

CSW

CIVIL SERVICE WORLD 

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VITAL STATISTICS

What does the civil service look like in 2022?

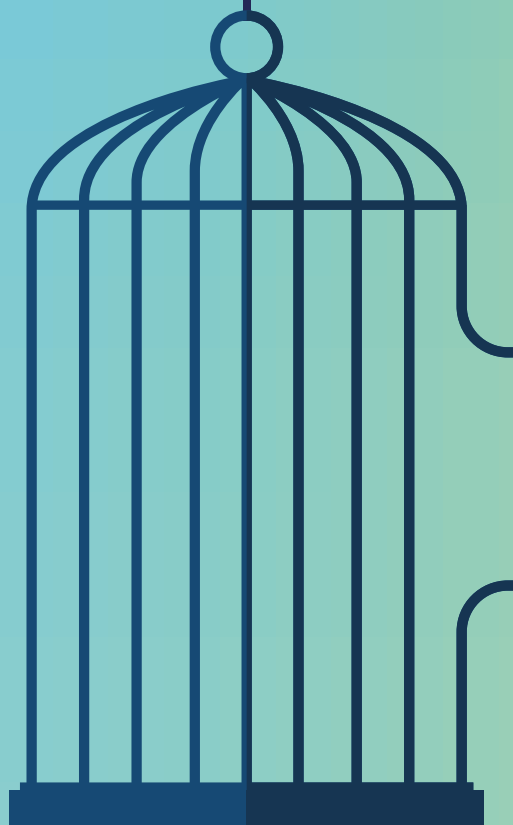
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TIME MACHINES

Sarah Healey on the history of digital policymaking

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THAT'S WHAT
I CALL THE
CIVIL SERVICE



FROM THE EDITOR

When producing a monthly publication, there is always a period of tension between the time we sign off copy and the moment it hits your desks or inboxes. At CSW we call it the Patel Effect, after the week in 2017 when we chose to run a story about then-international development secretary Priti Patel in our news pages. By the time the magazines had been printed and posted, Patel had been summoned back from an overseas trip and forced to resign over her unofficial meetings with Israeli ministers, business people and lobbyists.

Back then, we thought things were moving pretty fast in the world of politics. In retrospect, it feels like a golden age of stability. Today, it barely seems safe to even mention the prime minister by name in a magazine, lest they be ousted within the next few days rendering our work out-of-date. And when U-turns can be announced in less time than it takes for a disgraced minister to fly home from Kenya, it seems folly to even discuss policy issues in anything

other than a daily newsletter.

The speed with which politics is moving at the moment exacerbates a longstanding tension between the electoral cycle and the time it takes to effect change in most policy areas. The classic example is climate change – a challenge that requires consistent effort over decades, tackled by politicians who might hope to be in power for five-to-10 years at best.

When even five years of the same administration feels like a halcyon aspiration, it's not just long-term challenges which outlast the political cycle. Policymakers and implementers have always faced a challenge building long-term consensus and stability for policies like net zero, but now it's hard to even build consensus – or maintain momentum on – reforms or policies coming into effect over the next year or two.

This month we have an in-depth feature speaking to officials about concrete, collaborative work to reduce reoffending (p.16). With aligned budgets and common priorities, civil servants from different departments are able to drive



progress against this chronic and multi-faceted policy challenge. Their work was given a boost with the creation of a cabinet-level Crime and Justice Taskforce in 2019, which set reducing reoffending as a clear cross-government goal.

That committee has now been disbanded, with the arrival of a new PM. This doesn't mean the work stops, of course, but it creates a disturbance which already time-pressed officials must navigate, and a distraction from the fundamental aims of improving lives and benefiting society.

Civil servants are used to this, of course. Their ability to navigate uncertainty has been honed over the last six years like at no other time in their

professional memories. And while the political landscape is beyond anyone's control, civil servants *can* control how they approach their own development and practice. That's why it's encouraging to see a commitment from DCMS permanent secretary Sarah Healey to reflect and improve on the way digital policy is made in the UK (p.14). The digital department has a busy legislative and delivery agenda – it would be easy to see this kind of reflective work as a luxury. But in a context of such political and economic volatility, taking time to ensure that the civil service is preparing for the future (in this case by reflecting on the past) is a vital part of leadership. ■

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CIVIL SERVICE WORLD

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INBOX

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MAKING WORK PAY

The stories of DWP staff struggling to pay for essentials amid the cost-of-living crisis – collected by the PCS union in a dossier seen by CSW – got people talking. The stories included people turning to foodbanks, and some struggling to afford heating because years of real-terms pay cuts had left them on low pay.

Cormery @thepipster64 I'm in the same position re heating. I can't give up my car because we live in a rural area with no public transport and I need to get to work four days a week.

Paul Gibbs @Plumber471 Thank you for this, I am a civil servant (AA) and I'm sick and tired of the press labelling us all as senior people who work in Whitehall. Without us, the support staff who carry out jobs across the spectrum, the whole thing would collapse.

Cormery @thepipster64 Same here, my mortgage deal ends this month, the new one is double the amount. It's hard to shop around because we're in our 60s and there's not much on offer to us. Energy bill gone up, just affording to travel to

work is a problem. I honestly don't know how we are going to cope.

Rocio Ferro-Adams @RocioFerroAdams This is a real economic crisis which is affecting everyone.

The dossier revealed that employees of all ages were struggling, including some who had been working in the department for decades.

John Bell @PlasFron Is there a reason why they've stayed in a poorly paid job for 'decades', rather than seek a better paid job?

Alex Smith @alexthesmith They're important roles and the work itself is satisfying. The low pay leads to a high turnover of staff, so without the few who stay in the role, there'd be nobody to train up the constant flow of new people. I'm considered one of the most experienced in my work area after one year

MORALE COMPASS

Readers were sceptical that a call by the FDA and Prospect union chiefs to address civil service morale, following a series of attacks under Boris Johnson's administration, would cut through.

"I don't think Truss et al care a jot!" **Tim Sims** wrote.

"The response appears to be to an-

nounce that they are planning further cuts to government departments," **Helen Tait** said.

TRUST FALLS

CSW's first annual trust survey found civil servants consider commercial partners to be the least honest organisations they work with – but two-thirds of officials also said they struggle to find common ground with other government departments.

"I find the results of this survey incredibly sad. Met so many fantastic, hard working civil servants who recognise building trust, respect & a common purpose are vital ingredients in success," commented **Graeme McDonald**.

GROWING PAINS

Readers weren't enthused by an instruction to departments from chief secretary to the Treasury Simon Clarke to come up with growth plans – but also "look for efficiencies wherever we can find them".

"You wouldn't run business as we run the service. Drive should be on community, society and collective outcomes that drive benefits to all," **Stuart Brown** said.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

CSW meets head of the Defence and Security Accelerator Anita Friend and government chief property officer Mark Chivers

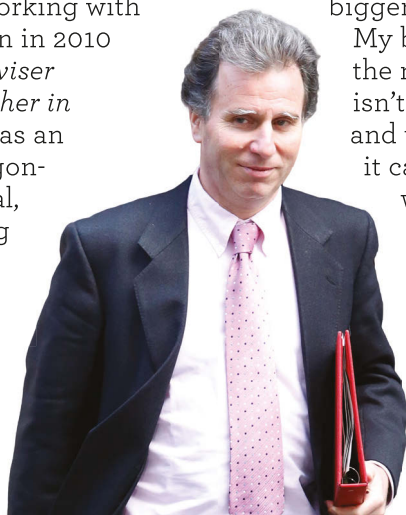
WHITEHALL WISDOM

The great and good pass judgement on government

Quotes taken from the *Civil Service World* archive

OLIVER LETWIN

"When I started working with civil servants again in 2010 [Letwin was an adviser to Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s], there was an awful lot more jargon-ridden, nonsensical, useless, distracting management speak, which I'm afraid we'd begun to sponsor in the 80s. But it



had clearly taken hold in a much bigger way in the interim. My biggest worry about all the management speak stuff isn't just the ghastly jargon and the waste of time. I think it can disadvantage people who are really remarkable at doing a really important job. Rather than reward them for doing their job well, they are asked to go and do something else which they might do

much less well, or be promoted to some level at which they aren't going to do anything except manage other people doing things. This is a terrible mistake. I think it's a system-wide problem: the civil service needs to find means to promote and honour people who are not commanding large groups of people, but rather who are doing their jobs extremely well."

The Tory grandee and ex-minister on the perils of management speak and 'ghastly jargon'

News round-up

What's new in the civil service world



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CIVIL SERVANTS QUESTION HONESTY OF PRIVATE PARTNERS - AND EACH OTHER



CSW survey finds two-thirds of officials struggle to find common ground with other government departments. By **Beckie Smith**

Civil servants consider commercial partners to be the least honest organisations they work with, according to a new survey by CSW - in which more than two-thirds of officials also said they struggle to find common ground with other government departments.

The first annual CSW trust survey polled civil servants across 15 departments and government agencies about their experience working with seven types of organisations: local government; commercial partners; the voluntary and community sector; academia; wider public service; non-departmental public bodies and executive agencies; and other government departments.

Of the 430 people surveyed, fewer than half said they deem private sector partners to be "open and honest". However,

Q: Thinking about working with the following partners, to what extent do you agree with the following statements? Base: Civil servants who work with commercial partners answering 'somewhat/strongly' agree

| Drivers of Trust | Government partners average | Local government | Commercial partners | Voluntary and community sector | Academia | Wider public service | Non-Departmental Public Bodies or Executive Agencies | Other government departments |
|---|-----------------------------|------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|----------|----------------------|--|------------------------------|
| I find it easy to collaborate with colleagues in this sector on work objectives | 64% | 68% | 61% | 57% | 68% | 69% | 63% | 60% |
| Organisations in this sector are open and honest | 64% | 68% | 47% | 69% | 76% | 72% | 65% | 53% |
| Organisations in this sector share common values with me | 66% | 67% | 47% | 76% | 67% | 75% | 71% | 62% |
| The people I work with in this sector are reliable | 66% | 68% | 62% | 67% | 68% | 71% | 69% | 58% |
| We can find common ground and goals | 76% | 75% | 73% | 79% | 77% | 81% | 76% | 68% |

■ Lowest agree % compared to other partners
 ■ Highest agree % compared to other partners

other government departments fared little better, with only 53% of respondents attributing these qualities to their colleagues in other ministries.

Academia was seen as the most honest sector (76%), followed by wider public service (72%), the voluntary sector (69%), local government (68%), and NDPBs and agencies (65%).

Commercial organisations also scored the lowest in CSW's overall trust rating – calculated by averaging out the percentage of survey respondents who agreed with five positive statements about the partner organisations they work with. The higher the score, the more likely it is that civil servants feel able to build strong partnerships with those organisations.

Civil servants were asked whether they find it easy to work with colleagues in each given sector; if they believe them to be open and honest; if they are able to find common ground and goals with them; if they share common values; and if the people in the sector are reliable.

The wider public service – which includes schools and healthcare providers – got the highest overall trust rating of 74%, closely followed by academia (71%) and the voluntary sector (70%).

However, these were also the areas our survey respondents were least likely to work with – with one in five or fewer saying they have partners in these sectors.

By contrast, four in five respondents said they work with other government departments – which scored a trust rating of 69%.

Just over two in five work with the lowest-scoring sectors – commercial partners, which

chalked up a trust rating of 58%, and NDPBs, which scored 60%.

CSW also asked civil servants to share the biggest barriers to collaboration with different partners.

In every case, at least half the respondents said a lack of understanding around how the different organisations' work impedes collaboration. This was especially the case with local government and the

voluntary sector.

Different organisational or professional cultures was another commonly cited stumbling block – particularly when working with academia, local government and NDPBs and agencies.

Just over half the people working with commercial partners and wider public bodies cited different budgeting or approval systems as a hurdle.

While respondents were most likely to cite misaligned objectives – or the perception of such – when talking about commercial partners, fewer people (40%) said they have encountered this barrier to working with businesses compared to the other issues raised in the survey.

The majority of survey respondents said they can find common ground and goals when working with each type of organisation. However, respondents were least likely to find common ground with other government departments – with just 68% agreeing with this statement, compared to the wider public sector, which came out on top with 81%.

And only 62% of respondents

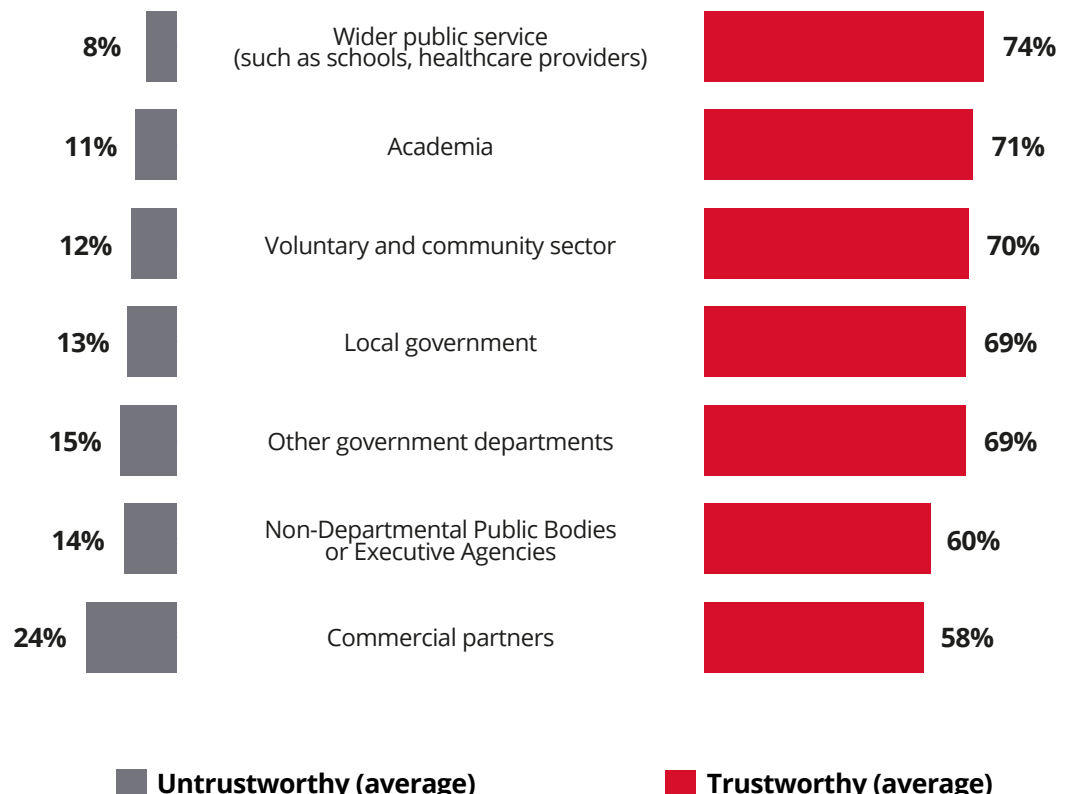
said they believe partners in other government departments share their values – scoring higher only than commercial partners, at 47%. By contrast, around three-quarters of respondents said they shared common values with the voluntary sector (76%), wider public service (75%) and NDPBs (71%).

