INSTITUTE FOR GOVERNMENT

Whitehall Monitor 2023

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About Whitehall Monitor

This is the 10th edition of *Whitehall Monitor*, the Institute for Government's annual, data-based assessment of the UK civil service – how it has changed and performed in 2022, and its priorities for 2023 and beyond.

Civil servants are responsible for supporting ministers to make decisions about government policy, implementing those policies, managing many frontline public services and delivering major projects across the country. Understanding the civil service matters because its work affects all of our lives in significant ways.

In *Whitehall Monitor* we bring together, analyse and visualise a range of publicly available data, alongside the Institute's ongoing research, to chart the change of the civil service, identify lessons it should learn and ways it can improve.

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Foreword

This is the 10th edition of *Whitehall Monitor* – our annual, data-based assessment of the UK civil service, how it has changed and performed over the past year, and its priorities for the future.

Last year was a turbulent one for British politics even by recent standards: 2022 saw three prime ministers, four chancellors and record-breaking numbers of ministerial resignations. Government had to contend with the death of the UK's longest serving monarch and head of state, war in Europe and an unprecedented cost of living crisis. This report paints a striking picture of the impact this tumult has had on the performance of the civil service, the relationship between ministers and their officials and the effective running of government. We bring together, analyse and visualise a wide range of data to reveal what the events of the past year tell us about the civil service, and the ways in which it should change to better serve the UK in 2023 and beyond.

The new year brings at least a momentary return to a calmer pace of Westminster politics and, with it, an opportunity to assess the state of the civil service and its relationship with ministers after the disruption of 2022. Morale is declining in the wake of hostile briefings against officials, combative attempts to cut staff headcounts and dissatisfaction with real-terms pay cuts leading to widespread industrial action among civil servants. Departments will need to manage increasingly tight budgets this year, and in the future, as the weak economic outlook translates to squeezed spending on the civil service in particular. Leaders will be forced to make difficult decisions on workforce, pay, property and operations.

Whitehall Monitor argues that the government should refresh momentum behind its reform agenda in 2023. And as we come closer to the next election, civil servants and politicians of all stripes have an opportunity to reflect on the deeper, long-term changes that would make government more effective in years to come. Whether safeguarding progress on digital transformation, designing a less centralised civil service, improving the government's ability to hire external talent and develop the workforce, or spreading best practice in policy making across UK government, 2022 made the case for a refreshed focus on long-term reform. In particular, the events of the past year demonstrated the merit of reinforcing a clearer civil service responsibility to steward the capability of government and to provide long-term policy advice and expertise – which supports the Institute's case for a new statutory footing for the civil service.

Hannah White OBE
Director, Institute for Government

Overview

Last year was another in which much of the work of the civil service was shaped by major external events. Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the energy crisis and worsening global economic outlook demanded urgent responses from the UK government. Meanwhile, domestic politics reached new levels of tumult in 2022, with three prime ministers, four chancellors and record-breaking numbers of ministerial resignations all within the calendar year.

Dealing with crises is a core part of the civil service's role. But responses to international instability and domestic uncertainty must happen alongside work to address other, long-term problems facing the UK – of which regional inequality, low rates of housebuilding, or recruitment and retention problems in social care are just some examples. However, the political turmoil and ministerial churn of 2022 slowed decision making and jammed up policy making. Attempts to find solutions to long-term problems were delayed in favour of short-term fixes. The same was true for efforts to reform the civil service, which lost momentum and direction.

Civil service leaders face two big challenges in 2023. First will be managing the workforce. The civil service goes into 2023 with record levels of turnover, declining morale and disrupted by widespread industrial action. Much is to be done to repair the relationship between ministers and officials, still strained by unresolved disputes over pay and the workforce, hostile press briefings against civil servants and the reverberations of the 'partygate' scandal that erupted a year ago. Public trust in both ministers and civil servants continues to get worse.

Second, departments will need to manage increasingly tight budgets. Programme budgets, squeezed by high inflation, are set to rise very little beyond this financial year. And though the 91,000 headcount cuts target may have been dropped, administration budgets, used to staff the civil service, are still expected to be cut further. Department leads will struggle to manage these pressures through pay restraint, as this winter's industrial action by many thousands of officials has shown. And they will have to balance cuts with the need to deliver an expanding portfolio of complex and expensive projects, while managing overstretched and in-demand public services.

Attempts to reform government, and specifically the civil service, took a back seat last year but remain critical to making government more effective in the future. Momentum needs to be revived in 2023. Civil service leaders need to safeguard the progress being made in some areas and push further in others.

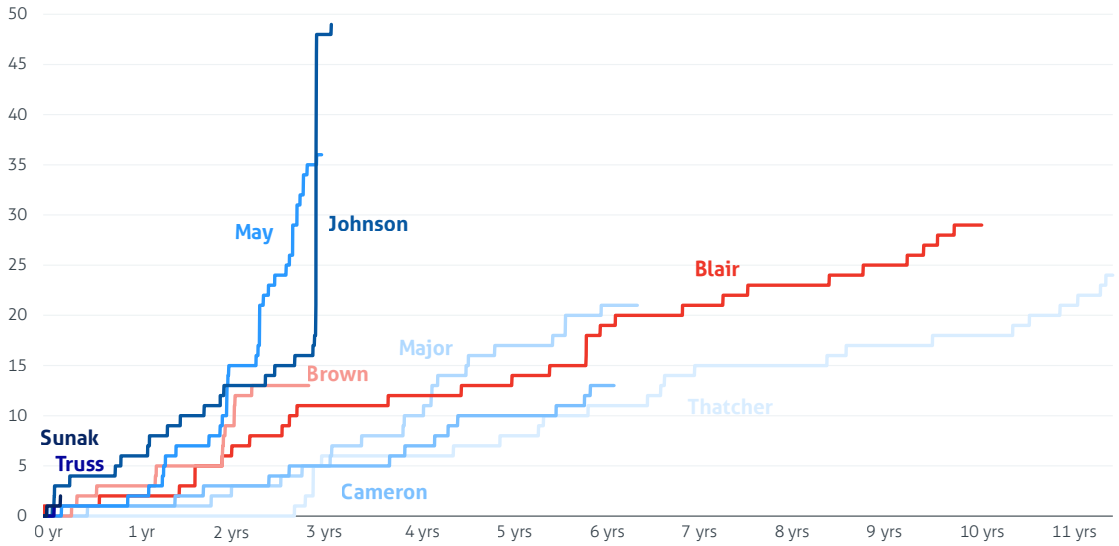
In the wake of the pandemic, the civil service should make the case to be given a clearer responsibility for managing the long-term capability of government. Political turmoil is an inevitable facet of democracy, but should not be allowed to undermine the capacity of the state to address long-standing problems.

The civil service needs a greater say in managing its own capabilities – its workforce, assets and technology – across departments. And it would be beneficial for both politicians and officials for the institution to have a properly defined duty to provide high-quality, long-term policy advice to ministers.

As the next general election comes closer, the civil service should start to build a case for such long-term improvements that a refreshed Sunak government – or a new Starmer-led administration – could adopt and promote. To do this it should begin, as we do in this overview, by recognising the principal problems that have prevented government performing as well as it might in recent years: political turmoil and ministerial churn; the financial stresses of 2022 and what this means for department budgets in 2023; strained relations between officials and ministers; and inadequate clarity over the role and responsibility of the civil service.

Political turmoil and ministerial churn has made government less effective

Figure 0.1 **Number of ministerial resignations outside reshuffles by prime minister, 1979 to January 2023**



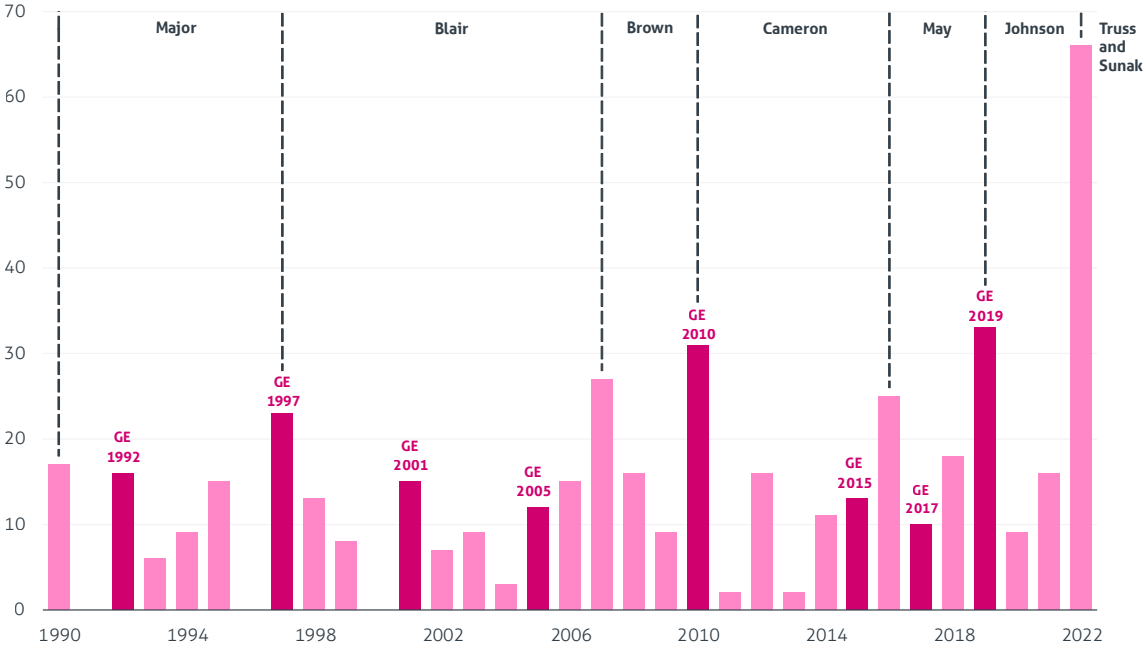
Source: Institute for Government analysis of sources including Butler and Butler, *British Political Facts*; House of Commons Library; King A and Allen N, 'Off with their heads: British prime ministers and the power to dismiss', *BJPolS*, 2010, vol. 40, no. 2, pp. 249–278; and IfG ministers database. Notes: We have excluded those resignations announced before a reshuffle but effectively taking place during it, e.g. Hurd (1995), Smith/Blears/Hughes/Watson (2009), Dunlop (2017), and sackings.

After a November 2021 reshuffle, Boris Johnson made few changes to his ministerial team until the partygate and later Chris Pincher scandals came to a head the following summer, the latter prompting the resignation of 28 government ministers between 5 and 7 July 2022.[1] Johnson's subsequent resignation was followed by a period of paralysis over the summer while the Conservative Party ran an eight-week leadership contest, eventually appointing Liz Truss his successor.

The collapse of Truss's government just weeks later led to another change of prime minister before the end of the year, with Rishi Sunak taking over on 25 October. In her 49 days in office, Truss created further ministerial churn: appointing then replacing Kwasi Kwarteng as chancellor, after the disastrous September 'mini budget', and moving Suella Braverman out of the Home Office to be replaced by Grant Shapps following policy disagreements and the former's violation of the ministerial code (Braverman would return just weeks later). This meant two of the great offices of state changed hands within a two-month premiership.[2]

Sunak's tenure as prime minister has so far managed relative ministerial stability – with the exception of Gavin Williamson's forced resignation after a week. But three prime ministers in a year has led to extraordinary instability in the ministerial ranks.[3]

Figure 0.2 **Cabinet appointments each calendar year, 1990–2022**

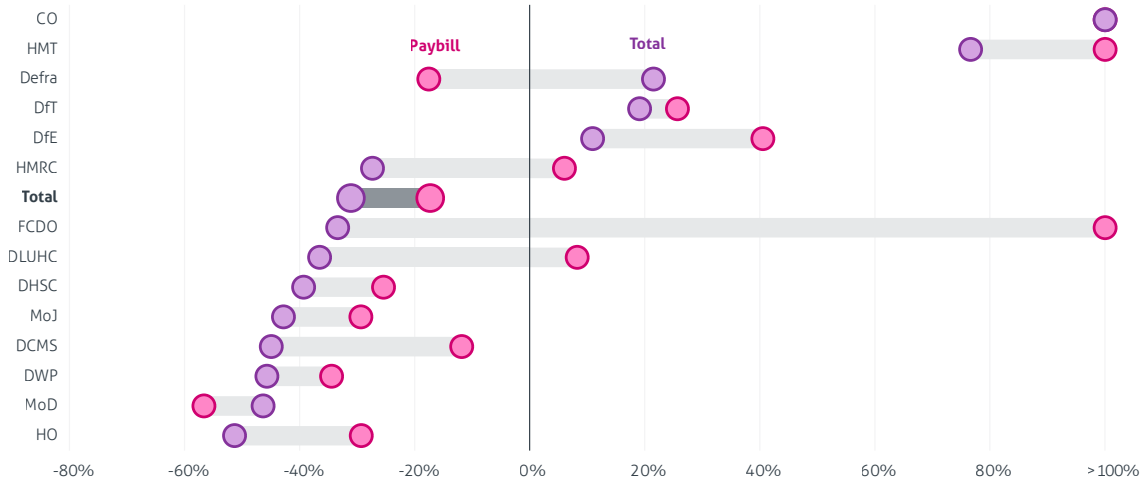


Source: Institute for Government analysis of IfG ministers database. Note: Figures include ministers attending cabinet.

