CSW

CIVIL SERVICE WORLD

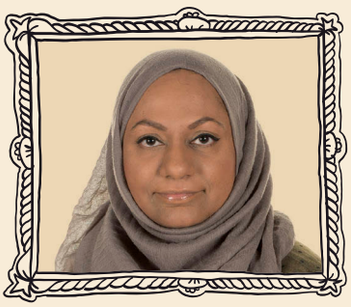
Issue 318 | Summer 2022 | www.civilserviceworld.com

UP AND AT 'EM
How can civil servants help make levelling up a success?

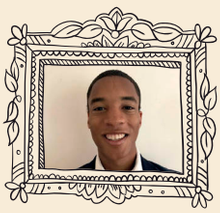
CLOSER INSPECTION
An exclusive interview with CPS watchdog Andrew Cayley QC

LICENCE TO SKILL
A look at the new civil service apprenticeships strategy




PORTRAIT OF THE CIVIL SERVICE












ANTONIA ROMEO | ALEX CHISHOLM | UNA O'BRIEN

A CRITICAL ENABLER

As the civil service is committed to innovation, world-class digital services and customer service improvements, BT's technology is leading the way forward, supporting the changes ahead

For many years now, future gazers in the technology sector have observed that the world is changing at an incredible pace. If you're not prepared to embrace the very latest technology, you'll either be outcompeted, out of business, or out of luck. The private and public sectors are converging, especially in technology – and even more so since March 2020 with the raft of change the pandemic has brought to all our lives.

So, what does all this change mean for prosperity, security, and resilience on a personal, organisational and national level? With rising costs of living and a digital skills gap which risks holding back UK productivity, the private and public sectors must work hard to find solutions to these pressing problems, and the right partners to deliver.

We can do more

Over several decades, BT has built a strong position in underpinning the UK's critical public services, serving millions of consumers, and more than 1.2 million corporate and public sector customers, including small, medium and large businesses, local authorities and government bodies.

As a critical enabler and the epitome of a trusted partner we provide fast, reliable and secure solutions, including smart bases for the MoD, great connectivity for NHS sites, supporting the country's 999 service and operating the Emergency Services Network (ESN).

Our new Charter to provide business and public sector customers with a springboard for growth is our way of saying we can do more. The commitments in this charter include a greater focus on purpose-driven goals, innovation, world-class cyber security, a new suite of digital services and customer service improvements.

To accelerate the pace of innovation across the UK, we're investing almost £100 million over the next three years to develop solutions which integrate technologies like 5G, IoT, Edge Compute, Cloud and AI. These solutions will transform and modernise key industries, driving positive business outcomes and fuelling the UK economy.

Furthermore, we're creating a 'Digital Fabric' for the UK – powered by the biggest full fibre and 5G public networks – which will deliver a series of hyper-connected 'Smart Spaces' across the nation. These will unlock intelligent and immersive experiences for businesses, consumers, and communities alike.

To keep our customers better protected against the rising tide of cyber-attacks, a new cyber health check tool, Safe Security – already available to larger UK corporate and public sector customers – will be extended to small businesses. We'll also roll out our Eagle-i proactive cyber defence platform later in the financial year. Together with our 3,000 cyber experts across the globe, these tools will provide superior levels of security to customers.

Connecting for good

Our core purpose – 'to Connect for Good' still guides us

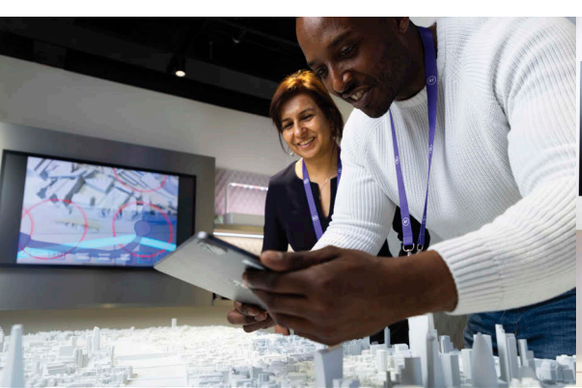
Almost 600,000 small business owners and employees have received free digital skills training through our Skills for Tomorrow programme, and by March 2023, we'll reach a further 350,000 small firms.

Our commitment to leading the way towards Net Zero includes removing all single use plastics for new business product packaging and devices within the next year and working with our supply chain to kick-start a device and equipment recovery, refurb and reuse scheme. We're also electrifying our entire fleet (the second largest in the UK) fully by 2025.

This is just a snapshot of our commitment to building better businesses and public services, with our network and technology making our customers more resilient, better connected, safer and more secure, whilst creating opportunities for innovation, collaboration and growth.

We take this responsibility seriously and will continue to play a critical part in enabling a prosperous and resilient United Kingdom for today and for tomorrow.

BT Means Business



For more information visit **https://business.bt.com/public-sector**

CONTENTS

Summer 2022

CSW
CIVIL SERVICE WORLD

www.civilserviceworld.com

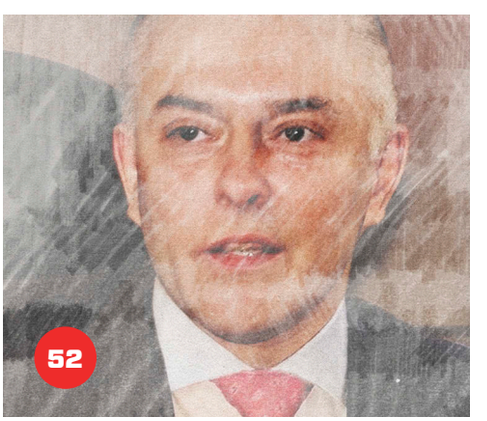
Editorial
editorial@civilserviceworld.com
020 7593 5569
Advertising
advertising@civilserviceworld.com
020 7593 5606

Published by
DODS

ON THE COVER
An exclusive design created by Antonello Sticca

8


42


52

FROM THE EDITOR

"At a time of discontinuity, leadership is at a premium. When the future is simply an extrapolation of the past, so that we are all tramping over familiar ground, the choice of someone to lead the procession may not be critical. But if we are setting out on unfamiliar terrain, we look for leaders who, at the very least, appear to have imagined what that terrain would be like."

These words, written in a 1977 policy document for the then-leader of the opposition, Margaret Thatcher, are strikingly relevant as we face economic challenges at home and the discontinuities caused by climate change and technological shifts.

Our political leadership, consumed with self-preservation, doesn't seem to have given that terrain much thought. "I wouldn't mind his attempts to cling on if he had any clue why he wants to be there," is how one official described Boris Johnson's vision for the country to *CSW*.

As for the government's plan to reform the civil service, there is a map in The Declaration on Government Reform. But Jacob Rees-Mogg, the minister who is apparently overseeing the reform plan, seems to not have much personal interest in it.

One topic about which he and other cabinet ministers are voluble, however, is the plan to cut tens of thousands of civil service jobs.

Cuts have grown from around 28,000 (as announced in last year's Spending Review) to 65,000 (as told by Rees-Mogg to *The Times* in February) to 91,000 (as announced in May).

Have we seen a comms plan helping civil servants moving towards this rocky terrain? An organisation-wide memo to officials or, at the very least, an email to perm secs explaining how ministers saw these cuts fitting into wider reform? No. The first staff and perm secs alike found out about the latest target was in the *Daily Mail*.

A couple of weeks later the prime minister did email all civil servants, seeming to tell them they had a "moral duty" to lose their jobs because of the rising cost of living. There was no comment about what huge price rises in food and fuel might mean for officials themselves.

It was hardly a missive which suggested the prime minister puts a premium on leading his staff.

Of course, ministers are right to consider whether government is the right size to deliver their objectives, and to enact change according to their democratic mandate. Civil servants are known for their ability to turn on a sixpence and operate with high levels of ambiguity. But they still need direction.

Perm secs, who do understand their leadership responsibilities, have the tough job of leading an exhausted workforce towards moving goalposts. Senior leaders are never going to be able to motivate everyone. But something they can do is be as visible and as open as possible

Perm secs do have a vision of what the terrain will look like for the civil service over the coming years – whether from the DGR or their own core departmental missions. And for many of them the context of job cuts and sweeping change is not new – they remember it from the early 2010s, so they know what is needed, and what risks lie ahead.

There are great leaders in the civil service. In recent weeks we have seen at least one permanent secretary publicly defend their staff from attack, while others used internal comms to acknowledge how worrying the spectre of swingeing job cuts must feel.

These leaders have their work cut out. But it's a challenge that they will be better equipped to meet than their political masters. Who aren't very good at leadership. In case you hadn't noticed. ■

CSW
CIVIL SERVICE WORLD

EDITOR
Jessica Bowie
jessica.bowie@dodsgroup.com
020 7593 5587

Suzannah Brecknell
suzannah.brecknell@dodsgroup.com
020 7593 5587

DEPUTY & ONLINE EDITOR
Beckie Smith
beckie.smith@dodsgroup.com
020 7593 5687

REPORTER
Tevye Markson
tevye.markson@dodsgroup.com
020 7593 5582

CONTENT STRATEGY MANAGER
Murielle Gonzalez
murielle.gonzalez@dodsgroup.com
020 7593 5794

COMMERCIAL ENQUIRIES
Dominic Risolino
dominic.risolino@dodsgroup.com
020 7593 5534

CREATIVE DIRECTOR
Tim Shepherd

SENIOR ARTWORKERS
Max Dubiel
Matt Titley
Antonello Sticca

ADVERTISING
020 7593 560

PHOTOGRAPHY
Alamy, Adobe Stock, unless stated otherwise

Redesign devised by Antonello Sticca

PRINTED BY
Magazine Printing Company
www.magprint.co.uk

DISTRIBUTED BY JYL

SUBSCRIPTIONS
www.civilserviceworld.com/subscriptions
020 7593 5510
dods@escosubs.co.uk
UK public sector: £49
UK private sector: £99

Visit www.civilserviceworld.com/subscriptions for details

PUBLISHED BY
DODS

POSTAL ADDRESS
Dods, 11th Floor, The Shard
London Bridge Street SE1 9SG
TELEPHONE
020 7593 5500
FAX
020 7593 5501

ISSN 2515-0235 (Print)

INBOX

editorial@civilserviceworld.com
twitter.com/CSWNews

CUT SCENES

The announcement of plans to cut 91,000 civil service jobs over the next three years sparked consternation, and many questioned how ministers had arrived at the figure – which adds up to around one in five civil service jobs.

"This beggars belief, Covid-19 increased jobs by roughly 25,000, now if 40,000 jobs reduce naturally per year why do we need to reduce more?" asked **Peter Drummond.** "I will happily leave this dysfunctional government for a modest voluntary redundancy. Private industry pays more."

"These jobs are mostly post-Brexit and post-Covid jobs created over the past two years," **Raymond Rose** said. "They were surely always time limited and destined to be lost as quickly as they were created, so heralding this as a response to cost of living crisis is disingenuous and a smoke and mirrors response hiding a total lack of response by the Treasury to increasing tax revenue by proper means, namely tax windfalls on energy companies and proper taxation of companies avoiding paying the morally correct level of tax return on profits raised in UK. It's a sticking plaster on a gaping wound."

CUTTING REMARK

Some readers took issue with comments made by Jacob Rees-Mogg in a leaked email sent to staff about the plans – which he insisted were not an attack, but a reversal of an increase in civil servants over the last few years to deal with the "temporary" extra work of Brexit and the pandemic.

"Temporary"? Are they giving up on Brexit, then?" asked **Robert Massimo Baldi.**

"No, it's the collective delusion that they hold that Brexit is 'over' and therefore things can return to 'normal'," **Ewan Kirk** replied. "Sadly they fail to see that the new normal includes the civil service absorbing a number of important agencies needed, that used to be provided by (and therefore paid for out of our contribution to) the EU."

Robert Massimo Baldi responded: "They see that very well; this is an excuse to create a situation where their solution will be to offload the work to the private sector... thus diverting taxpayers' money to their friends' companies (again), despite lack of any knowledge or experience."

CUT THE CRAP

Readers applauded former justice secretary David Gauke for calling the plans "unrealistically optimistic, politically motivated and ideologically incoherent", and for saying an analysis of why numbers have grown since 2016 should happen before reforms are decided.

"Sadly, politicians find the civil service an easy target. This 20% target reduction in manpower is pure fantasy. Unless this government wants a substantial reduction in services offered or not done at all. It is politicians' responsibility to educate the wider UK population on what the civil service does and allow their perm secs to robustly challenge the incessant vitriolic lies from those rags that are laughingly self labelled as newspapers... every lie and every claim needs to be confronted with fact," **Sushil Samant** said.

"I have no idea where the government thinks it can cut 91,000 people from!" **Emma Wilkinson** commented. "They are all busy picking up extra work due to Brexit tasks, recruitment freezes, retirements and people leaving over the abysmal pay. There's barely enough frontline staff in some organisations without chopping more away."

"One wonders how many contractor roles will be created to make up service shortfalls," **Matt Andrews** added.

CUT TO THE QUICK

Leaked minutes from a cabinet meeting revealed that ministers are planning to pause recruitment to the Fast Stream for at least a year to contribute towards the reduction in numbers. Readers didn't think much of the idea.

"This doesn't make any sense to me. No sensible business would make such a short sighted decision to cut off its long term source of talent," **Jim Gumbley** said. "Government should think on longer horizons, this is horribly short termist – aside from the loss of opportunity to a generation of graduates which has already taken its fair share of knocks in the pandemic years."

Tahmid Chowdhury commented: "Another depressing, short sighted and damaging decision. This whole job cut stuff is self imposed and freezing one of the best graduate schemes only stops talented individuals from entering the service. I'm sure the same ministers will complain in a year or two about substandard policy, but won't be willing to admit they're the reason a brain drain is happening."

HALF CUT

Nor were readers impressed by a memo from Simon Case and Alex Chisholm telling civil servants to remain "fully focused" on delivering public services after Sue Gray's report on the Partygate scandal was made public, now that Boris Johnson has taken "full responsibility" for the rule-breaking that took place.

"Thanks, but always have been. We serve the government. It doesn't matter what party is in power," **Charlie Barnes** wrote.

"It's easier to 'stay focused' when not continually second-guessed and micromanaged by politicians who haven't the first clue about good management," added **Colin Taylor.**

Tahmid Chowdhury questioned the timing of the memo, which was sent only a few days after Gray's report was published. "It's only been a week. I don't get how it's now just move on when the report hasn't even been fully digested (nor vomited up the wall, so to speak)," he said.

Ben Caile @deviantwriter
This coming from the same source that has repeatedly given civil servants real-terms pay cuts for over a decade and is now threatening 91,000 job cuts. We've always been focused and professional. We are not the problem!

Cpl Humblebucket @Corporalhumble Johnson taking "full responsibility" – without accepting any responsibility whatsoever

* Accountability broken
* Ministerial Code demolished
* Standards in Public Life trashed ■

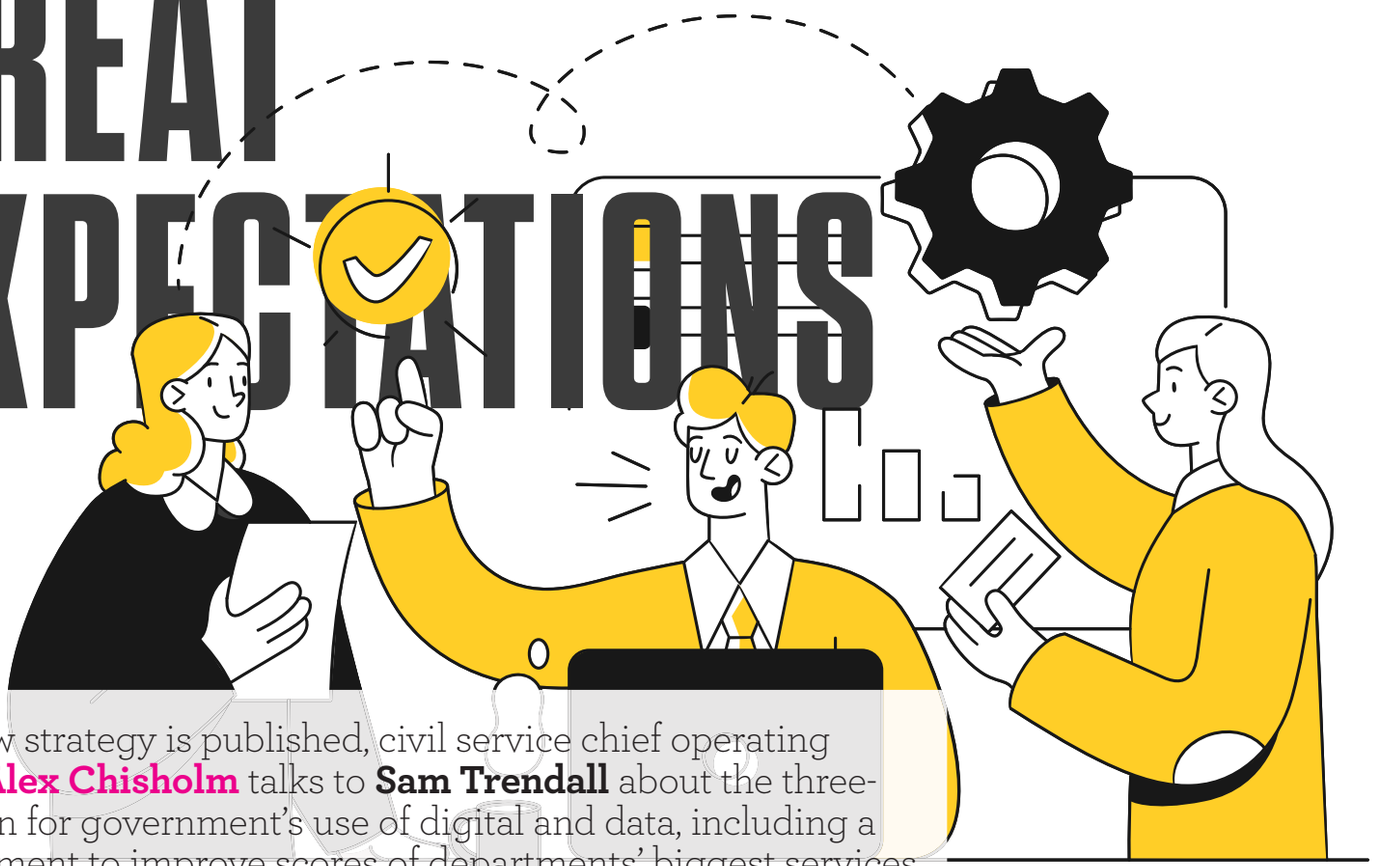
IN THE NEXT ISSUE

An interview with Ministry of Defence perm secs David Williams and Laurence Lee. PLUS a special report on the Government Major Projects Portfolio

Produced in association with *CSW*'s sister title *PublicTechnology*

PT Public Technology.net

GREAT EXPECTATIONS



As a new strategy is published, civil service chief operating officer **Alex Chisholm** talks to **Sam Trendall** about the three-year plan for government's use of digital and data, including a commitment to improve scores of departments' biggest services

"There have been attempts in the past to do digital and data strategies – which, sometimes, were long in aspiration and short in delivery," says Alex Chisholm, civil service chief operating officer and permanent secretary of the Cabinet Office.

Talking to *CSW* shortly before the launch of a new strategy for the use of data and digital technologies across government, he adds that the aim was to deliver "a shorter, more focused document, that's very specific in terms of what it wants to achieve, and how it's going to do that".

The strategy, titled *Transforming for a Digital Future,* was developed by the Central Digital and Data Office (CDDO), working in collaboration with departments.

This in itself is something of a "change in tone", Chisholm acknowledges, when compared with the wave of technology transformation that followed the founding of the Government Digital Service in late 2011.

"GDS, at the beginning, had a lot of attitude – which was probably [done] deliberately, to try and cut into a sense of inertia, or a lack of awareness in the wider civil service," he says. "But, 10 years on, it is very different, and a lot of the capacity and capability now is in departments. If you look at HMRC, DWP, MoD, Home Office, or MoJ – they've all got really big digital teams of their own."

In addition to a headline target of achieving £1.1bn in efficiencies by 2025 through smarter use of tech and data, the strategy aims to deliver on three core objectives.

The first is to "exceed expectations" by delivering "policies and services that are really user-centric and fit for the digital age", according to Chisholm.

"Equipping civil servants for this digital reality" is the second central ambition, he adds. The third is "to recognise that digital and data are key to providing a more efficient service, a lower cost service, and better standards... and also to do that in a way that is really secure".

To measure and track such improvements, the strategy unveils an online dashboard which will provide a performance rating for 75 of government's most-used digital services – such as applying for Universal Credit or making a claim for child benefit. The ambition is to ensure that, over the next three years, at least 50 of these achieve the top-level "Great" rating.

The One Login platform developed by GDS aims to provide citizens with a single, unified means of accessing all these services – and more. It is intended to replace an existing patchwork of almost 200 separate online accounts and 44 different login methods currently in use across departments.

The system is now ready to begin on-boarding its first services, and the strategy sets out an initial target of ensuring all departments have "an adoption strategy and roadmap" by April 2023, Chisholm tells *CSW*.

The aim is to bring all "services on board by 2025...and we're confident we can deliver that", he adds.

Produced in association with *CSW*'s sister title *PublicTechnology*

PT Public Technology.net

"Obviously, everyone wants that to go as quickly as possible, but we also recognise that there is a big responsibility to get this right – these are mission-critical services," Chisholm says. "So, we're doing it progressively."

Alongside these improvements to digital platforms, the strategy sets out an intention to make it easier for departments to share data with one another, in support of designing policy and delivering services. This work will include the creation of new catalogues of departmental data, as well as the implementation of government-wide standards and governance.

"GDS, at the beginning, had a lot of attitude, to try and cut into a sense of inertia. But, 10 years on, it is very different, and a lot of the capacity and capability now is in departments"

The ultimate goal is to ensure that "critical data assets are available and in use across government", Chisholm says. In doing so, government can learn from its own achievements during the pandemic – such as the creation, during the lockdown of 2020, of the online service allowing clinically vulnerable people to access support and services.

