other cultural changes which are arguably having less beneficial effects. There has been a change in the overall focus of Government communication towards *delivering* policy objectives as opposed to *explaining* them and this has affected the nature of the relationship GCS has with citizens. If the purpose of GCS is perceived to be more focused on assisting the Government, rather than being equally also a servant of the people, then this opens up doubts about its independence and this is important in a stable democracy. The people have to trust the institutions of Government even if they do not trust the Government itself.

An indication of the instrumentalisation indicated earlier is exemplified in the importation of the language of campaigning and marketing. Citizens are 'targets', they are the object of 'social marketing', their behaviour is to be 'driven' after 'insight' has been gained. They are not talked of as citizens who are entitled to make informed choices, and who then, in turn, should take responsibility for those choices. The relationship with citizens is in danger of becoming an exchange rather than maintaining a communitarian ethos (Hon and Grunig, 1999). When questioned about this, some respondents readily acknowledged this as an issue, but others did not. One respondent was quite adamant that, "the spirit of public service among communicators is stronger than ever".

Undoubtedly, the reality is there are some transactional relationships with Government, such as the purchasing of passports, but that is far from the whole case. There is a deep social contract which cannot be captured in the language of marketing alone. Words that imply mutuality, responsibility, service, respect, relationship and co-dependence are not prevalent in documentation reviewed and everyday use. Yet as the public relations literature shows, this is at the heart of creating trust and collaboration fails to deliver the richness of relationships which are possible and exemplified in the nation-building literature (Lee, 2015).

Incidentally and ironically there is apparently a double bind here. The more proficient and competent Government communicators become at delivering policy objectives, the more they can be seen to be the servants of the Government and not of the people.

In section 3.2 it was stated that at the beginning of the Coalition Government in 2010, a continuum had been traversed from the pre Thatcher years of the 1970's. At one end was a position where the orientation of government communication was seen to be one of service to the public for the benefit of a society based on notions of a social contract between

Government and citizenry which implied reciprocal rights and responsibilities on both sides. At the other it became service of the political purpose of government where politics was consumerised and its selling was seen to become the job of communication. The purpose of the GCS between 2010 and 2016 appears to be as a lever of Government, focused on the delivery of its policy objectives.

Given the historical context in which the period under scrutiny has been considered, it is now possible to identify intervals of time with particular characteristics which allow a classification of Government communication since World War II. This date is an important marker since it is when Government communication began to take recognisable shape as a Government-wide and co-ordinated service. As stated earlier in this paper, it was 1956, when Sir Charles Hill took on responsibility for all Government communication and put in place a system to coordinate activities between departments and central Government (COI, 2002). This was the first time such an appointment was made, and fittingly, for this paper, exactly 60 years before the end of the Cameron administration.

Figure 1 below offers such a periodization (Bentele, 2015)

Take in Figure 1 here

Having laid out and discussed the changes that have occurred in the GCS between 2010 and 2016 within their historical context and having considered their ongoing impact, what conclusions can be drawn?

Conclusions

Without doubt the GCS is more efficient. It goes about its work in a more business-like, structured and focused way than ever before. It is delivering more 'communication' for less money. Defined in its own terms, the service is more effective. Undoubtedly, these efforts are having impact as evaluations show. Campaigns are demonstrably delivering policy results. Government communicators are more capable: they can use modern communication channels and techniques well and there is more consistent performance across the whole of Government. There is evidence that they are more respected in Government because of these factors.

However, there are some lessons to be taken on board as impact of this approach is seen in its wider and literature context. Being focused on delivering efficiently and effectively for Government can be at the expense of the quality of relationships with citizenry. Listening, understanding the impact of policy and feeding that back to policy makers, on-going dialogue, being prepared to engage citizens in a meaningful way for them and treating governing as a privilege and a contract that has to be constantly reviewed and renewed are features of effective governance and of sustainable democracies.