Unsurprisingly, this political uncertainty has made the government and civil service less effective. On some issues, the Johnson, Truss and Sunak administrations held markedly different views. On others, the process of waiting for new ministers, inducting them and dealing with ministerial resignations simply meant policies were stuck in uncertainty. The result has been policy beleaguered by delay and U-turns – including on social care, planning, onshore wind, public bodies reform and public appointments, health inequalities, local government finance, agriculture, online harms, foreign policy towards China and the EU and, lastly but importantly, civil service reform.

2022 was a year of financial stresses – in 2023 the civil service will have to manage on tighter budgets

Figure 0.3 **Change in departments' administration day-to-day spending, 2011/12 to 2021/22 (real terms)**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of successive HM Treasury, Online System for Centre Accounting and Reporting annual publications. Notes: Paybill is net spending on pay. Cabinet Office total and paybill have both increased by over 100%.

A combination of a worsening global economic outlook and the fallout from Truss's September 2022 'mini-budget' means that a central challenge for the civil service in 2023 will be to manage increasingly tight budgets with less administrative resource.

Most departments have seen their administration spending reduce by more than a fifth in the past decade. Current plans will see these budgets reduce further in 2022/23 and beyond. Departments will need to make difficult choices about how to reduce the cost of the civil service while minimising the extent to which those choices undermine the ability of government to get things done. They will need to do this against the backdrop of civil and public service dissatisfaction with pay and conditions, which led to strikes this winter and will make pay restraint a more difficult tool to deploy in search of cuts. And they will need to do this while mitigating the risks of cuts to delivering an expanding and important portfolio of major projects.

Meanwhile, for most departments, spending on programmes is set to fall or barely increase in real terms over the next few years. Meeting the public's expectations for public services without new money will be difficult. As the resources of the civil service reduce, the problems it is tasked with managing remain. How senior officials address that tension will be an important test in 2023.

The relationship between ministers and civil servants has been strained

All of this will be made more difficult by strained relationships with ministers in 2022. Ministers, too, should concern themselves with their relationships with civil servants, because those relationships affect their ability to deliver their priorities.

Officials' and ministers' involvement in the 'partygate' scandal, more details of which came out across the year, raised serious questions about their respective standards, created negative publicity, harmed perceptions of civil service impartiality, and damaged the authority of the cabinet secretary, Simon Case.[4]

Jacob Rees-Mogg's attempts to reform the civil service were undermined by his willingness to brief against civil servants in public. During her leadership campaign, Liz Truss similarly adopted 'war on Whitehall' rhetoric, which she put into practice by deciding to sack the Treasury permanent secretary, Sir Tom Scholar, striking a blow against perceived 'Treasury orthodoxy'.[5]

Truss and Kwarteng's rejection of official analysis from the Office for Budget Responsibility and the Treasury ahead of the disastrous 'mini budget' in September undermined confidence in the UK's fiscal credibility.

Sunak has so far adopted a different, more constructive, tone. He has dropped the headcount target for cuts and resumed the paused Civil Service Fast Stream, taking the opportunity to stress his appreciation for the work of the civil service while continuing to prioritise efficiency and value for money.[6]

But that does not mean his ministers' relationships with civil servants are all in good shape. Officials in departments from across Whitehall took strike action over the winter in opposition to policy on pay and conditions. Questions surround the reappointment of Suella Braverman as home secretary just days after her resignation, and bullying allegations have forced an inquiry into the conduct of the deputy prime minister and justice secretary, Dominic Raab. Staff turnover has reached record highs following the pandemic. And the year ended with remarks from Simon Case recognising the problem of declining morale among the workforce.[7]

The civil service needs a long-term responsibility to steward government capability and advice

In times of political turbulence, or following unexpected events, it is more important than ever that the government makes the most of the permanent civil service, whose job should be to ensure the capabilities of government are maintained and the state can mitigate against long-term priorities being knocked off course. But it is hard to escape the view that, rather than helping to steward the government through the disruption of 2022, the civil service was at times paralysed by it.

That is why reform remains vital to improving the capability of government in the future. Now that the ministerial ranks have, at least temporarily, stabilised, Oliver Dowden and Jeremy Quin – the two ministers in the Cabinet Office responsible for reform – should re-commit to the programme of change outlined in June 2021's *Declaration on Government Reform*. This will mean safeguarding progress being made

in some areas, such as on relocating officials outside London, reviewing public bodies and training civil servants, but also pushing further in other areas, such as policy making, evaluation, external recruitment and interchange, and digital transformation.

But to improve the civil service's ability to support government in future times of crisis and political instability, the civil service needs to be given a clearer responsibility to manage the long-term capability of government and the provision of long-term policy advice. Civil servants should be held accountable for undertaking that responsibility. As we have been arguing over the past year, ministers and the civil service should make the case for this stewardship function in 2023.

Report outline

This edition of *Whitehall Monitor* assesses the change, performance and priorities of the civil service in three parts. The first details how the civil service changed in 2022 and looks ahead to 2023. The second analyses what progress was made towards reforming government – and the civil service in particular – last year, as well as what is missing from current reform plans. The third assesses how well the civil service undertook its key roles and responsibilities in 2022, as well as ways it could improve its performance in these key areas in the future.

Part 1: The size, cost and make-up of the civil service

This part of the report analyses the ways in which the civil service changed in 2022. It identifies what these changes mean for the priorities of the civil service and the challenges it will face in 2023.

The size, structure, location and turnover of the civil service:

- slowing growth of the civil service
- record high levels of staff turnover
- stability in the structures of government departments
- changes to the number of public bodies and their employees

Budgets, spend and costs:

- the varying ways in which departments spend their budgets
- cuts to departmental administration budgets
- the rising proportion of government spending handled by public bodies

Diversity:

- the long-term trend towards a more representative civil service
- the civil service becoming simultaneously younger and more senior
- the working experience of civil servants with a disability

Skills, professions and functions:

- the continued growth of the policy profession
- the contrasting pressure on operational delivery teams

Part 2: Government reform

This part of the report analyses efforts to reform government, and the civil service in particular, last year. It identified where progress has and has not been made, where there are gaps in the government's plans, and why the government should revive its focus on reform in 2023.

Efficiency and cuts:

- different approaches to the question of civil service headcount
- the difficulty of pay restraint in the context of industrial action and real-terms cuts
- plans to make savings from government property
- the principles of a long-term approach to efficiency

Recruitment, development and interchange:

- the Civil Service Fast Stream, its pause, resumption and prospects for reform
- progress made by the Government Skills and Curriculum Unit
- the civil service's need to get better at external recruitment and ways it could do so
- capability-based pay

Improving diversity and inclusion:

- the risk of complacency regarding the representation of protected characteristics
- the socio-economic diversity of the workforce
- the importance of 'inclusion' to 'diversity of thought'

Data and digital:

- the government's new digital strategy
- the importance of stability in the leadership of digital reform
- progress made improving officials' digital and data skills and on key digital priorities
- the role of legacy IT transformation in future efficiency

Public bodies and appointments reform:

- Progress made on the public bodies review programme
- Ongoing problems with public appointments

Devolution and decentralisation:

- The consequences of more English devolution and decentralisation for the civil service
- The relationship between the civil service and local government

Ministers and civil servants:

- The effect high levels of ministerial churn had on reform
- The consequences of a strained relationship between ministers and civil servants
- The case for the civil service having a long-term responsibility for government capability and high-quality advice

Part 3: Civil service effectiveness

This part of the report assesses the extent to which the civil service was effective at undertaking its key roles and responsibilities in 2022, and the ways in which it could improve its performance in the future. It includes:

Making and implementing policy:

- what 2022 showed happens when the relationship between ministers and officials at the heart of government policy making breaks down
- the need for the civil service to provide more long-term policy advice
- the case for publishing more evidence, advice and analysis
- ways in which the civil service can embed best practice methods of making policy
- next steps to improve government evaluation

Managing tight budgets:

- the pressure being applied to departmental budgets
- the importance of the government's performance framework to making and managing difficult spending decisions

Delivering large projects:

- the growing size and cost of the government's major project portfolio
- the risks created for major projects by squeezing departmental administration budgets

Working transparently and communicating effectively:

- declining trust in the civil service
- the role of communication in the government's priorities in 2022 and 2023
- ongoing problems with government transparency

Leading an engaged, motivated workforce:

- problems with civil service morale

Part 1: The size, cost and make-up of the civil service

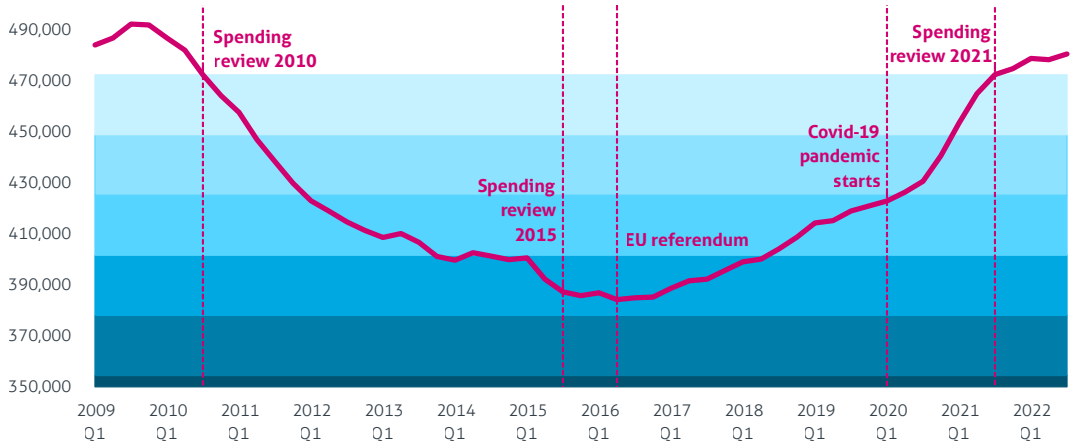
The first part of this report analyses how the civil service changed in 2022. It looks specifically at the size, structure, location and turnover of the civil service; budgets, spend and costs; diversity; and the skills, professions and functions of civil servants. For each we identify what these changes mean for the priorities of the civil service and the challenges it will face in 2023.

Size, structure, location and turnover

The growth of the civil service has plateaued

The recent expansion of the civil service slowed in 2022. At the time of the EU referendum in June 2016 the civil service had 384,230 full-time equivalent (FTE) roles, the smallest it had been since the Second World War after six years of retrenchment as a result of Cameron-era cuts. Over the following six years it grew by 25% – or nearly 95,000 roles – as the government prepared for Brexit, resourced new permanent post-Brexit responsibilities and, from 2020, responded to the Covid pandemic.

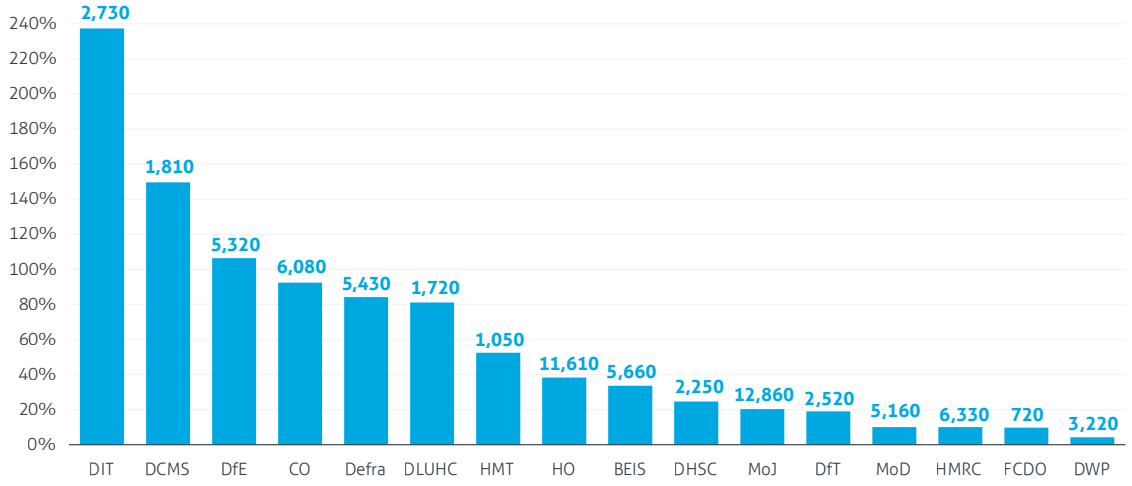
Figure 1.1 **Civil service staff numbers (FTE), Q1 2009 to Q3 2022**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of ONS, Public Sector Employment Data (Table 9), Q1 2009 to Q3 2022.