Government departments also scored the lowest for reliability – with just 58% of those who answered the survey saying they believed the people they worked with in other ministries to be reliable. Commercial partners scored only slightly higher, with 62% of respondents finding their counterparts reliable – compared with 71% saying the same about the wider public sector. ■

Download our whitepaper to read the full results of the CSW Trust Survey:
bit.ly/3y7m7v9

Q: Thinking about working with the following partners, to what extent do you agree with the following statements? Base: All

Government partner trustworthiness



Heywood Foundation looks to channel 'unheard' youth in policy prize's second year

Heywood Prize offers the change to shape government policy as well as winning up to £25,000.

Tevye Markson reports

A foundation set up in memory of former cabinet secretary Lord Jeremy Heywood is looking to young people for public policy ideas to improve life in the UK, with up to £25,000 on offer.

The Heywood Prize, which was set up last year to reward impactful and innovative public policy ideas, has put extra focus in its second year on encouraging entries from younger generations.

The foundation's top pick will receive £25,000, with runner-up awards of between £1,000 and £10,000 also up for grabs.

This year's round includes a separate youth prize for under-21s, worth between £500 and £5,000. Young entrants will also be eligible for the £25,000 prize.

"Building on the success of the inaugural Heywood Prize in 2021, in 2022 we also want to tap into the often unseen

and unheard insights and creativity of our younger generations," said Suzanne Heywood, chair of the Heywood Foundation and widow of Lord Heywood.

"Never has the need to bring their bold, new ways of thinking to the attention of policymakers been more important than it is today," she added.

The winner's suggestion will also be passed on to government policymakers, with the Foundation's full backing for fast-tracking.

Last year's top prize was a proposal to establish an NHS Reserve Force, a reserve "army" of medically qualified volunteers to support the UK's health service, especially in times of health emergencies.

The idea was shared with the government and has since been implemented by NHS England. Launched in March 2022, the NHS Reserve Programme has more than 4,100 reservists who are providing tens of thousands of hours of care in UK communities.

"This is an amazing example of

how our contestants can see their ideas rapidly translated into substantive policy and real-world actions that can change many people's lives in the UK for the better," said Lady Heywood, who was a civil servant in the 1990s.

Another award-winning entry in 2021 proposed that the support disabled students receive during their studies should be extended to help them find their first job on leaving higher education.

The Department for Work and Pensions is now piloting an "adjustments passport" to support a smoother transition into employment for disabled people.

All UK citizens can enter the 2022 competition until the 31 December deadline, with entries in audio, video or text formats all accepted. Both individuals and groups can apply.

The judging panel, which is still to be finalised, includes Zamila Bunglawala, director of international education at the Department for Education; Suzanne Heywood; and BBC political journalist Laura Kuenssberg.

Others on the panel include, Baroness Minouche Shafik, director of the London School of Economics and Political Science; Behavioural Insights Team chief executive David Halpern; and an as-yet unnamed Prince's Trust ambassador. ■



Lord Heywood

UK ranked No.5 in global public-services league table

Research names UAE as country with the most human-centred public services. **Jim Dunton** reports

Global research charting people's satisfaction with the way public services are designed to meet their needs has ranked the United Kingdom fifth out of a cohort of 30.

Consultancy Oxford Insights' first Human-Centred Public Services Index measures nations' performance in

creating public services that work well for users, based on criteria like ease of access, reliability and delivering on promised outcomes.

The United Arab Emirates leads the pack, followed by Singapore, Finland and Canada. The UK lands in the survey's top 20%, just ahead of New Zealand, Germany, Spain and Malaysia, and significantly ahead of Japan.

The index brings together five pillars of "service experience"; "accessibility and inclusion"; "public engagement"; "government effectiveness"; and "technical foundations". Its rankings are drawn from

a combination of secondary data and primary research, which includes a survey on around 10,000 citizens' perceptions of public services in the country where they live.

Oxford Insights' report on the findings said the UAE was "considerably ahead of other countries" in the service experience pillar, which assesses how quick, easy and seamless services are to access and use.

The UAE was also said to have excelled in the sections based on residents' feedback.

"The UAE actively prioritises and measures happiness in their programmes and services," the report's authors

said. "So it is perhaps unsurprising that they stand out as leaders in terms of how human centric their public services are from a user perspective."

Second-placed Singapore came out on top for the "government effectiveness" pillar.

Oxford Insights said the UK had scored "very highly" on webpage and mobile accessibility, driven by GOV.UK's accessibility standards.

But it added that UK's placing was "hindered" by the lack of a single integrated login for services across multiple ministries. The report acknowledged that this is now on the Government Digital Service's agenda. ■

Strike ballot of 150,000 civil servants begins

PCS says ballot is most significant in union's history amid "biggest cut in living standards civil servants have ever known". By **Tevye Markson**

Officials in the civil service's biggest union have started voting on whether to take strike action over "the biggest cut in living standards civil servants have ever known".

More than 150,000 PCS members, who work in 214 different government departments and agencies, will be asked whether they want to strike over pay, pensions, job cuts and redundancy terms.

The ballot will last until 7 November, with the result expected to be announced at a meeting of the union's national executive committee on 10 November.

PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka said: "The government has ignored our demands for a fair pay rise, so we have no choice other than to launch what is the most significant ballot for strike action in our history."

Serwotka said he had "never seen such a shocking situation" in 41 years of working in and around the civil service.

The union chief launched the ballot at the Labour Party Conference on Monday. Serwotka highlighted concerns over planned job cuts, real-terms pay cuts amid soaring inflation and civil servants struggles to afford food.

One in 12 civil servants are using foodbanks, according to a survey by PCS released in August.

In May, PCS delegates at the union's annual conference, backed plans for a ballot on taking industrial action shortly after the government announced proposals to cut 91,000 civil service jobs.

PCS is calling for a 10% pay rise and a living wage of at least £15 an hour for all civil servants, as well as an immediate 2% cut in pension contributions that civil servants have overpaid since 2018, and no further cuts to redundancy payments.

The union is also seeking a job-security agreement and "resources desperately needed to deliver public

services" in response to former prime minister Boris Johnson's pledge in May to cut a fifth of the civil service workforce.

Most departments offered their staff an average pay rise of between 2% and 3% this year, a pay award the Cabinet Office said aimed to "strike a careful balance between recognising the vital importance of public sector workers, whilst delivering value for the taxpayer, not increasing the country's debt further and being careful not to drive even higher prices in the future".

Serwotka said he is "confident" that the union will "force the government to retreat" and give the civil servants the pay and working conditions they deserve.

A Cabinet Office spokesperson said: "We are fully committed to our engagement with staff and unions."

"Industrial action should always be a last resort and we are working to minimise any potential disruptions to ensure the civil service continues to deliver public services with value for money to the taxpayer." ■

Watchdog takes action against departments over data requests

MoD and Home Office warned over major backlogs. By **Sam Trendall**

The Information Commissioner's Office has taken action against seven organisations for failing to meet transparency and data-protection obligations.

Reprimands issued to the Home Office; Ministry of Defence; Kent Police; three London boroughs and telecoms firm Virgin Media all relate to subject access requests (SARs), which the regulator says are crucial in addressing the "power imbalance" between the state and the individual.

Under data-protection law individuals can ask an organisation if it holds personal data on them and, if so, how it is being used. Businesses and public bodies are also required to provide people with a copy of any personal information held on them. SARs must be responded to within one month – or three months if the request can be considered especially complex.

All of the organisations reprimanded "repeatedly failed" to meet their obligations, ICO investigators found in probe which followed public complaints about the bodies.

Speaking to CSW's sister title *Public Technology*, information commissioner John Edwards said that subject access requests are a hugely important – but often overlooked – part of the UK's data-protection framework.

"They are absolutely fundamental in empowering individuals, and they provide the foundations for accessing many other rights – not just data protection," he said. "If you do not know what data they have about you, you cannot protect yourself."

The commissioner added: "They are a gateway to evening out the power imbalances: it is the one tool people have where they can demand equality. When we look at those complaints... we see that people are trying to understand aspects of their own life. If they were in a care home, for example, or they are trying to piece together their own history. In other cases, people are trying to protect themselves from harmful effects." ■



Mark Serwotka

JORDAN URBAN FROM SPAD TO WORSE

MARK FULLBROOK'S NO.10 ARRANGEMENT EXPOSES SERIOUS PROBLEMS WITH SPECIAL ADVISER RECRUITMENT

The prime minister's chief of staff is traditionally the most senior special adviser (spad) on the government's payroll. But Liz Truss's pick for the role, political operative Mark Fullbrook, was initially not on that payroll at all, instead being paid through his lobbying firm Fullbrook Strategies. The government has since acknowledged that this was a problem and has announced that Fullbrook's terms of employment had changed. He is now "employed directly by the government on a special adviser contract" – offering a level of clarity which should have been present from the start.

The Times's initial reporting described Fullbrook as "a contractor" who would be paid through his lobbying company – which Fullbrook said "has suspended commercial activities". But a No.10 spokesperson said that "there are established arrangements for employees to join government on secondment", implying that Fullbrook was in fact a secondee.

The distinction matters. If Fullbrook was a contractor then his behaviour would have fallen outside the scope of the civil service and special adviser codes of conduct. He would have had a consultant-client relationship with government, which (unless there was an agreement to the contrary) may have allowed him to take on unregulated outside work in addition to his role in No.10, creating potential for conflicts of interest. And crucially his future activities would not have been regulated by the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments, which provides guidance to departing civil servants on how they should behave in new roles. If he was *not* subject to ACOBA's rules, then upon leaving government there would have been no formal safeguards to prevent Fullbrook from trying to use his privileged access to information and relationships with senior government employees to advance the cause of his clients.

The government urgently needs to clarify his previous terms of employment. If Fullbrook was a contractor, then it was a deeply ill-advised arrangement which created the potential for serious ethical breaches. This would not bode well for the Truss administration's approach to standards in public life, which has already been questioned in light of her reluctance to appoint a new ethics adviser.

Proper transparency would have averted the controversy over Fullbrook's role. If Fullbrook was on secondment – unprecedented for the prime minister's chief of staff but not unheard of for a special adviser – being open about the arrangement would have dispelled the sense that the government had something to hide. And if he was a contractor then the need to be transparent would probably have meant that such an arrangement never happened.

The controversy and associated fall-out should be a wake-up call for the government. Even the most basic information about spads is not readily available for public scrutiny. The government does not even publish an up-to-date authoritative list, with a No.10 spokesperson recently telling a lobby briefing of journalists to instead visit the *Guido Fawkes* website. And it is not clear what process individual spads have undergone before appointment nor, it turns out, the nature of their employment. These are important government roles, paid for by public money, and there should be far more transparency about them.

The government also owes newly-recruited special advisers – and external hires to the civil service – greater clarity about what a government role might mean for their future employment.

Currently new joiners to government in senior posts must accept that their options after leaving government will be limited by ACOBA for a certain period. But one of the many problems with this system is that it is not clear at the recruitment stage what post-employment restrictions will be placed upon them. Entirely reasonably, this makes talented people reticent to join government due to uncertainty about their post-government employment prospects and a sense that ACOBA might advise them against undertaking legitimate business activity. If he was indeed a contractor, this might

have contributed to Fullbrook's initial preference to work for the government in that capacity.

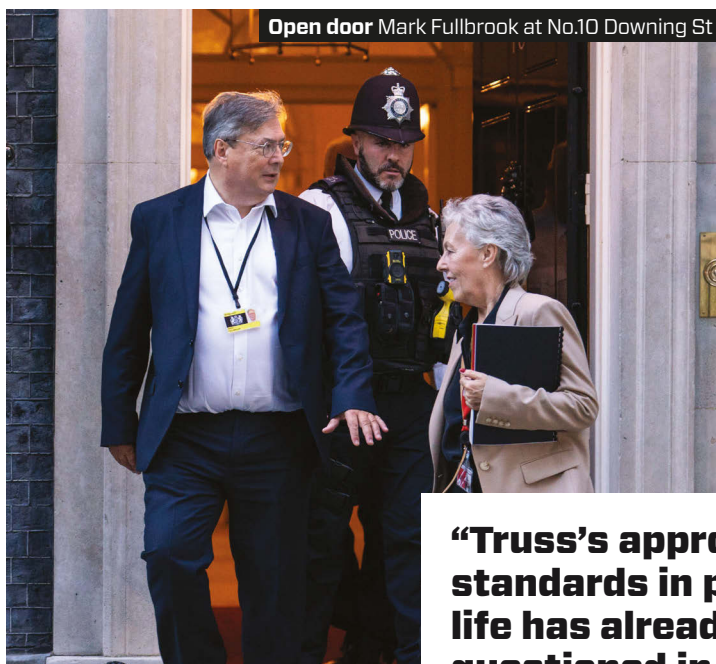
The government should make two key reforms. First, it should be clearer who is hired, how and on what terms. The Cabinet Office should set out clearly in its annual report on spads which advisers have been appointed by

which minister and the remit and responsibilities of each.

Second, the government should be clearer with incoming spads about what restrictions will be placed on their post-government employment. This would involve reforms to ACOBA.

Special advisers are a crucial cog in the Whitehall machine and it is right for government to seek the best external talent. But in light of the Fullbrook controversy, important changes to increase the transparency of the special adviser recruitment process must be made. ■

Jordan Urban is a researcher at the Institute for Government



“Truss’s approach to standards in public life has already been questioned in light of her reluctance to appoint a new ethics adviser”

DAVE PENMAN ABSENCE SPEAKS LOUDER THAN WORDS

THE PM'S PREVARICATION OVER APPOINTING AN ETHICS ADVISER LEAVES A MORAL VACUUM AT THE HEART OF GOVERNMENT

I write this as I travel back from Birmingham, having attended a couple of fringe meetings at the Conservative Party Conference. Lucky to get to a seat, never mind the one I booked – at least I'm on an actual train. The 07:43 from Euston to Birmingham – which was due to bring me to CPC – was apparently an elaborate joke from Avanti West Coast, and despite a host of anxious travellers holding tickets and seat reservations for it, did not even exist. Oh how we laughed.

The FDA's joint fringe event with the Institute for Government was on the theme of rebuilding trust in government, post the Johnson era. This followed our previous partnership with the IfG last week in Liverpool at the Labour Party Conference on the similar theme of rewiring standards in public life.

In Birmingham, our esteemed panel included Dr Hannah White and Tim Durrant from the IfG, Daniel Bruce from Transparency International UK, Dr Susan Hawley from Spotlight on Corruption and Sir Jeremy Wright MP, a member of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. He's the sort of politician you wish the public could see more of. Authoritative, self-deprecating, experienced and reasonable, with a bit of humour thrown in for good measure. All of which clearly makes him unfit for government. I mean, he's not even on Twitter.