"That was done at pace supported by GDS," Chisholm says, "but required interworking between NHS, the Department of Health and Social Care, Defra, DLUHC and local authorities – six different institutions, sharing data safely and correctly...But it's not just in crisis moments or under the shadow of the pandemic that we need to do that: it needs to be something that we're able to do whenever we need to do, to provide great services."

Central support

Although it was only established last year, the CDDO has already shown its efficacy in working with departments to help deliver their digital ambitions, according to Chisholm

The Cabinet Office perm sec, who previously led the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, says that during his time in government he has often seen "departments put forward really good [digital] plans to the centre [of government] seeking financial support – but it has been little bit hit and miss in the past" as to whether they received backing.

The preparation for the 2021 spending review saw a "much more sophisticated and well-coordinated approach", in which CDDO worked closely with the Treasury to try and ensure there was more hit than miss in departments' requests for digital funding.

CDDO helped assess bids for support totalling £12bn – resulting in endowments of £8bn. "That is a high score in itself – and we've never spent so much money on delivering digital and data," Chisholm says. "But I think, also, it shows there was a very robust process, and it's good that... [departments] feel, if they put forward a strong proposal, it gets support."

A key objective of many of those bids was reducing reliance on legacy tech – defined by the Cabinet Office as any system or business process that is considered: end-of-life; impossible to update; no longer supported by suppliers; no longer cost-effective; or considered to be above government's acceptable risk threshold.

Chisholm says that the continued prevalence of legacy tech across government is, to an extent, typical of any "large service organisation that has been going for many years". But, while businesses can eliminate ageing kit by simply discontinuing the product or service supported by it, this is not an option for government.

"That's one of the contributory factors to why there's a lot of legacy in government," he says. "But, also, in the past there has sometimes been a temptation to go after the exciting new project, and not do full justice to the need to update some of our older systems."

The Spending Review promised £2.6bn to be spent across departments to address legacy IT and reduce cyber risk. To help guide the allocation of this money, Chisholm says "a cross-government framework for assessing legacy systems" has been developed.

If a system is rated red under this framework it will need to have an agreed remediation plan developed and put in place.

The scope of the new digital strategy is not confined to just technology, but also to those who use it. The document outlines a plan to boost the digital and data skills of 90% of senior civil servants, and also pledges to provide additional training to the same proportion of DDaT professionals at least once a year.

This commitment to training forms part of a proposition that Chisholm hopes will enable government to attract talented technologists.

"The digital and data market is red hot at the moment, and it's not only government departments or public bodies who are finding it difficult to recruit top talent," he says. "The thing which we offer which nobody else can offer, is the incredible scale at which you're operating...the chance to come in and work on national projects is very exciting. We have been able to attract people into the civil service on that opportunity – not necessarily maxing out on earnings, but maxing out on satisfaction and impact."

Chisholm also cites the availability of top digital roles throughout the country – rather than just London and the south east – as another selling point. Extending and strengthening the DDaT pay framework will also help departments seeking to attract new technical talent.

"In common with our aspirations for other parts of civil service reform, I want people to feel they come into government, not necessarily for a job for life – because it isn't going to be for many people – it hasn't been for me, I've come in and out of government. But it should be, without doubt, an opportunity to work on really important national work that's incredibly valuable to your fellow citizens, and is amazingly interesting and challenging." ■

£1.1bn
Efficiencies to be achieved by 2025

50
Number of major digital services that will achieve 'Great' rating within three years

90%
Proportion of senior civil servants to receive additional digital and data training

SERVING A PURPOSE

In the 2022 *CSW* Leadership Lecture, Antonia Romeo, Ministry of Justice permanent secretary, described the importance of leading with purpose, and creating the conditions for people to thrive. **Tevye Markson** reports

"I've been asked to talk about leadership and how the model is changing and the sort of leadership that we're going to need over the next five years," Antonia Romeo said as she began the *CSW* Leadership Lecture 2022. "But really, I'm going to talk about leading with purpose."

To lead with purpose, the Ministry of Justice permanent secretary continued, it is necessary to consider the context within which you are leading, so you can adapt to it.

Romeo said the key developments over the past five years – Covid, geopolitical tensions and new technologies – mean that leadership over the *next* five years will be about bringing in the best talent, creating genuine progression and setting a culture of purpose.

"What all this adds up to is a world that is fundamentally different from the one that we imagined not just before the pandemic two years ago, but even six months ago. And, as the global economy changes at pace, the way we work changes, so do the expectations of the people we lead."

At the event, sponsored by global management consultancy Bain and Company, Romeo was joined by Bain's UK managing partner James Hadley, who shared insight from recent research into the future of organisations, and his perspectives on humanising leadership and work.

Creating the right conditions

"At its heart, leadership is about people and creating the conditions for them to thrive," Romeo said.

Both Romeo and Hadley agreed that one of the biggest challenges for leaders now is the battle for talent. However the good news for departments looking to recruit is that the ethos of the civil service fits squarely with the values and goals of the next generation.

"Generation Z is soon going to surpass millennials as the most populous generation," Romeo said. "It's a generation that values salary less than some previous generations, so they're opting for more interesting and more purposeful work.

"This is great news for the public sector because the focus that we have on delivering interesting, purposeful work is really significant."

For Romeo, winning this battle will mean not just recruiting far and wide – exemplified by the government's plans to move 22,000 jobs out of London by 2030 – but also creating the right culture and ensuring that, once in the civil service, "the opportunity [for officials] to develop skills and move is second to none".

"In my view, leadership over the next five years will be bringing in the best talent, creating genuine progression and opportunities for that talent and setting a culture of purpose," she said.

"Ultimately, it's about creating a culture in which colleagues can take

Bring out the best Antonia Romeo shares her views on leadership

Tom Hampson

pride, a work ethic characterised by the desire to serve the public, and, in everything we do, leading with purpose."

Nurturing talent

Hadley argued that filling organisations with the right people will be about nurturing talent as well as finding it, in a move away from "talent taking to talent making".

"Rather than defaulting to 'quick, call the headhunter', the default should be to supporting the talent you have to reach full potential," he said.

Leaders will need to invest more time into understanding their employees as human beings and coaching them, Hadley added.

"This means addressing not just what happens at work, but what happens outside work.

"We need to move from a one-size-fits-all approach ... to something that is much more nuanced, flexible and more human," he said.

The rise of automation is helping to achieve this by allowing organisations to focus on roles that need distinctively human skills, such as problem solving, creativity, and interpersonal connections, Hadley argued.

Alongside the focus on talent making and supporting employees as individuals, Hadley argued that leaders would need to strike a challenging balance between fostering a "greater sense of shared culture and purpose", while allowing for more and more diversity within each organisation.

"We're going to have people with different skills, different affinity groups, different locations in the country, and different motivations," he said. "So while the organisation needs a shared vision and purpose, a monolithic culture isn't going to work. In a sense, we need to allow for tribes within the tribe, without tribalism."

Working leaner and smarter

Neither Romeo nor Hadley shied away from a key challenge facing civil service leaders right now – the plan to return to 2016 staffing levels.

Romeo said this will mean the civil service must become leaner and smarter. "The prime minister and the cabinet have been clear that as a workforce, we've got to adapt to the new reality and deliver high quality public services at a more affordable cost," she said.

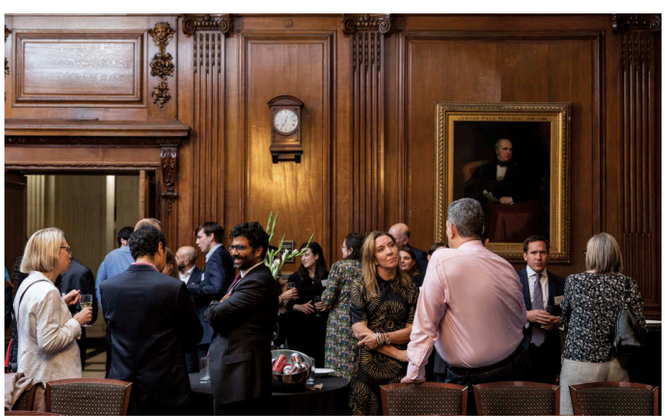
"It's going to mean delivering efficiencies and prioritising as well as innovating," Romeo added.

"You can't just do that through efficiency savings. We need genuine service delivery transformation so we can operate the same services at a reduced cost."

To illustrate this, Romeo pointed to an example from the MoJ's own transformation programme – the online probate service which was launched last year.

"This enables people to apply and pay for probate online which speeds up an emotional process, keeping it straightforward and efficient at a time of real stress," she said. "So that's a better service, but it's also a more efficient way to deliver that service."

Up front James Hadley (left) and Antonia Romeo



"At its heart, leadership is about people and creating the conditions for people to thrive" ***Antonia Romeo***

Change is being driven by more than efficiency, of course. Government must also respond to the ways in which technology is "rapidly transforming how we live and work," Romeo said, pointing to a rapid rise in digital trade alongside an increased dependence on digital technology driven, in part, by the pandemic.

"This has changed the way that people expect public services to be delivered," she said. Citizens want services which are "just as digital and just as easy" as the apps they use to do their supermarket shopping.

"This means we need to adapt how we deliver services, but also we've got to be able to regulate entirely new sectors, some of which we hadn't even thought of just a few years ago," she noted. "So we've got to be developing skills in government that we didn't previously need."

Diversity not a 'nice to have'

In this context, the innovation which comes from diverse thinking is all the more important. Romeo argued that fostering diversity – from female representation, to ethnic minorities, to geographical location – is vital to creating the right culture across an organisation.

"The civil service has come a long way since the image of white middle class Sir Humphrey in oak-panelled offices", Romeo said, highlighting the increase in female representation in the senior civil service – from 17% in 1996 to nearly 50% in 2021 – and the increase in ethnic minorities in the civil service – up from 9% in 2010 to 14% in 2021.

"We're now more representative of the people we serve and we as leaders must continue to do all we can to be as representative of society as possible."

But she said the figures for both decline the higher up you go and "that is something else we've got to focus on".

"If we really want to draw on the talents of the widest possible range of people, we've got to be a model for social mobility and a workplace where merit matters above all else," she said.

"And to be completely clear, diversity and inclusion is not a 'nice to have' for the civil service, it is absolutely crucial. Because if you work for the government, you work for the people, and we've got to be more representative of the people that we serve, and more innovative and making decisions in the best interests of the British people." ■

IN ALL SERIOUSNESS

It's a quality often associated with good leadership, but what does it really mean to have gravitas, and is it still relevant in a diverse and inclusive workplace? **Una O'Brien** and **Pete Freeman** offer a fresh perspective on gravitas for the modern leader

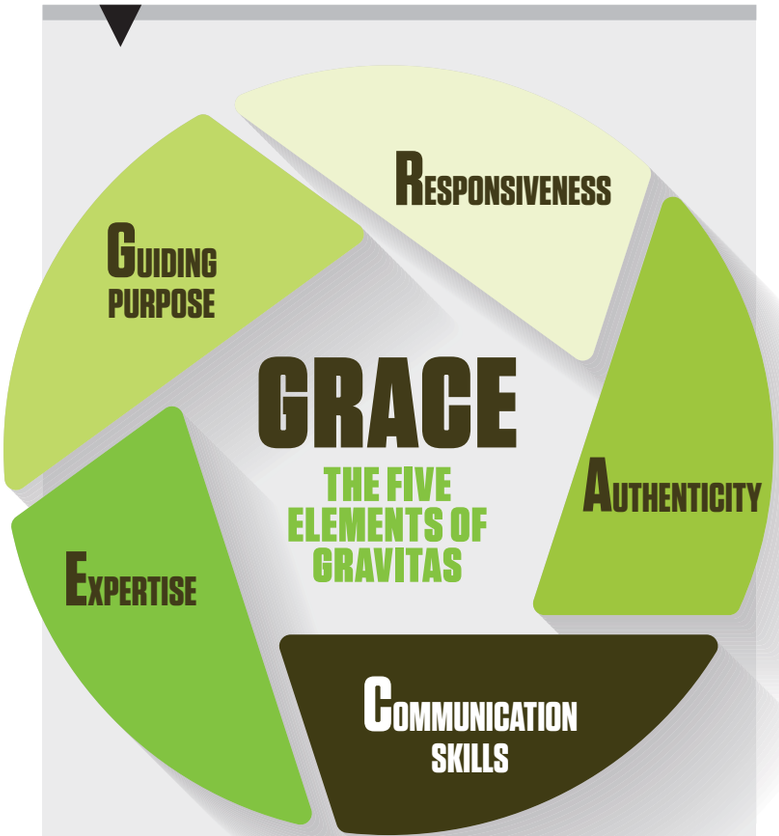
The term gravitas is used admiringly about highly regarded leaders and often comes up in conversation about leadership development and senior level recruitment in the civil service. There's no doubt the behaviours associated with gravitas are sought after by people wanting to be better leaders and by those aspiring to more senior positions. Across all sectors there's a clear sense that developing or being perceived as having gravitas is associated with enhanced responsibility and progression to senior leadership and board roles.

As coaches, we each work with people who ask for support explicitly to improve their gravitas. For some, their search is shorthand for: "I want to be better and more effective in handling challenges at work". Others are clear that, for them, it's all about how to have greater influence in decision making or seeking support to apply for a new job where recruiters are looking for evidence of gravitas.

Sometimes a client may have had feedback, perhaps from a line manager or a senior colleague about "the need to improve their gravitas" or that a "lack of gravitas" is what's holding them back. This can be unsettling. All too often such feedback is given without further explanation, leaving people uncertain about what is really meant and confused about their next steps. Even the word gravitas itself can meet a mixed reception suggesting, in some contexts, an uncomfortable feel of older, white male authority or an outmoded style of management.

We think much greater clarity is needed around the use of the term gravitas in personal and professional development as it should never be used, however unintentionally, to exclude people or hold them back.

So what exactly does it mean to have gravitas? It's certainly a quality we can see in others, though appearances alone don't tell the full story. It's also something deeper – a combina-



Guiding Purpose
Your thoughts and actions are clearly driven by your guiding purpose. You demonstrate humility making the most of your abilities by working with others, unconcerned with how clever you look and focused on sustainable progress towards your guiding purpose.

Responsiveness
You can remain calm with the self-control to retain grace under pressure. You are equally able to energise and inspire others to action. You are adaptable, both to the audience and to the moment, choosing how best to react, moving constructively towards your purpose.

Authenticity
You behave consistently with your values and your guiding purpose. You are driven by the need for self-development, continually learning and striving to better advance towards your goals. You are open to new ideas and new thinking.

Communication
You are able to mobilise thought and action in others through compelling communication skills. First and foremost, this means you listen to fully understand, rather than waiting to speak, or looking for weaknesses to exploit. You are courageous with what you say, but you remain sensitive; not alienating others, but bringing them with you.

Expertise
There is no gravitas without expertise. You may derive gravitas through expert knowledge or you may derive it from marshalling the expertise of others. Either way, you are always curious and open to different opinions. You are comfortable enough in your own skin to run towards what you don't yet know.

tion of behaviours that lead us to infer the person we see is responsible, serious in their intent and with the capability to make good decisions. People with gravitas are anchored in a deeper purpose, they hold our attention, they listen to us, are emotionally intelligent and can 'read the room'. They know to their core who they are. We respect their integrity and authenticity even when we might take a different perspective.

The differing interpretations of gravitas inspired us to research and produce our recent insight publication *Leading with Grace: a fresh perspective on gravitas at work*. We believe it is possible to reclaim gravitas as an entirely positive trait. Drawing on our experience as coaches, working with aspiring and established leaders across the private, public and third sectors, we have taken the best of gravitas and placed it in a modern, future-focused framework. In making transparent the positive behaviours underlying gravitas, we set out to make gravitas accessible and relevant to a wide and diverse range of 21st century leaders, and we invite anyone who wants to achieve more at work to integrate gravitas into their personal leadership style.

The GRACE framework
De-constructing gravitas into core capabilities helps make it more accessible, hence the five interconnected elements that comprise the Leading with GRACE framework (*see box left*).

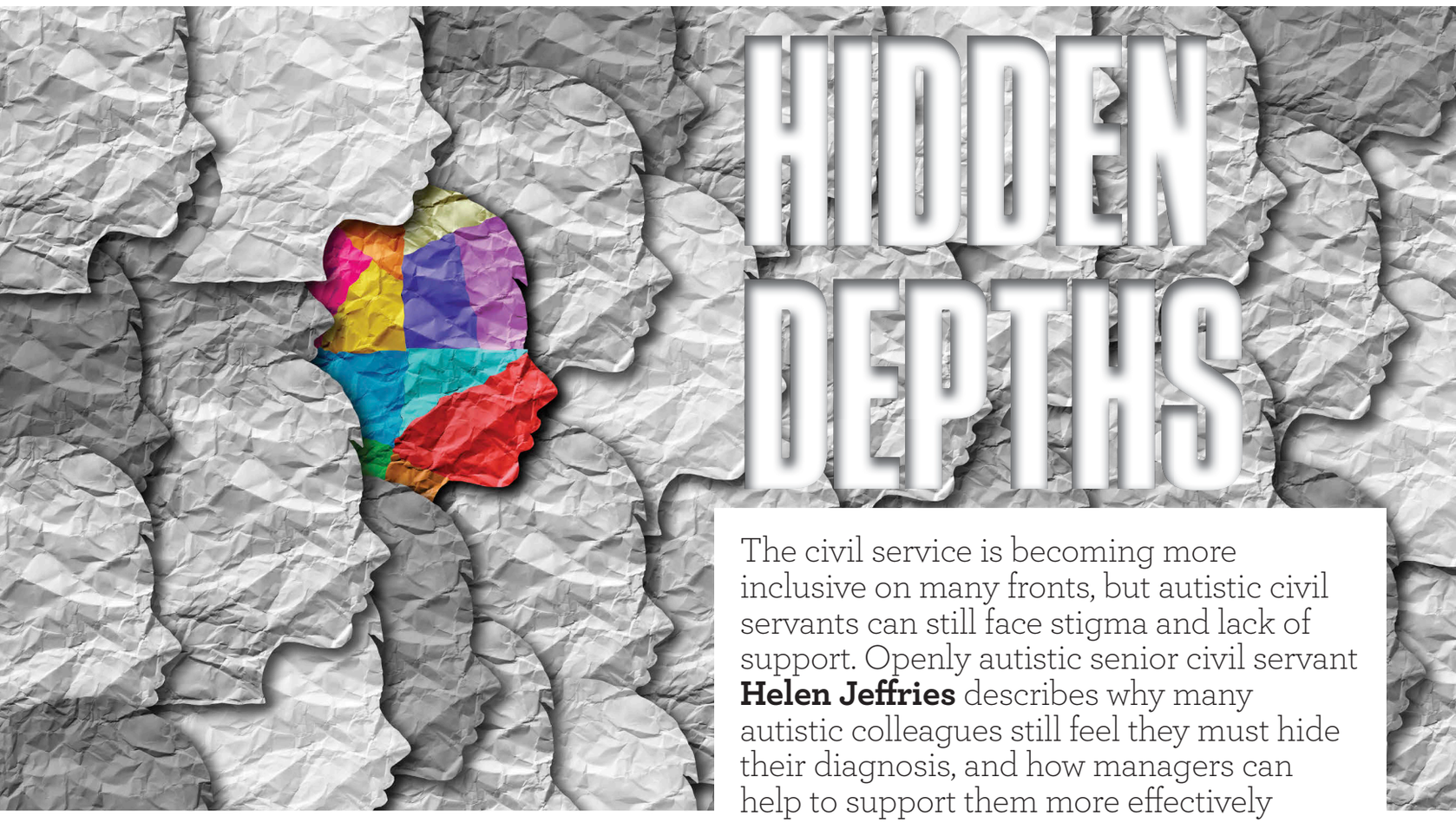
While we have separated the elements for clarity and focus, in the real world they are profoundly interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Focusing on any single element within GRACE could be helpful, but more useful may be to consider the elements in combination, each contributing to build the positive behaviours of a more modern approach to gravitas. In our publication we include questions for reflection and suggested actions – these are intended to offer possible next steps in the journey towards gravitas.

We are clear that the behaviours and mindsets associated with gravitas cannot be faked – it's not just about what's visible on the outside. The journey requires a focus on our internal world as well as on any external, visible impact. Our aim in creating and highlighting the five elements of the GRACE framework is to show that a firmer handshake, sharper clothing or a deeper voice alone should never be mistaken for gravitas. Rather, true gravitas invites a genuine focus on our internal world, in turn enabling greater collaboration with others, producing a more constructive impact on the world around us.

"A firmer handshake, sharper clothing or a deeper voice alone should never be mistaken for gravitas"

Gravitas, like wisdom, is one of those things you can't really claim yourself to have, yet it is within our gift to work on the things that mean others will perceive it in us. The GRACE framework offers a way in to gravitas and the good news is it's open to everyone, at any stage of their career, to engage with this journey. ■

Dame Una O'Brien, former permanent secretary at the Department of Health and Social Care, and Pete Freeman are independent coaches working with the Praesta Partnership. Their report can be downloaded at: praesta-uk.squarespace.com/leading-with-grace



HIDDEN DEPTHS

The civil service is becoming more inclusive on many fronts, but autistic civil servants can still face stigma and lack of support. Openly autistic senior civil servant **Helen Jeffries** describes why many autistic colleagues still feel they must hide their diagnosis, and how managers can help to support them more effectively

You've heard of autism – but did you realise you probably have autistic civil service colleagues? One or two people in a hundred are autistic so there's probably one in your directorate. But possibly that challenges your mental image of autism. Perhaps you know the shocking statistic that only about 22% of autistic adults are in any kind of work so you've assumed they couldn't be in your workplace. If they're here, why can't you see them?

In this article I'll set out why civil service work can suit autistic people well, but also that a lot of us are staying in our own autistic closet because we fear your reaction if we "come out"; sadly, in my own case, with some justification.