In the October 2021 spending review, ministers agreed a target to reduce the civil service headcount to pre-pandemic levels by 2024/25.[1] Before he left office in 2022 Boris Johnson went further, pledging a reduction instead to levels prior to the 2016 EU referendum, which at the time meant a reduction of 91,000 roles.[2] Ministers argued that the civil service could unwind the growth of recent years now the UK had left the EU and the acute phase of the pandemic had ended.

Figure 1.2 **Change in civil service staff numbers (FTE) since the EU referendum, by department**

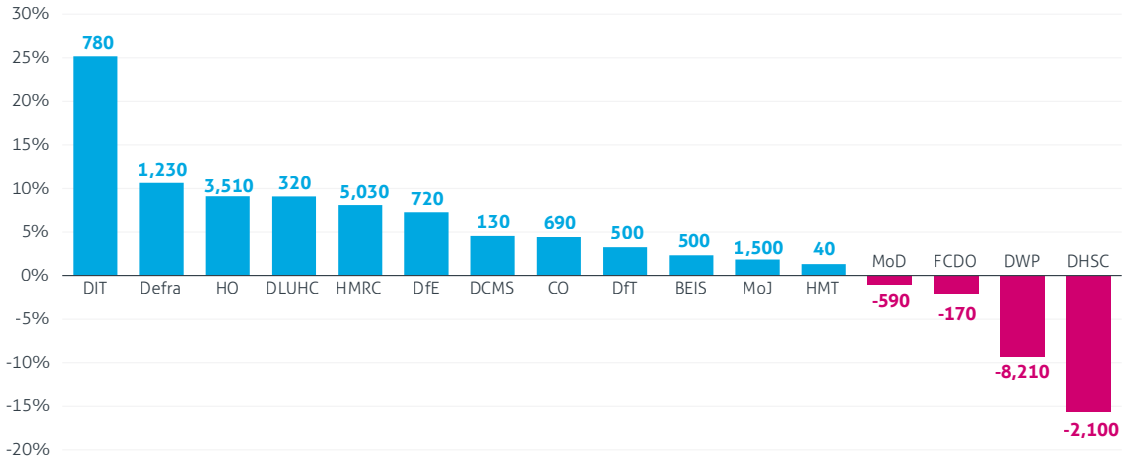


Source: Institute for Government analysis of ONS, Public Sector Employment Data (Table 9), Q2 2016 to Q3 2022.
Notes: DIT is calculated from Q4 2016, when its staff numbers were first reported by the ONS. Figures relate to departmental groups. These figures exclude transfers of staff that were the result of machinery of government changes. DExEU is excluded after its closure in 2020. The numbers for each department denote net change in FTE staff.

However, over the 12 months to September 2022 most departments continued to grow, though this did slow over the course of the year and MoD, DWP, DHSC and FCDO all shrank in that time.* In part this was due to departments disbanding temporary roles created to manage Covid pressures. This was particularly true for DHSC, which reduced by more than 2,000 roles after more than 4,000 roles were created during the pandemic (at its height an expansion of 46%). The reduction of staff in FCDO marks a continuation of a trend since the merger of FCO and DfID in 2020. Elsewhere, the slowing down of workforce expansion was at least in part the result of recruitment freezes introduced in response to ministers' 2021 headcount target.

* A list of departmental initialisms is found at the end of this report. For the purposes of reporting staff numbers, we categorise organisations into departmental groups based on where ministerial responsibility lies. For further information about how we do this, see the Methodology.

Figure 1.3 **Change in civil service staff numbers (FTE) between Q3 2021 and Q3 2022, by department**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of ONS, Public Sector Employment Data (Table 9), Q3 2021 to Q3 2022.
Notes: Figures relate to departmental groups. These figures exclude transfers of staff that were the result of machinery of government changes. The numbers for each department denote net change in FTE staff.

Most departments are now bigger than they were in 2010. However, the retrenchment then growth of the civil service has been experienced differently by big, operational departments than it has been by smaller, policy-focused ones. For both it has set the context in which they manage their workforces.

Smaller, policy-focused departments without large operational teams experienced the biggest proportional increases since the EU referendum. DIT, DCMS, DfE, the Cabinet Office, Defra and DLUHC all increased by over 80% between 2016 and 2022, though each still has fewer than 20,000 civil servants in their core department and public bodies.

By contrast, large operational departments with front-line services bore the biggest staffing cuts in the early 2010s, making growth after 2016 less striking. For example, while many did grow in absolute numbers after the referendum – MoD, HMRC and MoJ each now has more than 5,000 more officials than in 2016 – this amounts to proportionally smaller growth as they were adding to workforces of in many cases more than 50,000. DWP, MoD, MoJ and HMRC are each smaller than in 2010.

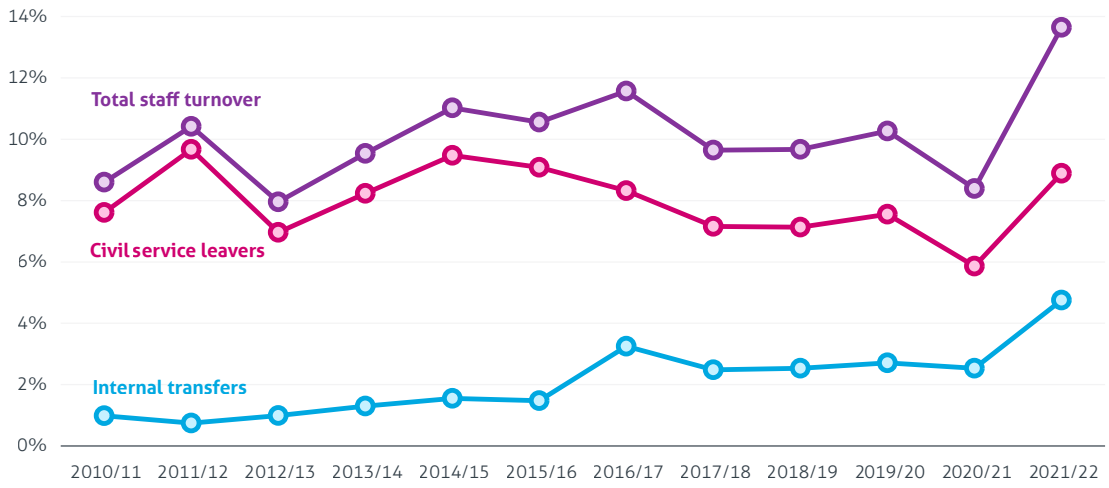
The Home Office is the only large, operational department to buck this trend. Its 31% growth since September 2010 largely reflects the additional capacity required to administer migration, citizenship and borders services as a result of the UK leaving the EU.

Figure 1.4 **Change in civil service staff numbers (FTE) by department, Q3 2010 to Q3 2022**

Source: Institute for Government analysis of ONS, Public Sector Employment Data (Table 9), Q3 2010 to Q3 2022. Notes: Figures relate to departmental groups. Figures for FCDO before the merger of FCO and DfID are the sum of the figures for the two component departments; the same applies for BEIS before the merger of BIS and DECC. DIT is not shown as it was not in existence in 2010.

Turnover is at record highs after falling during the pandemic

Figure 1.5 **Total staff turnover, civil service leavers and internal transfers as a percentage of the civil service workforce (headcount), 2010/11–2021/22**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of data provided by the Cabinet Office, 2010 –17, and Cabinet Office, Civil Service Statistics, 2018–22. Notes: Total staff turnover is the sum of civil service leavers and internal transfers of staff.

Between March 2021 and March 2022, some 13.6% of civil servants either moved between departments or left the civil service entirely – the highest level in at least a decade. High turnover damages productivity, undermines subject knowledge and expertise, disrupts projects and increases the resources required for recruitment and training.[3]

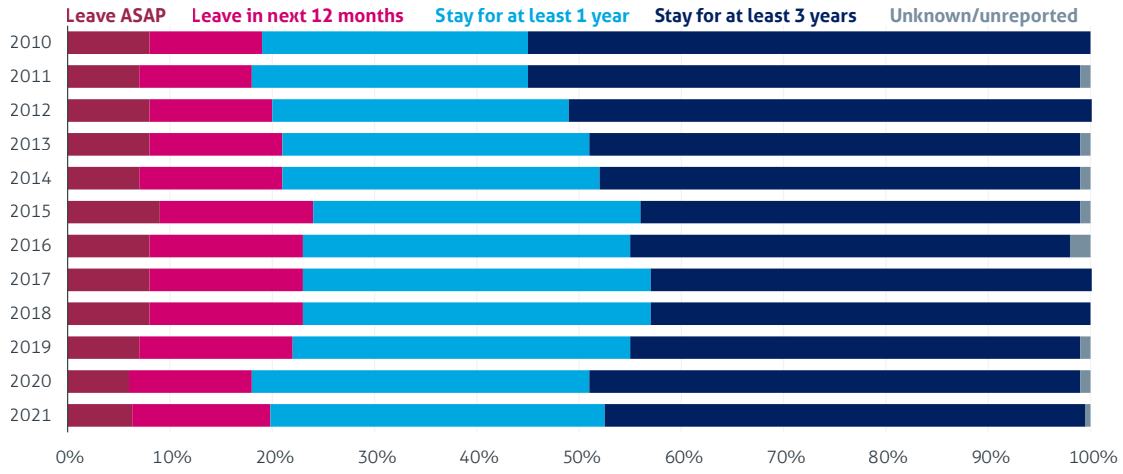
This level of turnover is an increase of 5.2 percentage points compared to 2020/21, when lower turnover was driven by fewer staff leaving the civil service than in previous years while the percentage of internal transfers remained constant. This was caused, in large part, by economic uncertainty related to the pandemic, which incentivised people to remain in stable employment (this was also seen in the private sector).[4]

But the proportion of officials leaving the civil service increased significantly even above pre-pandemic levels in 2021/22 to reach its highest level since 2015/16. Internal turnover, having remained stable at around 2.5% between 2017/18 and 2020/21, has also increased, almost doubling to 4.8% of the total workforce. This is notably higher than the previous peak of 3.2% in 2016/17, which was associated with organisational changes following the EU referendum, not least the creation of new Brexit and international trade departments. Internal turnover is now nearly five times higher than it was in 2010/11, when only 1% of the civil service workforce left for a role in another department.

These numbers reflect several at least partly mitigating factors. First, as noted, departments have unwound temporary roles created to respond to the pandemic, inevitably leading to internal turnover. Similarly, pent-up demand to move jobs was released after many staff 'sat tight' during the acute phase of the pandemic.[5]

However, there are more concerning factors the government should take note of. Some turnover stems from declining staff satisfaction – with pay in particular (as covered in Part 2 of this report), and officials' work more generally – which speaks to more systemic problems within the management of the civil service. In addition these figures, while already striking, present a major underestimate of civil service internal movement, because they record only internal transfers *between* departments, not the far higher number of transfers that happen *within* departments. These moves, for which there is no publicly available data, are less destabilising than outward moves, but nevertheless are resource-intensive, and hinder institutional memory.

Figure 1.6 **Intention of civil servants to leave the civil service, 2010–21**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office, Civil Service People Survey, 2010–21.

Trends for civil servants' employment intentions suggest that the number of leavers will be higher in the coming years than during the pandemic. In October 2020, 18% of civil servants intended to leave in the next 12 months or sooner, the smallest proportion since 2011 – but in 2021 this rose to 20%. And fewer than half (47%) intend to stay for at least three years, suggesting continued appetite to move in the medium term.

Turnover is higher in smaller, policy-focused departments

Figure 1.7 **Total staff turnover as a percentage of the civil service workforce by department (headcount), 2018/19–2021/22**

Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office, Civil Service Statistics, 2018–22. Notes: Total turnover is the sum of internal transfers and civil service leavers.

