

## **REPORT: LONDON VISIT, TUESDAY 12 SEPTEMBER**

John Concannon and Andrea Pappin met with Alex Aiken and his team in GCS, meeting with both Alex directly and also his head of Digital, Campaigns, Insight, and Business Liaison. Also met with Conrad Bird of The GREAT Britain campaign, and two leading members of Government Digital Service (Trisha Doyle – Head of Content Design, and Clive Richardson – Head of Policy & Engagement, GOV.UK).

### **Key insights**

- **Everything is based on hard evidence and data**
- **Citizen needs are more important than government needs**
- **The audacity in simplicity**
- **Collaboration is key, as is the technology to support that**
- **Authority v central control**

#### **Everything is based on hard evidence and data**

Every meeting, every initiative or campaign was grounded in data. Insight is constantly gleaned from own-commissioned market research, website and social media traffic and constant engagement with key sector. This grounds all of their thinking. It was noticeable how much time is spent listening to key audiences and reviewing the insight before campaigns were devised.

Furthermore, evaluation of government work was highly prevalent. Evaluation principles had been adopted across the board to ascertain reach, savings, efficiencies. It was noticeable how many we met had crystallised this into two to three headline numbers that show the impact of their work.

#### **Citizen needs > government needs**

There was a strong awareness of the Government bubble and the difference between that and the 'actual' needs of citizens. Every time, the needs of the citizen (based on the evidential data mentioned above) was put ahead of the needs of Whitehall or the Parliamentary bubble. As Alex Aiken simply put it, "We are all about the public good."

#### **The audacity in simplicity**

It was very powerful to see at all levels - strategic priorities, campaign execution, digital platforms, templates, overall communications standards - are so clean, clear and understood by all. One page was delivered instead of 45 – and where possible it was visual.

The GREAT Britain Campaign is the obvious example of this. The international branding has been developed and sustained for a number of years, with the audiences understood (C-Suite Executives, tourists, students, and those who buy British goods/services). The aim is to create jobs. It has been uncompromising in its standards.

In fact all of this work had at its heart a simple aim - to be the best. According to UN rankings, they are.

#### **Collaboration is key, as is the technology to support that**

To work smart, teams work across Departments re communications as a professional service (~3,000), Department Heads of Communications (~20), and the Management Board for Strategic Communications (4 Perm Secs, 4 Heads of Communications, 2 Agency Communications people, 2 external people).

**Authority v central control**

A number of simple rules have been implemented, which have helped keep standards high and bureaucracy low. It was stressed that this is not about 'central control', rather the work was deemed professional assurance for the Government communications industry. Examples of these simple and effective rules are:

- Standards, templates, brand guidelines, user guides are applied across the board, and closely monitored
- All communications campaigns over €10,000 have to be run past Government Strategic Communications, working to a clear template (Objectives, Audiences, Strategy, Implementation, Statistics/Evaluation) before the campaigns progress.
- Incentives – For The GREAT Britain campaign, there is a pool of monies for which Ambassadors can apply for local events. Only the Ambassador can apply for the monies, and only after working with their fellow Agency teams on the ground.

*13 September 2017*