I got my autism diagnosis in adulthood more than 10 years into a civil service career, but I wasn't initially open about it because I feared the stigma. "Autistic" and "on the spectrum" are throwaway insults in our culture, and management discussions of colleagues displaying autistic traits are not always as respectful and supportive as they should be. Even our competency framework can feel stacked against us – civil servants are supposed to excel at "change", but being stressed by change is an autistic characteristic.

When I was diagnosed I was the only autistic G7 I knew – I couldn't find any senior openly autistic role models and I doubted my chances of career progression. But I kept trying – dogged persistence is an autistic trait – and have managed to reach the SCS, where I'm trying to be the role model I never had. It's through talking openly about my autism that I've learned how many civil servants are hidden autistics – they're happy to talk to me because I'm openly autistic, but not to talk to their non-autistic colleagues. Later on I'll offer some tips on how you can make their lives easier, but first I want to convince you that autistic colleagues can actually benefit you and the civil service.

"Even our competency framework can feel stacked against us – civil servants are supposed to excel at change, but being stressed by change is an autistic characteristic"

AUTISTIC STRENGTHS

Every autistic person is different, but we tend to share some common strengths as well as impairments, and our strengths line up remarkably well with the civil service code.

Integrity: We tend to take rules and commitments very seriously and find it difficult to break them, even when there's a significant personal cost; not following a rule may make us feel incredibly uncomfortable.

Honesty: Autistic people tend to be extremely honest and reliable because we find it difficult to lie. We're also reliable in that we generally won't state a thing is true unless we know what evidence backs the assertion up.

Objectivity: We're often precise and detail-oriented, which supports rigorous analysis. If there's evidence that's been overlooked, or doesn't appear to stack up, we'll spot it and probe what's going on, which really drives objectivity.

Impartiality: Impartiality means acting solely according to the merits of the case without being swayed by emotional or personal considerations and autistic people can have a gift for that, since find the logic behind a decision, and natural justice, matter strongly to us.

As well as being naturally wired to abide by the civil service code, autistic civil servants may have a number of other helpful qualities. We tend to be punctual and dependable about schedules and processes. We may also be able to take in and process a lot of information quickly and have an extremely good memory for detailed facts – so if you want someone to be able to quote which paragraph of the legislation applies, try an autistic colleague! Many autistics think visually, which means we can manipulate problems differently and come up with fresh solutions. New perspective needed? Worth trying that autistic colleague. And autistic people can concentrate very deeply for long periods when our attention is engaged. Need those thousand consultation responses analysed in depth? Well you can see where this is going...

WHY AUTISTICS DON'T SUCCEED

But what you've just read might lead you to see autistic colleagues through the lens of the stereotype that we're great for those data, spreadsheet and precision roles, and can't be trusted with policy. You may be picturing a colleague who you think is autistic and remembering that they seemed to need continual help and explanation to get policy work done. But have you considered that maybe you were part of the problem?

Civil service work depends on a web of cultural knowledge, assumptions and reading between the lines that everyone picks up over time. Autistic colleagues struggle to pick them up because we think literally, and because we almost never get the one-off explanation that would make things clear. Take a look at the box below to see some examples.

These are all actual examples of where an autistic colleague has failed to understand what they were being asked to do because they didn't pick up all the things that are implied in a simple statement. The colleague did what they were literally asked to do, and their manager concluded they were idle or stupid because they hadn't done the job properly. Autistic colleague and manager just didn't understand each other, and the autistic person was left failing, confused and distressed. Sometimes that person was me. To prevent that happening, all that was needed was for the unspoken assumptions to be spoken – clearly and literally – once. It's not a huge ask, but it could make an immense amount of difference.

TAKEAWAYS

To make we autistics feel more welcome and valued, there are three things I'd love this article to leave with you:

1. Autistic people are all around you, whether or not they're openly autistic;
2. Autistic people are a benefit for the civil service; and
3. You can help autistic civil servants learn the civil service language and conventions – their disability is likely to mean they can't do it instinctively, and they have to learn it like a new language.

If you'd like to find out more, please try the National Autistic Society website or the great autism internships run by Ambitious about Autism. ■

Helen Jeffries is currently a deputy director working on healthcare for Ukrainian refugees in the Department of Health and Social Care. Prior to that she was a deputy director in the Cabinet Office Covid Task Force, which she joined on loan from DHSC where she had been working on Covid response and the Covid Contact Tracing App. She was diagnosed autistic four years ago. "I thought then that being autistic was a total barrier to career progression as I couldn't see any openly autistic senior civil servants," she said. "Recent national crises have given me progression opportunities so now I'm attempting to be the open autistic role model I lacked myself."

What a manager actually says:	What an autistic colleague may understand that to mean:	What an autistic colleague needs to hear (at least once):	
"Arrange a meeting with Joe about X"	Contact Joe saying you would like to agree a time for a meeting about X	**Find out:** • how important and urgent X is; and • who Joe is and whether X matters to them.	**Using the information you've found out, judge:** • how hard to press Joe for a meeting • how soon, and • what meetings should be rearranged to make time for Joe • whether what Joe's diary has offered is soon enough. If not, get support to push Joe for something sooner.
"Talk to Joe about X"	Tell Joe about X	**Identify:** • what matters to our team about X and what we want to happen; and • what matters to Joe about X.	Discuss the similarities and differences with Joe. Record the outcome of your conversation with Joe in an email, including next steps on how to make progress with X.
"Draft a sub on X"	Make some judgements about what to do about X and write the text of a submission on the correct template	**Make some judgements about what to do about X based on the evidence, and write them down, but that's only the beginning. You also need to:** • find all the people whose policy area is connected to X; • talk to them about their views on X; • broker compromises;	• get senior people to help resolve disagreements; • check that everyone's happy with what you're putting in the sub; and • get it signed off by senior people. Ensure no-one is going to be surprised with what's in the sub when you send it!

A CIVIL SERVANT'S GUIDE TO

DELEGATED POWERS

Delegated powers in bills, while a necessary tool, can sometimes be a source of controversy. **Dheemanth Vangimalla**, a researcher at the Hansard Society, outlines the principles underlying the delegation of legislative powers, the checks that exist in parliament when those powers are sought in bills, and questions that a civil servant may wish to consider when seeking such powers

In November 2021, two House of Lords Committees – the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee (DPRRC) and the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee (SLSC) – expressed concerns about trends in the volume and nature of delegated powers sought by successive governments in recent years. To pursue its concerns, the DPRRC is reinstating its previous practice of publishing end-of-session reports. These may include reflections on departments' performance in respect of the delegation of powers in bills. So, what does a civil servant (perhaps on a bill team for the first time) need to know about delegated powers?

What are delegated powers?

Primary legislation is the laws made by parliament – known as bills during their passage through parliament, and acts of parliament once they have received royal assent. But parliament can confer its law-making power on ministers (and sometimes other authorised individuals and bodies), through provision in primary legislation. Such provisions – often to allow ministers to make orders or regulations (forms of delegated legislation) – are referred to as delegated powers.

How are delegated powers scrutinised by parliament?

Delegated powers contained in a bill can be scrutinised and amended by parliamentarians during the bill's passage, much like any other provision contained in the bill.

In the House of Lords, the DPRRC also carries out detailed specialist scrutiny of delegated powers, examining all

delegation of powers in almost all bills. There is no equivalent committee in the House of Commons. On a case-by-case basis for each bill introduced to the House of Lords, the DPRRC determines whether the bill contains any inappropriate delegation of legislative power or subjects those powers to an inappropriate degree of parliamentary scrutiny.

Complementary to the work of the DPRRC, the House of Lords Constitution Committee polices "the constitutional implications of all public bills coming before the House". In doing so, the Constitution Committee may also make recommendations on delegated powers contained in a bill, as part of its wider consideration of a bill's constitutional aspects.

Additionally, any relevant departmental select committee or joint committee tasked with scrutinising a particular bill, or conducting pre-legislative scrutiny of a draft bill, may also make recommendations on delegated powers contained in that (draft) bill.

Why might you include delegated powers in your bill?

It is unrealistic and undesirable for all law to be made by primary legislation, not least because of the limits of parliamentary time. There is no hard-edged line that clearly demarcates the boundary between what provision should be in primary and what should be in delegated legislation. However, over the years, certain guiding principles have emerged that inform where this boundary should lie.

Sources such as Constitution Committee reports, the (recently updated) Cabinet Office Guide to Making Legislation and the DPRRC's Guidance for Departments emphasise that matters that are "the essence of the bill" and "principal aspects of policy" ought to be in primary legislation, with only its detailed implementation left to delegated legislation.

Certain broad criteria have also been suggested to identify circumstances in which seeking delegated powers is appropriate, such as:

- The matter in question may need adjusting more often than parliament can be expected to legislate for by primary legislation.
- The use of delegated powers in a particular area may have strong precedent and be uncontroversial.
- The matter in question is expected to change in future, such as uprating for inflation.

Certain types of delegated powers are also often included in bills, such as commencement powers – which enable ministers to bring a law into force at a date later than the date it received royal assent – and powers to make consequential provision which enable ministers to amend or 'tidy up' the statute book after a bill has been passed. The Office of the Parliamentary Counsel has produced detailed guidance that identifies commonly occurring policy issues and analyses possible legislative solutions – some of which may involve delegated powers.

Why does appropriateness in seeking delegated powers matter?

While the speed, flexibility and adaptability of delegated legislation may be appealing (regardless of the government's political persuasion), there are at least three good reasons for civil servants to advise caution when it comes to seeking delegated powers, particularly in the context of incomplete policy development. Firstly, if policy development is incomplete, seeking a power in a bill only defers the legislative burden to a later date. Secondly, implementing controversial policy in delegated legislation exposes the legislation to the risk of legal challenge in ways that are not applicable to primary legislation. Regardless of how well-founded the legal challenge may be, such proceedings undoubtedly introduce costs, media implications, and extra burdens on civil servants' time.

Finally, controversial policy in delegated legislation does not escape critique by parliament, particularly in the House of Lords. Departments open themselves up to reputational risk from negative reports by the DPRRC and the SLSC. In some instances, ministers and civil servants may even be called in to attend oral evidence sessions on problematic pieces of delegated legislation.

"Controversial policy in delegated legislation does not escape critique by parliament"

What do you need to consider when including delegated powers in bills?

As the DPRRC's function is in effect "to police the boundary between primary and delegated legislation", its work provides the nearest thing to a form of jurisprudence (a theory of law, though in this case we may also call it legisprudence) in the area of delegated powers. As noted in the Cabinet Office Guide to Making Legislation, the "DPRRC's recommendations must be considered seriously to see whether it is possible to accept them… There is, therefore, benefit in departments anticipating the views of the DPRRC when drafting the bill to avoid the need for amendments".

With this in mind, once the decision has been made to include a delegated power in a bill, there are several factors to consider regarding the power's scope and its applicable parliamentary procedure. Some questions to ask include:

- Could the power as currently drafted be used to make much more wide-ranging change than is necessary to achieve the stated aim?
- Does the power include wording that widens ministerial discretion – wording such as to 'simplify or improve' or to make provision 'in connection with' a particular matter?
- Does the power have to exist in perpetuity?
- Is the power in substance one where there is a strong presumption for the affirmative parliamentary procedure to apply (such as 'Henry VIII powers' which allow ministers to alter the effect of primary legislation by delegated legislation)?
- Is the exercise of the power subject to a less stringent parliamentary procedure when compared to a similar power under existing law?
- Would it be appropriate to incorporate a 'sifting mechanism', where a parliamentary sifting committee can recommend an 'upgrade' of the parliamentary procedure applicable to a piece of delegated legislation?

We address these questions and more in our recent *Compendium of Legislative Standards for Delegating Powers in Primary Legislation.* The standards were derived by systematically analysing over one hundred DPRRC reports, to get a sense of the Committee's thinking and concerns. We produced the compendium particularly with the needs of civil servants in mind when preparing bills and justifying delegated powers in supporting documents.

The compendium can be downloaded at www.hansardsociety.org.uk/publications. ■

Dheemanth Vangimalla is a researcher at Hansard Society. If you have feedback on this article or the compendium, or if you would like to discuss this topic further, please email Dheemanth.Vangimalla@hansardsociety.org.uk

A VIEW TO A SKILL?

The civil service has ambitious plans for recruiting apprentices into its own ranks. The programme has been excelling in some areas, but is stalling in others. **Jim Dunton** takes a look, and asks how the huge headcount reductions on the horizon might affect the future of the agenda

Five years ago, the then-civil service chief executive John Manzoni and Cabinet Office minister Ben Gummer committed to hiring at least 30,000 apprentices in England as part of a drive to show departments "leading by example" with their skills and training offer.

Against a backdrop of then-prime minister Theresa May's pre-levelling up "a country that works for everyone" mantra, the 2017 apprenticeships strategy targeted delivering 2.3% of the civil service workforce as "apprenticeship starts" by 2020.

Manzoni and Gummer said that by embedding apprenticeships in people strategies, talent management and career pathways, a modern employment offer and a "viable route" into the civil service, and up through its ranks, could be offered.

"Our apprentices will gain the transferable skills needed to succeed in the modern economy, while contributing to [the] manifesto commitment to create three million high-quality new apprenticeships across the country by 2020," they said.

An April 2021 update on the strategy pledged to continue the 2.3% target for apprentice starts in 2021-2022. It also confirmed the 30,000 apprentices figure had been hit, as of the end of the 2020-21 financial year.

In April this year, civil service chief operating officer Alex Chisholm and current Cabinet Office parliamentary secretary Heather Wheeler unveiled a new three-year strategy for apprenticeships, with a promise that the "quantitative would be outweighed by qualitative" and civil service apprenticeships would be better embedded into departmental HR planning.

Curiously for a strategy pledging a shift away from numbers, the document targets a doubling of apprentices as a proportion of the whole civil ser-

vice headcount in England. It states that leaders want 5% of civil servants to be apprentices by 2025, the end of the period that the document covers.

Wheeler and Chisholm's foreword to the document acknowledges there is room for improvement and pledges civil service apprenticeships "will be tailored to align with career pathways and provide relevant on-the-job opportunities". They also note a need to "attract and retain people with the aptitude and appetite for learning and public service, from all backgrounds".

The strategy itself is direct about the need to more closely embed apprenticeships into departments' HR culture, stating that they will be "integrated" into skills and capability plans, ways of working and people strategies.

"This includes supporting professions and departments to develop career pathways inclusive of apprenticeships – and will therefore ensure that standards are aligned to wider government reforms, among them our commitments in the Declaration on Government Reform," it says.

Put another way, apprenticeships have not been receiving the strategic focus they should from all departments. Similarly, the strategy's call for a "strengthened role" for the civil service professions in the "design, procurement and evaluation" of apprenticeships suggests current weakness.

HM Revenue and Customs and the Department for Work and Pensions have been two of the biggest employers of apprentices in government, according to the most recently published Cabinet Office statistics, which came out last year. They show HMRC registered a total of 7,798 apprenticeship starts between 2017 and 2021. The figure at DWP was 6,120.

Other data shows some departments have a 100% completion rate for apprenticeships between 2016 and 2021, but HMRC had a completion rate of 18% and DWP's rate was 30%. The cross civil-service average was 35%.

HMRC put a pause on new entrants joining its apprenticeship schemes and hired an independent consultant to investigate how its offer could be improved when retention problems worsened during the pandemic.

People and organisational development director Hannah Watson says in the strategy that the department saw "rising frustration" among apprentices and line managers when working arrangements had to change because of Covid. She says apprentices "increasingly began withdrawing from schemes".

Civil Service World understands departments' retention problems predated the pandemic.

Cabinet Office data suggests that as of last year 46% of apprentices were "satisfied" with their apprenticeship, an increase of 15 percentage points on 2020, supporting reports of lockdown problems. The lowest 2021 rate was among DWP apprentices, just 27% of whom were "satisfied". The figure was 38% at HMRC.

HMRC's Watson says the consultant her department brought in recommended remedies including external audit benchmarking to ensure the quality of learning and support were rectified.

"While HMRC recognises there is still progress to be made, it is now seeing better learner outcomes through end-point assessment, and receiving substantially better feedback from learners and coaches alike," she says.

The strategy says HMRC's multi-year "learning transformation programme" will form the basis for addressing some of the department's future questions around its status as a "great place to work" and the broader Civil Service Apprenticeships Strategy.

More widely, the strategy says ensuring civil service apprenticeships are "high quality and relevant" will see focus placed on better training for line managers; ensuring learning experiences are "engaging and stretching opportunities that are business relevant"; and aligning apprenticeship standards to profession capability frameworks.

Wynne Parry, a national officer with the FDA union and its apprenticeships lead, is supportive of the strategy and the Cabinet Office's approach.

"I genuinely feel that there's an attempt here to give the apprentices scheme the profile it should have," he says. "One of the points that we've made is that departments should see this as equivalent to the Fast Stream in terms of its value and importance.

"It's quite clear that there have been a number of issues with how the scheme's been running. I think there's a real desire to tighten up governance and get more strategic senior-leadership backing within departments for apprentices so they're much more part of overall workforce planning, rather than being something they felt they had to do to satisfy the Cabinet Office."

"There's a real desire to get more senior leadership backing in departments for apprentices so they're much more part of overall workforce planning, rather than being something they had to do to satisfy the Cabinet Office"
Wynne Parry, FDA

Parry questions whether it would have taken so long to address some of the problems that have emerged with apprenticeships if they had arisen in the flagship graduate-recruitment programme, however.

Another area in which the apprenticeships strategy pledges action is in improving the quality of bought-in learning provision. "We will work closely with market leaders to make sure we forge the best possible partnerships between providers and the civil service professions," it states. "This will see us regularly evaluate providers to make sure we are improving the breadth, quality and relevance of our standards."

Parry says there is a recognition among the main civil service unions that the quality of suppliers for apprenticeship training needs to be addressed, and suggests insufficient audit as an area of concern.

"There's a reference in the strategy about focusing on quality not quantity, and I think this is

»

what it is referencing," he adds.

For its part, PCS – the civil service's biggest union – has said it "broadly welcomes" the apprenticeships strategy, at the same time as expressing concerns over low pay, equality and engagement with unions. Parry agrees the Cabinet Office should be seeking to get more union input.

Just as the 2017 apprenticeships strategy sought to align itself with Theresa May's stated aim of helping "left behind" people and areas, the 2022 version makes reference to the part apprenticeships have to play in the levelling-up agenda.

The new strategy says apprenticeships will be "fundamental" to the civil service moving more career opportunities into local hubs and enabling the civil service to "tap into wider labour markets, such as school leavers and career changers". It says additional investment will be made in schools, higher education and further education outreach initiatives, and that the civil service will look to ensure that its regional apprenticeship headcount is proportionate to the overall size of its civil service workforce.

However, questions remain about the extent to which the government's controversial proposals to reduce the civil service headcount by 91,000 over the next three years – announced via the *Daily Mail*, two weeks after the strategy was launched – will impact apprenticeships.

Departments are currently working up proposals for delivering on the headcount reductions, and additional controls on recruitment are likely to be part of methods for delivering a higher magnitude of cuts than was previously anticipated.

Rhys Clyne, senior researcher at the Institute for Government, says any blanket recruitment freeze would have "obvious" risks for apprenticeships and knock-on impacts for departmental efficiency in the medium- and long-term.

"They are high-quality and fairly inexpensive recruitees," Clyne says of apprentices. "These are often very talented officials who go on to progress in the civil service, or have come in from other routes."

Cabinet Office data shows that around one-third of civil

"[Apprentices] are often very talented officials who go on to progress in the civil service"
Rhys Clyne, Institute for Government

service apprenticeship starts between 2016 and 2021 were existing civil servants starting new training programmes.

Clyne said limiting the recruitment of apprentices to drive efficiency savings would be a mistake.

"Headcount reduction based on arbitrary targets is not a particularly direct route to efficiency and financial savings as budgetary targets," he says. "Part of the value in apprentices comes in creating and nurturing those pools of talent for years to come and bringing people into the civil service early in their careers, or from other career backgrounds, who might then be able to progress."

Clyne adds that as apprentices represent "quite a diverse pool of recruits", any attempts to reduce recruitment will have implications for other civil service goals.

"The apprenticeship strategy notes that in September last year 42% of apprentices came from working-class backgrounds," he says. "So the aims in the Declaration on Government Reform and the Civil Service Diversity and Inclusion Strategy need to be considered in any decisions taken on the recruitment of apprentices."

He also notes that any reduction in hiring targets for apprentices will potentially be felt in efforts to rebalance the civil service headcount away from the capital.

The FDA's Parry is less pessimistic, but acknowledges that any plans to reduce the size of a workforce creates concerns about the reduction of learning opportunities.

"Part of it will be how far ministers determine that social mobility and the levelling up agenda still are paramount and whether they see apprenticeships as important to that," he says.

"Are they going to be saying to departments 'that's going to continue whatever happens'?"

He notes that the 5% figure was created "in an atmosphere that was mindful of a reducing civil service", but not one facing the scale of reductions that are now being presented to departments.

Civil Service World asked the Cabinet Office how the apprenticeships strategy might be affected by plans to deliver on the 91,000-job-cuts target that has followed on its heels. It did not provide an answer.

However, it said the strategy would result in completion rates for apprenticeships rising as apprenticeships were better integrated with career pathways, "providing clearer value for apprentices to complete their programmes". ■

Why it's vital to automate ID verification in a digital world

With an increasing number of public services being made available online, there has been a corresponding growth in fraud.

This makes it essential that those in the public sector confirm the identity of those they are providing services to.

Today, the best way to deliver accurate and fast identity verification is to automate the process.

Electronic ID verification (eIDV)

A good place to start is to use an automated eIDV service that supports cross-checks against an individual's contact data in real-time, as they complete an online application process, while ensuring the user experience isn't compromised. It's only by using an eIDV service that matches the name, address, date of birth, email, or phone number against reputable data streams such as government agency, credit agency and utility records, that it's possible to effectively confirm the ID of an individual. Address validation – matching a name to an address – is a particularly important part of the process when it comes to fraud prevention.