Larger, operational departments continue to have lower than average turnover – HMRC, the Home Office, MoD and DWP all have total turnover of below 13%, with the figure for HMRC decreasing by 1.8 percentage points in the last year. The MoJ is the only large operational department to buck this pattern, with total turnover of 15%.

Turnover at FCDO has historically been low but increased significantly last year from 5% to 10%. This in part reflects normal staff resourcing adjustments following the 2020 merger of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office with the Department for International Development – but the new department also faces particular problems with morale in the wake of the merger as it seeks to develop a new, coherent culture.[6]

Smaller, policy-focused and less operational departments tend to have higher turnover. DHSC (51%), the Cabinet Office (26%), DCMS (20%), the Treasury (18%), DLUHC (17%), DIT (16%), BEIS (16%) and DfT (15%) each had turnover at or above 15%.

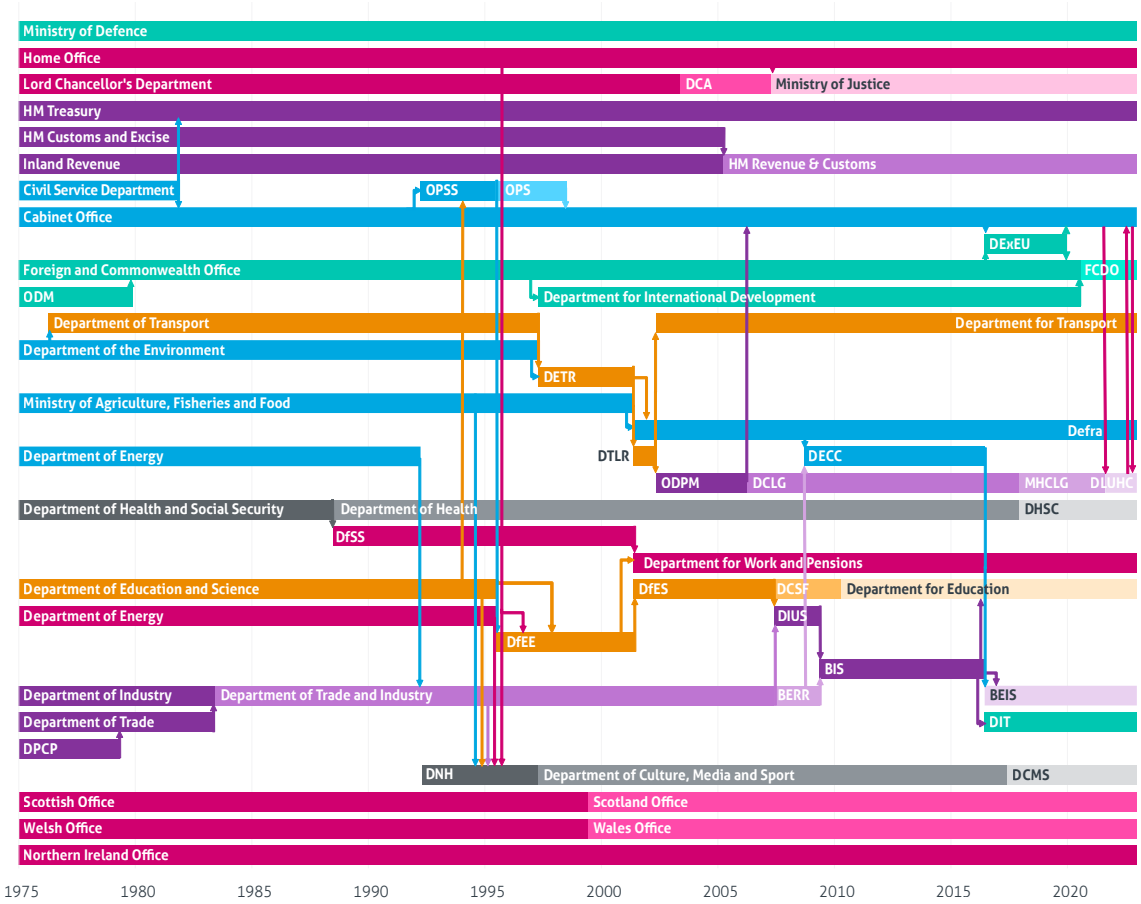
Turnover at DHSC increased from 14% to 51% from 2020/21 to 2021/22, largely driven by 1,310 of its staff transferring to another part of the civil service. This again reflects the department winding down some of its pandemic functions and sizeable recruitment. Potentially more concerning is high turnover at the Treasury, something the Institute for Government has previously identified as a particular problem because it undermines the department's ability to take a long-term strategic view of government spending.[7] Rates have nearly returned to pre-pandemic levels.

It is welcome that, to tackle high internal turnover, the civil service has introduced 'minimum expected assignment durations' for newly advertised senior civil service roles.[8] But previous research by the Institute suggests this measure is unlikely to control turnover unless disregarding it by leaving a role prematurely damages a civil servant's reputation and prospects for future promotion, a standard that has not yet been established.[9] Nor does this move do anything to address turnover for the majority of officials, who are in ranks below the senior civil service.

The Institute has previously argued that the civil service should go further to provide stronger financial incentives to stay in post longer – via capability-based pay, bonuses for reaching significant project milestones or financial penalties for leaving earlier than the expected tenure length.[10]

An absence of major machinery of government changes left departmental structures largely unchanged

Figure 1.8 **History of departmental reorganisations, 1975–2022**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of data from House of Commons; and Butler and Butler, *British Political Facts*, Palgrave Macmillan, 1986. A list of abbreviations can be found in the Methodology chapter of this report.

Prime ministers frequently restructure government departments as a way to signal their priorities inside and outside government, bring together related issues previously dealt with in different parts of government, allocate particular briefs to, and promote or demote, certain cabinet colleagues. New prime ministers in particular often use machinery of government changes soon after coming into office as a means of stamping their agenda on to Whitehall.

However, despite the UK having two new prime ministers in 2022 no major machinery of government changes were made. Rishi Sunak has not yet moved forward on reported plans for a 'Brexit Delivery Department', or on a dedicated Department for Energy, discussed during the first Conservative leadership contest in the summer 2022.[11,12] Nor did Liz Truss during her short premiership. This is welcome given the time-consuming, expensive and risky nature of machinery of government changes.[13,*]

The only notable changes to the machinery of government in 2022 were repeated moves of teams working on the union and devolution between the Cabinet Office and DLUHC, and the Brexit opportunities unit between the Cabinet Office and BEIS.[14]

The civil service is starting to become less London-centric, but there is a long way to go

In the March 2020 budget the then chancellor, Rishi Sunak, announced that the government would be moving 22,000 civil service roles out of London by 2030 as part of its 'places for growth' programme.[15] This commitment was repeated in July 2021's *Declaration on Government Reform*, which added that 50% of senior civil servants would be located outside the capital by the same date.[16] The levelling up white paper further defined the latter ambition as 50% of UK-based senior civil servants.[17]

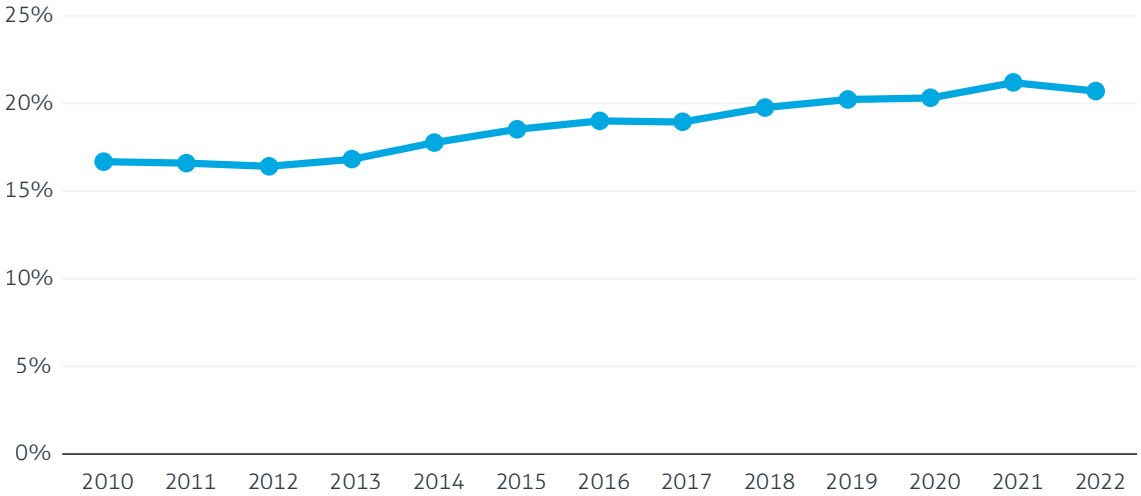
The government's three aims for relocation are to:

- allow talented people who do not want to live or work in London to contribute more effectively to the civil service
- change the way policy is made by incorporating the diversity of experience of people who live outside London into decision making
- 'level up' deprived areas by relocating public sector jobs to those parts of the country.

The government has made some progress towards its 22,000 target. As of September 2022, some 8,396 roles had been relocated from London to locations across the UK,[18] including more than 200 senior civil servants.

* In 2022, for example, the Institute published research on the handling of the 2020 merger of FCO and DfID, which identified ongoing problems connected to the merger including poor morale, incompatible IT and pay systems, and confusion over departmental policy.

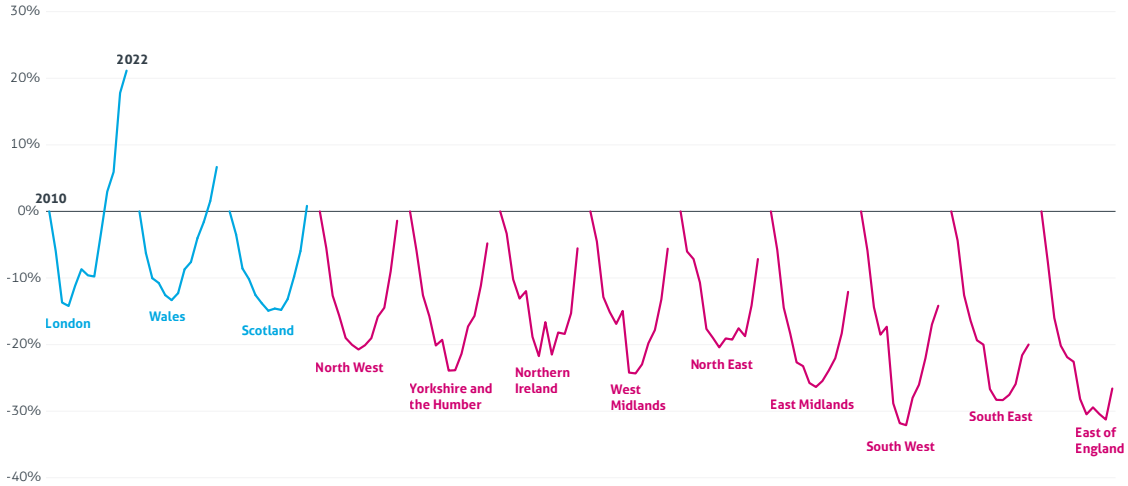
Figure 1.9 **Proportion of civil servants based in London, 2010–22**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of ONS, Civil Service Statistics, 2010–18; Cabinet Office, Civil Service Statistics, 2019–22.

The commitment to relocation was made in the context of an increasingly London-centric civil service. London is one of only three regions that has more civil servants than there were when the coalition government was formed in 2010, alongside Wales and Scotland. New roles created following the EU referendum in 2016 and in response to the Covid-19 pandemic were heavily weighted towards London.

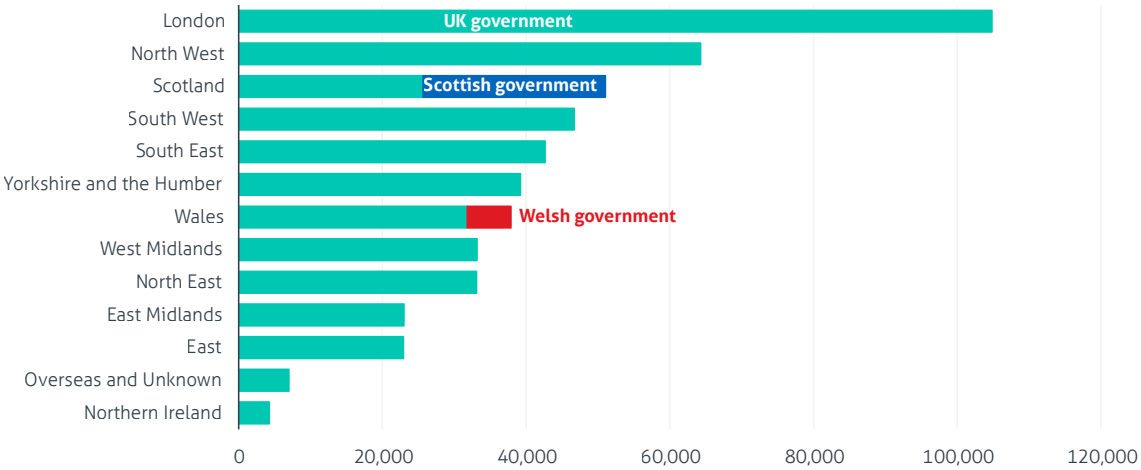
Figure 1.10 **Change in civil service staff numbers by region since 2010 (headcount)**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of ONS, Civil Service Statistics, 2010–18; Cabinet Office, Civil Service Statistics, 2019–22.