My specialist subject was rebuilding trust with the civil service. I had two main propositions.

Firstly, ministers need to stop attacking civil servants – on or off the record. Time and again it's the main theme from our members.

“In Whitehall it's still smoke and mirrors – all roads lead to the prime minister to determine guilt or innocence and penalty”

“I'm tired of being thanked in private then denigrated in public as my minister plays to the crowd” is a direct quote which I relayed to the standing room-only crowd (in the room, not the train). So whether it's the lazy bleeders pretending to work from home or metropolitan, woke elite remoaners guff, ministers need to end the briefing war.

Secondly, there needs to be an independent and transparent process for addressing ministerial misconduct. The Scottish Government has

it, parliament has it, but in Whitehall it's still smoke and mirrors. All roads lead to the prime minister to determine: whether an investigation starts; guilt or innocence; and penalty.

There was a lot of discussion on this theme and the current lack of an independent adviser on ministers' interests. The last two have resigned on principle, remember; never a good sign.

At last week's event it was reassuring to hear Chris Bryant MP, chair of parliament's Committee on Standards, unequivocally back the introduction of a statutory independent adviser on the ministerial code.

However, the new prime minister has been less clear. Liz Truss has talked about knowing what's right and wrong and that the UK's system of ethics regulation is too complex, with “numerous advisers, independent bodies and rules and regulations” and has failed to commit to the appointment of a new independent adviser.

There was a suggestion from the floor that Heather Wheeler, then minister at the Cabinet Office, had indicated otherwise. What she actually said in a Westminster Hall debate on 7 September was: “The prime minister said she was ‘not necessarily saying’ that she would not appoint an independent adviser, but that ‘the leadership needs to take responsibility. You cannot outsource ethics to an adviser. We need ethics running through government. The culture of organisations starts at the top and that's what's important to me.’” That was the day before Tom Scholar was sacked.

So all we can go on is that she hasn't apparently decided *not* to appoint an independent adviser, but neither has she decided to appoint one.

Are you keeping up?

Meanwhile, if a civil servant has a complaint to make about a minister, the lack of a written process is only half the problem, as the lack of someone to even investigate it is a bigger hurdle.

Simon Case, the cabinet secretary, made clear in his evidence to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee in June that the “role of the civil service is there to support the government of the day whilst upholding the values. Its function is not to provide some sort of judicial function over ministers”. He went on, saying that while civil servants can be asked to establish the facts, “the decisions and the adjudication, and the advice about that on the ministerial code aspects, have to come through the independent adviser.”

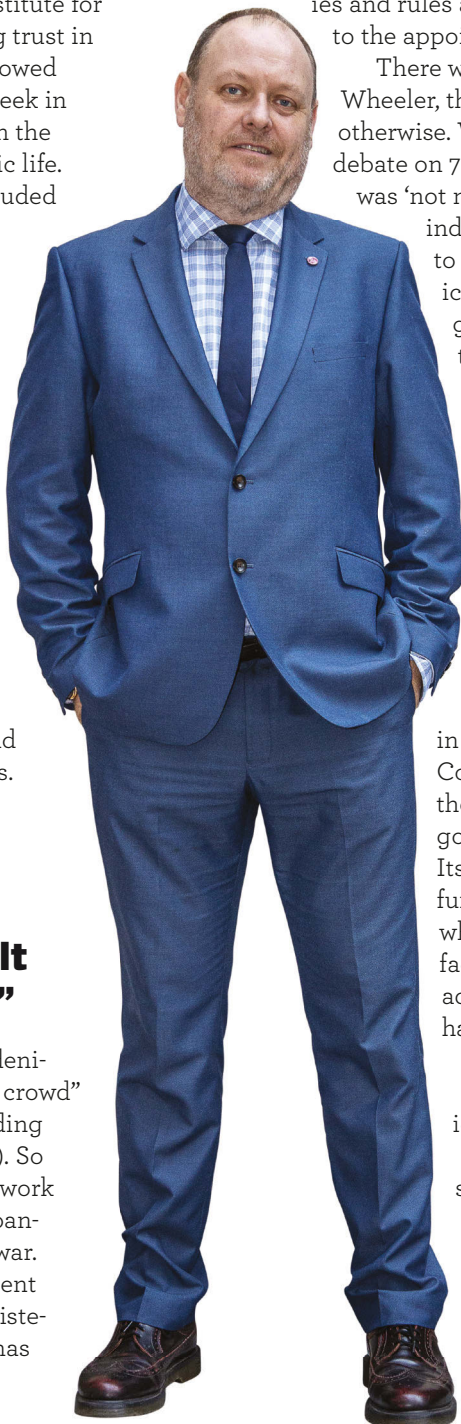
So where does that leave us?

No independent adviser and no idea if one will even be appointed.

Apparently it was Aristotle who said “nature abhors a vacuum”.

Well I've got news for him, so do civil servants. ■

Dave Penman is the general secretary of the FDA union



PATRICK KING QUESTION TIME

THERE IS NO QUICK FIX FOR THE NHS. TO CREATE A HEALTH SYSTEM FIT FOR THE FUTURE, PRACTITIONERS AND POLICYMAKERS NEED TO START ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

When it was established, the National Health Service was visionary: offering high-quality, timely care to meet the dominant needs of the population it served. Nearly 75 years on, it is clear that model is out of date.

From life expectancy to cancer and infant mortality rates, we are lagging behind many of our peers. With more than 6.8 million people on waitlists, healthcare is becoming increasingly inaccessible for those who cannot opt to pay for private treatment; and the cost of providing healthcare is increasingly squeezing out investment in other public services.

As demand for healthcare continues to grow, pressures on the NHS workforce – already near breaking point – will only become more acute.

Many of the answers to the health and care crisis are well rehearsed. We need to be much better at reducing and diverting demand on health services, rather than simply managing it. Much more needs to be invested in communities and primary care to reduce our reliance on hospitals. And capacity in social care needs to be greater, to support the growing number of people living with long-term conditions.

Yet despite two decades of strategies and a number of major health reforms, we have failed to make meaningful progress on any of these aims.

That is why Reform is launching a new programme of work entitled “Reimagining health”, supported by ten former health ministers from across the three main political parties. Together, we are calling for a much more open and honest conversation about the future of health in the UK, and an “urgent rethink” of the hospital-centric model we retain.

This must begin with asking how we maximise the health of the nation, rather than “fix” the NHS. It is estimated, for example, that healthcare accounts for only about 20% of health outcomes. Much more important are the places we live, work and socialise in – yet there is no clear cross-government strategy for improving these social determinants of health. Worse, when policies like the national obesity strategy are scrapped, taxpayers are left with the hefty price tag of treating the illnesses, like diabetes, that result.

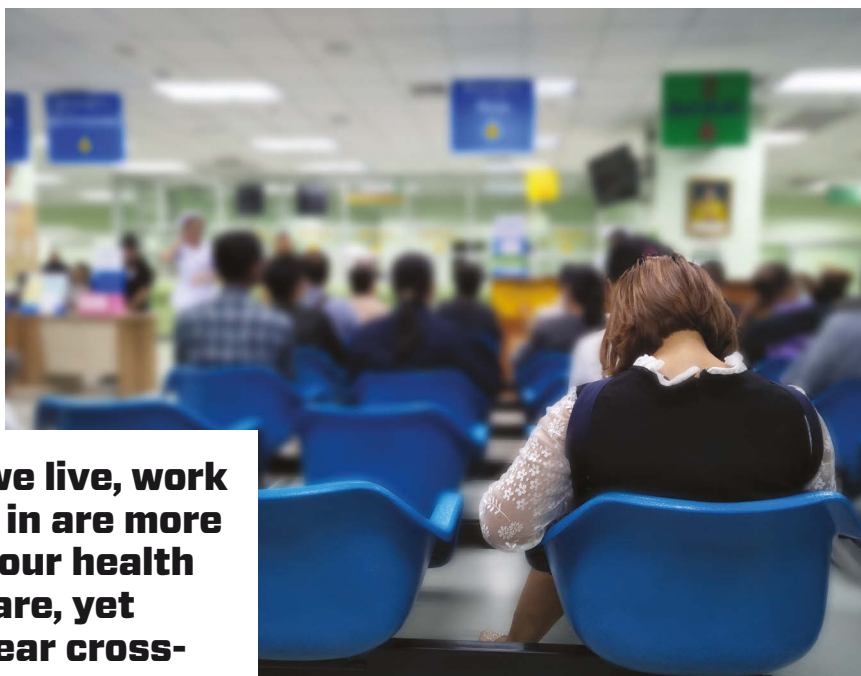
Reform wants to ask how power and resources should be distributed in our health system. What health functions should remain at the centre, and what should be devolved to local leaders, often responsible for services that create health, and with a much better understanding of the needs of their populations?

“The places we live, work and socialise in are more important to our health than healthcare, yet there is no clear cross-government strategy for improving them”

Of course, access to high-quality healthcare when we really need it will always be crucial. But our current model of delivery is largely the same as the one Nye Bevan introduced in the late ‘40s. It is not a model fit to tackle the challenges of an ageing population and a rising tide of multimorbidity. At the same time as our care needs have become more complex, our workforce has continued to become more specialised. Between 2010 and 2021, the number of community health workers declined by 20%, while the number of hospital consultants increased by 45%.

We need to rethink our model of healthcare delivery to meet the challenges of the future, rather than simply “optimise” what we already have – not least as continuing on the same path is unaffordable.

A genuinely honest conversation must consider not just the cost of delivering a world-class health and care system, but how



that cost is met. Not least because health spending crowds out other forms of expenditure, such as education and housing, which are key to building good health. But, as well as questions of how we raise revenue and ensure generational fairness in healthcare funding, we want to ask deeper questions, like “what do we value in healthcare?” and “how do we create incentives that prize quality and patient-centredness?”

There is broad consensus on what needs to change – less hospital care, more community and self-care. Despite that consensus, hospital spend as a proportion of health spending has been increasing. We are looking to answer how we can achieve that shift. To do this, we want to engage those thinking deeply about these issues from across the political spectrum – practitioners, policymakers and systems innovators.

We know we don’t have all the answers. But to create a health system fit for the future, we need the courage to start with the right questions. ■

Patrick King is a researcher for the Reform think tank

Driving sustainability and value for money through technology procurement



Dr Philip Orumwense, Commercial Director and Chief Procurement Officer for Technology at Crown Commercial Service (CCS) on helping public sector customers increase commercial benefits

As part of its mission, Crown Commercial Service (CCS) helps to manage over £10 billion of technology spend each year on behalf of public sector customers, and in the last 18 months the technology team has increased commercial benefits for technology customers from £431 million to £1.2 billion. In this interview, Dr Philip Orumwense, Commercial Director and Chief Procurement Officer for Technology at CCS, explains what it takes to achieve such commercial success.

How does CCS help the public sector procure technology solutions?

CCS is the biggest public procurement organisation in the UK. We help customers get the best technology solutions at the best price, from laptops for schools to advanced cloud technology solutions for local authorities to help them with their digital transformation journeys. We provide access to an unparalleled range of technology products and services, all designed to help public sector organisations run more effectively and cost efficiently.

What is CCS doing to make it easier for customers to use agreements?

We're constantly developing our commercial agreements to help customers make the best use of technology in the most cost-effective way. Under G-Cloud 13, which is expected

to go live later this year, we're introducing improved terms and conditions. For example, greater inclusion for the provision of day rate cloud support services along with introducing a fourth Lot for further competition for cloud support for larger, more complex requirements. New Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs), negotiated throughout 2021/22 are helping customers get the best technology at the right price. It will now be easier for public sector bodies, no matter how big or small, to get better value for money cloud capabilities and cutting-edge technology.

What is your team working on right now?

We're in the process of bringing to market several new, innovative commercial solutions including our 'first of its kind' Big Data and Analytics agreement, which aims to support the public sector to improve data use to drive efficiency and improve services. G-Cloud 13 and Cloud Compute 2 will continue to drive the transformation of cloud, storage and digital and technology professional services throughout the public sector.

What is your focus for 2022?

Our focus remains on leveraging the best value from our existing suite of agreements. We're continuously looking for opportunities to drive the message of aggregated buying. We're also preparing ourselves for the upcoming rules reform

and its implementation in 2023. Our key priority is making sure that we understand how we'll grasp the opportunities so we can bring even more power to our customers' procurement.

How is CCS helping customers to make responsible decisions about sustainability and social value?

We're continuing our work on providing sustainable technology solutions to ensure the government delivers on its commitment to carbon net zero. Our Crown Hosting agreement provides data centre colocation facilities for the public sector, delivering significant cost savings and sustainability measures. Through this agreement, carbon savings in the region of 99.9% are achieved from efficient hyperscale facilities and 'Green Electricity'. We'll also be engaging with the various procurement policies including how we boost our own and our supply chain partners compliance to the modern slavery statement. And we're accelerating our focus on growing our SME spend through our supply chains. Our SME engagement statistics for 21/22 are outstanding (total SME spend for technology through CCS agreements was £1.88bn, representing 25% of direct spend) but there's more to do.

To find out how CCS can help you make better buying decisions, visit crowncommercial.gov.uk



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Service

CULTURE SHIFT

DCMS permanent secretary **Sarah Healey** takes the long view on digital policymaking in government. **Suzannah Brecknell** reports

In 1992, the US Congress passed the Scientific and Advanced Technology Act, paving the way for the modern internet. Meanwhile in the UK, prime minister John Major created the Department for National Heritage, bringing together responsibility for arts, sports and culture policy for the first time.

The two events – one a milestone on the road towards the digital era, the other a recognition, as Major put it at the time, that “man cannot live by GDP alone” – may not seem connected.

Yet that department – now known as the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport – is playing a central part in helping government respond to the challenges and opportunities of the digital revolution. It has developed what permanent secretary Sarah Healey described in a recent speech as a “coherent, consolidated capability” for digital policymaking within the civil service.

This setup, she argued, is “almost unique among governments” and represents “an incredible asset to the UK compared to those overseas administrations who continue to suffer from a fragmented split of responsibilities on digital policy”.

Healey’s speech set out both how the UK ended up with this unique arrangement and the benefits it brings, while also acknowledging that there is still much to learn as the pace of digital change continues to quicken.

The speech marked the start of a partnership with the Strand Group, part of King’s College London, which Healey hopes will help to ensure digital policymaking in the UK continues to improve.

“There is endless commentary and analysis of how the internet has developed, how tech giants have become dominant

in our economy, how technology has improved and transformed almost every industry sector and how our lives have changed now we live them online,” Healey said. “But a lot less on how government and the public administration has responded to the impact of technology on our lives, our economy, our security and our society. While individual policies are rightly scrutinised, challenged or lauded, there is little debate about whether government and the civil service have organised themselves to set digital policy effectively.”

