



Industry in Focus

Future of Government

January 2024





We launched our Future of Government campaign in 2019, using public polling and original research to explore topics such as public perceptions of fairness in the UK, regional inequality, social mobility, ethnic diversity and inclusion, gender inequality, and declining trust in public sector organisations.

Our current research program is examining the potential to reimagine the architecture of government in the UK, taking into account key factors that should be considered.

Future of Government – rethinking capacity and capability in the public sector

People are at the heart of the public sector – both the citizens it serves, and the people working across a range of departments and agencies right across the UK.

Attracting, nurturing, and deploying talent to best deliver services is one of the key challenges facing the sector. At the same time, responsibly harnessing the power of digital technology to benefit the public sector workforce and citizens represents one of the greatest opportunities.

There is an urgent need to consider how best to reconcile these issues and reimagine how we unlock the potential capacity and capabilities of the public sector. Working in partnership with practitioners and senior leaders from across government and the wider public sector, we have identified four areas for action:

01 Unlocking the matrix – solving critical problems through issues-led collaboration

The public sector workforce is characterised by its commitment to improving outcomes for people and places. However, this can often be impeded by the structure of the public sector which sees many workforces operating in silos. This restricts organisations in coming together to corral action behind pressing cross-cutting public priorities and the need to drive economies of scale.

- Taking an issue-led, multidisciplinary approach to solving critical problems, would allow the public sector to pool resources into formalised delivery units to make use of specific capabilities. For example, should this be applied to the delivery of net zero, it could be bolstered by investment in analytical and policy capabilities to fund net zero-relevant skills.
- Championing the use of centres of excellence to bring talent from various public sector departments together would allow the Government to tackle its most urgent challenges. These units would increase the fluidity of how public sector talent is deployed and revolutionise how capabilities are harnessed and applied.
- Using this approach as a catalyst for greater cooperation with other sectors – both the private and voluntary-may find it easier to engage around specific issues and outcomes.



02 Going further and faster with the power of technology and data

The public sector is making progress in deploying new technology, and using data to generate insight to address society's more complex challenges. However, it could go further and faster. Technology has a key role to play in enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of services, and freeing up the workforce to focus on higher value activities.

- The arrival of GenAI is already having a positive impact on the way that public bodies operate and engage with service users, residents and communities. However, a step change in technology investment is required across the public sector to maximise the obvious benefits of deploying machine learning in both front and back office environments.
- The Government and public sector organisations have a wide range of disparate data sources, but they need to take steps to integrate data sets to deliver greater insights. For instance, the lack of integration between healthcare and social service databases hampers providers' ability to deliver comprehensive and coordinated care.
- The UK's response to the Covid pandemic illustrated, for the most part, the benefits of taking a data-led approach to decision making. There is potential to go much further in using data modelling to predict the impact of policy and/or service interventions, albeit this may require a more pragmatic approach to data protection.

03 Developing more agile career pathways to accelerate development

The public sector is experiencing workforce challenges, reflecting broader issues in the UK economy. However, it is also becoming increasingly clear that the traditional approach to developing professional silos has limitations and the benefits of adopting a [skills-first strategy are evident across the public and private sectors](#).

- There is potential to build on the success of initiatives, such as the £165m Local Skills Improvement Fund, which has begun to identify and develop unconventional sources of talent to foster greater fluidity in career pathways across the public sector. While cycles of experience in different departments is commonplace within Whitehall, there are relatively few examples of this happening between central government and the wider public sector. Developing additional innovative mechanisms in this space would improve understanding and generate more of a culture of collaboration.
- There are some impressive apprenticeship schemes within government, but more could be achieved through the development of cross-organisational schemes at scale. Steps could include creating standardised schemes with recognised approaches to continuous professional development and coaching to nurture future leaders and provide alternative pathways into public service.
- There may be some additional benefit to exploring the potential of more secondments between the public and private sectors – there are some good examples of this in certain areas of government, but much more could be done to make this common practice.





04 Improving the public service 'offer' to attract and retain the best possible talent

Some commentators have referred to a trend of new entrants to the workforce becoming more and more purpose driven – Gen Z employees, in particular, want meaningful work, and seek organisations that are [focusing on more than the bottom line](#). The public sector is as well placed as any to attract individuals who are motivated to make a difference, at the same time as developing their skills and experience.

- When it comes to the competition for talent, government needs to be bolder in shouting about the experience and learning environment it offers. The public sector should be acting as an incubator for skills development and fostering a more fluid boundary between public and private organisations.
- The public sector should also be considering how best to create a culture that will promote innovation and adaptability. While acknowledging that effective risk management will remain a critical requirement, we must also recognise that it should not be so regimented as to stifle opportunities to challenge convention and to think and act differently.
- Consistent with the situation in the workforce more generally, more needs to be done to assure existing and future talent that their requirements for upskilling are met. [Our research](#) on workforce trends in Europe has highlighted that many workers are less aware of the skills they will need in their future careers and are not confident that their employers will help them develop their skills.

The challenges facing our society are significant, but so too are the opportunities. Government and the wider public sector need to consider the skills required to meet these challenges. Additionally, they must contemplate how best to attract and nurture a workforce with different expectations than previous generations and how to harness new technologies to secure the best possible future for all.

Over the coming months, we will be canvassing further views on how best to rethink the architecture of government. We will work with think tank leaders, policy makers and practitioners from across the public sector and will publish additional insights in the new year.

How can you get involved?

For further information about this research programme, or to highlight your interest in contributing, please contact:



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