In absolute terms, London remains the region with the most civil servants (104,830) and Northern Ireland remains the region with the fewest (4,260). Half of roles in Scotland (49.7%) are part of the Scottish government, while 16.1% of roles in Wales are part of the Welsh government.

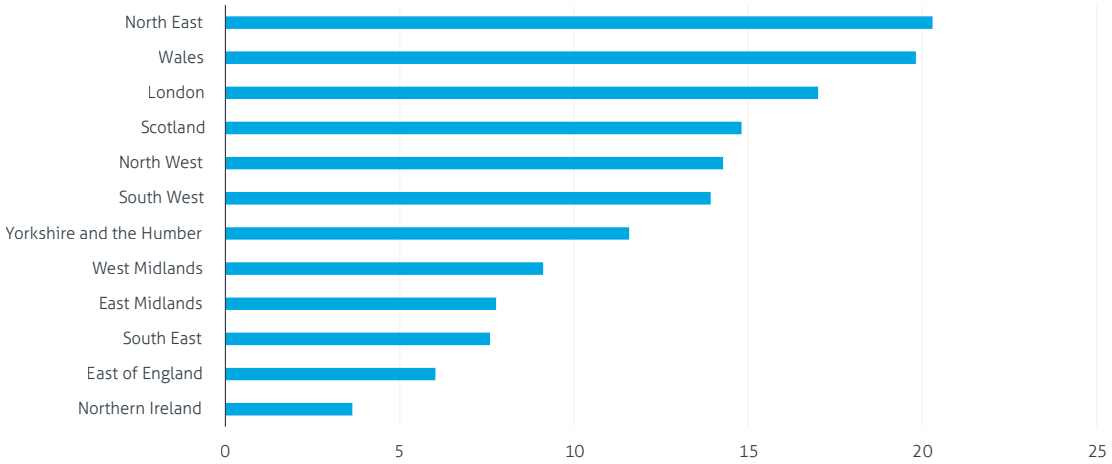
Figure 1.11 **Location of civil servants in the UK, 2022**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office, Civil Service Statistics, 2022.

However, proportional to the working-age population of each region, London has the third most civil servants after the North East and Wales, which both have approximately 20 officials per 1,000 working-age people. Northern Ireland has the fewest with 3.6 civil servants per 1,000 working-age people.

Figure 1.12 **Civil servants per 1,000 population by region, 2022**

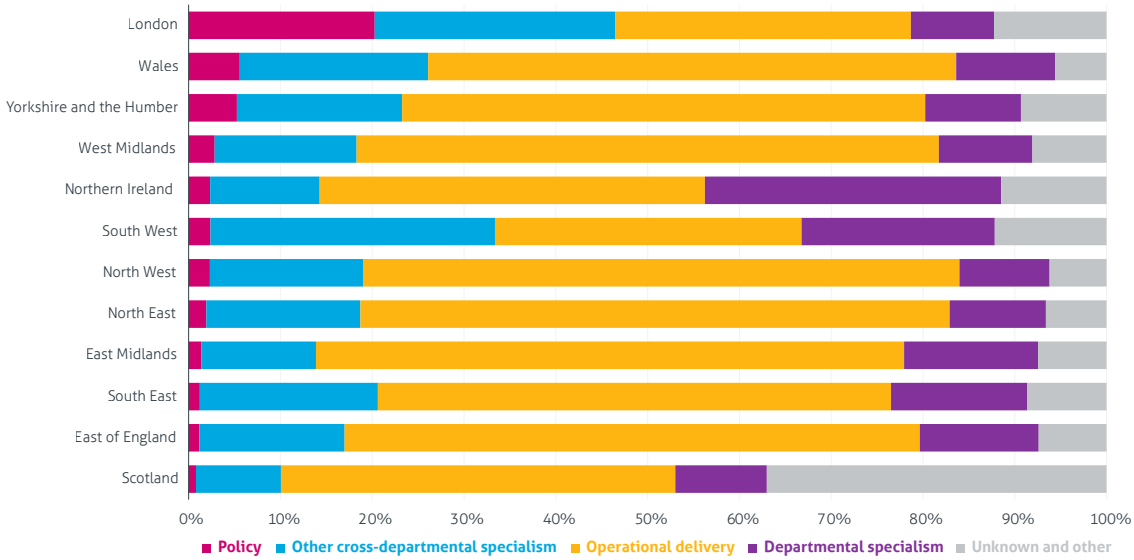


Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office, Civil Service Statistics, 2022. Notes: Calculations are made using working-age population.

The London-centricism of the civil service is not determined solely by absolute or per head numbers, however. A disproportionate number of senior and policy officials work in the capital, which the government argues negatively affects the effectiveness of the civil service, reducing its ability to draw on high-quality talent from across the country and narrowing the civil service's mindset.

London is, for instance, the region with the greatest proportion of policy roles, exacerbated by the fact that the roles created in preparation for Brexit and in response to Covid were weighted towards the capital. One in five London-based civil servants work in policy; the next highest figure is in Wales, at just 5.6%. In contrast, London has the lowest proportion of officials in operational delivery, at 32.2%, compared to over 60% in the North West, North East, East Midlands, West Midlands and East of England.

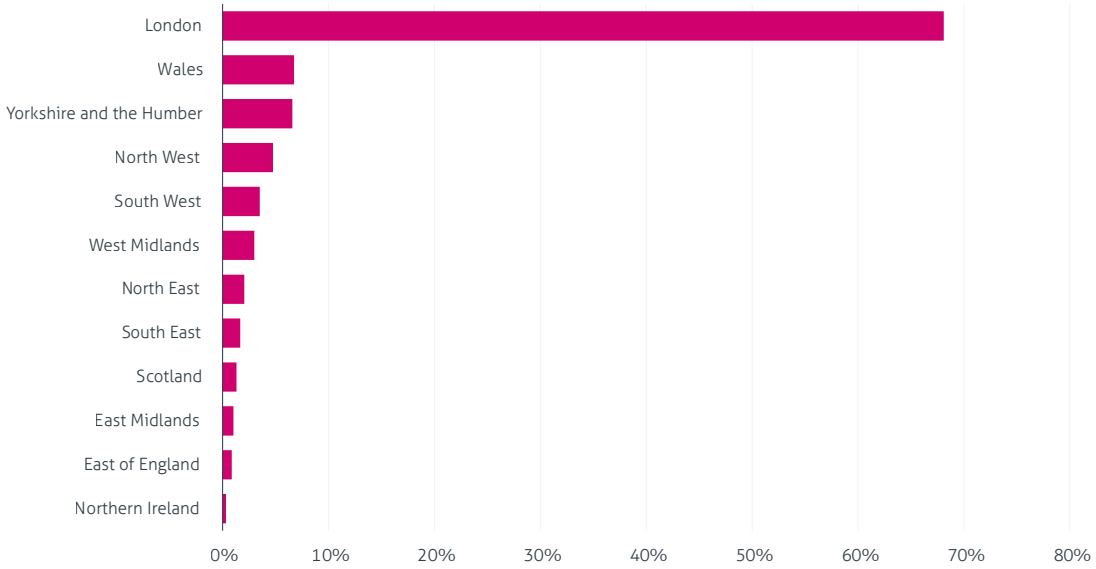
Figure 1.13 **Proportion of civil servants in each profession type by region, 2022**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office, Civil Service Statistics, 2022.

The relocations taking place as part of the 'places for growth' programme have slightly reduced the London-centricism of the policy profession. Around two thirds (68%) of all UK-based policy professionals are based in London, down from 72% in 2021. But no other region hosts more than 7%. While shifting roles does take time and the civil service has started to make some progress, increasing the regional diversity of the policy profession will be a challenge for the relocation agenda over the next year.

Figure 1.14 **Regional distribution of policy professionals, 2022**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office, Civil Service Statistics, 2022.

The relocation programme has also made some progress at reducing the proportion of the senior civil service (SCS) based in London, which has fallen from 67% in 2021 to 65% in 2022. While hardly a decisive shift, keeping up this momentum over the next eight years would just about enable the government to achieve its target of moving 50% of SCS roles out of London by 2030. Doing so will not be easy, but the

government should be helped by natural attrition of senior officials, via retirement or other departures from the civil service, providing an opportunity to hire replacements outside the capital, and by the successful relocation of senior staff to the Darlington Economic Campus acting as a proof of concept.

Figure 1.15 **Location of civil servants by grade (percentage of grade in each region, headcount)**

	Whole civil service	AO/AA	EO	SEO/HEO	Grades 6/7	SCS
London	21%	9%	16%	25%	43%	65%
North West	13%	15%	15%	11%	8%	4%
Scotland	10%	12%	11%	10%	8%	5%
South West	9%	7%	8%	12%	10%	5%
South East	8%	10%	10%	7%	6%	3%
Yorkshire and the Humber	8%	8%	8%	7%	7%	4%
Wales	7%	9%	7%	7%	5%	5%
West Midlands	7%	8%	8%	6%	4%	3%
North East	7%	10%	6%	5%	4%	2%
East Midlands	5%	6%	5%	4%	2%	1%
East	5%	5%	5%	4%	2%	2%
Northern Ireland	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%
Not reported	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office, Civil Service Statistics, 2022. Notes: Figures exclude civil servants based overseas.

Senior jobs are the hardest to shift, as incumbents tend to be of the age and career stage at which their location becomes 'stickier' – they may have school-age children or have bought property. But Institute for Government research suggests that their presence is crucial to the success of relocated offices – showing junior officials that they will be able to reach the civil service's highest echelons while working outside London and avoiding the sense that offices outside London are 'auxiliary offices', removed from the real action in the capital.[19] The early success of the Darlington Economic Campus, for example, is partly built on the high concentration of senior staff based there.

Maintaining the momentum behind the relocation of senior and policy jobs over the next year is a prerequisite to the success of the relocation agenda and ministers and senior civil servants must continue to emphasise its importance.

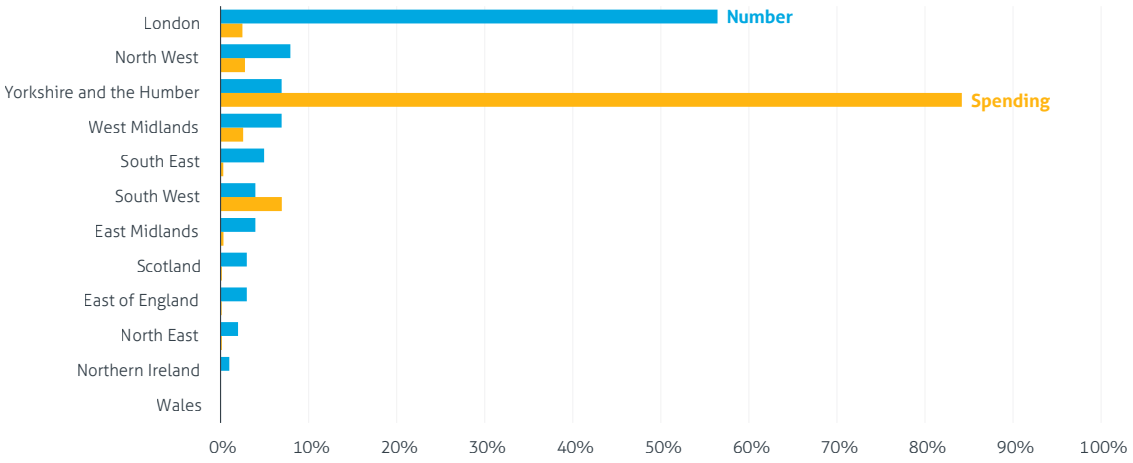
The government has partially realised its ambition to relocate more public bodies outside London

The government announced in the February 2022 levelling up white paper an ambition to move more public bodies out of London.[20,21] It has been government policy since at least 2018 that new public bodies should be based outside the capital, unless they can demonstrate an 'unequivocal business need' to be there.[22] The recent report by Labour's Commission on the UK's Future also recommended that more public bodies' headquarters should be moved out of London.[23]

In response to the government's policy, some public bodies have increased their footprint outside London in recent years. For instance, the Education and Skills Funding Agency cut its London headcount and increased staff numbers in every other region of England between 2019 and 2022,[24] and the Competition and Markets Authority announced plans in 2021 to move 200 staff to Manchester by 2025.[25]

Although there is no aggregate data on the location of public body staff who are not civil servants,[*] we can look at the headquarters of public bodies according to their annual reports to get a sense of their geographic spread. This shows that non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs), a type of public body that does not employ civil servants and is more independent from its sponsor department, are already much more geographically distributed than government departments. Although the capital hosts a large number of cultural institutions with relatively small budgets, most of the largest NDPBs by spend are already headquartered outside London – including NHS England, in Leeds (Yorkshire and Humber). Even if NHS England is excluded from the analysis, London headquartered NDPBs would account for only 13% of overall spend. They are also spread across the country: 27 towns and cities across the UK are home to at least one body.[**]

Figure 1.16 **Regional location of NDPBs by number and spending, 2022**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of NDPB annual reports, 2018/19 and 2021/22. Notes: Includes only executive or tribunal NDPBs with more than 10 FTE staff in 2020. Some bodies have not yet released their annual reports for 2021/22 – in this case, their most recent annual report was used.