Healey wants, therefore, to start this conversation in a bid to keep improving the UK’s ability to make digital policy, which she defined as not about “the way government uses digital technology to deliver its own services” but “the shorthand we use for policymaking in response to the massive transformation effected by digital technology on the world we live in.”

The partnership between DCMS and the Strand Group is modelled on a similar relationship the latter has with the Treasury, which was established in 2015 because then-permanent secretary Nick (now Lord) Macpherson wanted to improve understanding of organisational and policy history among Treasury officials.

“[Macpherson] felt too much knowledge and memory was being lost and future policymaking would consequently suffer,” Healey explained. “I agree with him: historical analysis is a hugely undervalued aspect of policy analysis as undertaken by the civil service.”

The Treasury partnership began with a series of speeches given by Macpherson and now includes a wide range of events and activities such as research placements for postgraduate students working in the

Treasury’s archive, producing papers which are available for officials. Civil servants are also given the opportunity to join a postgraduate course studying the history of Treasury policy work, with lectures from Macpherson alongside course leader Professor Jon Davis and guest lecturers such as Ed Balls and George Osborne.

While Macpherson’s speeches on the history of the Treasury spanned 400 years, Healey’s took in just over a decade, albeit a decade in which the pace of change has been intense. She outlined three phases of digital policymaking, starting with a period around the early 2010s when there were “pockets of isolated activity [across government] reacting to technological change largely as it was felt within existing structures”. This included Cabinet Office-led work around cybersecurity and a team in the business department looking at the digital sector, which at that point was focused as much on the older tech giants such as HP and IBM as the new online platforms. “Where there were deeper examinations, they still did not anticipate how all-consuming the change would be and how rapid,” Healey added.

This began to change in the mid-2010s, Healey argued. By 2014, DCMS and the business department were running a joint unit working on the digital economy and in this second phase, “the civil service was starting better to cover parts of the new landscape of digital policy but our efforts were still immature”.

There was still a “heavy focus on growth, but less on security and harms”, she said, and disparate policy teams were not yet able to grasp the “connections and synergies between these issues”. There were also gaps in government’s

policy capability “as small teams raced to try and cover a set of issues unfolding at breakneck pace in ways we simply did not fully understand, the consequences of which were already bedded in before they had been really properly observed”.

To some extent, she argued, these were challenges faced by countries around the world, none of which had yet grasped the need for coherent digital policies. “Across all administrations, public policy efforts were limited because the internet was seen as too big, too global and too ubiquitous for a coordinated and planned response from any government alone,” she said. “There was a sense that national action could not succeed given the supranational structure of the internet and the industry that grew from it.”

In response to a question after the talk, Healey noted that this assumption was reflected among tech companies too. There was a period, she said, when many of these firms “didn’t necessarily think of themselves as being in a space that could or should be regulated”, believing they existed in “a sort of other, fleeting world where, intervention from national government isn’t relevant or possible”.

In the UK, this assumption around policymaking changed “almost accidentally” in the third phase of government’s digital policy evolution. The machinery of government change which saw DCMS take on media and internet competition policy (and led to that joint DCMS and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills digital economy unit) was not part of a grand plan, but driven by then-business secretary Vince Cable’s views about Sky. However, from 2015 a series of what Healey called “enlightened machinery of government changes” began to consolidate other areas of digital policy within DCMS.

By this point, Healey had joined DCMS as a director general, under permanent secretary Sue Owen. She recalled how bringing these teams together into a single department “began to show us both how interconnected the issues were but also how many gaps remained in our coverage of digital policy”.

This led to considerable growth in DCMS’s digital capability, expanding its remit to include things such as digital identity, digital competition, AI regulation and international digital policy. It also prompted a name change to recognise these new responsibilities. The digital group within DCMS now consists of some 1,200 officials: over half of DCMS’s overall workforce and more than twice the department’s total headcount in 2015 before the new capabil-

ity began to grow. Healey argued that the growth of this coherent policy capability not only means officials “can support ministers across the full span of digital policy issues” but the “capabilities can all reinforce and inform each other and so lead to better, more complete policymaking”.

This also helps government to understand the impact of digital on other areas. “DCMS can now also speak with a single, expert voice on digital policy within HMG. This has made the civil service more effective at embedding digital policy within the wider strategic objectives it can support,” Healey said.

Finally, the change has helped to build a strong relationship with the tech sector, she suggested. Having a single place in government to lead “consolidated and serious” conversations with industry helped to shift the assumption among some platforms that regulation wasn’t possible or desirable, and recent discussions in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine showed this. “There was absolutely no question that they were taking responsibility for the content that was going through their sites in a way which I think, five years ago, wouldn’t have happened,” she said. The change to a consolidated digital team was not “seamless”, Healey said, noting that some elements of data policy returned to Cabinet Office in 2018 under the DDaT function, and there were “occasional turf wars over what exactly was and wasn’t digital policy, especially in the blurry field of emerging technology”.

“Digital policy being homed in DCMS means it’s benefited from more ministerial attention than in a larger economic department”



Nonetheless, DCMS continued to build its digital policy, thanks in part to growing political recognition of the wide and interconnected issues around digital change, and partly due to the process of leaving the EU, which created the need for “an expert, lead department” on policy around data and online harms.

Change was also supported by a quirk of the UK system, Healey suggested. “Digital policy being homed in DCMS has meant it has benefited from much greater ministerial attention than it would have done in a larger economic department where politicians’ attention has to be spread more thinly. That brings drive and ambition and has meant policy gets pushed forward much more quickly – crucial in such a fast-moving world.”

She acknowledges, however, that even this rapid change was outpaced by change in the tech sector and beyond. “If you chart the development against the major milestones of the tech sector’s development, it is apparent the civil service’s response lagged,” she said. “In a hundred different areas there is evidence of a world that changed faster than policy could keep up.” In the Q&A session after the speech she also acknowledged that as well as the

consolidated digital capacity in DCMS there will still be a need to build distributed digital policy capability in departments, given the centrality of technology to so many areas.

“It took 30 years for technology to become the centre of our economy and society. It will remain so forever,” she said. “Government must be able to respond to that and to learn the lessons of how strategically and comprehensively to anticipate and respond to the totality of

change and, in some cases, the huge threats that technological innovation brings.

“We are in the first era of digital policymaking and big challenges and big opportunities are still to come. The global conversation on digital policy will mature. Technology will develop with unpredictable impact, societal views on technology will evolve. We will be best placed to respond to that if we identify, interrogate, learn from and record the lessons of our current endeavours.” ■

Sarah Healey will be giving the next speech in the series on 16 November. For more details visit thestrandgroup.kcl.ac.uk/events/

OPENING THE DOOR TO A BETTER LIFE



Like many complex issues, reducing reoffending is a challenge that can get caught in the web of organisational boundaries. But with focused, collaborative work, positive change can happen. **Jess Bowie** speaks to officials working together through the Reducing Reoffending Board and finds out how they build common goals, line up their budgets – and why they still value their own departments

WHO'S WHO?



Matt Grey, executive director, reducing reoffending, partnerships and accommodation, HM Prison and Probation Service

"My team works to drive down risk of reoffending, working very closely with colleagues in the Ministry of Justice and numerous other government departments."



Caroline Allnutt, deputy director, mental health and offender health, Department of Health and Social Care

"As well as collaborating with colleagues in NHS England, my team has for some time worked very closely with the MoJ on the reducing offending agenda, particularly thinking about the positive impact that health interventions and good health and wellbeing can make."



Helen Walker, deputy director, disadvantaged groups, Department for Work and Pensions

"My policy team act as a focal point across the DWP for people with a history of offending. I've been working on reducing reoffending and how we can support people into welfare and employment, particularly when they leave prison, for quite a long time."



Adam Bailey, deputy director, prisoner outcomes, resettlement and reoffending, Ministry of Justice

"I lead the policy team responsible for the overall programme of work to reduce reoffending and particularly work really closely with those across government to make progress on the issue."



Caragh Arthur, former lived experience lead, now policy team, Ministry of Justice

"I help shape the landscape of reducing reoffending and ensuring people's lived experience of prison feeds into strategic direction."

Reducing the number of prisoners who continue to commit crimes after their sentence ends is not just a social issue: the latest Ministry of Justice research shows reoffending costs the economy £18bn a year. Government after government has pledged to tackle this issue but it is a classic "wicked problem" – complex, multi-faceted and cutting across many departmental remits.

That's not to say officials have thrown their hands up: recently cooperation between departments has become more formalised, including the creation of the cross-government Reducing Reoffending Board in 2020. This official-level board was established to work under the Crime and Justice Taskforce – a cabinet committee created by Boris Johnson in 2020 with reducing reoffending as one of its priorities.

The CJTF also led to other collaborative initiatives, including multi-department "policy sprints", and the Prison Leavers Project, a Ministry of Justice-led scheme set up under the Shared Outcomes Fund to drive collaboration across not just government but all sectors to find new ways of helping prison leavers.

CSW brought together a number of

officials working together on these initiatives, to find out more about this joint working and the lessons it might have for other cross-cutting policy work.

What are the key elements of reducing reoffending?

Adam Bailey, deputy director, prisoner outcomes, resettlement and reoffending, Ministry of Justice: The thing that makes reducing reoffending so vital an issue but also, from a personal perspective, such an interesting one to think about is that it's just so multi-dimensional.

The key strands range from things that

"Our collective success relies on us being able to face back to our own departments, make the case for change, and support each other"
Matt Grey, HMPPS

we in the MoJ and HMPPS do – so thinking about probation and probation reform and how we better supervise prison leavers and people on community sentences – through

to the other factors that drive people to reoffend, such as substance misuse, lack of accommodation and unemployment.

And of course tackling these issues also requires not just a cross-departmental effort, but also support from people who aren't in government at all – like employers, to offer prison leavers jobs, and private rented sector landlords or local authorities, to provide accommodation.

A really high number of those receiving cautions or convictions have offended before – around 80%. So the other strand of reoffending is: if we get it right, there is an opportunity for someone to really turn their life around. And the prospect of changing people's lives for the better is something that inspires and motivates all of us.

What was the situation when you all began working together and how did the more formalised joint working start?

AB: There had been a lot of important work prior to 2020, such as the creation of the New Futures Network, HMPPS's in-house employment broker, which developed partnerships between prisons and employers to help prison leavers find jobs.

When the Crime and Justice Task



Force was established, ministers focused on three areas where the evidence suggests you can have a real impact on reoffending: accommodation on release from prison; employment on release from prison; and substance misuse treatment. The logic being that if you can get these three elements right, you set someone up for a really good re-entry into society.

In that early period we ran a series of what we called “policy sprints”. These brought the MoJ and HMPPS together with other government departments, operational bodies and third-sector organisations to talk about the three priorities, and try to understand the problems that existed. And as ever, the hardest bit was: how do we solve them? And it was that work in early 2020 that set us up for this new phase.

Two other things happened. One was the establishment of a senior-official-level Reducing Reoffending Board, which included people from the government departments whose ministers also attended the CJTF, and others from further afield. That group was responsible for driving progress. The other thing was The Prison Leavers Project, which was set up to think about innovative ways of solving reoffending.

Helen Walker, deputy director, disadvantaged groups, Department for Work and Pensions: Yes, we’d already been trying to work together but when the taskforce came along, that gave us that very senior level political commitment and also a really clear focus on the three big ticket things that we need to work on.

Before the CJTF, evidence was showing that things falling down on an offender’s journey either lay with one department or another, or actually in the handoffs between departments. Now, though, we’re able to look at it all quite holistically. So we’re no longer looking at accommodation or employment or substance abuse

in isolation. We’re recognising that these things all have to come together and that we have to bring everybody together, including people with lived experience, in the same room, at the same time.

Caragh Arthur, lived experience lead, now policy team, MoJ: Helen mentions lived experience: one of the things the approach did was to ensure that lots of people with lived experience were recruited, particularly into what are called crime diversion roles. I think that’s made a real difference, because, while we all know that offering somebody employment is likely to pull them away from a life of crime, some of the jobs that are on offer aren’t paid very highly, particularly compared to what people might have been earning through illicit work, like selling drugs.

Employment opportunities, on the face of it, can sometimes not be that attractive to prison leavers. What’s so useful about people with lived experience who are leading some of this work on the ground is, when they’re going into speak to somebody about employment and the ways they can transform their life, they’re able to say: “Okay, you sell drugs, and you might have earned five grand over the course of a week or two weeks. But when we break that down, and you’re sat up for 24 hours in a drug den, at risk of somebody kicking off the door and shooting you to rob you for your drugs, actually, it’s danger money. Is it really worth it? And, you know, it’s not really your money because the police can also take it off you, and then you go to prison.”

Somebody with lived experience can say: “I started off on a low salary too. But getting a job taught me how to build my character, and how to communicate with mainstream members of society.” And you can help people realise: “I can prosper here. It may take a bit longer to get from A to B. But once I do, the

money’s mine, I’m not going to be shot, I’m not going to be arrested.” And it helps people to make better decisions.

How do the nuts and bolts of this collaboration work, to stop people slipping through the cracks? Do you have shared budgets?

Matt Grey, executive director, reducing reoffending, partnerships and accommodation, HM Prison and Probation Service: Others have talked about how the CJTF galvanised departments around a set of actions. But it also challenged us to set some really ambitious objectives to deliver a step change in the outcomes that we see over time. It’s been really helpful to have that because it’s changed the concept of reducing reoffending from being a MoJ and HMPPS objective to being something that the government needs to get behind.

The Reducing Reoffending Board Adam mentioned is critical for us because it’s making sure we have a single group that comes together and is really clear on priorities. That group meets monthly, and beyond that, there’s still a lot of bilateral engagement where we need it: so there are specific policies we try to take forward with DWP, with DHSC, with DfE and so on.

Even within the three strands of accommodation, substance use and employment you need different departments to work together. Employment, for example, is a cross-cutting issue. So there’s all sorts of engagement that happens at senior level, at team level but also, crucially, on the front line.

And actually we all recognise reducing reoffending is not just the job of Whitehall civil servants. The joint working that happens right on the front line is absolutely crucial: it’s people in prisons working with DWP job coaches, with health and justice specialists provided by DHSC, the NHS and local health providers. It’s engage-





ment by Probation with the police and crime commissioners and local police forces, with housing providers, and indeed local schools – there are some amazing examples of collaboration there, too.

There are a couple of areas where we share budgets, but on the whole what has been helpful with the CJTF is not necessarily the pooling of budgets, but better budgetary alignment. For example, there are things

that we do in the MoJ and HMPPS that we know we need the Department for Leveling Up to work on too, to get people into settled accommodation. And that's created a far better understanding of the totality of how the money flows and how it all adds up to become greater than the sum of its parts.