Additionally, with eIDV it's possible to strengthen governance by aiding compliance with 'know your customer' (KYC) or citizen, and anti-money laundering (AML) regulations.

Biometric technology

In combination with eIDV, automated biometric technology plays an important role in verifying identity, without the need for time-consuming security questions and passwords – improving the user experience. A tool utilising optical character recognition (OCR) can check the validity of ID documentation in real-time, by successfully examining the image in the master ID documents with the selfie provided by the applicant or customer to see if they match.

It's important that the biometric service delivers liveness checks to prevent fraudsters using creative methods like 2D images and video playback to trick the facial verification technology and 'prove' they are the person they are impersonating. This requires a 'challenge response' where the individual is requested to blink to confirm eye movement and proof of life.

Sanctions / watchlists

Access a service that is able to provide all the global sanctions (watchlist) data from governments and international bodies, such as the UN and EU, in one place; one that has the technology to automatically update new sanctions information as soon as it's announced. This is critical with the large number of sanctions being announced against Russia and Belarus.

Automated vs manual checks

Automating ID verification is significantly better than the physical, time consuming, and more costly checks that traditionally take place behind the scenes at public bodies. With manual checks human error is always a possibility, as it's not easy for staff to check documents for authenticity. Also, employees can't be expected to know all ID document types, which can cause review-related delays. Additionally, sourcing those with sanctions against them using a search engine is not best practice, particularly with watchlists readily available.

The accuracy, speed, user experience and cost benefits offered by the automation powering eIDV, biometrics and watchlists are far superior to any manual approach to ID verification, and they provide a fully auditable pathway should that be needed for reference. It's why automating identity verification today and in the future is the way forward.

Visit Melissa at **stand 43** at **Civil Service Live London (5-6 July)** to find out more about our market leading ID verification and data quality services. Or Email: **barley.laing@melissa.com** Tel: **0207 718 0070** Website: **www.melissa.com/uk**

By Barley Laing, the UK Managing Director at Melissa

melissa

SERVANTS OF THE PEOPLE

The civil service is changing.

Over the last decade it has become more diverse on almost every front, so that by March 2021 the proportion of women, disabled people and those from minority ethnic backgrounds in the civil service matched, or nearly matched, the wider economically active population.
There is, of course, more to be done. Representation of minority groups at senior levels is still too low. Socio-economic diversity is a particular challenge and geographic diversity is still in its early stages.
Despite this, it's true to say that the stereotype of faceless bureaucrats pushing pens in Whitehall has long gone. Civil servants come from all walks of life, and most of them work on the front line, delivering services to the public across the country in a range of important roles.
In this special report, *CSW* profiles officials from across the country to show the breadth of their work and diversity of their backgrounds.

This is the modern civil service. »

TEALE

APPRENTICE, LONDON

Teale Cunningham is an economic analyst in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. His role is part of the Government Economic Service Degree Apprenticeship Programme

When and why did you become a civil service apprentice?
I became interested in economics at sixth form due to the way it can help solve global concerns such as climate change. The media coverage of the EU referendum, which brought the political world into the limelight, made me realise that the civil service would be a great place to make a difference.

I started looking for opportunities and saw an advert on Twitter for the Government Economic Service Degree Apprenticeship Programme – a brand new apprenticeship enabling anyone to become a government economist with just three A-Levels or equivalent qualifications. It seemed like the perfect fit! I started in September 2019 as part of the very first cohort.

"I've had fantastic opportunities. I had not expected to develop so quickly – I've briefed ministers, analysed policy and markets and modelled parts of the economy"

What did you do before becoming a civil service apprentice?
Before becoming a civil service apprentice, I primarily spent my time trying to remember the process for DNA replication. I was previously at the Bishop's Stortford High School studying A-Level economics, maths and biology.

Did you know much about the civil service before you joined – and how does it compare to your preconceptions?
I imagined that life in politics would be a lot like in *Yes, Minister* and *The Thick of It*.

On my first day I actually told my line manager how surprisingly calm the office was compared the world I had imagined – to quite a bit of laughter.

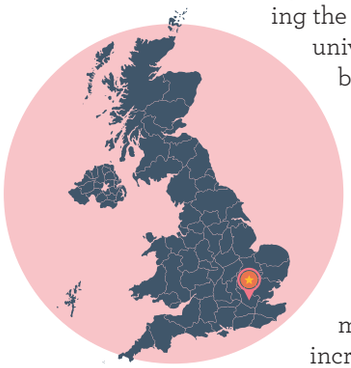
However, my biggest surprise was how supportive everyone in the civil service is, no matter their seniority. It's a great environment for professional development – particularly as an apprentice.

Tell us what you do and how it helps citizens?
I work as an economic analyst modelling policy and economic scenarios on a Computable General Equilibrium model – please don't switch off yet!

I'm based in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs so I primarily look at how policy changes involving food and agricultural sectors (e.g. new trade deals) affect businesses like farms, consumers (i.e. all of us) and the environment including carbon emissions.

Policy changes almost always create winners and losers. I try and identify who those will be and what the government could do to make sure those who lose out have other, equal opportunities to prosper.

How did your role change over the pandemic?
Like many others, I worked remotely during the pandemic – though my university study had always been delivered through distanced learning.



My role at the time – supporting the transformation of the UK farming industry – started to focus on the impact of the pandemic on farms. While markets adjusted to this incredible shift from restaurants and cafes to take aways and supermarkets, it was vital to ensure farms were able to continue operating and supply food to the country.

Having this sense of purpose helped me persevere through the sudden lifestyle changes which the pandemic imposed on us all.

Can you see yourself staying on in the civil service, or using the skills you've learnt to explore other opportunities?
The civil service offers a wide variety of opportunities for when I complete my apprenticeship in Summer 2023. These range from promotion, to becoming more specialised in trade and international economics, to leaving economics altogether for another civil service profession.

If I do end up leaving the civil service, I feel like I will be in a good position given the fantastic opportunities I've had. I had not expected to develop so quickly – I have briefed ministers, analysed policy and markets and modelled parts of the economy! So I'm very grateful for what I've been able to do here in such a short space of time. ■

NICOLA

PRISON GOVERNOR, MILTON KEYNES

Nicola Marfleet has worked in prisons for 22 years and is currently in charge of HMP Woodhill, where she strives to reduce the number of future victims by changing the lives of prisoners

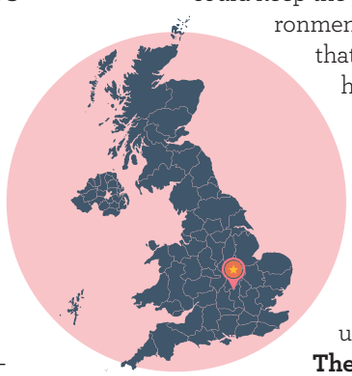
When and why did you join the civil service?
I joined in 2000, as a prison officer in Kent. It wasn't a career I'd even considered, but I'd had an introduction to being "behind the walls" when I'd been invited into Maidstone prison a couple of years earlier.

It was one of those pivotal life moments that you don't see coming. I was talking to a man in the chapel, and it wasn't till he walked away that I realised he was a prisoner. In that moment, all my misconceptions about prison were shattered. He was "so normal" and not what I had thought a prisoner would be like. I continued to volunteer for three years until I joined HM Prison and Probation Service.

What did you do before?
I joined straight from university and a variety of short temping jobs, including working in a strawberry factory and for a sorting office in Royal Mail. The experience in both these basic level jobs taught me who I wanted to be as an employee, a teammate and a leader.

I made an early commitment to work hard, to use every experience to learn, and to be kind to others. Instead of seeing setbacks as something to feel discouraged about, I've intentionally used every moment as an opportunity to grow. Even now, as governor at HMP Woodhill, I am still using things I learnt back then.

Tell us what you do and how it helps citizens?
I am responsible for looking after an enclosed community of 1,000 people. Every day is about keeping people safe, caring for them "with humanity" (I love that it is written in our Statement of Purpose on my ID badge!), and helping people grow positively.



How we do that is different for someone serving two years or two decades, but at the heart of everything I do is a passion to make prison a transformative experience. Each day is different: incident management, making difficult decisions and, on the good days, celebrating achievements. Ultimately, it is about reducing the number of future victims.

How did your role change during the pandemic?
The past two years have been the most challenging of my career. Woodhill managed to keep Covid completely out for 18 months, but in that time, we had to literally lock down, and most days the regime felt like one of those "eat, sleep, repeat" t-shirts you can buy.

With 22 years' experience of working in prisons, I couldn't have believed that we could keep the prison stable in that environment, but I am deeply grateful that it was. Now the challenge has shifted – we have a huge proportion of our staff who joined during Covid and so have never seen how the prison operated before. I have an enduring respect for those who have stayed working alongside us showing grit and courage.

There's a stereotype that prison governors have to be extremely tough. Do you think that's accurate? What other attributes are important to do the job well?
Prison governors must be extremely resilient. There is no requirement to be tough. As a woman in frontline prison leadership, I have most often had people mistake kindness I've shown for weakness.

I remember when I first joined, a prison officer said "she won't last two weeks".

"I remember when I first joined, a prison officer said: 'She won't last two weeks.' That spurred me on"

That spurred me on. I did my advanced tornado (riot) training and was actively deployed to incidents over four years.

At one stage, I became the only female governor leading a high security prison. Grit, determination, compassion and empathy are essential attributes. And overall, it's having the integrity and humility to keep turning up, learning from your mistakes and going again. ■

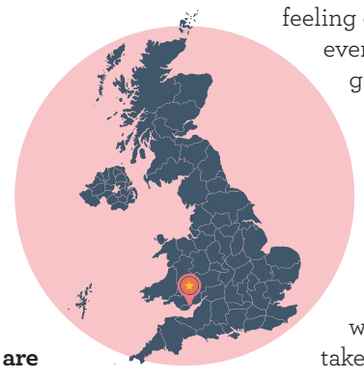
IOANA

CUSTOMER SERVICE ADVISOR, CARDIFF

Ioana Sur, from Cardiff via Transylvania, helps people navigate the tax system as a customer service advisor for HM Revenue and Customs

When and why did you join the civil service?
I came to the UK in 2010. Before joining HM Revenue and Customs I worked for the technology firm HP as a technician. When I was ready for a change, I put my CV on several sites and then had an offer from one agency. It sounded very different from what I've done before. But I applied, was offered it and I've been with HMRC since 2017.

What do you do and how does it help citizens?
At the moment I'm doing web chat, but normally I would be taking calls from customers: employers, taxpayers, self-assessment, Pay As You Earn, agents, accountants – you name it. I deal with the tax side of things, so normally people who have a problem with their tax code or their self-assessment. It can be complex work. The training was quite hard at the beginning, I must say – there was so much information. So rather different from what I was doing before, where people would ring up and say there was something wrong with their printer!



HMRC customer service officials are on the delivery front line. How many of your calls are from angry people?
Well, that's the beauty of the job. Most of the calls are angry people! Firstly they're angry because they often have to sit on hold before getting through to us, but secondly because various errors mean – for example – they haven't received their repayment and they're in hardship. So I try to put myself in their situation, and also to treat every call as if it's the first of the day. It can be challenging and on occasion you can end up taking it personally. But your job is to solve the query and to help them and, overall, I really enjoy my work. To get somebody who's very upset and then, after you've solved the problem for them, to hear their tone completely change by the end of the call – it's very satisfying.

The fact that the national guidance is always changing also means it's never a boring job!

How did your role change over the pandemic?
During the pandemic I was taking calls about the furlough scheme, the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme – huge new programmes we had no previous experience of. And obviously the normal tax calls too. It was challenging, but the communication and support from various managers was great, so that feeling of being in a team where everybody is trying to do a good job was still there.

I did find it quite hard doing the job entirely from home. When you're in the office and you have situations with upset customers, you have a colleague to discuss it with. When you have to take calls from home, you only have your partner, or your cat, or your dog, and the frustration can build up. So I actually felt that the pressure was more intense taking calls from home.

What's a surprising thing about your role?
One thing I would mention is that sometimes colleagues complain about the guidance – that it's not supportive enough or there isn't enough information there. But I've worked with the guidance for the last few years, and it is definitely possible to get it changed. Actually, every time you submit a suggestion of how it could change, and then it changes as a result, you get a certificate. I've managed to get 38 certificates in five years! So as frontline employees we can help the guidance evolve and become more user-friendly, and that's satisfying too. ■

"To get someone who's very upset and then, after you've solved their problem, to hear their tone completely change by the end of the call – it's very satisfying"

CRISPIAN

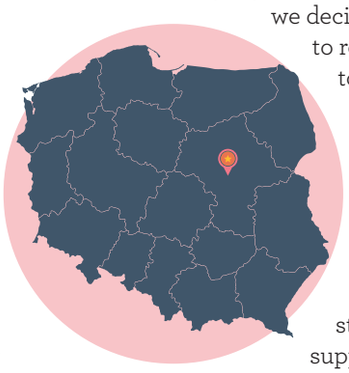
DIPLOMAT, WARSAW

Crispian Wilson is a career diplomat currently based in Poland, where he has been supporting the UK's response to the Ukraine crisis

When and why did you join the civil service?
I joined the civil service via the then-Foreign and Commonwealth Office diplomatic service mainstream as an EO in November 2005. I suppose I joined for the reasons lots of people join, to make a difference in the world and to be part of something bigger than myself that felt exciting and important. I also really wanted to travel, to live overseas and to understand other countries.

What did you do before?
I joined straight from university, where I studied engineering. The FCO noticed my specialism and gave me my first job in international science policy!

Tell us what you do and how it helps citizens
I'm currently the political counsellor at the British Embassy in Warsaw. I oversee the strategic relationship between the UK and Poland on a range of key issues, including foreign policy, defence and security, and justice and home affairs. In practice this means working with Poland to strengthen the UK's security in Nato, countering Russia and delivering military and humanitarian support to Ukraine. It also means working together on emerging issues like cybersecurity, countering disinformation and serious and organised crime. To do this I need to understand how power and influence works in Poland and build relationships to achieve UK aims. During the recent Ukraine crisis I was also one of the embassy crisis managers, overseeing our response including consular support to UK nationals (including vulnerable families) crossing the border from Ukraine back into Poland, ensuring that those that needed assistance got the help they needed.



How did your role change during the pandemic?
I had a strange pandemic! At the start of the pandemic I was working in the FCO's crisis management department and responded to the early outbreaks of Covid in China and then across the world. As a silver operational manager I was responsible for overseeing evacuation flights from Wuhan to the UK – I remember one night shift desperately hoping the weather at Brize Norton would hold as an airliner full of evacuees was on its way! As the pandemic widened, I became an operational manager helping to oversee the repatriation of 1.3 million UK nationals. We did this from home – working out of spare rooms and from kitchen tables. I then left that role to go on language training and spent 10 months in the UK learning Polish over Zoom, before moving to Poland towards the end of the pandemic. It was a real challenge moving the family in a time of Covid testing and different international restrictions.

"On one night shift early in the pandemic, I remember desperately hoping the weather at Brize Norton would hold as an airliner full of evacuees from Wuhan was on its way"

Your diplomatic career didn't quite follow the path you were initially expecting – what have some of the challenges been and how have you overcome them?
Most UK diplomats expect to spend around two-thirds of their careers overseas. However, during my first overseas posting in Turkey my mother sadly died from cancer and we decided to cut our posting short to return to the UK to be closer to our family. A few years later we had our first daughter, who was diagnosed antenatally with a serious heart condition. She was very ill when she was born and spent 16 months in hospital. On discharge she still needed a lot of medical support and so overseas travel wasn't an option. Overall, we ended up in the UK for about five years longer than we had expected. However, when she got older and stronger, we decided to take the plunge with an overseas posting. We are delighted to be overseas again, in fascinating country at a fascinating time. ■

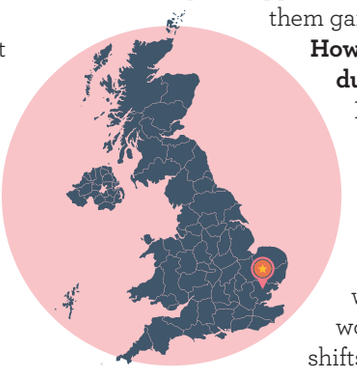
STEPHEN

MEAT HYGIENE INSPECTOR, ESSEX

Stephen Holden has been ensuring food is safe to eat for over 30 years, moving from local to central government as the regulatory framework changed. In 2022 he was named the FSA's Meat Hygiene Inspector of the Year

When and why did you join the civil service?
I started my career in 1990 with Ipswich Borough Council when local authorities were responsible for the licensing of slaughterhouses in their areas. In 1995, the government created a new Meat Hygiene Service and meat inspectors became civil servants. When the Food Standards Agency was set up in 2000 it took on this responsibility as the food regulator and I became an FSA employee.

What did you do before?
I started my trade as a Saturday boy at a butcher when I was 14, earning £5 a week. The butcher had his own small slaughterhouse at the rear of his busy shop and I became friendly with the meat inspector. I would ask him questions about meat inspection, so he encouraged me to go to college. I did three years' training at Smithfield College in London before qualifying as a Meat Hygiene Inspector (MHI).



Tell us what you do and how it helps citizens?
I ensure meat is safe to eat and that animal welfare is not compromised. Most of my time is spent on the front line in several abattoirs in Essex, starting early in the mornings or working shifts which finish late in the evenings. I often work with a team of meat inspectors to carry out Official Controls. This involves full post-mortem inspection in slaughterhouses and health marking of all animals, including poultry. Other official duties include ensuring that all meat found to be unfit for human consumption is correctly disposed of, and inspecting game meats. I carry out residue sampling of offal and meat for surveillance and do animal welfare checks. I am a member of the Animal Welfare Team, so I make unannounced visits to slaughterhouses to ensure that welfare standards are compliant with the current legislation and report any issues to an official veterinarian for further investigation. I have also just qualified as an NVQ assessor and provide peer support to new trainee MHIs to help them gain their qualification.

How did your role change during the pandemic?
I spent most of my time working on the front line supporting my fellow MHIs under pressure to maintain 100% delivery and ensure that all meat was safe to eat. I often worked weekends and night shifts to cover any shortfall of staff, so it was a difficult time.

What are some of the more bizarre scenarios you've encountered during inspections?
I have seen so many changes over the last 30 years as an MHI. I worked during the BSE crisis in the early 1990s which resulted in the collapse of the beef industry. I also had to deal with the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease which led to the slaughter of millions of livestock in 2001, which was a rather unpleasant experience. I have seen livestock try to make a bid for freedom. I also remember a time when I first started as an MHI and had to reject a whole sheep carcase unfit for human consumption.

What qualities does it take to be a good food inspector?
You need to be professional, trustworthy, and be able to make to make sound judgements. Being able to tolerate long hours inside the abattoir is a big must.

As a profoundly Deaf person I realise my career path has been an amazing achievement for me. I have survived in the hearing world for over thirty years and have broken down barriers to prove that I am capable of doing the important work required to ensure all food is safe to eat. ■

"I started my trade as a Saturday boy at a butcher when I was 14, earning £5 a week"

ANNE

EMPLOYER AND PARTNERSHIP MANAGER, SCUNTHORPE

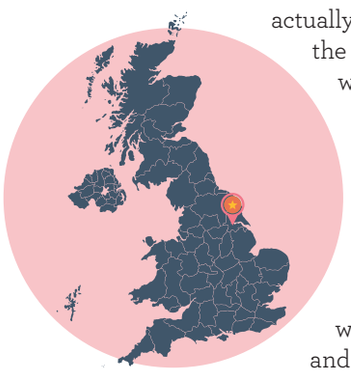
Anne Brewster, employer and partnership manager for North Lincolnshire at the Department for Work and Pensions, reduces unemployment by working with businesses and the council

When and why did you join the civil service?

I left school and tried college, but it wasn't for me at the time. So I got a job in a library but it's not really my thing to be so quiet. One of my parents' friends worked in the civil service and suggested I apply. This was 1978.

The interview was quite scary: you're sitting in front of three people behind a desk. I'd never done anything like that. I got through, and became an administrative officer in the Department of Employment. I did that for 10 years and thoroughly enjoyed it. And then children came along. In those days, there wasn't a lot of childcare provision so I ended up leaving and running my own childminding business, becoming one of the first in the area to be a nursery educator. Then when my own children got to 14, and I felt maybe I couldn't do Play-Doh anymore, I applied to go back into the civil service. This was 2004. I'd been an executive officer before, but because I'd been out for 13 years I could only go back as an administrative officer. So then I made my way back up to executive officer and I'm a higher executive officer now.

I'm proud to call myself a civil servant. I may not have been to university, but I'm a civil servant, you know? In my role, the decisions aren't made that far above us. The higher management are all very visible and even the ministers come and talk to us. So you feel part of it: you can put your ideas in and share good practice across the country.



What is your role and how does it help citizens?

I run a team of five employer advisers who go out to businesses and sell DWP initiatives to get people back into work. We sometimes help businesses if they're making redundancies, too: we'll go in and give redundancy support so that, hopefully, the people being made redundant won't reach our books and claim benefits, because we'll try and help them into work before then.

Another part of what I do is to liaise with the local authority and various partners in the area to address some of the barriers people face in going into work. And if we've not got provision in those areas, it's my job to go out and try and broker something with partners to fill those gaps.

How did your role change during the pandemic?

Because we were key workers, we were actually in the office virtually all the time. The biggest change was that my team – along with the work coaches – pivoted to paying out Universal Credit, which we hadn't done before. The pandemic led to an unprecedented amount of claims, so it was: "Let's drop everything and get these people paid".

It was quite awe-inspiring that colleagues managed to do that.

What motivates you?

There are still those that are very far from work – perhaps people with a disability – but it's our job to change that. Firstly the work coaches help people realise

> **"There are still those that are very far from work – it's our job to change that"**

that they can work, but it's my team's job to go out to business and say, "What about employing disabled people? Let's try and get everybody working, because we know that work is good for us."