* Only staff working for government departments, executive agencies, non-ministerial departments and crown non-departmental public bodies are civil servants; other staff count as public servants. For further information see the Methodology.

** Institute for Government analysis of NDPB annual reports, 2018/19 and 2021/22. Notes: Only includes executive or tribunal NDPBs with more than ten full-time equivalent staff in 2020. Some bodies have not yet released their annual reports for 2021/22 – in this case, their most recent annual report was used.

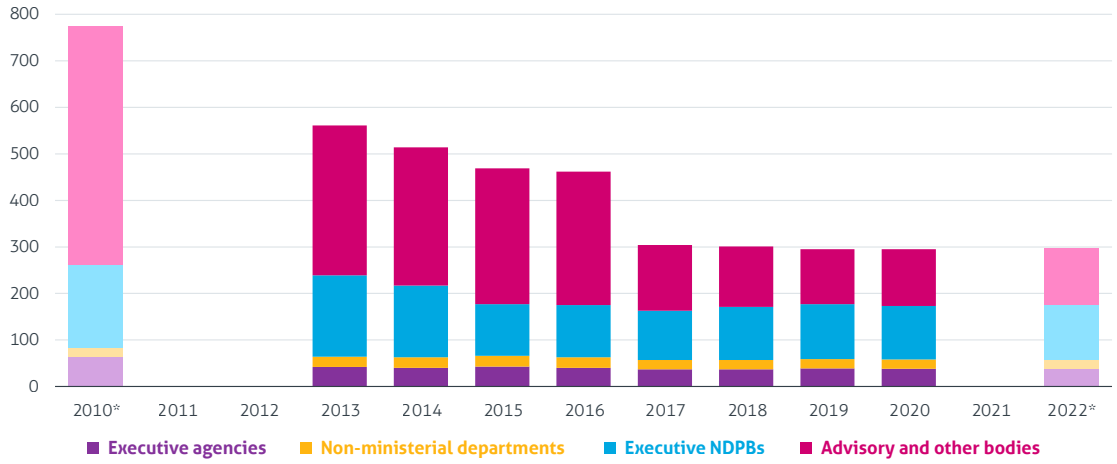
However, progress has been slow in moving more bodies out of London. Looking at executive and tribunal NDPBs that existed in 2019 and 2022, only UK Anti-Doping and East West Rail have moved out of London, to Loughborough and Milton Keynes respectively. The majority (58%) of NDPBs remain headquartered in the capital. Even excluding museums, that leaves London hosting 52% of the head offices of executive and tribunal NDPBs.

More progress could be made in moving some of these headquarters and staff outside London, especially for bodies where a pool of expertise exists beyond the capital. For instance, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) is headquartered in London despite being a national regulator, and despite the presence of pools of relevant expertise in cities such as Leeds, which as noted is home to NHS England.

The number of arm's length bodies has risen for the first time since 2005

The number of arm's length bodies has been falling consistently for as long as data on their numbers has been published – since 1979 for NDPBs, barring a brief rise in the mid-2000s, and since 2010 for other types of arm's length body.* But due to changes in how the Cabinet Office collects this data, no information has been published on the number of arm's length bodies since the start of the pandemic in March 2020.

Figure 1.17 **Number of arm's length bodies, 2010–22**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office, public bodies datasets 2013–20, departmental annual reports 2009/10 and Gov.uk announcements of public bodies reforms. Notes: Government has not published this dataset for 2010–12, 2021 or 2022, so 2010 numbers are calculated based on an analysis of departmental annual reports, and 2022 numbers are calculated based on publicly announced creations and abolitions of bodies. As a result, the numbers for 2010 and 2022 are not completely consistent with other datasets.

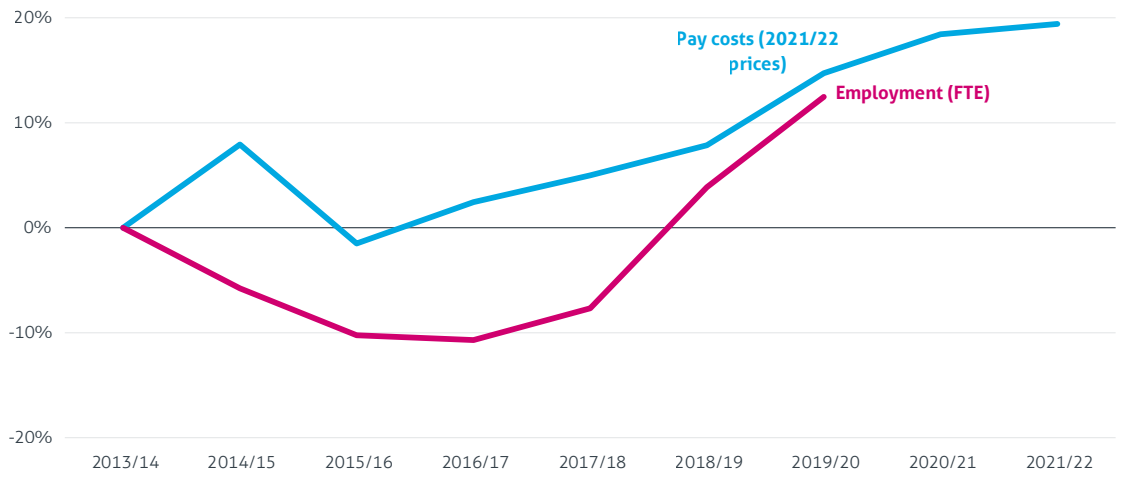
* Arm's length bodies are a subset of public bodies limited to NDPBs, executive agencies and non-ministerial departments. As such, these figures do not include public corporations, unclassified bodies or parliamentary bodies.

However, our analysis of public announcements suggests that the number has, marginally, increased since then, from 295 to 297. This small increase reflects the fact that government has created new public bodies, such as the Office for Environmental Protection and the Trade Remedies Authority, to administer functions previously undertaken by EU institutions. It also reflects the lack of impetus in government for public bodies reform in recent years, as well as a lack of obvious candidates to abolish or merge following decades of abolitions. The plans for public bodies reform set out by the government in 2022,[26] however, may result in a renewed effort to reduce the number or scope of public bodies (see Part 2 of this report).

While the number of arm's length bodies has remained fairly static in recent years, employment within them has, again marginally, increased. The latest data shows a similar pattern to overall civil service staff numbers with numbers falling until 2016, and then rising. These increases also reflect similar factors, namely Brexit and the pandemic.

Pay costs have generally risen slightly faster than employment. Employees of NDPBs, which account for around a third of arm's length body staff, are not civil servants, and so were not necessarily subject to the same real-terms pay cuts as civil servants over this period. However, pay costs – and presumably employment numbers – appear to have plateaued in 2021/22.

Figure 1.18 **Change in real-terms pay costs and FTE employment in arm's length bodies, 2012/13–2021/22**

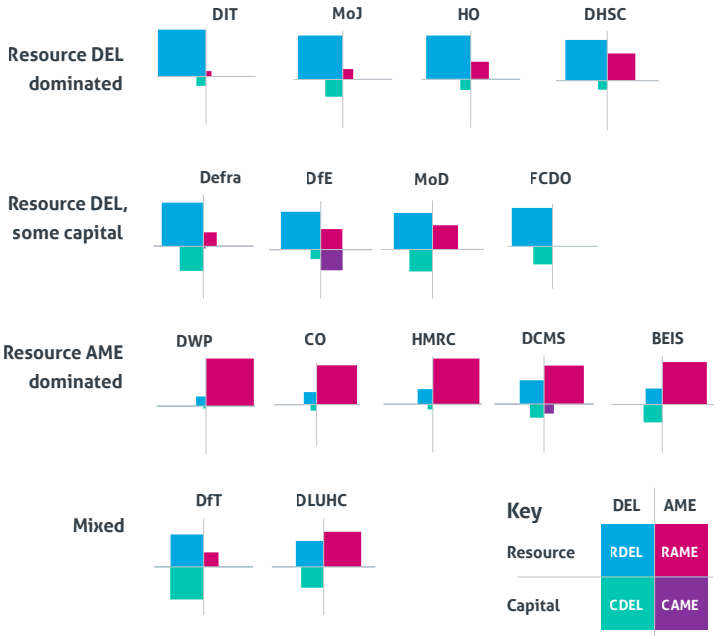


Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office, public bodies dataset 2013-20 and OSCAR II database.
Notes: For more details see Methodology. Employment numbers exclude HMRC, which was only added to the dataset in 2017/18, and are as of the end of the financial year. Pay costs exclude Network Rail, whose pay costs were only added to the dataset in 2019/20.

Budgets, spend and cost

Departments spend their budgets very differently – even when delivering comparable services

Figure 1.19 **Classification of departments' spending, 2021/22**



Resource DEL includes public services (MoJ, DHSC, HO) and international affairs (DIT). **Resource AME** includes NHS litigation (DHSC) and police pensions (HO).

Resource DEL includes military staff (MoD) and schools grants (DfE) and international affairs (FCDO). **Capital DEL** includes flood defences (Defra) and new school buildings (DfE).

Resource AME includes benefits (DWP), tax credits (HMRC) , the BBC licence fee (DCMS , public service pensions (CO) and nuclear decommissioning (BEIS). **Resource DEL** includes Jobcentres (DWP), administration (CO) and tax collection (HMRC). **Capital DEL** includes and research councils (BEIS). **Capital AME** includes lottery grants (DCMS).

Resource AME includes local government support (DLUHC). **Capital DEL** includes housing (DLUHC) and road investments (DfT) .

Source: Institute for Government analysis of HM Treasury, Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2022, Tables 1.3 and 1.8, July 2022.

Each government department is responsible for delivering programmes in its area using budgets provided by the Treasury. Different departments have differing levels of control over spending.* Some are more day-to-day intensive while others spend most of their money on investment, such as MoD and DfT. For example, DHSC and DWP are the largest departments by total budget, but DHSC spending is mostly under its own control (DEL) while DWP spending is mostly not (AME).

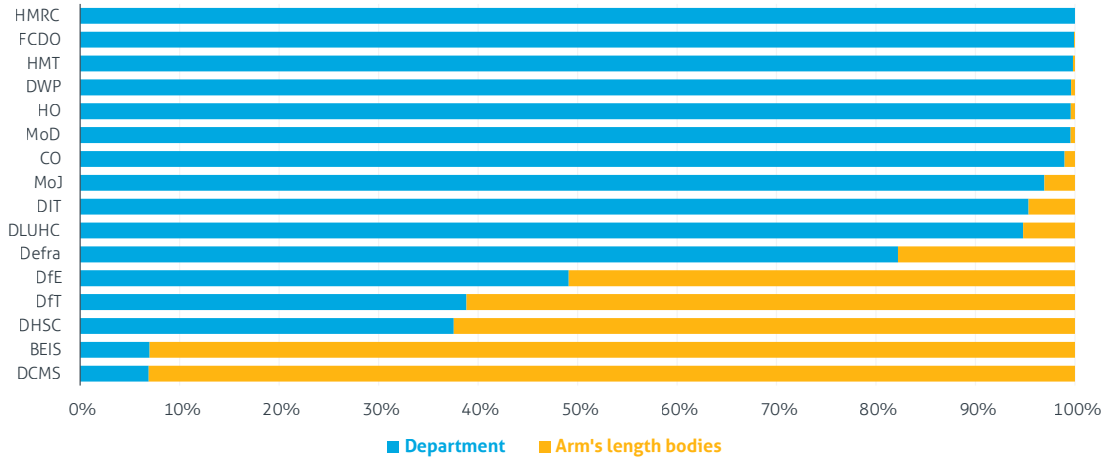
To look in more detail at how departments spent their money, we also conducted a new analysis of the Treasury's OSCAR II spending dataset (Figures 1.20–1.23). This shows that there is significant variation in how much of each department's budget is spent directly by that department, rather than being passed on to public bodies or pension schemes.** The degree of spending administered centrally is often a by-product of the choice of particular delivery models rather than the function of each department.