Post the Referendum to leave the EU in June 2016 and with greater impetus following the surprise results of the General Election in June 2017 called by Cameron's successor Theresa May, renewed consideration has been given to the role of communication in Government. It is too soon at this stage to come to any reasoned conclusions, but suffice to say that the results and the apparent gaps in understanding of the mood and intensions of the electorate, put a jolt through Government that has caused it to reflect on its communication efforts. It is clear that Government was disconnected from, even unaware of the public mood, especially outside London. At the heart of this was a failure to genuinely connect with citizenry: to listen to them, to engage on the issues that were of concern to them and to understand their lives. This can only be done through a genuine process of dialogue rather than a purely top down approach to promoting the Government agenda. Actions are now in place to redress this imbalance with both Government itself and Government communicators spending more time outside London and in more engagement activities.

In light of this, future reflection will reveal if 2016 provided the starting point for a new period of Government Communication in the UK and if so, what its defining characteristics will be. A starting and departure point for this paper is that the principle of the electorate holding the Government to account is still pre-eminent in democracies, and it is this that has been the spur to deep reflection on the nature the communication compact between those who govern and the governed.

Notes.

1. See the collection of papers on the varying impacts of public spending cuts from the University of Warwick School of Law. *Reports on the Impact of Public Spending Cuts Across the UK* available from <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/research/centres/chrp/spendingcuts/resources/reports-uk/>

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A Board (now GCS Board) responsible for the effective and efficient delivery of communication activity, departmental marketing plans, and coordination between departments. The Board is Chaired by the Minister for the Cabinet Office and comprises other Ministers and Permanent Secretaries, a number of Communication Directors from Departments and ALBs and two independent external directors of communication.

A Strategic Centre led by the Executive Director for Government Communications (in place of a Permanent Secretary), who is also Head of Profession. The Executive Director is located in a merged Prime Minister's Office and Cabinet Office communication team.

Departmental communication teams are retained, headed by Directors of Communication. These directors have now been formed into a Directors of Communication Group.

Originally seven Communication Hubs, comprising groups of departments coordinating activity across departmental boundaries was envisaged. The coordinating function is now done by the Directors Group. They primarily use their own resources,

<p>but where required, can commission communication activity via Government Procurement Service (GPS) contracts or from the centrally based GCS resource pool.</p>
<p>Capability within departments is subject to Capability Reviews led by a team from the Strategic Centre and including external experts. They produce reports to the Executive Director, the Department under review and the Board.</p>
<p>Responsibility for the procurement of all communications services rests with the GPS and all government departments use GPS frameworks for the procurement of communications services.</p>

Table 1. Main structural changes made in UK Government communication in 2012

Phase 1: 2013/14	Phase 2: 2014/15	Phase 3: 2015/16	Phase 4: 2016/17
New Government Communication Service (GCS)	Implementing existing initiatives	Internal change and engagement	Single campaign approach
Mandatory evaluation	Internal communication and engagement	Professional and personal capabilities	Modern media operation
Aligning departmental Comms strategies with Government priorities	Structure and organisation of the modern communications team	Structures: the Modern Communications Operating Model	Improving professional capability
Improving spending controls	Developing people and capability	Clear professional standards	Developing the GCS
Introduction of Government Communication Board	Communications leadership learning and development	Public service co-operation	
Structures aligning work of Departments and main ALBs	Cost-effective communications		
Improving cross-government internal communications	GCS commercialisation of advice and support		
Improving regional communications services	Digital and social media capability improvement		
Enhancing existing Communications Hubs	Ministerial engagement on the communication role and function		
Additional central resource to support Departments			
Integrating social media and digital channels within press office function			

Table 2. Reform, change and improvement programmes put in place by GCS Executive Director Alex Aiken

Time	Orientation	Characteristic
1956 - 1974	Public service amateur (service to the public)	Reciprocal responsibility
1974 - 1997	Amateur professional (service to Government and public)	Responsible partisanship
1997 - 2010	Politicised professional (service to political party)	Partisan promotion
2010 - 2016	Professional policy- deliverer (service to Government)	Promotional proficiency

Figure 1. Periodisation of UK Government Communication from 1956 to June 2016