AB: Part of what prompts the shared working is because it helps deliver a lot of different departments' objectives simul-

taneously. So from my MoJ perspective, employment can help reduce reoffending; from Helen's perspective, prison leavers who secure employment have the best chance of progressing and delivering on DWP's objectives. So whilst we don't necessarily have shared budgets, we've got a complementary approach that respects the various departmental boundaries.

HW: There is also a very collegial approach to the bidding process. One example is when there was an expansion in the number of prisons: we bid for additional prison work coaches to match. It was us bidding for that pot of money, but in conjunction with what Adam and colleagues were doing.

Another really significant example was the Drugs Strategy, and how everybody came together to make a bid for money for treatment and recovery, which was over £700m. That was all given to DH, but was then parcelled out to the departments to run their particular bits.

Caroline Allnutt, deputy director, mental health legislation and justice, Department of Health and Social Care:

From a health perspective, we've hugely valued a positive working relationship with our colleagues in MoJ and other departments. The reducing reoffending

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agenda has really added impetus to our objectives to improve health outcomes for particularly vulnerable groups.

To be frank, when you're bidding for health spending, the context has been increasingly tough over recent years, and, while there's always a clear motivation of "let's do the right thing for vulnerable groups", being able to show how this will contribute to the wider government agenda and save on big societal costs is incredibly helpful.

Evidence suggests that 45% of prisoners suffer from anxiety and depression, and many suffer from more serious forms of mental illness. Over half of people in prison are being treated for an addiction. We would want to be addressing this anyway. But obviously, having clear evidence which demonstrates that connecting prison leavers into the health services that they need to maintain recovery has a big impact on reducing reoffending has been really helpful.

Our areas of focus are very much around diverting people into health services when they come into contact with the criminal justice system. So liaison and diversion services, which either can support people if they do end up going to court and through into prison, or, if they don't

need to get that far, services which divert them into things like community sentence treatment requirements instead of prison.

I definitely wouldn't say "we've cracked it", nor would I underestimate the very real challenges. On different budgets, I think it's amazing that we're able to work together and be very transparent about bids and the investment case. But when it comes down to the nitty gritty of spending reviews, it's always quite tough to make that case.

As Matt was saying, there's a lot we need to do in Whitehall to set the overall agenda, but it also hugely depends on effective working relationships between frontline agencies. And sometimes that can be a cultural challenge as much as anything. The goodwill is there but organi-

"My tips for successful collaboration? Be transparent about what you can and can't do. Also, be a bit pushy with each other. If someone says they can't do something, push a little bit"

Helen Walker, DWP

sations operate in quite different ways.

That said, there's been huge progress since I've been in this role at cementing and improving those relationships. The pandemic actually was a huge catalyst for doing that. It's amazing how people pull together in a crisis.

Do you ever wish there was a single department for reducing reoffending?

MG: I think we've really shown through the reducing reoffending agenda that operating in different departments hasn't stopped us delivering some great outcomes. Do I think that you could take my team, Adam's team, Helen's team, Caroline's team and many other teams, put us all in the same building and make improvements? Not necessarily. Because actually our success relies on us being able to face back off to our own departments and make the case and support each other.

I know, because we've sat in meetings, that Helen has to go and fight the good fight with her department, and Caroline has to do the same. And we've been there to provide support and insight and collaboration as needed, and ensure ministers

across government get consistently good advice. So I don't think departmental barriers have really been too much of an impediment in that space. It's the same on the front line of reducing reoffending: I don't think

departmental boundaries affect them either.

HW: From my perspective, it is useful being located in a huge department like DWP, which, like Health, serves pretty much everybody in the population in some way. If I were in a niche group outside my own department, my ability to advocate for what is actually quite a small group within DWP would be hampered rather



than helped. It's also useful coming back into the cross-government group and reminding them that actually, whole great swathes of DWP policy on how we pay welfare can't simply change because it's not exactly working for offenders. So it's finding workarounds and ways through to make it work for all. So I think it is much better, in many ways, this way round.

CA (DH): Helen makes a really good point: it's so helpful being the advocate within a department and understanding the way both your department *and* the wider system work.

What are some of the barriers and frustrations you encounter and what

are the lessons for other departments looking to collaborate?

HW: One of my biggest frustrations is data. The lack of data to build your evidence base. Working with so many organisations, on the frontline and departmentally, data sharing is always complex. Building our evidence base is something that we should continue to prioritise. We've done huge amounts on that front over the last few years, but there is always more we can do.

In terms of tips for other officials hoping to collaborate like us: be transparent with each other about what you can do and what you can't do. And also be a bit pushy with each other. If someone says they can't do something, push a little bit.

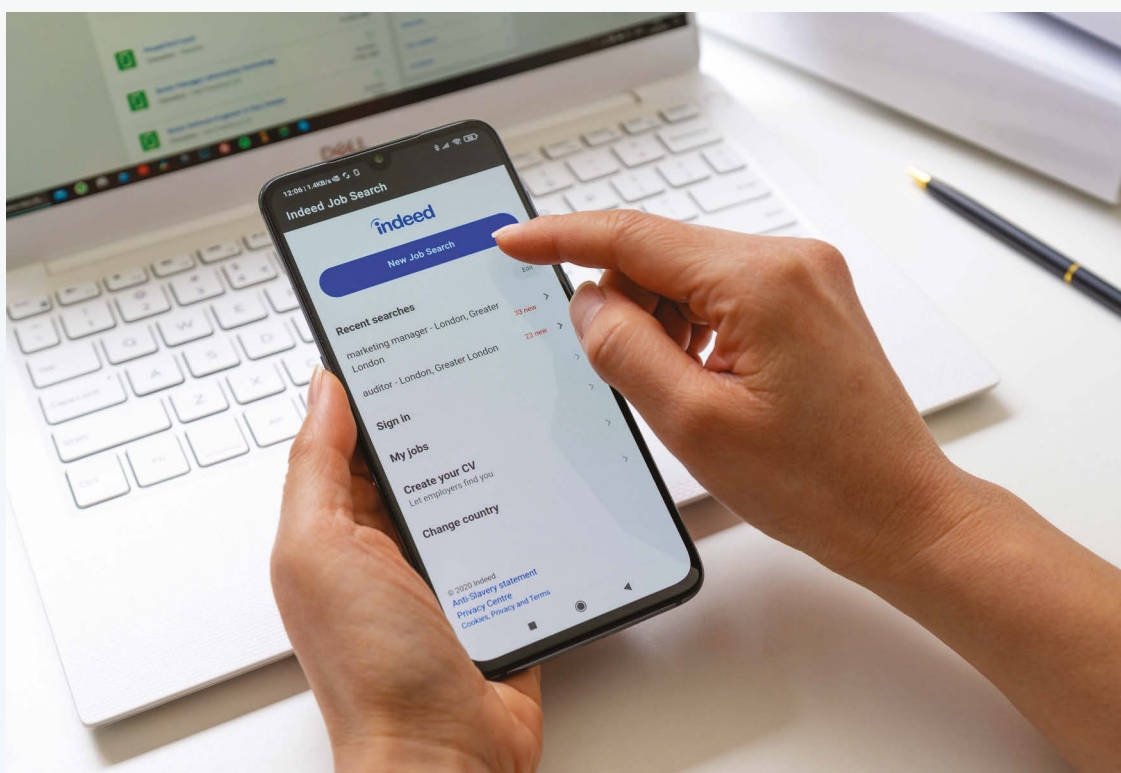
CA (DHSC): I would add: try to remember the context of other departments, and that the thing you're working on only forms one bit of ministers' workloads on any given day. So just make it really easy for each other to articulate the value of the work and why ministers should engage.

MG: There is never enough evidence for what you want to do, so identify what evidence you need and work together to get it. Some conditions for success: find a common cause and sense of shared objectives. Be open to innovation – and to do that, you really must involve the front line. They are the experts at tackling the problems, and will have the best solutions.

CA (MoJ): One frustration for me is the vetting process for ex-offenders who could be getting jobs in the government supply chain – like lorry drivers, or people in the construction industry that have been in prison, who could be involved with building new prisons. The vetting process is too slow, and whilst some progress has been made, sometimes the computer says no without assessing the individual's rehabilitative progress, giving an inaccurate reflection of the risk. I'd also like to see more help for people with lived experience to become civil servants in policy roles (I believe senior managers are working on this). I think there's an assumption that someone like me, who's 20 years out of prison, could have just competed and got a job in the civil service without the various schemes that have been introduced. And that simply isn't true. If I had competed under normal circumstances, I would never have made it into the civil service.

AB: There is a barrier around time. Government is busy, and there is a lot to get done, and sometimes the really innovative ideas can take longer to think through and iterate. In January 2021 we got £50m to test, iterate and embed a lot of the reducing reoffending ideas we're now implementing. And it's working really well. Of course we are all ambitious to move quickly and fix things, but having that time to do it properly is vital.

Finally, being open to ideas from everywhere – the frontline, those like Caragh with lived experience, the third sector. Sometimes you also have to challenge yourself about what you're doing, and sometimes you have to compromise to accommodate what other government departments are doing. ■



NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL THE CIVIL SERVICE

The civil service is always changing, adapting and transforming itself. In a year where more people left and joined than any in other in the last decade, that is as true as ever. The latest statistics, released this summer, show the makeup of the civil service as of March and how it has changed over recent years. CSW takes a look

Here is the civil service at a glance

IN 2022, THE CIVIL SERVICE IS...

...GETTING BIGGER (BUT LOTS OF PEOPLE LEFT LAST YEAR)

Fig 1: Shows change in overall size of civil service (full-time equivalent) in last 20 years

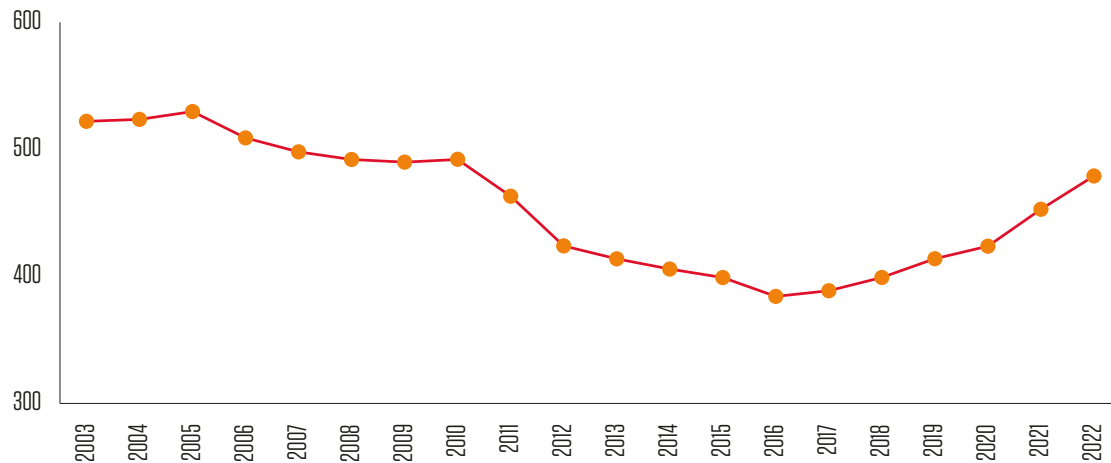
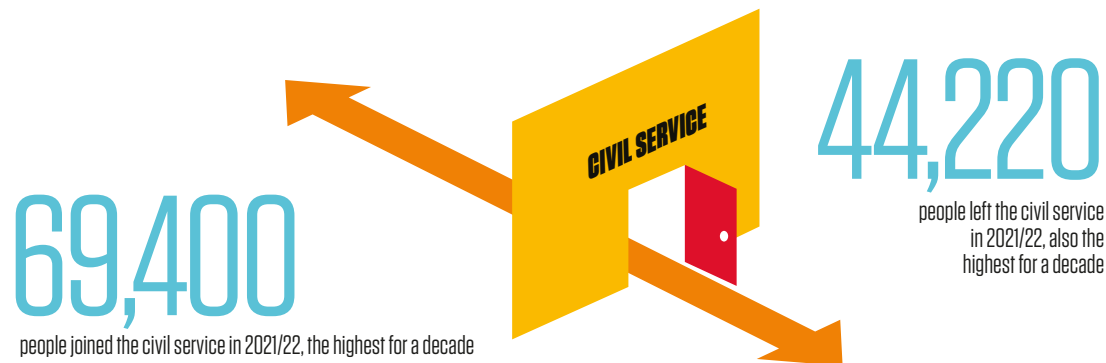
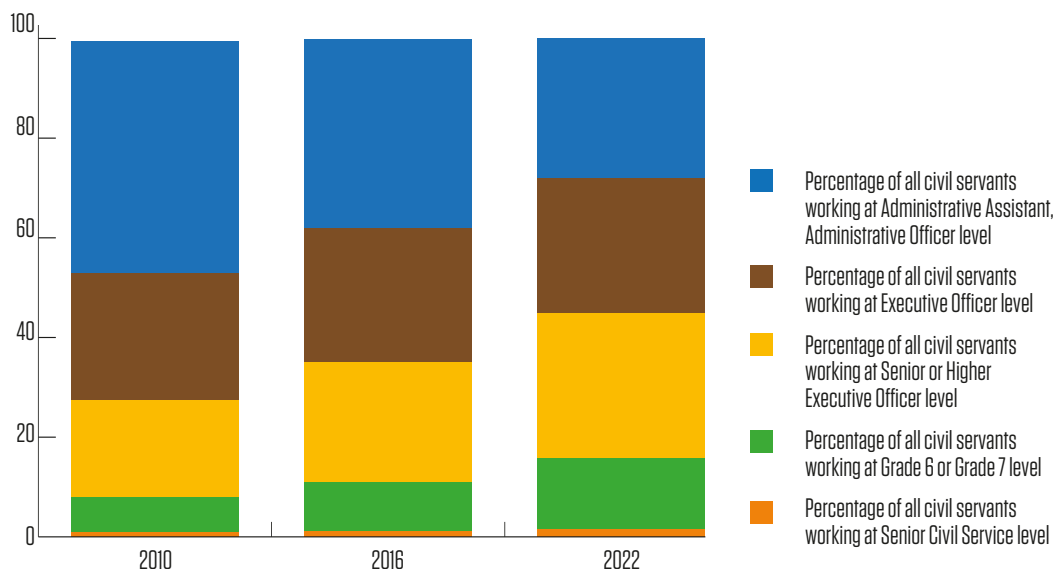


Fig 2: Shows how lots of officials are joining and leaving the civil service



...MORE SENIOR (BUT ALSO HAS MORE MIDDLE MANAGERS)

Fig 3: Shows how civil service has become more senior since 2010



The civil service has grown each year since 2016, when the UK voted to leave the EU, and is now the biggest it has been since 2010. In May this year, Boris Johnson's government said it wanted to bring the headcount back down to 2016 levels – by cutting around 91,000 jobs – by 2025. During the Conservative Party leadership race this summer, as departments were modelling cuts of between 20% and 40% of their staff, Liz Truss promised a “leaner” workforce but did not explicitly commit to Johnson's 20% reduction. The latest reports suggest the goal is still to return the civil service to 2016 levels, but without the 2025 deadline.