* Some spending can be controlled directly and departments are given firm limits – known as departmental expenditure limits (DEL) – that they must stay within. Other spending is less predictable: for example, spending on social security depends on rules that determine whether people are entitled to welfare payments. This is known as annual managed expenditure (AME). Spending is also split between money that is dedicated to day-to-day (resource) spending such as employing teachers, and money spent on investment (capital) such as school buildings.

** OSCAR II is a dataset published by the Treasury that provides key management information and data on aggregate public spending. Our analysis here excludes spending that is directly granted to local government or the devolved administrations. To read more about this analysis, see the Methodology.

For instance, while both DWP and DHSC are responsible for major public services, their proportion of funding spent through public bodies differs markedly. Since Jobcentre Plus was brought into DWP in October 2011, it has overwhelmingly delivered its services itself and centrally. By contrast, DHSC channels a huge amount of funding through public bodies such as NHS England and the UK Health Security Agency.

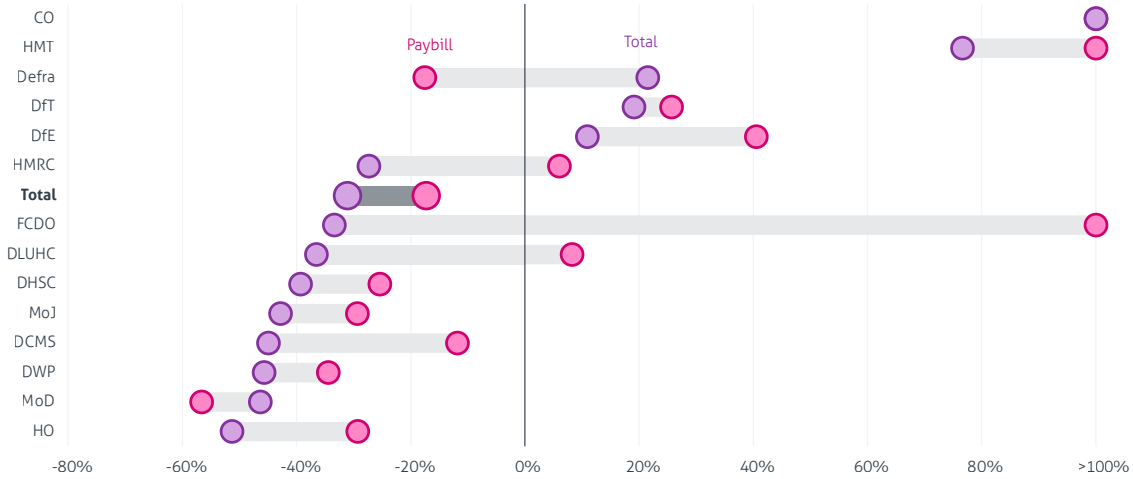
Figure 1.20 **Day-to-day departmental spending (RDEL and RAME) by group and spending body, 2021/22**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of HMT, OSCAR II database, 2021/22. Notes: Excludes pension schemes, and transfers to local and devolved governments. For full details, see Methodology.

Administration budgets have been cut and are set to fall further

Figure 1.21 **Change in departments' administration day-to-day spending, 2011/12 to 2021/22 (real terms)**



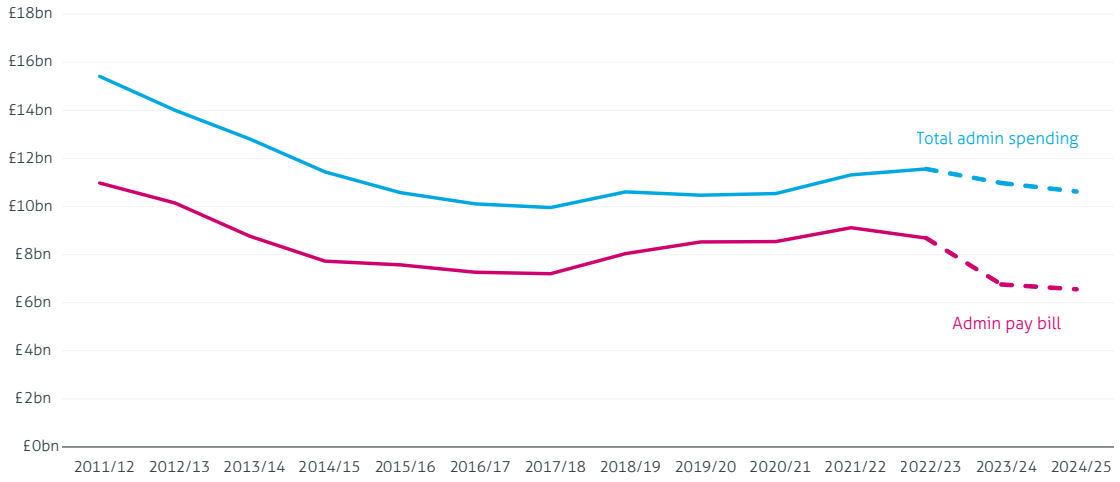
Source: Institute for Government analysis of successive HM Treasury, Online System for Centre Accounting and Reporting annual publications. Notes: Paybill is net spending on pay. Cabinet Office total and paybill have both increased by more than 100%.

Government spending on administration – meaning broadly on the civil service and the operation of government machinery as opposed to spending on programmes – fell sharply during the 2010s. Between 2011/12 and 2017/18, departments' administration budgets were cut by 35% in real terms, far sharper than cuts to the much larger programme budgets.

As the civil service has grown, the cost of departments has also grown. In 2022/23 administration budgets are forecast to be 16% higher in real terms than the low of 2017/18, although still far below 2011/12. Those cuts have not fallen evenly across departments: some have grown in size while others' capacity has shrunk substantially. Departments at the centre – the Cabinet Office and Treasury – have grown; more delivery-focused departments such as the Home Office and DWP have shrunk.

Over the next few years, the government is planning to cut spending on administration again: by 8% by 2024/25. Plans for the administration paybill are even more striking, as the latest figures imply a 25% fall over the next two years. These numbers were published in summer 2022, when the government was still planning to cut the civil service headcount by 91,000 – since dropped by Sunak as prime minister. However, there has been no update since to indicate that the plans for administration budgets will be revised. A big question in 2023 will be whether the Sunak government is sticking to 25% civil service paybill 'efficiencies', or will abandon, or relax, that side of the headcount objective too.

Figure 1.22 **Administration day-to-day spending, 2011/12 to 2024/25 (2021/22 prices)**

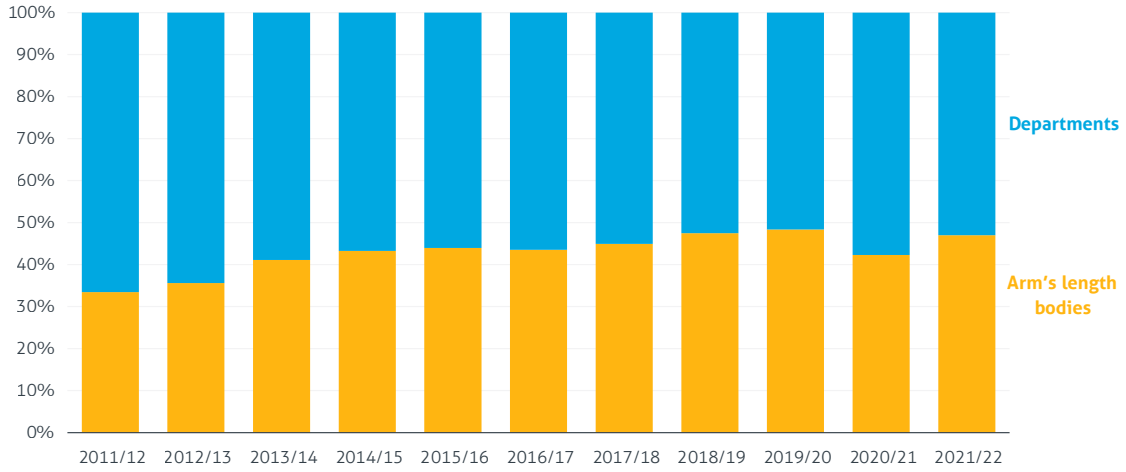


Source: Institute for Government analysis of successive HM Treasury, Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses. Notes: Paybill is net spending on pay. Dotted line indicates forecast for future years.

Public bodies have decreased in number but not in spending over the last decade

Despite a fall of nearly half in the number of public bodies since 2013, the proportion of day-to-day government expenditure going through public bodies has risen in that time. This is in large part due to the growing costs associated with NHS England. The proportion of departmental day-to-day spending going to NHS England, and the NHS trusts it funds, now stands at 31.3%.*

Figure 1.23 **Day-to-day departmental spending (RDEL) by spending body, 2011/12–2021/22**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of the HMT OSCAR database, 2011/12 to 2021/22. Notes: Excludes a small amount of spending categorised as devolved. For full details, see Methodology.

While this indicates that spending in public bodies did not fall in line with the number of bodies in the years after 2010, there are limits to what findings can be drawn from this data. The OSCAR dataset does not consistently include the gross spending of public corporations, like the BBC, and it counts some executive agencies as within their departments and others are counted as separate public bodies. The Cabinet Office is planning to release new public body spending data in 2023 to align more accurately with OSCAR. This is much needed. The absence of rigorous spending data undermines ministers' ability to assess the scale of the public body estate, and therefore to make well-informed decisions about reform.

* This was briefly reversed in 2020/21, when the proportion of spending fell from 31.3% to 28.6%, due to extraordinary pandemic spending outside NHS England – for example, for business loans and Test and Trace.

Diversity

The civil service continues to become more representative but senior ethnic minority representation has stalled

In 2022 the civil service largely continued its long-term trend of becoming more diverse. Over the last 20 years there has been significant progress in headline figures for three key measures of sex, ethnicity and disability – legally protected characteristics once greatly under-represented within the civil service.* Female officials and officials from minority ethnic backgrounds are now at least as represented in the civil service as a whole as they are in the economically active population, while the gap in representation for people with disabilities narrowed this year to less than two percentage points.

However, the senior civil service (SCS) still has further to go. Despite improvement over recent decades, there remain gaps in representation in senior ranks based on all three of these characteristics – particularly for disability, where there is an almost 7 percentage point disparity compared to the wider UK workforce. And in 2022, the proportion of minority ethnic SCS staff decreased slightly for the first time since 2015. Previous headline targets for new minority ethnic and disabled entrants into the senior civil service – due to run to 2025 – were abandoned in 2022.[27] Given the direction of travel, this is not the time to drop targets for ethnic diversity in the SCS.