I'm also the older worker representative for the district, and, being an older worker, I've got experience of that! So I explain to businesses how they can retrain, recruit, and keep their older workers and that doing so makes a real difference in the community.

If I can, by my stories, make that difference to people's lives, if I can inspire somebody, then that is worth every bit of being a civil servant. ■

Delivering data dividends: **lessons from the pandemic**

Data proved to be a pivotal weapon in the fight against Covid-19, but it is vital to draw important lessons from this period to help strengthen the response to future public health challenges. BAE Systems' Andy Lethbridge chronicles his experiences navigating uncharted waters at the heart of the UK's pandemic response

Data. Governments need it; governments produce it; governments use it. It's no exaggeration to say that data has become the very lifeblood of government. And as the UK grappled with the onset of Covid-19, it had never been more important.

However, the data needed for informed and timely government decisions and improved patient outcomes was often rendered inaccessible as it sat across a myriad of disparate government organisations and systems. Policymakers, who were operating under immense pressure, often saw valuable analyst time consumed by spreadsheet manipulation as they sought to track down the information they needed.

It's important to remember that to maximise its value, data needs to be understood and not looked at in isolation. This meant data had to be consolidated, made consistent and accessible, whilst protecting GDPR and citizens' privacy.

The sheer scale and urgency of the challenge meant that policymakers alone couldn't shoulder these issues. So, organisations from across the private sector came together to lend their expertise. The result, however, was a patchwork delivery structure.

About the author

Andy Lethbridge is Head of Consulting, Central Government, at BAE Systems Digital Intelligence

andy.lethbridge@baesystems.com

BAE SYSTEMS

So, what could be done?

There was a clear and urgent need to create a single platform to house consumable terabytes of data for data scientists and data analysts to use, whilst always adhering to GDPR and other ethical safeguards. The platform needed to drive up quality and massively reduce the manual effort to consolidate data and generate insightful reports. All within a secure environment owned by the department.

Within three weeks we had begun to build a data platform to consolidate the vast array of data needed for the pandemic response and emerging Joint Biosecurity Centre. In only six weeks we had loaded our first dataset onto the platform and within 12 weeks had incorporated sufficient data to enable an 80 per cent reduction in effort to create the weekly statistics report for DHSC.

Where previously it had taken weeks to expose critical datasets to a wide analyst community, the platform produced trustworthy datasets within a matter of days or even hours.

Blending pace with teamwork

The experience of operating effectively in such intense, high-pressured circumstances, holds some important lessons for future projects. The pace of the programme showed that bringing technical teams and user communities much closer together can deliver huge benefits. Although not always possible, the integration of all aspects of service design and delivery transformed the end result.

Keeping platform engineers, data engineers and data scientists very close to our analyst colleagues was critical. Not only did it enhance resilience, access to extended knowledge and planning for future activities, it also ensured we created a community that enabled issues to be prioritised and resolved swiftly – a shared ownership approach that generated real value.

This flexible and inclusive culture was imperative because it ensured that team members worked for the programme, rather than more limited commercial or departmental goals. This was particularly important given the increasing demand for different datasets and the growing need and mandate to bring datasets together within the fluctuating priorities. Such requirements are, quite rightly, likely to become pre-requisites in other government transformation programmes.

A results business

The new platform and capability now enables the processing of more than 2.7 billion records, or 1.9TB of data a day, effectively providing contingency for several heritage systems, and has enabled timely informed decisions to be made across government.

We enabled system-wide stakeholder engagement and secure movement of data across complex systems and organisational boundaries. We have also fostered and facilitated sharing of data between multiple government departments. And critically, we delivered an enduring asset which can support ongoing disease surveillance and future pandemics.

At the heart of these efforts was our central belief that data holds the key to improved performance. Data's very ubiquity has heralded huge consequences for organisations large and small. Only those which have the ability to capture it, understand it and use it to fuel strategic and operational decisions are able to reap the dividends it has on offer.

CAT

CHIEF DESIGN OFFICER, EDINBURGH

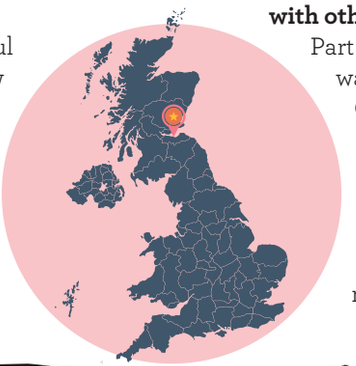
Cat Macaulay works for the Scottish Government, making sure that officials, in partnership with citizens, design the right solutions to the right problems

When and why did you join the civil service?
I joined in 2014 after a 20+ year career in business, the third sector, international aid, and academia. I'd had colleagues who'd joined GDS and was intrigued to discover that design was becoming a "thing" in government. I firmly believe design is an important way of thinking about and solving problems of value in any democracy. The opportunity to understand how it might add value in the Scottish Government was too good to pass up.

"Design fails when the first part is rushed, which it often is: we impatient humans have an awful tendency to assume we know what 'the problem' is"

What do you do and how does it help citizens?
The heart of my job is designing how we "do" design in the Scottish Government and promoting that across Scotland. A big focus within that is ensuring the people of Scotland have the right opportunities and support to participate in designing the services they need. That co-design is essential if we are to both design the right services and design those services right. Design fails when the first part is rushed, which it often is: we impatient humans have an awful tendency to assume we know what "the problem" is.

What's a surprising thing about your role?
The thing that has surprised me is how much we need to work at the policy end of government not just the delivery end. It shouldn't have surprised me, of course, as one way of thinking about what policymaking produces is a design brief for an intervention in society.



How did your role change over the pandemic?
I had my first experience of setting up a major programme – Connecting Scotland. I usually support the design parts of programmes rather than set them up myself! Digital exclusion is a critical design issue for public services design, made even more acute for people and the public services trying to reach them during the pandemic. So I initiated a programme which now has brought online 60,000 of Scotland's c. 350,000 digitally excluded households who were particularly impacted by the pandemic.

What makes working for the Scottish Government unique compared with other organisations?
Part of what inspired me to join was the Scottish Approach to Government. It has three key principles – build on strengths, make change with people not simply for them, and embrace continuous improvement. As a designer it was a philosophy about how government should operate that felt very familiar. I am sure it's part of why the Scottish Government has a chief design officer – something pretty rare in the government world. It also underpins the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework which sets out the outcomes we want to achieve as a country. One of the NPF's values is we treat all our people with kindness, dignity and compassion, which has become a routine and important design question our teams ask. Most recently it has underpinned work to design Scotland's social security system, and customer feedback suggests we are living up to that value. ■

CRAIG

HEAD OF ACCESSIBILITY, NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE

Craig Abbott ensures that everyone can access government services as the head of accessibility, DWP Digital, in the Department for Work and Pensions

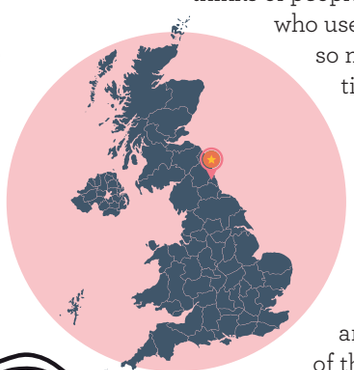
When and why did you join the civil service?
I joined as an interaction designer. I wanted to work on things that genuinely impacted people's lives. At DWP, if you get the service right, it has the possibility to change people's lives, and if you get it wrong, it goes the other way as well.

What did you do before?
I worked in a startup. For me, the stuff we were doing wasn't meaningful. It was building a product for profit that didn't really have much impact on people's lives.

Tell us what you do and how it helps citizens
My job is to make sure that teams know the regulations and the standards that we have to meet for accessibility. A lot of it is talking to teams and making sure that they understand their responsibilities, doing training and reporting on the compliance of our services with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines and the Public Sector Bodies Accessibility Regulations. Ultimately, my job is to make sure that whatever you're applying for or however you're trying to interact with the department, you have the same options available as everybody else. If we deliver accessible services, it means that people aren't excluded from getting access to things that they're entitled to, like benefits or applying for jobs or the financial support which comes from DWP. If we don't build our services to be accessible, people either don't get what they're entitled to, or they need an alternative route that might be less desirable.

How did your role change over the pandemic?
My role started at the start of the pandemic. Initially, we were a small team doing accessibility audits. As people were getting furloughed, people were getting made redundant, companies were closing down, there was a lot of pressure to get digital services on live. We were boots-on-the-ground, doing the testing on those services to make sure that when we released them, they were in an accessible state. As everything's started to return to normal and timelines have normalised a bit, we've stepped more into a consultant-type role. We do less assurance work and instead we're trying to teach teams to do that work themselves, because it just wasn't sustainable for us to have one small team auditing all of the services.

When we talk about accessibility, who are some of the people who are typically excluded from services?
In discussions about accessibility, everyone thinks of people with visual impairments who use screen readers, but there's so many people that use assistive technology who don't even know that's what they do – my dad's changed all the font sizes on his phone so he can see it, for example. And there's a lot of people who have hidden disabilities – for example, I've got ADHD. Most of the time, that doesn't impact my ability to do things, but I'm in the office today and there's so many distractions. Those kinds of things can have an impact on somebody's ability to use a digital service. So meeting the standards is one thing. People see meeting the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines as the holy grail, but it's really the bare minimum. There are definitely some shortcomings



"If we don't build our services to be accessible, people either don't get what they're entitled to, or they need an alternative route that might be less desirable"

where it's difficult to identify the people that have accessibility needs because the space isn't mature enough to ask the right questions. Rather than asking people if they use assistive technology, it's better to ask people how they use the web with questions like, 'Do you ever have to zoom in on the browser? Do you have the computer read things out to you or do you prefer to look at images rather than text?' ■

LISA

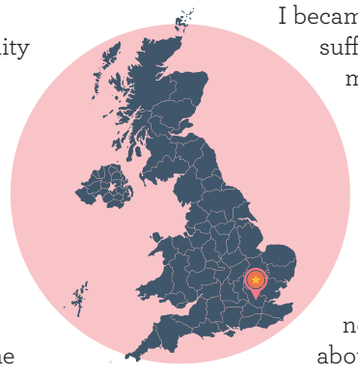
ASSOCIATE DIGITAL USER EXPERT, LONDON

Lisa Baldock uses her own experiences to make the Department for Work and Pensions' tech as inclusive as possible

When and why did you join the civil service?
In 2001 – 21 years ago! I have a profound hearing loss and I always wanted to work in an organisation such as the civil service. I wanted to share my knowledge and make a difference to society.

Tell us what you do and how it helps citizens
I work in the DWP and am currently on loan from HR to the digital team.

My current role has been by far the most interesting. I work in a team supporting colleagues to ensure our Microsoft 365 systems work with accessibility software, which in turn enables them to communicate and collaborate effectively to do their everyday jobs. No two days are the same: I could be working screen reader users one day, and reviewing our website's fonts, colour contrasts and page layouts the next. I also help our colleagues use functions such as captions, subtitles and transcripts or simply show them how to access interpreter provision remotely. We want our colleagues who use accessibility to fly, not to fall. I call our team the A-Team!



How did your role change over the pandemic? Did your hearing dog miss going into the office?
I faced my own personal issues with obtaining remote access for my interpreters both inside and outside work, and mask-wearing and not being able to lipread others prevented me going out, which made me feel very isolated. I needed communication support more than ever: without it I cannot function and do my job.

I retired my previous assistance hearing dog Inca during the pandemic and was matched with a totally new dog named Lima. Not working in office and pandemic restrictions meant I had to train him at home – which was really hard work as the trainers worked remotely. Luckily, we were allowed to keep Inca with us, which meant she was able to show him the way! It's not been easy but now the pandemic restrictions are easing, Lima is now learning more about socialisation and adapting to working both in the office and at home.

How have things changed for deaf civil servants in the last decade?
To begin with it was hard, access was so restricted. Myself and deaf peers were isolated. I had to depend so much on other people to help me and did not venture far. I became isolated, depressed and suffered huge anxiety. My line management really supported me, and, over the years, we have worked together to change people's perspectives. It made services rethink their access strategies. We had to become innovative and think more about how to communicate. Although during the pandemic masks were a huge barrier for most deaf officials, there were some positive legacies from Covid-19: we advanced our technology to allow captions and transcripts and we gave interpreters remote access too. It also led to really productive conversations between colleagues with hearing loss and their managers, and enabled everyone to consider different ways of working.

"I retired my assistance hearing dog during the pandemic and was matched with a totally new dog. Restrictions meant I had to train him at home, which was really hard work"

I always had an interest in technology, I wear two cochlear implants and used FaceTime outside of work, so to see similar advances in work was incredible. More opportunities have opened up so those like me can flourish. ■

SEAN

SENIOR POLICY ADVISER, MANCHESTER

Sean Finch is helping to build a safer, more inclusive society as team leader and senior LGBT+ policy adviser at the Government Equalities Office

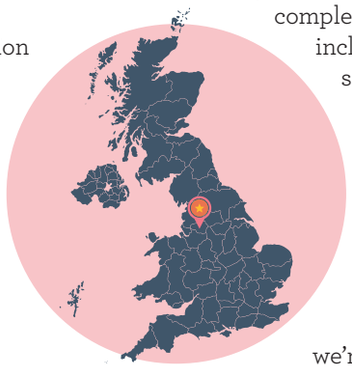
When and why did you join the civil service?
I joined the civil service three years ago. Prior to that, I was working for an education charity called Ambition Institute, and before that I was a teacher as part of the Teach First programme.

In those previous roles, it became pretty obvious from my own experiences that being authentic about your identity, sexuality or your gender identity wasn't something that was just a given, nor was it easy to do. I particularly understood that, in the context of being a teacher, it can be difficult to be your authentic self with all the other staff members. So during my time in the education charity I supported a couple of colleagues to set up LGBTed, which is a teacher-led network for LGBT+ teachers. On the back of that, when I saw the role in the LGBT+ team in the Government Equalities Office come up, it seemed like a perfect opportunity to influence public policy on a wider scale and continue that mission towards making people feel comfortable and safe at work – in whatever sector.

Tell us more about your job and how it helps citizens
I've worked on a series of different policy portfolios from education – where I was the programme manager for anti homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying in schools – to heading up data and monitoring, so working with the ONS on the tail-end of the introduction of the sexual orientation and gender identity questions in the census. Most recently, I've been part of the Safe To Be Me LGBT+ conference team, which was cancelled on the back of the conversion therapy issues.

So my work is about helping bring about a safer, more equal and inclusive society, but also to come up with solutions to some of the most pressing issues based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Whether that be in the workplace, in an education setting, or just people being able to lead their day-to-day lives.

How do you approach these policy challenges – what techniques do you use?
We do a lot of listening. The LGBT+ community is not a homogenous one. It's completely diverse within itself, including in terms of how sexual orientation or gender identity intersect with, for example, your race or religion. There are so many different factors at play that create a unique experience for people. So listening is really important.



We also make sure that we're working with the third sector, those people that are providing the frontline services for LGBT+ people, and hearing from them about the most pressing issues facing people and then using that as part of our wider evidence-gathering. It's vital for us that all our policy is grounded in evidence.

"The LGBT+ community is not a homogenous one – it's completely diverse within itself. So listening is really important"

Our work often requires creative thinking in terms of policy solutions, for example seeing what's worked for other minority groups across government and exploring if there's anything that we can take from there.

Collaborating with other government departments is a key part of what we do, too. The GEO is there to provide expertise on equalities to other departments, so we work with them to make sure that any policy that they introduce considers the implications for LGBT+ people. ■

KOBIRUL

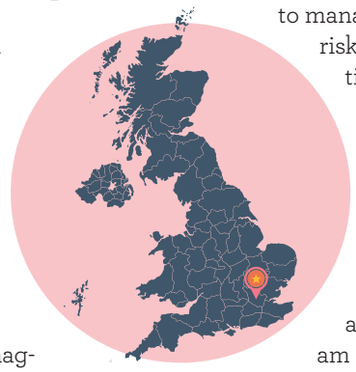
COMMERCIAL LEAD, LONDON

Kobirul Islam helps to ensure outcomes are delivered efficiently as a commercial lead for the Home Office. He is also co-chair of the Commercial Function's Positive Support Group

When and why did you join the civil service?
I joined the Home Office as commercial lead via Government Commercial Organisation in August 2020 looking for a new challenge and opportunity to make a difference. Little did I realise that on arrival, from day one, I would be working on some of the largest challenges of our lifetime, delivering complex commercial outcomes at pace during not only EU exit but also the Covid pandemic. Challenges have not stopped since, so I have got what I wished for – exposure to a wide variety of important projects across government.

What did you do before?
I worked as a senior commercial business partner at the Security Industry Authority, a non-departmental public body. During my time at SIA, I worked within the corporate services function (the organisation's nerve centre that included HR, finance, IT and information secretariat teams) to support the crucial procurement and contract management delivery of security licensing activities. Commercial savings led to a reduction of the overall license fee by 5%. This was money back in the pocket of key frontline staff.

Tell us what you do and how it helps citizens
I work with key business functions managing a large portfolio of spend and contracts. This includes managing strategic supplier and critical contracts to ensure business case outcomes are achieved. I develop innovative commercial strategies, ensuring procurement activity delivers tangible outcomes, value for money and more efficient and lean services, whilst considering social value and sustainability. All this activity has a direct impact on citizens at the forefront of our delivery work. A critical contract in my portfolio has enabled 26 buildings to operate across the UK to keep vital services open to both the public and key workers during the pandemic. Collaborative working has delivered significant value for money and value-added outcomes through the delivery of training and employment to unemployed people. This work has been recognised through the Government Commercial Function Contract Management Award.



How did your role change during the pandemic?
My role evolved from initial crisis management i.e. influencing suppliers and stakeholders to build adequate resilience to manage emerging issues and risks to ensure minimal disruptions to critical services. The pandemic has also had some positives, including closer relationships with both stakeholders and suppliers to deliver over and above the targets to continually improve services. Now I am focusing on fostering that collaborative culture to deliver better services to stakeholders and ultimately the public across my portfolio.

What are some of the most important attributes and skills for civil servants working in the commercial function?
Resilience for me is key. There is always lots going on and another crisis or disruption could be around the corner. You need to learn to thrive in that complex environment spinning lots of plates, build both personal resilience as well as in the immediate team to deliver. I decompress from the day job by focusing on my wellbeing, which I do through running and cycling which I enjoy and derive satisfaction and a parallel sense of achievement. ■

"A critical contract in my portfolio has enabled 26 buildings to operate across the UK to keep vital services open to both the public and key workers during the pandemic"

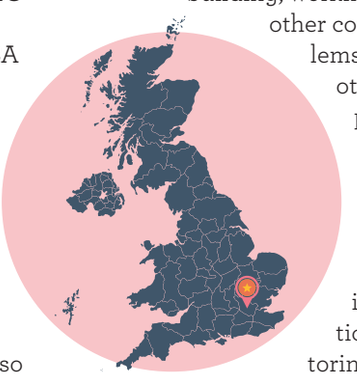
GILLIAN

DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF PEOPLE AND CULTURE, CROYDON

Gillian Smith works in HM Revenue & Customs' Cross-Service People and Organisation Squad on accelerated service transformation, helping to build more effective services for the public

When and why did you join the civil service?
I joined the Home Office as an executive officer in 1983, and like many civil servants I had little idea what my career had in store for me. Indeed, I had wanted to teach, but my parents really needed me to start contributing a wage to the household. They objected to me going to university, and although I stubbornly went off to Lancaster University to study French, linguistics and education, I returned some 10 weeks later, unable to afford to eat and luckily returned to my summer job in Sainsbury's. My neighbour worked at the Ministry of Defence and told me "you could do a lot worse than apply for the civil service", so with nothing to lose and a lot more to gain than I realised, I applied through the Commission appointments route.

How did you end up in your current role?
I have worked in five civil service professions – starting in operational delivery, then moving frequently between operations and policy, before stints in finance, project management and HR. Being adaptable and keen to learn, including gaining professional qualifications in different fields and completing an MBA while working full-time with a young child, has been key to my continuous growth. I also took risks on roles that looked too difficult and learned from others around me. Working in different departments and undertaking cross-CS roles has also helped to keep me motivated and engaged.



What do you do and how does it help citizens?
I am part of a multidisciplinary team working to deliver more customer-centric, agile and efficient operations in HMRC. As we transform services, it will be easier for taxpayers to pay the right tax and receive the right benefits. In my previous role, I led work on equality, diversity and inclusion for HMRC, ensuring that our workforce is representative, respectful and inclusive. Getting this right for colleagues is key to providing better services for our diverse range of customers, and we of course have commitments to this effect in our Public Sector Duty Equality Objectives.

What has been the most interesting thing you've done in the civil service so far?
This is quite a difficult one to answer – there have been so many opportunities. Highlights include: getting out to communities to meet with asylum seekers and local residents to better to design system improvements; meeting with offenders in prisons to contribute to planning of prison building; working with civil servants from other countries on common problems and learning from each other; supporting young people in understanding graduate and apprenticeship opportunities and diversifying hires into the civil service; directly supporting ministers when introducing new legislation; coaching and mentoring colleagues to support under-represented talent to flourish; and working in the charity sector on secondment to advance opportunities for young people to engage in social action for the wider benefit of our communities.