A huge 69,400 officials joined the civil service last year, while 44,220 left, with both figures the highest in a decade. The high join rate is partly due to 7,000 Community Rehabilitation Company staff being transferred to HM Prison and

The civil service workforce is the biggest it has been since 2010

Probation Service as part of the renationalisation of privatised probation services.

The portion of administrative officials has dropped dramatically, losing their decade-long status as the civil service's most common grade. All other grades have grown, with higher and senior executive officers now the most common. The cohort working at grade 6/7 has grown the most, more »

...MORE DIVERSE (BUT NOT AT SENIOR LEVELS)

Fig 4: Shows change in representation of protected groups in the civil service from 2010 to 2022 looking at three years: 2010, 2016 and 2022

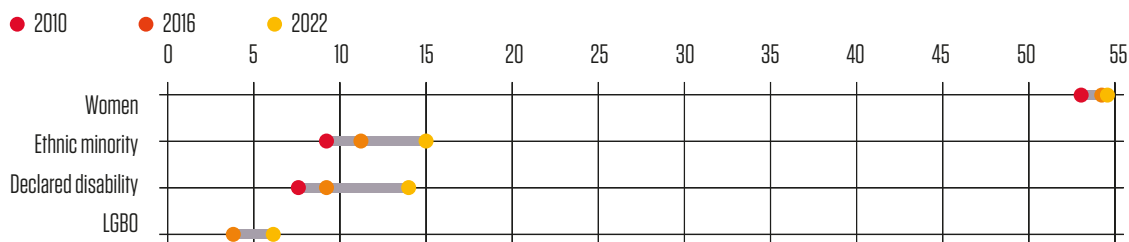
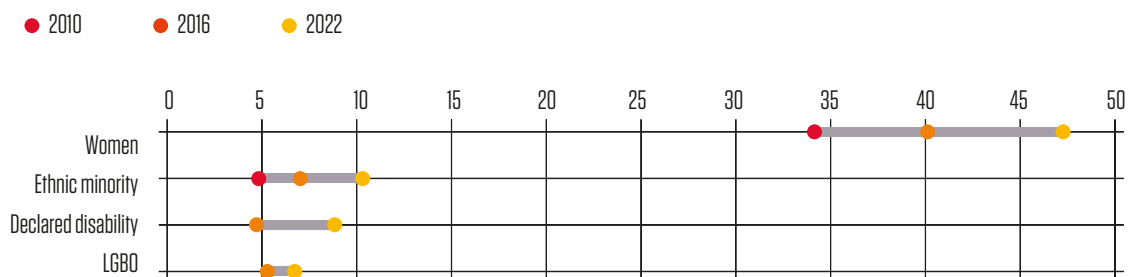
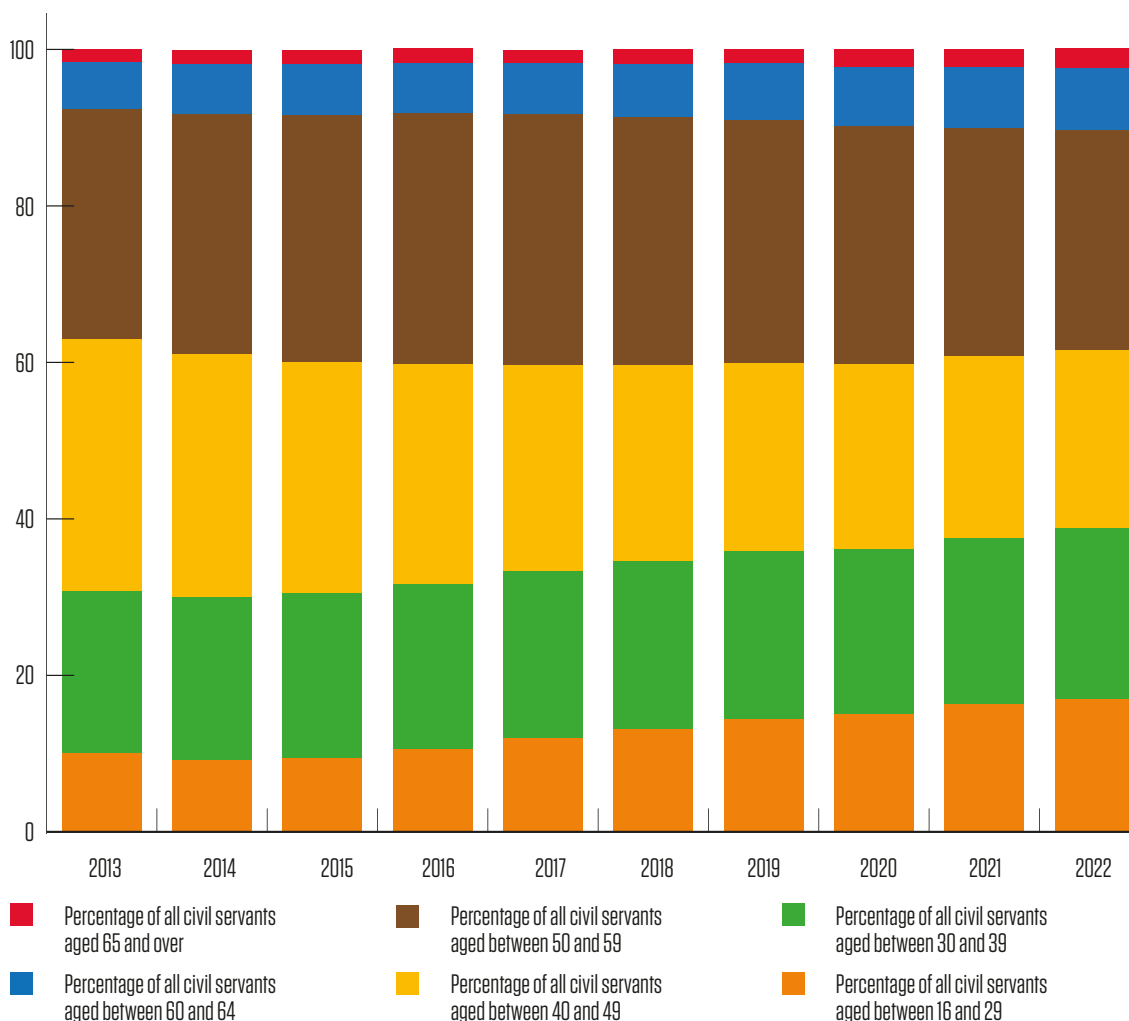


Fig 5: Shows the same for the senior civil service



...SLIGHTLY YOUNGER (BUT STILL OLDER THAN IN 2010)

Fig 6: Shows how the civil service has become more broad in age



than doubling since 2010.

Representation of women; those from ethnic minority backgrounds; those declaring a disability; and those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or other (LGBO) continues to grow. There are more women than men working in the civil service, similar to the general population split. Men still outnumber women for senior posts but the gap has shrunk hugely since 2010. The civil service has had a higher percentage of employees from

Women now represent 47% of the SCS, compared to 34% in 2010

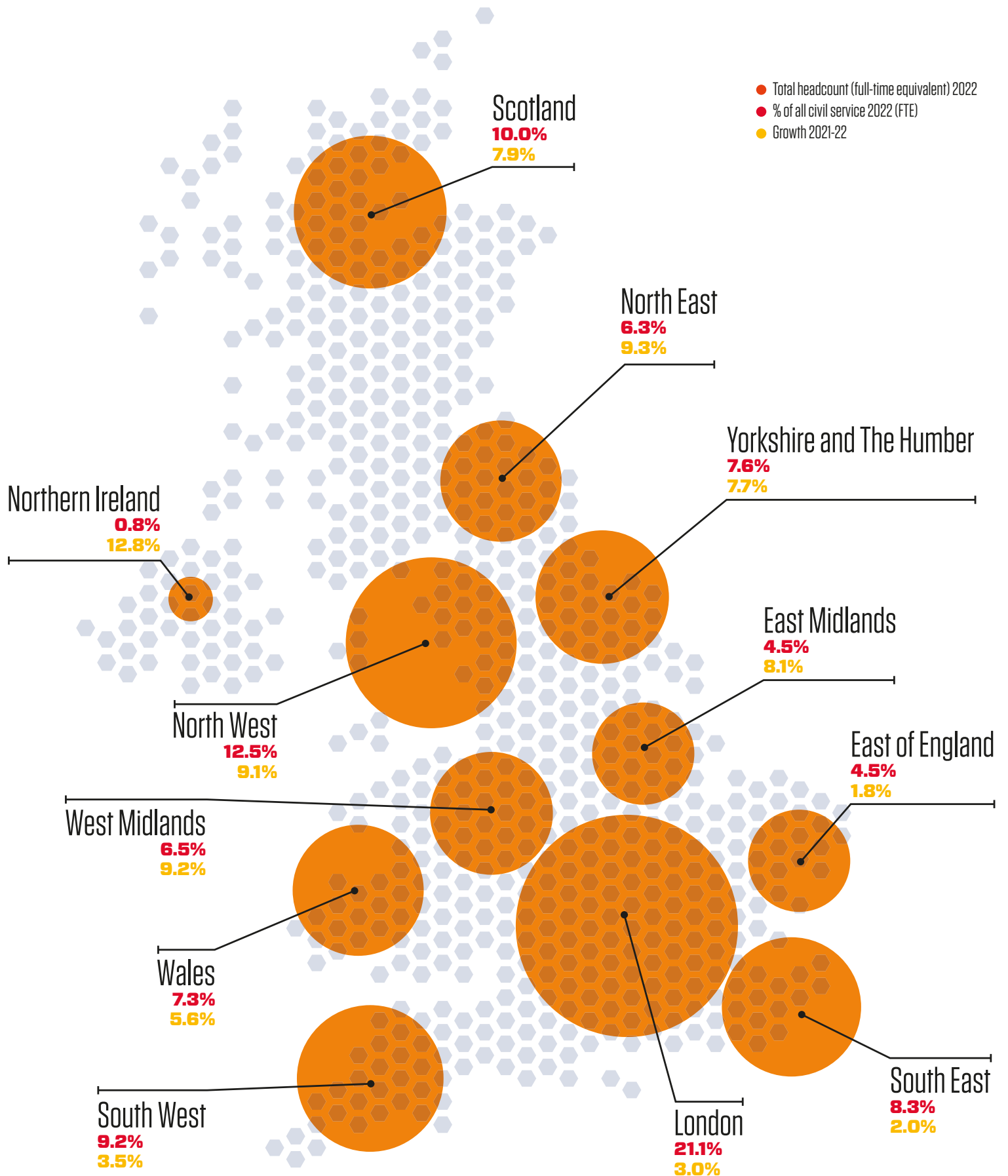
ethnic backgrounds than the national working average in both 2021 and 2022, having lagged behind in the previous decade. There were no official statistics for sexuality in the civil service workforce until 2015 but since then the portion reporting their sexuality and declaring as LGBO has risen every year. Senior civil servants are more likely to call themselves LGBO and more likely to declare their sexuality.

The median civil servant is aged 44 (down from 46 in 2020 and 47 in 2017). Despite this, there is a much lower portion of official in their 40s than a decade ago, when they made up almost a third of civil servants. The 50s age group is now the biggest, despite its own share of civil servants dropping. The 65+ and under-30s age groups have seen the biggest growth.

There are still many more civil servants in London than in any other region but some areas are closing the gap (see next page).

...BASED MOSTLY IN LONDON (BUT OTHER REGIONS ARE GROWING FASTER)

Fig 7: Shows where most civil servants are



Parting thoughts ...

CAREER REFLECTIONS WITH SIMON ANCONA



Simon Ancona, the outgoing chief executive of the Whitehall & Industry Group – who has also held various senior Ministry of Defence roles – sits down with **Tevye Markson** to discuss memorable career moments, civil service reform, life on a warship and the blues harmonica

What was it like moving from the navy to Whitehall?

I spent over 10 years in the Ministry of Defence in various jobs, which were a fusion of military and civil service. So quite a lot of what I did in the MoD was effectively civil service practice. Moving in and out of the MoD is pretty seamless. The civil service has moved to meet the military and the military has moved to meet the civil service. Each party understands the constraints and restraints of the other and of course defence language is pretty much the same. I think the first time you go to a govern-

ment department, it takes quite a long time to just understand how things are done. Once you've done one job there, going back there is reasonably straightforward.

What civil service reforms would make if you were prime minister?

I'm not sure I can be drawn into suggesting a policy. If you are forcing me into saying something, though, I'll give you two words: "continuity and consistency". If you provide those two things to businesses, they'll work with it. If you deny a business that, then it's very difficult for them to conceive strategy and deliver and grow. So those are the two things that, in my experience, business yearns for more

than anything else. If I was forced to add a third, just for the sake of alliteration, it would probably be communication.

Is the civil service working well with other sectors?

When there's an existential threat, communication is very good. We saw that during Covid. At the moment, you've got a government setting policy around corporation tax and various other things. Businesses, depending on the business and the segment within the private sector, will have different views on whether that is actually helpful to them or unhelpful. The private sector don't necessarily want a great deal. They tend to want a fair chance, certainty and situational awareness. And they like a reasonable regulatory and legislative environment. Incentives would be nice, but they are not the top things that they look for.

They do want a joined-up government. I've spoken to private sector businesses who are dealing with four different government departments on energy policy – or something similar – and they find that very difficult to do. And I don't think anyone has really cracked the challenge of access. I think it's getting better. I think there are things in the digital space that are making it easier. But the inevitable churn in the civil service, the movement at ministerial level, in recent months and years, has made none of that particularly easy, which is why WIG does what it does. WIG is never as popular as when people yearn for a bit of certainty and information.

Civil service unions have claimed civil service morale is at its worst in decades amid regular criticism from ministers.

How were relations when you worked in Whitehall? Have they always been this strained? One of the things WIG doesn't do is that we don't go near politicians. WIG is set up specifically to deal with officials and the private sector. I have a great deal of sympathy with the civil service, mainly because of a lack of certainty and continuity. In the last three years, not only have there been the huge challenges around Brexit – and there are residue issues there – but there's been Covid and also quite a lot of political change. When you're asking departments to move through the various phases of setting policy, conceiving policy that is compatible and conducive to what ministers want to achieve, then designing strategy to deliver that policy, and then moving, which is the trickiest bit, that strategy into operational delivery, that's fine if departments can be left to get on with

that. But when in that cycle things change mid-stride, that makes life very difficult for departments. In the current circumstances, I don't think any department, apart from perhaps one or two, has a full expectation of their three-year comprehensive spending review settlement maintaining any sort of consistency or surviving.

What was the most challenging day or moment in your career?

Different stages in your career offer different challenges because you're a different person as you mature. I can name you difficult days in helicopters off Kuwait in the first Gulf War for instance. But equally I could offer you the challenge, which was a pleasurable one, of bringing together a coherent global defence engagement strategy. Wedding the MoD's non-war-fighting efforts and influence globally with the plans of the [then separate] Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development, was a really interesting exercise in policy alignment and delivery. That was something I enjoyed a great deal.

I was also lucky enough to have four commands at sea. So I remember being captain of a patrol boat around Hong Kong in the lead-up and through the handover of Hong Kong.

Proudest achievement?

I'm tempted to say it was capturing £200m worth of cocaine off Colombia... Sadly, I have to point out that none of that money flowed into my pocket as it would have done in the 18th century. We don't do prize money anymore.

But I would focus on WIG, which is now larger, and does more things with more people, with more members, than it ever has before.

Creating value through collaboration is central to what WIG does. A key focus at the moment is developing a collaboration methodology or a 'how to' playbook, working with the Blavatnik School for Government. The aim is to establish the academic underpinning for collaboration, and provide a practical guide on how to approach it effectively. This would have huge utility for all three sectors, and we hope it will serve to improve interaction between government and the private sector, not-for-profits and academia, as well as central to local government.

What advice would you give to your successor?

I think it's got to be: conversations with the civil service are a constant thing. It's not the business of forming a network, resting on one's laurels, using those contacts. It's such a moving, living thing, even at the senior level, that my piece of advice is that building those relationships is a constant endeavour. The other thing I would point out to them are the four truths: no-one knows it all; more unites the different sectors than divides them; some form of coordination, cooperation or collaboration is no longer discretionary; and greater understanding and cooperation results in better decisions.

What was the best and worst part of life on a warship?

I think the worst part of life on a warship, if you're away for six-plus months, has got to be separation from family. Being isolated in a tin box for that amount of time, there are psychological tricks to be played there. The best thing about it is the sheer unity of effort, teamwork and common endeavour

that you can generate within a ship's company. You can take a warship, deploy it to the other side of the globe, where it is ostensibly on its own, where it needs to run itself, be ready for anything, adapt to circumstance, make its own decisions and sustain itself, and that is a real buzz for anyone who's part of that close-knit team. So that

“The first time you go to a government department, it takes quite a long time to just understand how things are done”

for me is the zenith of teamworking against which I suppose I compare all teamworking.

CSW has read that you play the blues harmonica...

When I was doing flight training, there was a local band – this is down in Cornwall – that was made up from another squadron and they had a guy there who played the blues harmonica and I thought if there's an instrument that's convenient to take anywhere, that's got to be it, because it could fit in your pocket. So I started to dabble way back then. And I've sort of kept it up, really. It was a good way of earning beer in various bars around the world. And if pressed to do so and enough has been imbibed, then yes, I have been guilty of whipping it out and playing it sometimes. I'm by no means an expert, but after a few it sounds alright. ■

Ancona left WIG on September 30 and Vicky Browning has been appointed as interim CEO. Recruitment for his permanent successor is now open. You can apply here: www.wig.co.uk/internal-vacancies/ceo

As the National Data Strategy's second birthday fast approaches, **Civil Service World** and **Civica** bring together a panel of experts for a progress report



STEPPING UP

In July, the National Audit Office (NAO) published a guide for senior leaders which described data as government's biggest asset but also a leading cause of inefficiency – providing a succinct summary of the gap between potential and reality.

The National Data Strategy (NDS), published in September 2020, is the latest in a long line of initiatives aimed at closing this gap. It contains five missions – one of

which focuses on “transforming government's use of data to drive efficiency and improve public services” – underpinned by four data pillars: foundations, availability, skills and responsible data.

None of these pillars presents a new area for government, and the NAO argues that it will take sustained effort to finally see real progress against any of them. To support this effort, *Civil Service World* partnered with Civica to bring together experts from across government to consider how work around the National Data Strategy is progressing, and where leaders can focus their efforts to drive further change.

Civica's consultancy director Mark Humphries began the discussion by outlining why data professionals should view this as an important moment. Data literacy among civil service leaders has increased, he suggested, and there is consistency across government on the data issues which need to be addressed as well as the importance of doing so.

“We've had the National Data Strategy; various government departments have put out their own strategies and we've moved very much into the execution phase now,” he said. “For those of us who have been working in the data management space, it's an exciting and slightly scary time because we have been banging the drum for many years about the importance of managing data well and making sure it's fit for purpose.

“Now the rest of the world, especially central government, is turning around to us and saying: ‘OK, we hear what you've been saying, show us what you can do. How do we sort our data out? How do we make it happen?’”

Data foundations

The NDS describes this pillar as “ensuring data is fit for purpose”, and the roundtable showcased the many purposes for which data is used across government – from improving how major projects are delivered in the Ministry of Defence (MoD)

to preventing and detecting fraud and supporting work to meet Net Zero targets.

There was general consensus that the NDS provides a useful starting point for departmental strategies across many of these areas. Several participants said that it had helped to steer or shape work, either in their own teams or across their departments, though they also suggested that more practical or detailed guidance would be helpful as work moves from planning to execution.

Zainab Zorokong, head of data analytics strategy at the MoD, suggested that more practical guidance would be helpful as the department thinks about how it can implement the strategy across its large and complex organisation. Rashmit Kalra, head of data governance and privacy at the Competition and Markets Authority, agreed that it would be helpful, and save duplicated effort, to have more guidance around implementation.

No-one said that their team did not have enough data, but participants noted that much of the data is far from fit-for-purpose. Chris Small, head of Heat Networks South at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), expressed a challenge which was reflected across the board: “We hold an inordinate amount of data within government specifically for the purposes that we collected it, but it's very difficult to use it from a delivery perspective.”

“For those of us who have been working in the data management space, it's an exciting and slightly scary time”
Mark Humphries

This might be because of quality or lack of standardisation. For example, he said, a lack of consistency in how addresses are recorded makes it hard to match energy data with properties across the country, which would greatly help work to improve energy efficiency. Or it might be because data has been collected with only one narrow purpose in mind and cannot be adapted to others: in another area, Small noted, data collected five years ago for analytical purposes could not be used for delivery so the department was having to pay to collect the data again in a usable format.

Graeme Thomson, head of fraud analytics and strategy in the Cabinet Office's Counter Fraud Centre of Expertise, suggested that to improve the quality and use of



NATIONAL DATA STRATE

IS NDS INFLUENCING
YOUR STRATEGIES?

'SOME PARTS OF GOVERNMENT ARE MORE AWARE THAN OTHERS' /

CAUSE

WHAT
YOURS?

GOVERNMENT'S DIGITAL STRATEGY

STRATEGIC ASSET

LOCAL

CENTRAL
GOVT

BIG GAPS

'BAU WITHOUT A BURNING PLATFORM IS A CHALLENGE'

BLAH, BLAH,
BLAH, BLAH....

'TRANSLATING GUIDANCE DOWN CAN BE TRICKY'

TO BETTER USE OF DATA ACROSS GOVERNMENT

DATA ITSELF

- QUALITY
- ACCURACY
- COMPLETENESS

CAPABILITY

IN GOVERNMENT

INCLUDING
COST OF BAD
DATA!

NERVOUS

SHARE

WE DON'T
OPEN UP FOR
PRIVATE SECTOR
DELIVERY — HARD FOR
THEM TO USE THE DATA

SCARED
TO REPORT THE
TRUTH?

INTEROPERABILITY AS A CORE PRINCIPLE

✓ DIFFICULT TO MAKE HAPPEN AT LOWER LAYERS

A cartoon illustration of a cowboy wearing a brown hat and a red shirt, holding a newspaper. The newspaper has two headlines: "FOOTBALL DATA IN ☐ OWN GOAL!" and "DATA SHOCK! WHP DID IT?".

USING DATA FOR ENFORCEMENT

SAY NO TO
BULK
SHARING

LEAVE
DATA WHERE
IT IS!

MAKE
DATA
ACCESSIBLE

GET AN
ANSWER TO
A QUESTION

STRATEGY: PROGRESS, CHALLENGES & WHAT'S BEYOND 2022

27 JULY 2022

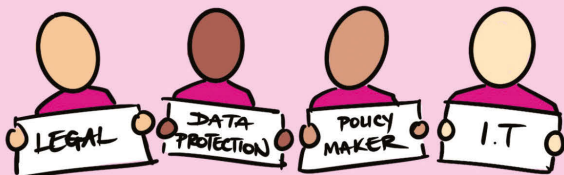
OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

STANDARD DOCUMENTATION

TEMPLATES, FORMATS, SPECS, KNOWLEDGE HUB

✓ DON'T HAVE TO INVENT & RE-INVENT IN EMERGENCY SETTING

SUPPORTS MULTI-DISCIPLINARY TEAMS



SHARE BY DEFAULT

- ✓ GOVERNMENTAL SAFEGUARDS
- ✓ PROTECTION WHEN SHARING
- ✓ POSITIVE SHARING ENVIRONMENT

SHARE!

DATA PROFESSIONALS!

IT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO UNDERSTAND & INTERPRET LEGISLATION FOR OTHERS



'IN THEIR LANGUAGE'

PRACTICAL

TANGIBLE

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY A STANDARD?

AGREE ON A COMMON SPECIFICATION

✓ ADAPT DATA HELD IN YOUR STANDARD TO MEET SPEC

✓ UNDERSTAND DIFFERENCES TO HELP SHARE WITH EXPEDIENCY

BOUNDARIES DON'T OVERLAP

BOGGED DOWN WITH AGREEMENTS

FINAL THOUGHTS

1 CONCRETE ACTION OR OPPORTUNITY IN THE NEXT 18 MONTHS ...

WE MUST CHALLENGE BEHAVIOUR FOR DATA TO BE DYNAMIC

DOG FOODING
DATA NOMS ARE WE USING OUR OWN DATA?

DIGITAL INFORMATION BILL ...
... GIVES OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONVERSATIONS
FOSTERS COLLABORATION AND ALLEVIATES CHALLENGES

CONSISTENT APPLICATION OF DATA STRATEGY IN LOWER LAYERS

PLATFORM FOR CONSISTENTLY SHARED DATA
HELP YOURSELF!

NO PAPER NO EXCEL NO POWERPOINT

DATA TOOLKIT
OBJECTIVE DATA CONFIDENT CIVIL SERVICE
Inky Thinking

data across government it will be essential to develop a “data mindset” so that officials think about the wider value and importance of data rather than just focusing on why it might be of use in their immediate role.

“When you want to understand data, it’s not purely just the data that you need to run your policy, it’s other broader elements of data available to you,” he said. “We need to develop a data mindset, so people understand how to use data, the quality of data and what it can mean to people.”

Data skills

Building data skills across many industries is another pillar of the NDS, and government has long recognised it faces a particular challenge in this area. Attendees at the round table agreed government needs more data skills but not only in specialist roles.

Brad Chew, product owner and data lead at BEIS said capability needed to be improved across the board. Having joined the civil service from the private sector, he noted that in his previous work “everyone was a lot more geared up on data – they knew where it was, why it had been collected; everyone was a lot more ready to use it and report on it.”

Thomson suggested that improving data understanding would also help to tackle challenges around data collection and quality. “If you don’t know how to use something, you don’t understand the importance of it,” he said, “[and] you don’t put effort into collecting it or capturing it or maintaining the quality of it.”

Humphries agreed, wanting to create a culture where users would drive demand for better data. “Anyone who is in regular receipt of reports in Excel, or static reports printed out, should develop the reflex to challenge it and ask why they don’t have access to this data in a dynamic dashboard that is kept up to date,” he said. “If we develop that challenge, that will drive so many other good behaviours behind it.”

However, Small cautioned that there would be limits to how far government could match the complex skills needed in some policy areas. His own team, he said, was largely made up of people who had joined the civil service from the private sector and were fairly data savvy. “We can all run complex things in Excel, but it’s not Excel that we need to be using,” he said.

He outlined the challenge for teams working on complex, long term projects which require deep expertise and systems it would be impossible to build in-house. He suggested that government needs

to be more flexible and creative in how it works with external partners in this area, rather than relying on short- and medium-term procurement cycles.

Data availability

Small’s example touched on how another key aspect of the NDS – ensuring data is “appropriately accessible” for use by businesses and organisations outside government. BEIS collects lots of data for analytical purposes, he said. “But what we don’t do is open any of that up for practical, private-sector delivery. It’s very difficult for the private sector to understand or use that national data set for delivering things on the ground because they simply cannot access it.”

There have been several recent attempts to encourage appropriate data sharing, including through the Digital Economy Act which created a legal framework allowing simpler sharing between public sector organisations, but many officials are still wary of allowing access to data. Humphries suggested that one way to address this is to think beyond simply giving a

“If you don’t know how to use something, you don’t understand the importance of it” **Graeme Thomson**

partner access to entire data sets. “There’s more interest on the idea of leaving data where it is and making data either accessible through an API, a sort of data as a service, or data as a product,” he said.

In the field of fraud detection, for example, an official might simply need to know if a person or organisation appears on a risk register. “So, you can centralise your fraud data and build in a simple vetting API which checks a person and gives them a red or green light,” Humphries said. This model keeps the original data secure, protects the details in the data and fits neatly into digital services, he added.

Thomson, who worked on the counter fraud sections of the Digital Economy Act, said the new legal framework it offers has helped to make data sharing faster, and explained how his team is hoping to improve this further by developing standardised documents and templates which will help to speed data sharing agreements.

He also pointed to the importance of relationships as well as policy: “We’ve seen that once you get two organisa-

tions who become familiar with each other, if they had to come back to share data the next time, it’s a much more rapid progress [towards an agreement].”

Gavin Freeguard, an associate of the Institute for Government and special adviser at the Open Data Institute, added that building relationships across professions will also be important. “Being able to bring that legal and data protection expertise together with policymakers, and those involved in delivering policy, means that you’ve got access to all of the expertise that you need, but it may also help build a relationship with your data protection professionals which is less confrontational,” he said.

“I think there is still in large parts of government a feeling that Data Protection Officers will suddenly come and stop colleagues from doing something, whereas in reality most DPOs want a more productive and constructive relationship.”

Freeguard also noted that work to put in place data sharing standards and agreements had paid off during the response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

“A lot of the time people were having to work incredibly hard to invent those things or reinvent those things in the heat of the moment,” he said. “Where that documentation was already in place, it allowed people to move much more quickly in an emergency setting.”

Responsible data

The final pillar of the NDS is about ensuring safe data-use across industries and building public trust in the use of data. This topic emerged as participants discussed the legacy of Covid-19 on government’s data communities. Several agreed that the urgent pandemic-response work saw a greater engagement with data across government – the Cabinet Office’s Thomson described how it helped to “overcome inertia” around using data to tackle fraud, for example.