"The image of the tea-drinking and undynamic civil servant still persists and I really wish we could change this"

What is the best thing about the civil service? And what element would you most like to change?
It's been a real privilege to work on some of the most important social and societal issues facing the UK in the last four decades. I've genuinely felt able to influence and shape improvements for citizens and for fellow civil servants. The range of work I have been able to do and the learning and growth opportunities this has given me have been excellent. My colleagues do fantastic work, but the image of the tea-drinking and undynamic civil servant still persists and I really wish we could change this. ■

PAUL

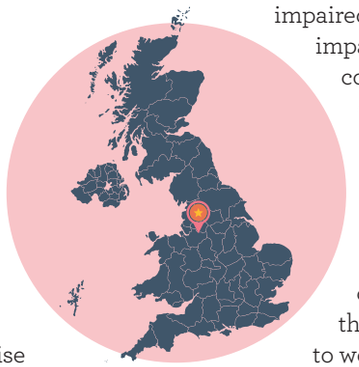
DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE, WILMSLOW

Paul Arnold has helped to ensure data is safely used and stored for 24 years and is now deputy chief executive at the Information Commissioner's Office

When and why did you join the civil service?
I joined the data protection registrar, now the Information Commissioner's Office, 24 years ago. I started in customer-facing roles and developed a management leadership career that's spanned everything from regulation to IT, to finance, to governance. I was drawn to a public service role; I wanted to do something where you could see the difference that you made for an organisation with a clear purpose. I've stayed so long because of the variety – it's felt like I've changed employers several times because of the evolution of the use of data and information rights and the way the regulator has had to transform to keep pace.

What did you do before?
I did a politics and history degree and I was pretty open minded as to what I did, which you could interpret as not having a clear idea of what I wanted to do next. I had a short career after university in customer service, and that helped me find direction – working for an organisation with a real purpose and a role in public life really helped me refine my thinking and work out what I wanted to do.

Tell us what you do and how it helps citizens
It's to deputise for the information commissioner, who is a public appointee with a fixed term, in their capacity as chief executive. My role is responsible for the leadership and performance of the organisation. I have direct line management over a lot of our corporate and operational functions, but also a wider responsibility for the way the ICO organises itself, and the way our culture develops and the way we transform and change to keep pace with the society and economy that we regulate. It's quite a broad role, everything from HR to legal services to finance to customer service, to risk governance.



How did your role change over the pandemic?
The pandemic was a phenomenal challenge but it was also an opportunity to evaluate the way we did things. I was determined that we wouldn't just snap back to all of our business-as-usual habits, so in my role I took some time out to reflect on all of these things and to bring some of that learning and perspective back to the ICO. I felt a real responsibility to help steer the organisation through those tricky waters and come out the other side hopefully stronger for it, and having taken the opportunity to reflect on what it means for us all to be productive in our work.

What were some of things you were reflecting on?
I've got very severely impaired vision, and one thing I reflected on was the challenge of navigating some of the normal conventions of coming to work if you are visually impaired or have any other kind of impairment. There were lots of conventions that you had to conform to – like shaking somebody's hand when you go into a meeting, for example – that I took for granted were a little bit stressful because you can't quite judge those things. When you're forced to work from home, all of those things disappear. They're replaced by other challenges, but it made me examine what an inclusive workplace really meant. I've tried to use that to fuel a lot of the planning for our recovery from the pandemic. I've also been thinking about our office space. In an open-plan office, you would often have people sitting with their earphones in just to get some peace and quiet so they could do some focused work. Rather than the one-size-fits-all approach, it's about understanding how we need to use workspaces to be as productive as possible. ■

"The pandemic was a phenomenal challenge but it was also an opportunity to evaluate the way we did things – I was determined that we wouldn't just snap back to all of our business-as-usual habits"

AMANDA

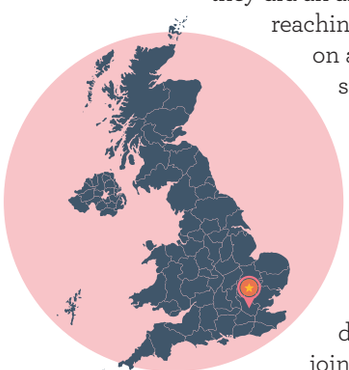
DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR TRADE NEGOTIATIONS, LONDON

Amanda Brooks works on trade negotiations which support economic growth and consumer choice in her director general role at the Department for International Trade

When and why did you join the civil service?
I joined the Cabinet Office as an EO, about nine months after leaving university – mostly because my mum had seen an advert and nagged me to apply. I thought I would just stay for a year or so while I worked out what I wanted to do when I grew up. I enjoyed the work so much, I'm still here!

How did you end up in your current role?
After the EU exit referendum, I volunteered/asked to move back to work on trade policy, which I had worked on earlier in my career. I've been in DIT ever since, working in a variety of different roles, from leading work on export licenses to being chief US negotiator. I've been DG for trade negotiations for the last year.

What do you do and how does it help citizens?
The UK has one of the largest trade negotiation programmes in the world, and we are currently negotiating agreements with India, Canada, Mexico and Greenland, negotiating our accession to the Trans-Pacific trade agreement, and preparing to negotiate with the Gulf Co-operation Council, Israel and Switzerland. Trade agreements help citizens in a number of different ways – from reducing the cost of products you buy, increasing the range of products to choose from, and providing businesses with easier ways to export and invest – which drives increased employment opportunities across the whole of the UK.



What has been the most interesting thing you've done in DIT so far?
In the last year, supporting the chief negotiators and their teams to conclude our first "from scratch" and world leading agreements with Australia and New Zealand was an incredible experience – they did an amazing job. Personally, reaching agreement with the US on a long-standing dispute on support for large civil aircraft was pretty rewarding too.

How did your role change during the pandemic?
I changed role (more than once!) during the pandemic. I found it much harder to understand the dynamic of the team I was joining when I was working virtually than I do when I meet people face to face. And harder to get to know people too. I am enjoying hybrid working more! It also changed how all the team was negotiating with our counterparts – there were lots of benefits, but the time differences have been pretty brutal.

"Trade agreements help citizens in a number of different ways – from reducing the cost of products you buy to driving increased employment opportunities"

What are the most important skills or attributes someone would need to do your job well?
For me, this job is all about people – the team I'm working with in DIT and across government, those we are negotiating with and the businesses and citizens we are seeking to deliver benefits for. So, keeping focused on that is critical. Being a trade policy nerd is helpful too though! ■

SIDRAH

HEAD OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS POLICY, LONDON

Sidrah Chowdry inadvertently started her career as a job centre adviser more than two decades ago. She now leads the SEND policy and operations team at the Department for Education

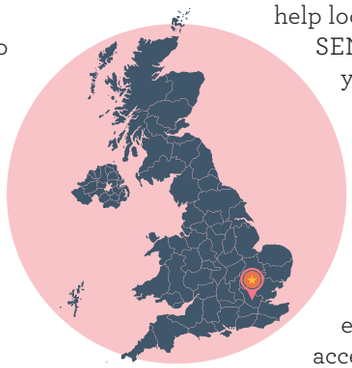
When and why did you join the civil service?
After graduating in 2001, I decided I needed an immediate and regular income to fuel my shopping habits while deciding what on earth a Biochemistry graduate does. I decided to sign on to buy some time – and some "essential" clothes. The adviser at the Jobcentre decided I was overqualified (I'm not sure she was allowed to say that) and offered me a role at the Jobcentre that very day. I started as an adviser, telling other 18-24 year olds just how easy it was to find a job!

I was bribed into staying longer than I had ever intended when DWP agreed to pay for me to do an MBA part-time. Hungry for experiences, I decided to apply for a secondment to a regeneration programme. Those two years were an incredible opportunity, and gave me some policy and delivery experience which I then used to apply to become a policy and planning lead at the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in North London. The deciding factor to take that job was the higher salary rather than anything else because at that point I still hadn't worked out what I wanted to do.

How did you end up in DfE?
Quite by accident – story of my life. The LSC became the Young People's Learning Agency which morphed into the Education and Skills Funding Agency which was then swallowed up by the DfE and I went along for the ride. When I joined the academies team in the ESFA, I started to realise I was really interested in the work of the department and in education in general.

Over the years I've held a number of different roles in the schools/academies/funding space and further developed my knowledge and skills to the point where I was then able to feel confident enough to feel like I could do a hard job, really well. Which was just as well...

What is your role and how does it help citizens?
I am head of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Policy and Operations Team in the DfE. My team develop all of the programmes and strategies to help local areas improve their SEN services to children, young people and their families. I view this job as the most important I have ever had. Work that I am directly responsible for will in some shape or form deliver a more positive experience for young people accessing the SEN system.



How did your role change during the pandemic?
Funnily enough, I started my role on 9 March 2020, and you all know what happened round about then. Whether that was a blessing in disguise or not, I didn't need to change anything given how new I was. I simply built up a team, focused on the need and the rest as they say is history.

"I view this job as the most important I've ever had. Work that I am directly responsible for will in some shape of form deliver a more positive experience for young people accessing the SEN system"

What motivates you?
My faith – I'm in this world to do good things as I pass through. My daughters – they need to see a woman in a hijab doing great things. Money – I still like to buy clothes! ■

COLIN

HEAD OF FORENSICS AT HM REVENUE & CUSTOMS, LONDON

Colin Smith started out as a police officer before moving into the private sector. He returned to the public sector to rediscover the buzz of making a real impact and now leads forensics at HMRC

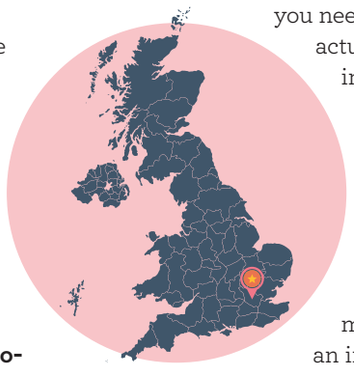
When and why did you join the civil service?
I joined the civil service in 2014 in the Competition and Markets Authority. I started my professional life as a police officer and ended up in forensics when computers started to become critical in criminal investigations.

After 10 years, I left the police thinking I could make a fortune in the private sector with my newly acquired skills. I'll be honest – I hated the private sector. Yes, I had a better salary but the amount of hours I was expected to work meant I had no home life at all. I was stressed most of the time and had zero work satisfaction.

I returned to the public sector to regain that unique feeling of satisfaction you get when you see your hard work have real impact. The buzz when you see a bad guy go to prison as a direct result of your efforts really can't be beaten.

What does your job entail?
I run the team that provides all the forensic services to HMRC's Fraud Investigation Service. It's my responsibility that the team work effectively, provide a high level of service and are fully equipped to meet the needs of modern law enforcement. This mainly involves lots of listening and communicating – I listen to investigation teams to ascertain what challenges are being faced when investigating fraud and then talk to my team of experts to see how we can solve those problems.

How close is your professional life to a crime drama?
It depends what crime drama you watch, I suppose! We do wear lab coats, have high-tech equipment and recover DNA and fingerprints from crime scenes. But on the TV, they never seem to be doing the same amount of paperwork! Also, in crime dramas they never seem to be enjoying their job. In my labs, you are far more likely to see the teams smiling and having a laugh rather than worrying about inside men or women.



Your background is in the police. How different is the culture of the civil service from that of the police?

As I work in law enforcement within the civil service, there are more similarities than differences. The drive to do well is still the same, and we're both here to lock up the bad guys and that shared passion is there in both cultures.

Being a police officer is a thoroughly exhilarating and rewarding experience but the civil service offers so much more in terms of career pathways and opportunities. For example, I was fortunate to be on the civil service Future Leaders Scheme and I now hold a very privileged position of heading up a fantastic national team.

What is a "complex" tax fraud case?
Because my background isn't in tax I find every case complex, to be honest! Luckily there are many top experts in HMRC who know about that sort of thing.

In truth though, I would say a complex case is made up of multiple compound factors. A single case could involve many suspects in multiple companies linked to big organised crime gangs with deeply complex financial trickery which takes many months to unravel. Criminals go to great lengths to cover up their wrongdoings, and you need to work out how they are actually committing the fraud in the first place and then try to collect the evidence. The fact that every modern fraud is enabled by technology makes its investigation even more challenging and complex which is why I'm confident my team will be always be an important part of every investigation for years to come.

Can you give us an example of a case you've worked on recently?
I can tell you about an organised crime gang attempting to import tobacco illegally into the UK. A lorry known to contain tobacco was stopped at Dover and searched. Luckily an earlier piece of evidence in the investigation showed the design for a hidden compartment on the lorry where the tobacco was being stored. When the driver of the lorry was arrested and interviewed, he claimed no knowledge of the tobacco. A number of mobile phones were found on him and my team worked quickly to recover the data. Revealing evidence, such as photos, videos and WhatsApp messages, proved that the driver was fully aware of the tobacco and in fact had helped to conceal it. Our in-house team also found his fingerprints all over the goods. You can't argue with the forensics!

What's the largest amount of money you've ever recovered for HMRC?
My team support all fraud investigations and often recover the key evidence that leads to the big recoveries. I know of cases where the amount recovered due to the combined efforts of all teams has exceeded £300m. ■

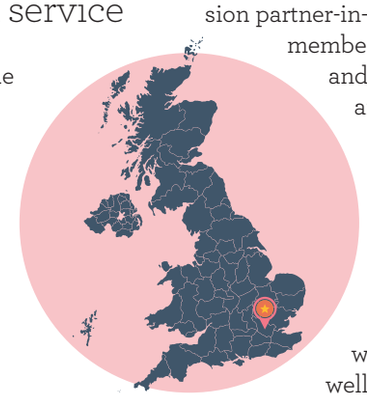
JUSTIN

HEAD OF NET ZERO GOVERNANCE AND FISCAL EVENTS, LONDON

Justin Placide leads a team helping to coordinate climate change action across government at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and also spurs equality efforts across the civil service

When and why did you join the civil service?
I joined the civil service in 2007 on a temporary contract because I wanted to help people on a larger scale and influence decision makers who were creating policies which were disproportionately affecting people within my community.

What did you do before?
After finishing university, my first career journey was joining the financial industry working for a company selling pensions and mortgages. I loved the job because I had the opportunity to work with a diversity of people and I enjoyed calculating how much compensation should be paid to people who were mis-sold endowment policies.



Tell us what you do and how it helps citizens?
I head up the Net Zero Governance and Fiscal Events Team based at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. Our focus is on developing and co-ordinating ambitious new action across government to deliver on the net zero target and on interim carbon budgets.

How did your role change during the pandemic?
In my former role working within Business Investment, my role changed drastically. We had to accelerate our business-as-usual work and help create a helpline, grant scheme and payment method to support businesses and their employees that were impacted by the pandemic.

I also have another role as co-chair of the Faith and Minority Ethnic (FAME) Network and The Civil Service Race Forum (CSRF). Along with my diversity and inclusion partner-in-crime Sharon Lo, I lead our members to deliver on our goals and objectives. Our committees and volunteers worked long hours after work, creating an online support network to help our members and other colleagues in the civil service adapt to working from home. Additionally, we supported those whose mental health and wellbeing was impacted due to being in isolation. All of this was being delivered against a background of the murder of George Floyd, racial trauma, protests across the world and the impact of Covid-19 on the most vulnerable and ethnic minority communities.

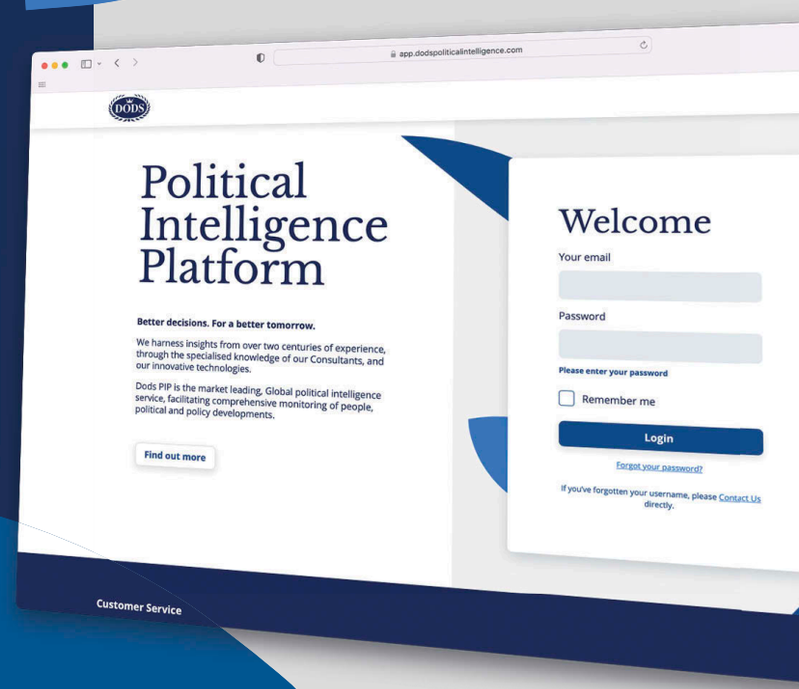
“Our committees and volunteers worked long hours after work, creating an online support network to help our members and other colleagues in the civil service adapt to working from home”

How have your skills developed since you joined the civil service?
My leadership skills have improved due to working with and leading large teams of people throughout the pandemic, my inclusive approach and emotional and cultural intelligence has also improved due to helping and collaborating with so many other great D&I Networks across the civil service. ■

DODS | POLITICAL INTELLIGENCE

Dods. Insight, Intelligence, Impact.

Now on a new platform, tailored to you.



13,000+ sources

35+ sectors

25,000+ stakeholders

30+ consultants

Book a free trial

www.dodspoliticalintelligence.com

UP AND AWAY

As government's levelling up work gets underway, **Tevye Markson** speaks to experts, including local politicians, to find out what civil servants can do to help economies across the country take flight

Levelling up is the flagship policy of Boris Johnson's government. The prime minister has said it will "break the link between geography and destiny so that no matter where you live, you have access to the same opportunities".

Although the levelling up white paper, unveiled in February, includes plans to improve education, infrastructure and "pride in place", a central plank of the agenda is driving growth across the country.

Economic growth, which is driven largely by high employment and productivity, is over-concentrated in specific areas, particularly the south-east of England, where there is more R&D investment and there are greater employment opportunities.

But how likely is it that the latest economic growth plan will succeed where others have failed and what can officials do maximise the chances of genuine progress?

A key challenge when looking at regional plans is that the civil service is not well set up to deal with spatial policies, "perhaps in part because, historically, spatial analysis might not have been a big part of policy development", says Thomas Pope, the Institute for Government's deputy chief economist.

To put spatial considerations at the centre of the government's decision making, a new Levelling Up Cabinet Committee was established last year, tasked with embedding levelling up across central government policy design and delivery.

"If we're going to have more devolved policy, it's critical that we understand better what is actually working, and what is actually driving change"
Thomas Pope, IfG

The committee will also work directly with local leaders to improve the clarity, consistency and coordination of policy.

Another area where there is room for improvement is the government's evidence base for growth policy. The National Audit Office said in a report in February that the government lacks evidence on whether the billions of pounds of public funding it has awarded to local bodies in the past ten years for supporting local growth has had the impact intended.

The white paper sets out plans to reform the government's approach to data and evaluation to make it easier to see what impact local spending has. Pope says the government is saying the right things but he would like to see firmer plans developed.

"One thing that our work has exposed is that, even though there are clear lessons that you can learn from past policies that different governments have implemented, the evidence is not as good as it should be, because governments haven't spent enough time evaluating it.

"if we're going to have more de-

volved policy, and therefore, different policy experiments in different parts of the country, it's critical that we understand better what is actually working, and what is actually driving change."

This would mean having clear evaluation plans from the start as new projects are developed and making greater use of external researchers to evaluate policy and making data more available, he says.

High level visit Cabinet meeting at Middleport Pottery in Stoke-on-Trent

The structure of the civil service – with departments organised around discrete policy areas – presents another challenge. The levelling up white paper includes 12 missions, ranging from education and transport to health and digital connectivity. While some missions have cross-departmental aims, most sit within one department and the white paper identifies siloed policymaking in central government as one of the key issues that has hampered previous attempts to drive regional growth.

Pope agrees that joining up the 12 missions will be crucial to levelling up.

"If you take, say, skills policy, there's good evidence that if you improve people's skills, they will earn more and be more productive," he says.

"But just improving people's skills is not necessarily the answer to levelling up, because people who are skilled in places that don't have the jobs will then move to places that have jobs."

He adds that: "Departments need to think about how their policies interact with other departments' policies and ensure there's as much joined up working on those things as possible.

"They need to understand that driving levelling up is about a set of policies working together rather than the one contribution of their specific policy."

The levelling up cabinet committee is a "textbook answer as to how you drive better cross departmental working", he says, adding that: "What you really need is political will and weight behind an agenda like levelling up to create better incentives for departments to work together."

Pope says the white paper has a vision for "quite a radical change to the way that Whitehall is set up, the way it works and the way that it interacts with local government". This includes putting geographical inequality at the centre of policymaking, improving collaboration between central and local government, and devolving more decision making away from the centre.

"I think for those changes to be pushed through, it really does require political commitment from ministers to make it work, and not just commitment from the minister for levelling up, but also from the secretary of state for levelling up, housing and communities, and from the prime minister and the chancellor," he says.

Better coordination across Whitehall will not be enough, however, to drive change.

"To coordinate better locally," Pope says, "there are some policies that it makes sense to devolve as well."

A key aspect of the levelling up plan is to devolve more power to local government in England, offering each area access to "London-style" powers, which could include their own mayor, if they want it.

To monitor use of these new powers, the government will create a new independent body aimed at "improving transparency of local government performance".

For many these powers are seen as the key to unlocking the rest of the levelling up agenda. "There are policies where local knowledge is particularly useful, like tailoring policy specifically to a local labour market, or there's policy where it really makes sense for two levers to be decided jointly and strategically," Pope says.

"You want your transport policy and your housing policy to work together in a local area, so those are the types of policies that it makes sense to devolve.

That's part of what's going on with the metro mayor model and attempts at green new deals." But, he adds: "Even if those deals are agreed, England in particular will still be relatively centralised compared to most other countries."

Graeme Atherton, head of the Centre for Levelling Up at the University of West London says the UK is not well prepared to devolve power because of just how centralised its system of government is compared to other countries in western Europe.

"The government needs to think seriously about how it can devolve power to the local government level," Atherton says.

"It's a major challenge for the government to do that so it needs to really consider the mechanisms in place. Shifting power is often harder than shifting resources. And to what level?"