When considering what lessons could flow from this response, Freeguard and the MoD’s Zorokong, noted that officials must ensure they are considering how public perceptions may have changed during and after the pandemic response. Zorokong said people were more comfortable with data being handled or used in new ways to address a national crisis, but as organisations have moved back to business as usual, “people will value a different approach to the collection and the managing of their data” and this will require strong communications from policy and delivery officials.



Standard life

Crossing several of the pillars of the NDS is the issue of data standards – designed, among other things, to improve quality and interoperability of data. Yet while many data professionals agree that standards are a good thing, Humphries noted that there is a live discussion in the data community about what makes a good standard. “There are opportunities to look at other sectors, other industries and see what kind of standards are applied to the car industry, the energy market, financial sector,” he said.

Freeguard argued that a key factor will be not just designing good standards but helping officials across government to “grasp the importance” of them. Data professionals may understand the potential to improve data use through common rules and formats, he said, “But how do you talk to the civil servant who’s filling in a spreadsheet and just saving a particular file format. How do you get across that the way you put this number in this cell really matters?”

The answer, he suggested, is to draw out the “human, practical, tangi-

ble” aspects – if you do not follow the right format someone down the line will be unable to do their job well”.

Thomson challenged the assumption that standards were always positive, however, saying that “sometimes, standards are part of the problem.”

He explained that in government, where most data is stored on legacy systems – themselves a major challenge for digital and data teams – the imposition of too many standards would create “a huge amount of work trying to realign legacy systems and redesign software”.

In the area of counter fraud, they have instead agreed common specifications for data sharing, he continued. “What that means is you can keep your own standard. You can have data on your legacy systems. But when we come to share data in the centre or between ourselves, we will use a specification,” Thomson said.

While Humphries agreed that standards across all government data would be “totally unrealistic”, he said that in areas where data collection or use is relatively stable

standards will be vital to drive innovation.

“The emergence of standards is a sign of maturity in any technological revolution going all the way back to the Industrial Revolution,” he said. “The original railways all had different gauge tracks and eventually they standardise.”

With any revolution, he continued, there is a period of “wild and exciting” innovation where standards would constrict change. But once systems mature then a lack of standards can stifle innovation. Humphries added: “When I started out in technology there were still different, competing networking standards. But once everybody standardised on TCP IP and other web protocols, that enabled a whole series of innovation on top of that.” ■

This round table formed part of an ongoing programme of research around the NDS carried out by Civica, which also included a survey of more than 800 civil servants. You can read the latest white paper detailing the findings of this research here: <https://bit.ly/3SUhBsb>

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ONS signs £15m deal for consumer price index aid

Data analytics firm Kantar will help statisticians select products for the CPI 'basket' of goods

The Office for National Statistics has selected a long-term commercial partner to support its work on the consumer price index.

The CPI – and the CPIH – which factors in additional housing-related costs and council tax – are seen as a key measures of inflation. The CPI 'basket' contains a periodically updated range of common goods and services, the prices of which are then tracked. There is also a retail price index: an older statistical exercise that remains as a complement to the CPI, but this

is no longer the primary means of calculating the impact of inflation on households.

Updates made to the basket this year saw 19 new items – including meat-free sausages, sports bras, and pet collars – added to the list. Those removed included doughnuts, coal, and men's suits.

From 1 February next year, Kantar will serve as the ONS's primary provider of data for the CPI, CPIH and RPI. The data analytics and brand consultancy firm has signed a seven-year contract with the national statistics body, worth £15.6m.

Over the course of the engagement, the company's duties will include helping statisticians select items to go in the basket, and "sourcing products and outlets, finding products that comply with the item specifications, and outlets in which to price those products".

The firm will then gather a wide range



Newcomers to the CPI 'basket' include meat-free sausages

of "representative price data and descriptions of the products being priced," before performing "cleaning" and quality assurance of data and, finally, delivering data sets to the ONS.

Data published last month revealed that consumer price inflation had fallen very slightly in the previous two months: from 10.1% to 9.9%. However, it remains at its highest level for about 40 years, and ministers, the media and the general public will

be keeping a close eye on CPI information over the coming months.

Kantar has sealed the long-term contract to support the ONS having worked with the statistical agency on its collection of CPI data since the mid-1990s. ■



Doughnuts are 'off the menu'



Coal has left the 'basket'

DfT signs data pact

£25k deal with Rightmove aims to improve off-street parking data

The Department for Transport is looking to improve its access to data on off-street parking around the UK via a deal to tap into information from online property firm Rightmove.

The deal, which came into effect on 28 September, provides access to a 12-month "Rightmove data licence" and will be worth £25,000 to the property-search firm.

The contract relates to data sets col-

lated by the firm on the availability of off-street parking spaces. This information will be provided to the department's Roads, Places, Environment and Future Mobility team.

Contract databases show that Rightmove has previously won deals to provide data on property market trends to the then Ministry of Housing, Communi-



ties and Local Government and its executive agency Homes England. Its engagement with the DfT is its first deal related to parking data.

Last year, the department began work – alongside partner Manchester City Council – on a pilot project to create a National Parking Platform, an online tool through which people will be able to pay for parking. The system will also collate and dispense the relevant data to local authorities around the country.

To support this programme, the DfT has been working to better understand existing parking options and the availability of each. ■

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Minister merry-go-round

Truss reshuffle brings forth the latest in a series of ministers for digital government

Key ministerial posts dedicated to digital technologies and data changed hands during a reshuffle undertaken by Liz Truss immediately after she was confirmed as the UK's new prime minister.

This included another new minister taking on responsibility for oversight of the Government Digital Service and the Central Digital and Data Office: the 13th person to hold such a post in seven years.

Following Truss's installation in Downing Street last month, a government shake-up saw Brendan Clarke-Smith appointed to a role as parliamentary secretary at the Cabinet Office. He was previously minister for children and

families at the Department for Education.

In his new position, he is a direct replacement for Heather Wheeler, who was in post for just seven months but has now returned to the back benches.



The new minister for digital government

Duties of the position include not just oversight of GDS and CDDO, but the wider use of digital and data across government, as well as shared services, and science, technology and innovation. The junior ministerial portfolio

also includes Civil Service HR, and secondary legislation stemming from the Cabinet Office.

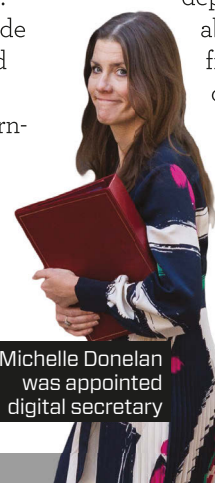
Clarke-Smith has been an

MP for three years, having been elected in 2019 as the first Conservative MP in 90 years to serve the Nottinghamshire constituency of Bassetlaw – which the Tories won following an 18,000-vote swing, the biggest of the election.

The new prime minister has also appointed Michelle Donelan as secretary of state for digital, culture, media and sport. She replaces Nadine Dorries.

Part of Donelan's team at DCMS is Julia Lopez – who has returned to the department after a two-month absence. In July, she resigned from her post as minister for digital infrastructure and data as part of the scores of government resignations that prompted the departure of former PM Boris Johnson.

She was swiftly replaced by Matt Warman – a switch that now appears to have been directly reversed, with the latter no longer holding a ministerial post. ■



Michelle Donelan was appointed digital secretary

Access to sensitive records

National Archives plans digital service for officials to access sensitive records

The National Archives is planning to implement a digital service through which civil servants will be able to access sensitive government records.

A key part of the archiving organisation's remit is to collect, store and provide ongoing access to records of government business, which it said are "increasingly" provided in the form of digital files.

Government officials seeking access to sensitive records, even those archived by their own department and related to their work, "must visit in person to see records in a physical invigilation room" at The National Archives' Richmond headquarters. "This not scalable and does not offer a good user experience", TNA said, in a newly published commercial notice.

The organisation is seeking a specialist supplier to support its ongoing work to develop an 'Access Your Records' service

providing civil servants with "timely, online, self-service access to the digital records they archive with us", including sensitive information not available to the general public.

TNA is currently creating and testing a skeleton 'wire-frame' version of the service.

Over the course of an initial four-month con-

"The current access is not scalable and does not offer a good user experience"



The National Archives in Richmond

tract worth about £200,000, the archive will work with its chosen provider to develop a fully functioning model for further testing and improvement.

The notice picked out a handful of "technical problems" TNA has identified and wishes to address.

These include the implementation of an authentication platform to verify users across both the existing service, through which departments transfer records for archiving, and the planned

service for providing access.

Other issues the supplier will be asked to help solve include the need for users to "search and browse based on user access privileges", how the service should store and retrieve records and how best to ensure "security of sensitive data and user information".

Work on the beta phase is due to get under way imminently, after which the priority will be to design a workable system for secure authentication and management of users, which will then lead into work on controls to dictate which records are accessible to each user. ■



As switch off looms for the UK's 30-year-old customs IT platform, many of its users feared that issues with government internal systems meant that they too were facing closure. **Sam Trendall** investigates

The CHIEF technology platform that supports the UK's customs system has now entered the last six months of its near 30-year existence.

The project to deliver its replacement, the Customs Declaration Service (CDS), has run in parallel for almost a third of its predecessor's lifespan – during which time there has hardly been a day when it has not faced a major, and often unexpected, challenge.

The most of significant of these came in light of the Brexit referendum in 2016, which took place three years after work began on CDS.

At the time of the vote, the plan was to build a platform with enough capacity to handle 100 million customs declarations annually – a figure comfortably in excess of the 55 million that were typically processed each year before the country left the EU. Post-Brexit, HM Revenue and Customs expects to receive an annual total of about 250 million declarations.

But that is contingent on traders

and customs brokerages being able to use the system in the first place.

PublicTechnology understands that thousands of traders may have more than 18 months of difficulties in registering for the new platform – including hundreds that have been completely unable to do so as a result HMRC's internal systems failing to correctly update firms' details.

It is understood that the department has diagnosed and is now fixing this issue. Affected traders have been identified and contacted and, until they are able to get up and running on CDS, have also been given an extension in using CHIEF beyond the scheduled cut-off date of 30 September for import declarations. Export declarations are open until 31 March 2023, after which point the system will be permanently shut down.

This progress towards resolution will be welcome. But for some it only comes after months of seeking help that was never provided, and asking questions that – with just days left until long-standing businesses were facing overnight closure

– remained unanswered. In addition to the immense stress caused, those impacted now have just a few weeks to undertake up to 100 hours' worth of training on CDS.

EORI issues

For hundreds of small traders, this disruption stems from the fact that the Government Gateway login system used by HMRC did not correctly update a small, but crucial piece of information: their 12-digit Economic Operators Registration and Identification (EORI) number.

Traders importing or exporting goods at the UK border are required to register for an EORI number which – where applicable – comprises their existing nine-digit VAT-registration number, with three zeroes on the end.

Many customs brokerages are small businesses and, for those that are not VAT-registered – which is typically not required for any firm with less than £85,000 annual turnover – a so-called pseudo-EORI number, not linked to a VAT account, can be issued by HMRC.

In line with the fivefold increase in border bureaucracy caused by Brexit, many traders have seen their business expand rapidly – in many cases from single-person operations to six-figure businesses with multiple staff.

Issues have arisen where traders have registered for VAT and been issued with an updated EORI number linked to their new taxable status.

When they have then come to sign up for CDS, these firms have found that their Government Gateway account is still linked to their previous, non-VAT-aligned EORI number. This has left them unable to sign up for the new system, instead being informed during the registration process that their EORI number and their unique taxpayer reference (UTR) number did not match one another.

Reports of this issue – and of the difficulty traders were experiencing in obtaining help from HMRC in addressing it – first emerged in early 2021.

Intercarry Couriers, a specialist customs clearance firm which became VAT-registered last year, found itself in this position when attempting to register for CDS in November 2021, company director Sarah Darby tells *PublicTechnology*.

Immediately – and repeatedly over the coming months – she contacted various teams at HMRC to re-

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port the issue and seek a solution.

"Most of them came back to say: 'we are sorry that you are struggling to pay your VAT'; or 'we are sorry that you are struggling to get an EORI number'. It did not appear that they were listening – or maybe that they did not understand," she says.

Time passed, and the deadline of 30 September drew nearer, after which point traders not up and running on CDS would no longer be able to make import declarations.

In August, HMRC issued a press release claiming that, unless an outstanding total of about 3,500 import firms registered for CDS within two months, the UK could face "significant delays" in getting goods through border controls.

Intercarry would have been counted among those traders that HMRC was addressing when it warned that "registering takes time, so businesses should start mov-

ing to CDS to ensure a smooth transition and avoid disruption to their business".

'Stress and anxiety'

Darby – whose company was receiving similar warnings via a steady stream of letters, phone calls, and emails – was, indeed, preparing for disruption.

September began with the Intercarry boss preparing for the inevitability that it would be her company's last month in operation, after 15 years.

"All of the stress and anxiety had been building up – I was even practising what I would say to my staff when I had to let them go; I thought we were going to close," she said. "I was losing sleep; I felt like I had been passed from pillar to post for 10 months."

At this point, she "started shouting quite loudly on LinkedIn" and, finally, found "one or two people that started to listen".

She received contact from officials working on the CDS programme, and from a dedicated complaints-handling team.

On 21 September – with nine days left until Intercarry was facing closure – "someone called me and said they had seen all my emails and contacts, and that they were going to make sure this gets resolved", Darby says.

The day before this phone call, HMRC had also launched an online service allowing any firms that had "been unable to migrate to the Customs Declaration Service to make import declarations" to apply for permission to continue using CHIEF beyond 30 September.

When contacted by *PublicTechnology*, HMRC indicated that it was aware of the registration problems experienced by firms that have been given a new EORI number after registering for VAT. The department is now working to fix the underlying issues and said that "users will be able to continue to use the legacy CHIEF system" until this work is complete.

It is understood that those in this position identified by the department should have been automatically granted an extension – although all firms affected are still encouraged to apply.

In a statement issued on 26 September, an HMRC spokesperson said: "The majority of traders are on track to have migrated to CDS by 30 September 2022. We are providing a little extra time for those who have a good reason why they can't migrate, and will ensure that there is no disruption to trade flows."

Intercarry is now signed up for CDS and, according to the company director, has also "been reassured that we will not be kicked off CHIEF until our problem is resolved".

In the meantime, Darby has begun "cramming" in an effort to get through about 14 working days' worth of training in the space of little more than a month – rather than the 11 months she would have had if she had been able to successfully register when she first tried to do so.

But, after everything she went through, she would still like more answers about the cause of the problems encountered by her firm – as well as potentially thousands of others.

"I have been trying to scream for this help for months – and no one knew how to help," she says. "I do not think a lot of people realise how difficult it has been." ■

30 September

Scheduled deadline for making import declarations via CHIEF

3,500

Number of traders that had not signed up for CDS as of August

£85,000

Annual turnover threshold for VAT registration – which many customs brokerages have passed as result of Brexit-related work

11 months

Length of time Intercarry sought support from HMRC in fixing its registration issues



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