The government's current system of awarding funding to councils in general is also problematic. The government operates a competitive funding model, whereby local authorities have to bid for pots of money and prove that each of their projects is value for money and better value for money than other projects. The white paper sets out plans for a simplified, long-term funding settlement, however.

The current system is "understandable" but there are two downsides, Pope says. "Ultimately, they [civil servants] are held accountable for the money that is spent, and they want to make sure it is spent well. But local government can then end up spending quite a lot of resources in the bidding process, which may be a bit wasteful.

"The second is that one of the big benefits of devolving policy is an ability to have levers operating strategically together. That's much harder to do if you have to bid independently for each of those projects. If you don't know which of those you're going to be awarded, it's much harder to think, strategically."

This could be solved by having more flexible funding but with more accountability, Pope says.

"I think that is part of how central and local government can work better together," he adds.

"There probably is some money that will end up being less well spent, as a result. But there may also be money that can be much more effectively spent, taking advantage of local areas' nuanced understanding of what's required."

That nuance also means devolution is not necessarily the right route to growth for all local authorities. Stoke-on-Trent City Council leader Abi Brown says the city would benefit more from getting on with levelling up rather than spending that time battling over devolution.

"For some places, I can see it's really valuable, but it isn't necessarily for us, and as a place that needs to level up, I've got two choices: I can either spend a lot of time to battle over devolution that I may or may not win, or I can actually crack on with levelling up.

"And I really believe that my efforts are better suited to levelling up for my residents than what is in effect, at times, an administrative battle over devolution. Because I'd have to join with another area to get devolution and that's going to take a huge amount of my time and my effort, when actually, there's a number of things that I can do that I don't really need devolution for."

Instead, Brown says moral support from government will be far more important to achieving the city's goals – Stoke-on-Trent City Council published its own plan for levelling up last year – than devolution. Part of this moral support is simply civil servants visiting more often – something Brown says has happened a lot more in the last six months and "makes quite a big difference".

"There's a particular perception often in the press about the city that isn't really what it looks like at all. It isn't really full of broken-down factories or broken windows, which sadly does tend to be the perception sometimes.

"So having people come here to see the good things, but also some of the real challenges, is really helpful. And I think that goes quite a long way towards helping civil servants to understand how to address the levelling up of agenda."

Brown says the next step would be to be able to get relevant departments and arm's-lengths bodies in the same room "rather than having to tell our story again and again to each department".

"I appreciate that's quite complicated because there's lots of councils out there, but that would make it so much easier," she says.

Even for a council which does not see devolution as the vital to levelling up, new powers could play a big role in achieving levelling up success. Improving transport is one of four pillars in Stoke-on-Trent's plan and Brown says this is an area where getting devolved powers would benefit the city and areas around it.

The key for Brown, therefore, will be if the government can be pragmatic in its conversations with local authorities to allow for varying levels of devolution.

"As a place that needs to level up, I've got two choices: I can either spend a lot of time to battle over devolution that I may or may not win, or I can actually crack on with levelling up" ***Abi Brown, Stoke-on-Trent Council***

The white paper sets out a plan for the next eight years, accepting that levelling up will take some time.

"The government's right to acknowledge that this is a long-term situation," Atherton says, but he adds that eight years is a minimum: "It's going to take longer to reverse decades of economic and social challenge.

For economic growth policies to be successful, stability will be key, he continues: "If you are going to have those targets, then stick with them; allow people who are working in this space to understand what they are and remain with them."

Atherton is hopeful that there will be progress but says it will not look the same across the country: "Different communities have different starting points. And what progress means in in, say, Blackpool is different to what progress might mean in Thanet, in Kent, with different sets of challenges."

But he says the jury is out on whether that will be long-lasting regeneration and the test will be to check in five years' time if there has been stability of commitment to the agenda and a significant machinery of government to allow funding to make a difference.

Even if all of the missions were to be achieved, Atherton says they would still be "only a fraction of what would need to be done to instigate long-term meaningful change in some areas".

Pope strikes a cautiously optimistic note but also stresses that the next few years will be key. He believes government is trying to address the reasons why previous initiatives have failed, and there's "a good chance it will at least make some difference to policy".

"I'm not sure there will be huge changes to the economic geography of the UK, but that would be a very difficult thing to achieve," he adds.

"A lot hinges on what happens in the next couple of years, and whether there's enough political momentum to actually push through some of the organisational changes that are proposed."

For Brown, levelling up success would mean being able to tell new stories.

"Last year, we completed our £7m spitfire extension to our Potteries Museum and Art Gallery. The designer of the Spitfire Reginald Joseph Mitchell came from the city and his legacy really is not [just] the spitfire we house within the spitfire gallery. It's the idea that any child from Stoke-on-Trent could go on to change the world as he did, by designing something that changed everybody's lives.

"So for me in a way levelling up is that – that we get to the point where I don't have to tell that story any longer because a child from Stoke-on-Trent can aspire to go to university, to live in nice houses, to have good jobs, to not die younger than everybody else pretty much in the UK – and they can aspire to do it here." ■

Going up Spitfire at Stoke-on-Trent Potteries Museum And Art Gallery

CASTING THE NET WIDE

With ambitious net zero targets in place, **Mark Rowe** reports on a *CSW* cross-sector round table discussing how government can be a catalyst for change. Photography by Paul Heartfield

Net zero is the fulcrum on which the UK government's climate change policy turns. The binding goal of a 100% reduction in emissions by 2050 (on 1990 levels) covers all sectors of the economy, but setting the goal and delivering it are quite different matters. Meaningful carbon reductions must be implemented by all governmental departments as well as the sectors they serve. Nothing is exempt, whether it is prisons, transport, military equipment or schools. Carbon-heavy sectors such as cement, steel, shipping and aviation can no longer simply turn to credits to offset their climate debts.

Achieving this will require a substantial and coordinated effort across all sectors – government may have set out plans, but it will be business, citizens and local communities who are vital to their delivery. It was in this context that *Civil Service World* recently chaired a roundtable on the issue, bringing together officials from across government with public and private sector experts including sponsors KBR, a company that provides science, technology and engineering solutions to governments and which has its own net zero target for 2030.

"It needs something solid, such as an Office for Sustainability at the centre of government – it's not enough for individuals to be championing this" *Richard Nugee*

Attendees were acutely aware of many hurdles to overcome. Past attempts to drive green initiatives have faltered, and the event took place just days after the Public Accounts Committee published a report critiquing government's net zero plans as lacking details on how the transition to net zero would be funded and monitored, while also questioning government's ability to support the business investment and consumer changes which would be needed.

Although they agreed that achieving net zero would require effort from all sectors, attendees at the round table also discussed the importance of government facilitating – rather than hampering – change. As Rezina Hakim, senior policy advisor for the NHS Confederation put it, government must provide, "consistency, clarity and capability" to help others achieve net zero targets.

One key aspect was how messages around net zero are positioned, both by leaders at the top of government and sustainability teams within departments. "Awareness could be better, and we need to highlight the benefits to society at large," argued Muhammad Ali, head of the climate change and sustainability unit at the Ministry of Justice. His advice was that teams "bring value back into the argument".

James Clare, director of climate change and sustainability at the Ministry of Defence stated that long-term savings in cost, as well as wider energy security resilience benefits, should provide a practical financial argument in favour of decarbonisation.

This was the approach taken in the MoD's Climate Change and Sustainability Strategic Approach, published in 2021. This document used defence objectives to make the case for climate change mitigation (that is, reducing emissions) and adaptation (preparing for climate changes already in train), writing that "a defence properly organised for climate change is one that will be better able to defend its citizens".

Clare worked on this strategy, working under Lieutenant General Richard Nugee, now retired. Nugee was also an attendee at the *CSW* round table, where he pointed to the importance of long-term context when making a positive case for net zero work. "If we are all self-reliant on energy in 30 years it would be much cheaper for everyone and much healthier," he said "That's better than a negative message that 'we must do this or else or it's a catastrophe'."

Attendees were clear that net zero and sustainability work must be linked to wider policy or business objectives. It soon became apparent that all departments faced practical questions in relation to net zero policies. Within the MoD, Nugee pointed out, "we are buying and building vessels and we need to know what fuel we will be using in 25 years time to fill them up. It's not just about climate change – it's practical – if we're using diesel but no-one else is, we won't be able to refuel".

For prisons, Ali pointed out, implementation of net zero projects had to be integrated with wider operations, capital and maintenance projects. Fitting LED lights into a cell, for example, at the same time as carrying out fire safety works. Co-ordinating such tasks with other works saves money and delivers a more comprehensive outcome, he said.

For Simon Bittlestone, director at the National Audit Office, integrating net zero meant it should not be seen as a stand-alone policy; instead government should show how "this fits in with wider biodiversity objectives and air quality and levelling up."

But while there was consensus on the need for strong and appropriate communication from the top, attendees also saw other roles for government in supporting industry to tackle climate change. "High level messaging is something only government can do," said Julia Beck, deputy director for strategy at UK Export Finance. "But from the bottom up, we need to understand what the private sector wants and to support academia."

There was a need "to start grappling with this pretty urgently," she added. "There's a huge amount of capital and

liquidity out there that wants to get involved but is looking for bankable technology and products, the government needs to help with this. At UKEF we are focusing our support on more nascent technologies like hydrogen, with favourable terms for green sectors."

A practical example of this was provided shortly after the round table when UKEF announced it would be underwriting a loan of £400m to boost research and development in sustainable technologies. The loan, provided by HSBC, Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation and Bank of America and backed by UKEF, will be given to sustainable technology company Johnson Matthey and will also support the development of high-skilled jobs across the UK.

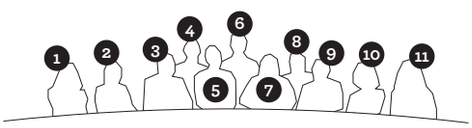
Bittlestone said that organisations such as Innovation UK would be well placed to ensure such things were joined up and liaise with private companies who could develop appropriate structures.

To a certain extent, attendees agreed, governments need to ensure they were consistent about which technologies they intended to support, giving industry the long-term confidence to invest and develop infrastructure. This appears to be working in relation to electric vehicles – which enjoy impetus from the deadline for stopping production of petrol engines in 2030. The same could happen with air source heat pumps although for many energy producers and environmentalists, the jury is still out on these technologies. "The government is counting on industry to make them better, smaller," said Bittlestone. "The question is what happens if the industry doesn't?"

Joy Newton, associate director of Sustainability and ESG Finance, Lloyds Banking Group, also warned that any intervention in the supply chain should consider the unintended consequences from the wider sustainability perspective. "If organisations are setting long-term targets and ambitions there needs to be realistic plans that sit behind them, any intervention in operations or the supply chain will have a positive or negative consequence, and any intervention needs to be considered holistically," she said.

These questions alluded to government's unenviable task of being not only consistent and providing long-term support, but of being nimble. It's entirely possible, as several attendees pointed out, that the technology that ultimately "delivers" genuine net zero status for the UK has yet to be invented.

On this topic, Benjamin Sawford, global VP, consulting for KBR, pointed out that recent years have shown just how quickly innovation can happen in a crisis. "If Covid has taught us anything it is that the scale of change can be incredible. Ideas have



1 Suzannah Brecknell, *editor, Civil Service World*
2 Anne Epsom, *head of policy and improvement, Orbis Procurement*
3 Lt-Gen Richard Nugee, *non-executive board member, Ministry of Defence*
4 Dougal Monk, *director of strategic development, government solutions, KBR*
5 Simon Bittlestone, *director, National Audit Office*
6 James Clare, *director of climate change and sustainability, Ministry of Defence*
7 Joy Newton, *associate director of sustainability and ESG, Lloyds Banking Group*
8 Ben Sawford, *global VP, consulting, KBR*
9 Muhammad Ali, *head of climate change and sustainability, Ministry of Justice*
10 Julia Beck, *deputy director for strategy, UK Export Finance*
11 Rezina Hakim, *senior policy adviser, NHS Confederation*

gone from decision-making to reality within two years, that's never happened before."

As well as providing policy sticks and carrots, government has a very strong way to influence change: through the many procurement, commissioning and funding decisions it makes each year. It has already taken several successful steps to use this power. Dougal Monk, director of strategic development, government solutions for KBR, noted that 75% of the government's strategic suppliers have net zero statements. "If it wasn't for the government stressing the importance, I don't think they all would have done this. Net zero is now on boards' agendas," he said.

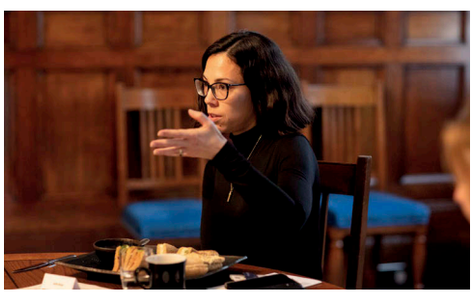
Such an approach matters but must come, again, with consistency both in terms of how targets are monitored, and of funding over the long term, as several attendees argued. Bittlestone pointed to reports by the NAO on how government "had chopped and changed" its direction on climate change over the years.

Anne Epsom, head of policy and improvement for Orbis Procurement, which oversees procurement for county councils in southern England, warned that: "A lack of consistency will cost money. There's a perception that the green levy is optional, we need to get across that net zero is a legally binding target. It comes back to the consistency of message." Funding also had to be consistent and long term, she added. "It's not just about budgets for this year, it's for the following year and the year after that."

She also noted that it was hard for organisations to measure and monitor their carbon impact without a clear framework and information. "We have over 330 local authorities in England alone scrambling to tackle climate change. We need to collaborate to have a consistent model, and there could be a role for central government in supporting that."

But while attendees agreed that consistent ways to report and monitor progress would be important in decarbonising supply chains, Clare argued that we should not let perfect be the enemy of good. "We don't need to know everything to the nth degree we just need enough to start the conversation," he said.

Hakim also raised worries about traditional short-term funding which makes NHS long-term planning for climate change problematic: "The NHS is well-known for short-term injections of cash. The funding is always welcome but how do you dovetail that sustainably? We don't have the luxury of long-term planning."



Yet several attendees pointed out that if organisations can start to plan and implement their net zero ambitions now it will be much less costly than if the work is put off for another 20 years. Doing nothing has its own costs, as Sawford put it, "the cost of doing nothing is staring us in the face right now, with oil at US$170 a barrel".

Returning to the three 'C's which Hakim set out at the starte of the discussion, attendees agreed that there is an urgent need to build capability across government in terms of understanding issues around climate change, net zero and sustainability. Several mooted the idea of a sustainability function which could provide cross-departmental standards and support. Nugee envisaged some specific structural changes to truly embed sustainability in everything the civil service does. "It needs something solid, such as an Office for Sustainability at the centre of government," he added. "It's not enough for individuals to be championing this."

He argued that one way to embed this and build capability would be to require all papers submitted to the National Security Council to include implications or impact of climate change on the issue at hand. This would ensure senior decision makers were made aware of the impact of climate change, but also build capability since there would need to be a team able to provide this advice. He suggested this mechanism could act as a "dynamo" driving change in government.

Hakim added another way in which net zero could be embedded into organisational strategic and structural thinking. "The Care Quality Commission's regulatory framework doesn't adequately include any standards for net zero and this lack of joined up approach is unhelpful for the NHS" she said.

Sawford, meanwhile, argued that an Office of Sustainability, or similar entity, could "bring the private sector and government together and be more connected, which would be critical to making change happen at the pace required."

Despite the challenges raised during the round table, Bittlestone drew a positive conclusion. Referring to the near-unanimity around the table on the importance of on integrating net zero with wider policy goals, he reminded colleagues of an important point. "It feels a long time since net zero was set but it's actually less than three years. The positive thing is that [in that short time] we now have people right across Whitehall thinking about these issues." ■

THE HOUSE BRIEFING

ONLINE EVENT

30 Jun 2022 | 09:30 – 15:30

Building a better future – Preparing for biodiversity net gain

The Government is continuing to impose tighter environmental regulations on the development and construction industry.

The Environment Act 2021 brings in the introduction of a mandatory 10 per cent biodiversity net gain (BNG) requirement on every planning permission granted in England.

Register to attend this online event to uncover key elements of the BNG policy and its implications on infrastructure developments. Hear first-hand from the Government, policy experts and leaders in industry who will share their insight and offer practical guidance to prepare your organisation for the new mandatory BNG requirements.

Key takeaways:

- How will BNG be incorporated into the planning system of England?
- What will BNG mean for local authorities, developers and landowners?
- Who is responsible for creating and maintaining net gain?
- How will biodiversity be measured and whose responsibility will it be to measure it?

Use your phone's camera to register for this event

Register now: thehousebriefing.co.uk/events
Email: customer.service@thehousebriefing.com
Phone: 020 7593 5739

SCIENTIFIC BRITANNICA

The government has been clear in its aim to turn Britain into a science and technology powerhouse. But in a difficult climate for public spending, can it hope to do so? **Tom Hunter** examines the plans

In June 2021, riding high from the success of the Covid vaccine roll-out, prime minister Boris Johnson wrote: "We want the UK to regain its status as a science superpower."

Spearheading the effort is George Freeman, the minister for science, research and innovation. He told the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee in February that to achieve this goal the government was shifting science, technology, and innovation from specialist thinking to the economic mainstream; increasing annual R&D spending by 30% in three years; making sure UK science could solve global challenges, such as tackling climate change and hunger; ensuring the best young scientists start their careers in the UK; and attracting more international R&D investment – and then "harnessing all of that for geopolitical influence".

This drive to become a "science superpower" is spread across a variety of strategies, advisory boards, and reviews, but questions have been raised about whether the government can put its money where its mouth is in the current climate.

Funding and investment

The government has committed to spending 2.4% of GDP – the average for industrialised countries – on R&D by 2027, a significant increase on the recent average of 1.7% However, it has pushed back its time frame for boosting annual public R&D investment to £22bn from £14.9bn last year by two years to 2026-27 amid the tough economic environment. The budget for UK Research and Innovation, the main public R&D funding agency, was also cut by £700m to £7.9bn following the government's decision to cut spending on overseas aid (known as official development assistance or ODA), which had been used to fund international research projects. The Royal Society described the cuts as a "devastating blow to global research." The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy also announced in May that it would be bringing its bilateral ODA funding in China to an end and winding

down the Newton Research Fund and Global Challenges Research Fund, seen as key tools of R&D soft power and influence.

UK researchers have also experienced complications in collaborating with European counterparts and projects following Brexit, as the UK awaits confirmation of its association to the EU's Horizon Europe programme. Warnings from the European Research Council that grants could be pulled have created uncertainty for scientists, although BEIS has said it would guarantee approved funding.

British universities receive a larger share of government science funding than counterparts in many other countries, where companies and research institutes play a larger role. Experts say that to achieve its science ambitions, the government needs to stimulate private sector investment.

R&D tax credits are key, with different schemes for small and large companies that together are worth more than £5bn a year to industry. HM Revenue & Customs is reviewing the incentives, with industry generally supportive of their expansion.

Government can also encourage corporate R&D by helping science companies collaborate with each other and with universities, particularly by nurturing science and research campuses, such as Harwell in Oxfordshire, home of the UK Vaccines Manufacturing and Innovation Centre. US firm Catalent Biologics bought a biologics development and manufacturing facility there in April and plans to invest about £120m in the site.

People and place

To generate the workforce needed to match the investment, the BEIS R&D People and Culture Strategy includes plans to attract postgraduate students, identify skills gaps, and set up a youth academy. There's also a focus on identifying solid career paths, further support for early career researchers, and ensuring the development of leadership and management skills.

This drive to attract scientists is supported by the Office for Talent – established in the 2020 UK R&D Roadmap – and the Global Talent Visa, which enables non-UK citizens to work in British academia or research if they are a leader or potential leader in science, medicine, engineering, or humanities. This has been bolstered by plans, launched in May, for a so-called new High Potential Individual visa for graduates of a top global university who have shown potential to benefit the UK workforce, and Scale-UP, which allows participating firms to sponsor and recruit highly skilled foreigners.

In 2019, the government estimated that the UK needed at least 260,000 additional researchers working in R&D across universities, business and industry. The Royal Society warned last year that significant growth in those workers was unlikely without additional action from government.

The government is also keen to spread R&D expertise around the UK as part of its levelling up agenda. Office for National Statistics data shows there are significant geographical disparities in R&D spend per capita across the UK, with 52% of spending by government and universities going to the East and South East of England, including London.

While the government has yet to publish its planned R&D Place Strategy, there have been signs of investment moving beyond the traditional hub, the "golden triangle" between London, Oxford and Cambridge. These include research campuses such as Glasgow City Innovation District, and the Cheshire-based Sci-Tech Daresbury, and Alderley Park.

"Experts say that to achieve its science ambitions, the government needs to stimulate private sector investment"

The levelling up white paper, published earlier this year, set a target for the government to invest at least 55% of its total domestic R&D funding outside the greater South East by 2024-25. It also outlines ambitions to create private-public-academic partnerships to "replicate the Stanford-Silicon Valley and MIT-Greater Boston models of clustering research excellence", with pilots centred on Greater Manchester, the West Midlands and Glasgow City Region, and backed by £100m of investment for these three new "Innovation Accelerators".

Innovation and institutions

The UK Innovation Strategy, published in mid-2021, sets out the government's priorities on future industries and opportunities, including seven new "technology families": advanced materials and manufacturing; AI, digital and advanced computing; bioinformatics and genomics; engineering biology; electronics, photonics and quantum; energy and environment technologies; and robotics and smart machines.

To support this effort the government is setting up an array of institutions, some inspired by the US approach. Based on the Pentagon's Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency model, the UK's Advanced Research and Invention Agency aims to bring a high-risk, high-reward approach to science in Britain. While its initial budget of £800m over four years is relatively small, the agency will be tasked with pursuing some of the new technologies outlined in the Innovation Strategy.

A review of the R&D organisational landscape was also announced in the strategy, to be led by Nobel laureate professor Sir Paul Nurse of the Francis Crick Institute.

A new ministerial National Science and Technology Council, led by the prime minister, will help drive strategy on how science and technology will tackle societal challenges – although peers have raised concerns about its infrequent meetings.

The council will be supported by a new Office for Science and Technology Strategy, based in the Cabinet Office and headed up by Sir Patrick Vallance who adds national technology adviser to his role of chief scientific adviser. It remains to be seen how these two bodies will work with the existing Council for Science and Technology – which advises the prime minister on science and technology policy – and the Government Office for Science, which Sir Patrick also heads up.

The government's focus on people and place, and innovation and new institutions, indicates a concerted effort to put in place the building blocks to turn the UK into a science superpower. But time will tell if it follows through in the current tough economic climate with the funding required to realise its lofty ambition. ■

Tom Hunter is a political consultant at Dods Political Intelligence

AN INSPECTOR CALLS

As the man in charge of inspecting the Crown Prosecution Service, **Andrew Cayley** believes there is scope for real change through effective collaboration and accountability. He tells **Jonathan Owen** about his plans, and his incredibly tough – and rewarding – experiences prosecuting war crimes across the world

Andrew Cayley QC recently celebrated his first year as HM chief inspector of the crown prosecution inspectorate. Becoming a chief inspector – with responsibility for inspecting the Crown Prosecution Service and the Serious Fraud Office, making recommendations to improve their efficiency, effectiveness and fairness – was not part of his life plan, but then again his career has been anything but orthodox.

He grew up with an interest in the law, stimulated by watching ITV's 70s courtroom drama series, *Crown Court*. Cayley started off as a solicitor before joining the army as a lawyer and travelling the world, becoming a major in just seven years. During this time, he went on a three-year secondment to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

The turning point came when he was 33, by which time he was married with a young family. Cayley was presented with a choice. He could accept a regular commission in the army, which would have been a "a job for life with a very good pension," he says. Or he could take a six-month role with the United Nations and an uncertain future.

"It was one of those decisions that absolutely changed the course of my life," he recalls. "I was looking at this thinking: I've got the offer to go back to the army, guaranteed for the rest of my life, or I can take a six-month contract with the UN with no guarantees of renewal and a lot of stress.

"I actually chose to go into the UN because I found the work so rewarding. Nothing I'd ever done had been as rewarding as doing this kind of work."

Cayley ended up spending a decade prosecuting war crimes cases at the ICTY, including the Srebrenica massacre of more than 8,000 men and boys. He also investigated Bosnian Serb Colonel General Ratko Mladic, who was ultimately convicted of war crimes and genocide.

He has seen things that few can comprehend, and even fewer would willingly witness. For him it was part of the job. Yet the impact of dealing with human misery at its most acute has left its mark. Cayley's voice breaks with emotion when he recalls how a policeman was faced with the body of his young son who had been killed during the Zenica massacre in Bosnia – one of several occasions that stick in his memory as the hardest points of that work.

Another was the first time he saw a mass grave, during the Srebrenica case. "I wanted to go and see for myself, and that was pretty shocking because you had eight to nine hundred people buried in a mass grave."

He recalls, also, listening to the testimony of a teenage boy who, along with just one other person, survived the murder of 1,400 people in a place near Srebenica called Petkovići Dam. "It was one of the most shocking, brutal accounts I've ever heard...the fear and the brutality of it all. And he told this story from the beginning from when he was captured right through to when he escaped and, I can tell you, at the end of it, you could have heard a pin drop and one of the judges was actually weeping."

The witness, who was granted anonymity, told the court: "If I had the rights and the capacity on behalf of all those innocent people that were murdered I would actually forgive the perpetrators for what they did because they were misled. It was the people who organised all of this that are the most responsible."

Cayley went on to become a senior prosecutor at the International Criminal Court, investigating war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur, Sudan.

He then spent a few years as a poacher turned gamekeeper, defending former Liberian president Charles Taylor at the Special Court for Sierra Leone. Taylor was found guilty of war crimes and sentenced to 50 years.

Cayley had more success in defending Croatian general Ivan Čermak, who was acquitted of war crimes at the ICTY. "Even in cases like that where the crimes are so terrible, people still do deserve a defence, and they deserve a decent defence," he says.

In 2009 he became the international co-prosecutor of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal in Cambodia. One of his first actions was to appeal a 35-year sentence given to Comrade Duch, who had been convicted of crimes against humanity for the murders of more than 14,000 men, women and children at the notorious Tuol Sleng 'interrogation centre' in Phnom Penh. Cayley's efforts saw the sentence increased to life in prison (Duch died in jail in 2020).

In 2013, Cayley returned to the UK to take up the job of director of service prosecutions, a senior civil service role in the Ministry of Defence.

He was a "bit of an odd duck" among other senior civil servants in the MoD: "I was very new to it all but they were very inclusive," Cayley says. He speaks highly of his former permanent secretaries Sir Jon Thompson – "a great guy" and Sir Stephen Lovegrove – "a decent bloke".

His role was a baptism of fire, as Cayley faced the task of dealing with thousands of allegations against British soldiers accused of mistreatment, torture and, in some cases, the deaths of civilians.

The sheer scale of claims prompted the International Criminal Court to open a preliminary examination – a precursor to a formal investigation. Yet the vast majority of claims were marked by a "complete lack of evidence" or had "no realistic way of finding more evidence," according to Cayley.

"In the end it boiled down to about 10 cases that we thought might have legs. I gave advice on one myself and then the rest of them I decided we will get independent legal advice so there's never an allegation that this was a cover up." He freely admits there'd been a "small number of disgraceful episodes that happened," but the "difficulty was we couldn't prove it, for various evidential reasons".

The former war crimes prosecutor is equally forthright when asked about prosecuting veterans for crimes committed during the Troubles. "We were sending very young soldiers out to Northern Ireland to essentially augment the police force in a civil war and then we expected them to be absolutely discerning and careful about how they used lethal force in that kind of situation."

Cayley admits that there are "a small minority of soldiers who probably did shoot people and kill them because they like the sport" but argues "the vast majority" were "kids who were placed in an impossible situation".

"To prosecute people 50 years later for events that they were mixed up in when they were 18 years old I just think is wrong," he says, adding that: "Crimes committed by the IRA were "much more considered and violent and awful and planned".

"Most of the deaths that we are talking about that we attribute as crimes to British soldiers were terrible bloody accidents, it wasn't cold blooded, it was frightened young soldiers reacting in a situation. I've seen these files," he says.

> **"It was one of the most shocking, brutal accounts I've ever heard... I can tell you, at the end of it, you could have heard a pin drop and one of the judges was actually weeping"**

In his latest role, at HMCPSI, Cayley reports directly to the attorney general and the solicitor general, and has a working relationship with the director general of the Attorney General's Office, Doug Wilson. The CPS is under enormous pressure, with very high caseloads for its staff, yet Cayley says he's "been pleasantly surprised how good the work is".

He describes media reports over a lack of public confidence in the CPS as "unfair" and says issues such as serious crime, terrorism, and murder are being handled "exceptionally well". On a wider note, he views the civil service as a "modern organisation" with some "incredibly impressive people".

"I probably shouldn't say this," he adds, "but the quality of civil servants within the British civil service is certainly a lot higher than the general quality in the UN."

That's not to say there isn't room for improvement in how the system runs. Select committees, for example, should be "more adversarial" when grilling people. "I like to be quizzed. I think it's good as a public official to be accountable for what you're doing." Turning to the challenges faced by the CPS, Cayley cites the back- »

log in courts as the single biggest concern.

HMCPSI recently took part in a joint investigation with the inspectorates of constabulary and fire and rescue services; prisons; and probation. The bodies joined forces to look at the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the criminal justice system.

Their report, released in May 2022, makes for grim reading. It warns that the criminal justice system is a long way from recovering from the effects of the pandemic, and is operating at "unacceptable levels". The report reveals that by the end of December 2021 some 25% of cases had been waiting for a year or more to come to court. It states: "Justice is delayed, denied or disrupted in far too many instances."

Asked how confident he is that meaningful change can be achieved without massive resourcing, Cayley answers: "I don't think it's just about resourcing. I think it's also about working differently." He cites the importance of good relations between the police and CPS, which he admits are "not so good" in some places.

Allegations British soldiers in Northern Ireland

"It's about individuals in the end. It's about how individuals respond to things and my view is that you've got to create the best environment you can for people working under enormous amounts of stress to do the best they can," he says.

When it comes to the age-old issue of tackling silo mentality, the answer also lies in personal relationships between people, he says, but this doesn't just happen by itself. Structures are needed to create the conditions for collaboration, he argues. One such structure he is supporting is greater use of joint inspections as a way to break down barriers between departments. "The only way that we are going to confront and solve the challenges that we face in criminal justice is to ensure that all the parts are working better together."

"The only way that we are going to confront and solve the challenges that we face in criminal justice is to ensure that all the parts are working better together"

In the context of the CPS, that means closer working between police officers investigating cases and prosecutors, so that they can get "the best evidence for a prosecution".

Cayley is impatient to make a difference. He's already come up with a plan to help the CPS become more efficient and achieve better results. He intends to focus his efforts on getting prosecutng agencies to more effectively implement his recommendations. There will be more collaborative working, due to the need for improvements to the "whole criminal justice system rather than just to one agency". He will be "working much more frequently with other inspectorates on joint inspections" and there will be particular focus on improving relations between the police and CPS.

Reflecting on his latest challenge, he describes how "there are so many moving parts in criminal justice" and says it works very differently to the rest of the civil service. "There is a level of examination and scrutiny of the work of the CPS which I think is probably unmatched in any other area of government work."

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has brought back a lot of memories for Cayley. "It is really shocking because it is a professional army and they've just been murdering innocent people."

He admits that it makes him want to return to the fray as a war crimes prosecutor.

"It was the toughest job I ever did but it was the most rewarding part of my career because I felt that it was so much more important than me, for all of us. I played a modest part in all of it but it was really bloody important to a lot of people what we were doing. It was about justice."

For all that, he is committed to his new role, which presents an opportunity of a different kind – to make a real difference to the criminal justice system. "I enjoy the civil service. If another job came up after this one, if whichever government is in power was interested in keeping me on to work with government ,I'd do it because I do actually enjoy it. When I see things change and get better that's very rewarding." ■

Tipping the scales The work of the CPS is under more scrutiny than any other part of government, Cayley says

THE HOUSE BRIEFING

ONLINE EVENT

15 Sep 2022 | 09:30 - 15:15

Revitalising High Streets

Make the most of levelling-up opportunities to shape the high streets of the future

Town councils, city planners and major developers have all had to rethink how high streets can adapt to the online-shopping, out-of-town hypermarket, post-Covid world, to attract more footfall and re-engage with communities.

The Government's Levelling Up White Paper has allocated funds to breathe new life into some of the UK's less prosperous towns.

This House Briefing will explore the key challenges facing high streets, offer case studies from impressive innovators, and present solutions from policy leaders in the planning and development industry who will share their insights and solutions.

Key Takeaways

- What are the key trends impacting high streets?
- Case studies demonstrating innovative policies and practices
- How can local authorities, businesses and community organisations work together?

Use your phone's camera to register for this event

Register now: thehousebriefing.co.uk/events
Email: customer.service@thehousebriefing.com
Phone: 020 7593 5739

NUDGE AND A WINK

The use of behavioural insights to improve public services represents a new policy approach which has affected the lives of millions of people around the world. Here, **Felicity Algate**, director of economic policy at the Behavioural Insights Team, explores the evolution of the discipline in government

If you have worked within the civil service over the past decade, then the chances are you've discussed using behavioural insights or 'nudging' to support your policy work. Indeed, it's more than likely that your department even has its own dedicated behavioural insights (BI) team.

Deriving from Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein's famous nudge theory, the practice has been used across public services to generate low-cost interventions that vastly improve service outcomes. Since its adoption by policymakers around the world, BI has transformed public policy for the better, both saving government money and, more importantly, improving millions of lives.

A bold claim? Let's look at the evidence. First, I should declare that I am a founder member of the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT); the world's first government department dedicated to

applying BI to public policy. We are now an international organisation with offices around the world, working in partnership with national, regional and local governments, businesses, foundations and charities, to tackle major policy problems.

What are behavioural insights?

BI asserts that much of our behaviour is unconscious and is thus determined by habits, cues in the environment and the way information is presented. Consequently, it's possible to influence people's behaviour and decision-making by 'nudging' them to make a particular choice.

There have been plenty of success stories of how nudges have driven positive behavioural change: from encouraging more cancer referrals, to prompting parents to read to their children more. Yet at BIT, we feel that solely focusing on nudges provided individual solutions to problems, rather than systematic approaches. This approach misses the wider opportunity that BI offers. Instead, we recognise the practice both as a lens through which one can consider policies and services, and a powerful tool in achieving desired outcomes.

How are they used?

BI can be used tactically or strategically. Tactical applications involve making changes to existing processes and programmes. For example, energy companies have found that informing customers that their energy use is above the neighbourhood average leads to them reducing their consumption.

"There have been plenty of success stories: from encouraging more cancer referrals, to prompting parents to read to their children more"

These tactical applications are often small and cheap but can have a large cumulative impact; trials to encourage people to switch their energy supplier, run by energy regulator Ofgem and BIT, are estimated to have saved consumers about £2bn on their energy bills since 2008.

Strategic applications aim to affect wider audiences, with a prime example being the UK's implementation of the sugar levy. Introduced as a tax on sugary drinks, the levy was designed to help tackle childhood obesity by raising product prices. However, the real impact was driven by manufacturers, who rushed to reformulate their drinks with less sugar. This allowed them to dodge the levy, but also meant healthier products for consumers, leading an estimated health benefit of £3.3bn.

These are prime examples of how applying a behavioural lens can enhance traditional approaches to policy making and bring benefits for citizens and government alike. That said, the use of BI isn't without its critics, and there are some real concerns that shouldn't be disregarded.

Overcoming concerns

The main criticism levelled at BI is that it has a limited impact and tackles the symptoms of an issue rather than the cause. This point has been made by some sections of the academic world as well as policy makers and journalists.

Such criticisms may certainly hold some weight, but I counter that this reflects how the public and private sector have so far focused on using BI at a tactical level, to make small changes to existing programmes or policies.

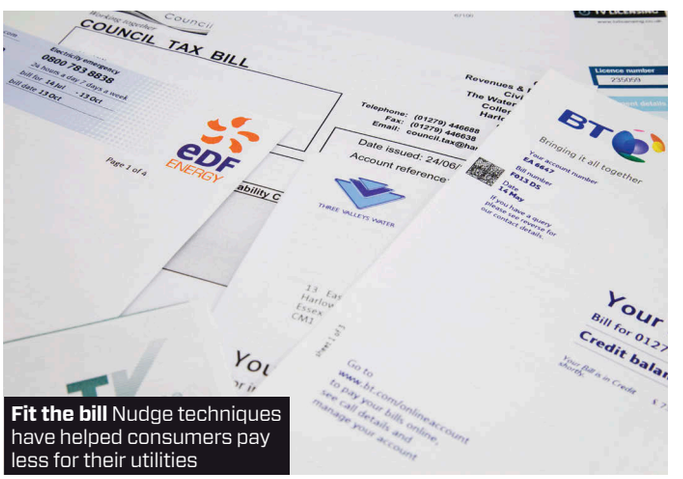
However, more strategic applications are emerging that can have a holistic impact during the policy development process, which I sincerely hope will continue to bring the practice forward.

What next?

When I joined BIT in 2011, BI was a relatively new field, meaning that we often had to spend time explaining what we did. Today, it is heartening to see how widely the approach has been adopted – and we're continuing to undertake detailed and nuanced conversations with organisations and governments alike about how BI can be used in new and exciting areas. So, what might the next 10 years bring?

Earlier, I claimed that BI had improved the lives of millions of people. Independent analysis of projects by BIT in the US found that key policy outcomes were improved by an average 8.1% – and at a low cost. Our work encouraged more diverse applicants to join police departments, increased engagement with a free primary care service for lower income residents of New Orleans, raised college enrolment among veterans and reduced overprescribing of antipsychotic medications.

Sweetener The Sugar Levy influenced companies' behaviour too; many soft drinks became healthier



Fit the bill Nudge techniques have helped consumers pay less for their utilities

Collectively, these interventions by both local and national government have reached 24 million people across the US in just four years. Imagine how many could be helped over the next 10 years?

It might sound contradictory, but my most sincere hope is that in a decade's time, we will no longer be talking about BI as a separate approach. Not because the idea has been abandoned, but because it has been universally accepted as the standard way of developing government policy. Most government policies are essentially a way of trying to influence behaviour in one way or another – my hope is that more people recognise that BI is just a more human approach to achieving this. ■

Felicity Algate is professor of practice at Alliance Manchester Business School and director of economic policy in the Behavioural Insights Team

Hug a 'hood David Cameron and Lord Heseltine visit Birkenhead in 2006

GROWING PAINS

Andrew Southam looks back at the different ways governments have tried to drive levelling up in the last century

Boris Johnson mentioned German reunification when trailing the Levelling Up White Paper in July 2020, contrasting strong growth in east Germany since 1989 with flagging growth in the north and east of the United Kingdom. "In the last 40 years," he lamented, "we have had 40 different schemes or bodies to boost local or regional growth" which haven't been "powerful enough".

It's actually been longer. Most twentieth century governments struggled to redress regional imbalance and promote opportunity.

Victorian politicians first used levelling up to mean religious equality. Prime minister William Gladstone dismissed Conservative attacks on his 1864 policy improving Irish Catholic churches. Their only plan, he said, was one announced "from these benches twelve months ago—the plan vulgarly called 'levelling up'".

By the early twentieth century, the term had settled into a financial meaning. Early state intervention to support regional growth took various forms. Stanley Baldwin's government wanted workers to move home for better prospects. The 1928 Industrial Transference Board encouraged some quarter of a million to emigrate. Miners became forest workers.

Ramsay MacDonald's national unity government tried a 'scientific experiment'. His 1934 Special Services Act promoted factories in depressed areas of South Wales, the North East and West Scotland. "Just as a scientist takes his test tube into his laboratory, works out his results and their reactions", he said, "by experimenting in the concentrated area you can reach your universal cure."

Post-war governments actually decided where businesses should go. Clement Attlee's 1947 Town and Country Planning Act sought the "proper distribution of industry": buildings above 5000 sq ft were refused industrial development certificates for being in the wrong place.

In 1962 Harold Macmillan wanted to "prevent two nations developing geographically, a poor north and a rich and overcrowded south" and thought Europe the answer.

"Justine Greening plausibly claims the levelling up copyright, using the phrase to explain social mobility to her mum"

Inner city plight attracted attention in the 1960s. Harold Wilson launched the Urban Aid Programme and Community Development Projects to boost deprived areas. Then, with urban regeneration the government's focus in the seventies, Jim Callaghan's 1978 Inner Urban Areas boosted this assistance.

Margaret Thatcher used the market to foster regeneration. She charged at inner city deprivation when cities burned in 1981 with enterprise zones, a national gardens festival freeing up development land and urban development corporations. Environment Secretary Michael Heseltine's espousal of development corporations even won over Liverpool which later made him a freeman of the city.

John Major introduced a softer focus with his City Challenge programme and later the 1994 Single Regeneration Budgets fostering joint public and private sector and community proposals.

New Labour promised an "urban renaissance" to "narrow the gap between deprived areas and the rest of the country by dramatically improving outcomes". They created nine Regional Development Agencies to even growth and a New Deal for Communities supporting deprived neighbourhoods. Education also became a focus. Education secretary David Blunkett smoothed pupil school funding – and increased further education investment with the hope of "levelling up, not levelling down".

Thinking evolved in Conservative circles. "Dave" Cameron wanted a "Big Society" with the "most dramatic redistribution of power...to promote local responsibility, innovation and civic actions". The resulting 2011 Localism Act gave councils new tax powers, replaced regional agencies with Local Enterprise Partnerships and introduced metro mayors. A social mobility commission was created and headed by a former Labour minister. Most prominent was the Chancellor's 2016 Northern Powerhouse project, aiming for British Los Angeles and Chicagos across the north.

Theresa May's short tenure wanted "a society that works for everyone" amid a "great meritocracy". Her education secretary started six opportunity areas to tackle low social mobility besides grammar school expansion. In fact, Justine Greening significantly developed the concept in the Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential White Paper with "levelling up opportunities" through education. She plausibly claims the levelling up copyright, using the phrase to explain social mobility to her mum.

Boris Johnson has defined the meaning further and created a rebranded government department to back it. Every government effort has made a difference, though the regions spoken about 100 years ago remain similar today. Will this current initiative prove a German miracle? ■

Andrew Southam is a freelance history correspondent and writer

Unlocking the
Senior Civil Service

Ever wonder what it would be like to work in the Senior Civil Service?

Unlocking the Senior Civil Service is aimed at people who wish to learn more about the application process, and what it is really like once you join.

While opportunities for joining are rare, the application process is rigorous, and the competition is fierce, it can be a rewarding career.

Now in its 10th year, this event provides practical help and guidance to those wishing to see their career develop, and is specifically designed to help you to improve your chances of a successful application.

DODS fda

Upcoming dates and locations:

Leeds – Tuesday 6th September 2022

Online – Tuesday 27th September 2022

London – Thursday 6th October 2022

To book or for more information:

T: Customer Services on 020 7593 5739

E: conference.admin@dodsgroup.com

W: unlockingthescs.co.uk

UKAS
A world of confidence

UKAS accreditation

Supporting better regulation

The United Kingdom Accreditation Service works with government to build trust and support protection in policy areas such as product safety, environmental management, healthcare, data protection and forensic science.

UKAS accreditation can complement or provide an alternative to regulation in a risk-based and proportionate approach to policy delivery.

The UKAS "crown and tick" and other symbols give confidence in markets around the world. UKAS accreditation enables international regulatory cooperation and forms part of a global network of mutual recognition that reduces technical barriers to trade.

ukas.com | Creating confidence in the products and services we all rely upon.