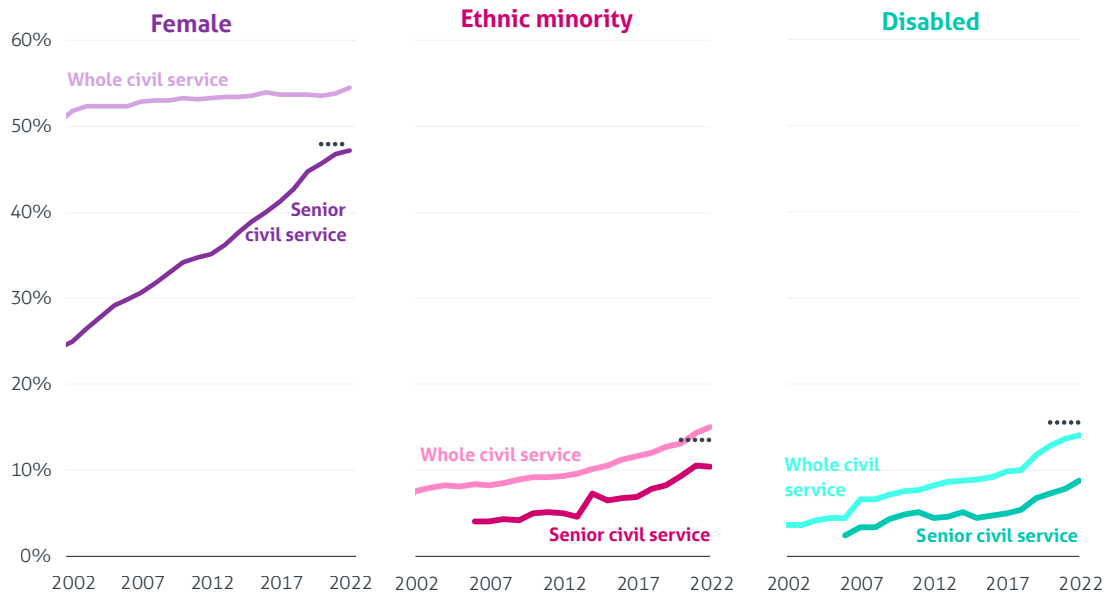
As of March 2022:

- 55% of civil servants are female, including 47% of senior civil servants, compared with 48% of the economically active population
- 15% of civil servants come from a minority ethnic background, including 10% of senior civil servants, compared with 14% of the economically active population
- 14% of civil servants have a disability, including 9% of senior civil servants, compared with 16% of the economically active population.[28,**]

* Under the Equality Act 2010, it is against the law to discriminate against anyone in the workplace or in wider society based on the following 'protected' characteristics: age, gender reassignment, being married or in a civil partnership, being pregnant or on maternity leave, disability, race including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. See 'Discrimination: your rights', www.gov.uk/discrimination-your-rights. For more detailed information on the diversity of the civil service workforce, see the Institute's explainers on disability, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, faith and age in the civil service.

** For more information on how we calculate population benchmarks, see Methodology.

Figure 1.24 **Female, minority ethnic and disabled staff in the civil service, 2002–22**



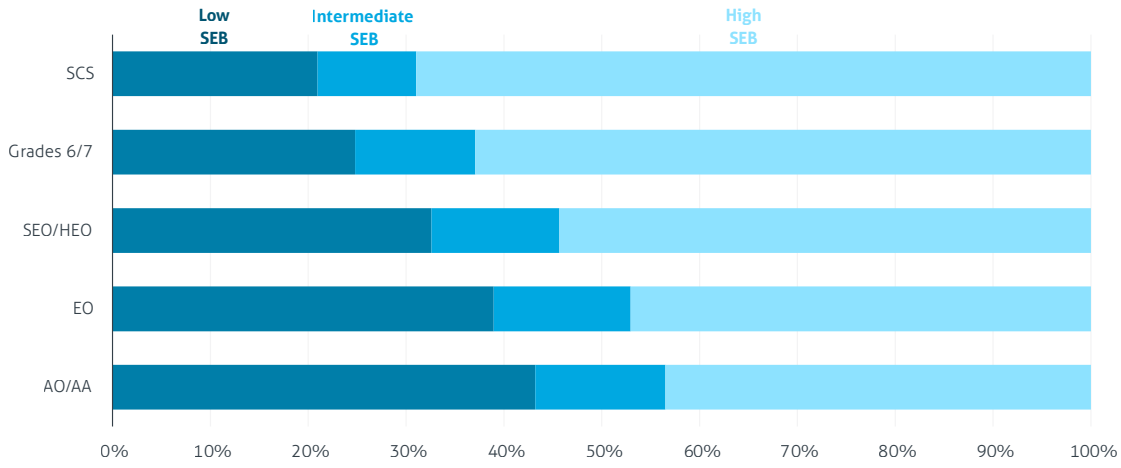
▪▪▪▪▪▪ **indicates the figures for the economically active working-age UK population, Q2 2021 to Q1 2022**

Source: Institute for Government analysis of ONS, Annual Civil Service Employment Survey, 2001–2018; Cabinet Office, SCS database 2001–2006; Cabinet Office, Civil Service Statistics, 2018–2022; ONS, Labour market survey, Table A02: Labour Force Survey Summary: economically active total population and female population (UK, aged 16–64, Q2 2021 to Q1 2022); Table A09: labour market status: economically active by ethnicity: People (not seasonally adjusted), Q2 2021 to Q1 2022; and Table A08: Economic activity of people with disabilities aged 16–64: levels, UK, GSS Standard Levels (People), Q2 2021 to Q1 2022. Notes: All civil service staff numbers are by headcount. The benchmarks for the economically active working-age population with each of these characteristics are calculated as the average over the last four quarters up to 31 March 2022.

Two fifths of the UK workforce (39%) are from lower socio-economic backgrounds (when measured by parental occupation, the metric recommended by the Social Mobility Commission, SMC),[29] but of respondents to the 2021 civil service staff survey* 34% identified as being in that group.[30] The survey results also suggest that the civil service gets more socio-economically exclusive with seniority. People from lower socio-economic backgrounds were over-represented among administrative officers and administrative assistants, the most junior grades, but the figure within the SCS was only 21%.

* While the civil service has recently developed new measures for socio-economic background (SEB), these have not yet been included in its annual workforce statistics, only its survey of staff attitudes. We can analyse the limited data on the distribution of socio-economic background in the civil service using the number of responses by group in the 2021 survey. However, this is not as robust as analysis based on workforce statistics.

Figure 1.25 **Socio-economic background of civil servants by grade, 2021**



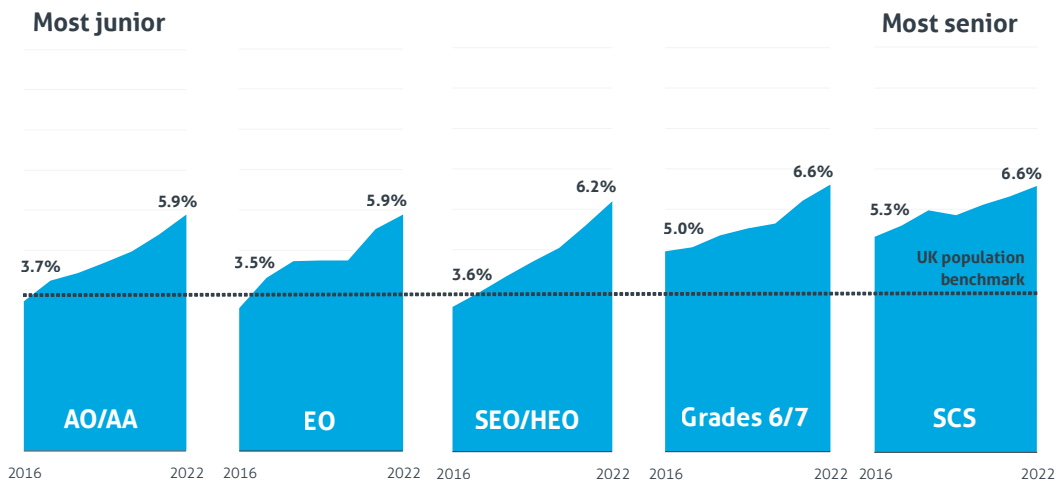
Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office, Civil Service People Survey, 2021. Notes: Socio-economic background (SEB) is approximated using civil servants' parental occupation when they were aged 14 and grouped according to the three-class National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) scheme. The figures shown here exclude civil servants with an unknown socio-economic background. AO/AA = administrative officer/administrative assistant; EO = executive officer; SEO/HEO = senior executive officer/higher executive officer; and SCS = senior civil servant.

Separately, the SCS reported a higher percentage of officials who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or who recorded their sexual orientation as 'other' (LGB+)* as a proportion of those providing information on their sexual orientation, compared to the civil service as a whole (6.6% compared to 6.1%). In both cases this exceeds the UK population benchmark of 3.3%.[31,**] This may partly reflect that senior officials feel better able to declare their sexual orientation than junior officials – in 2022, three quarters (76%) of senior civil servants provided this information compared to 67% of administrative officers and administrative assistants.[32]

* The Annual Civil Service Employment Survey (ACSES) invites civil servants to record their sexual orientation as 'Heterosexual/straight', 'Gay or Lesbian', 'Bisexual' or 'Other'. Our use of the term LGB+ refers to staff who report belonging to one of the last three groups. The term 'LGBT+' is not used because this data refers only to sexual orientation. The ACSES does not collect data on the gender identities of civil servants.

** This figure excludes the 3.6 million people (7.5% of respondents) who did not answer the voluntary question on sexual orientation in the 2021 census.

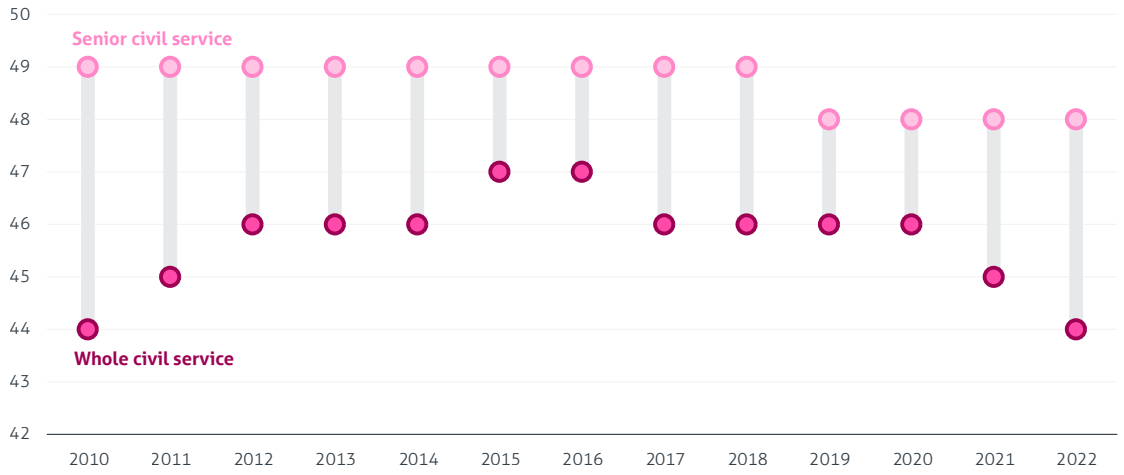
Figure 1.26 **Civil servants identifying as LGB+ by grade, 2016–22**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of ONS, Annual Civil Service Employment Survey, 2016–2018, and Cabinet Office, Civil Service Statistics, 2018 to 2022. Notes: The percentages shown in this chart exclude those with an unknown sexual orientation. The benchmark is calculated as the UK population aged 16+ who identify as gay/lesbian, bisexual or another sexual identity, divided by the UK population with a known sexual identity, from the ONS Annual Population Survey, 2022.

The civil service is becoming younger in age and more senior in job grade

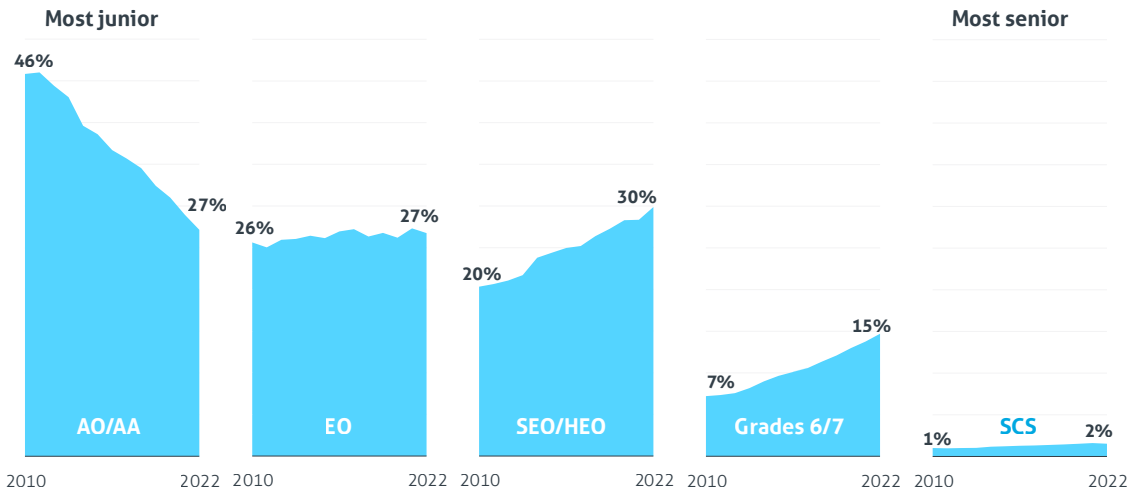
Figure 1.27 **Median age of the whole civil service and the senior civil service, 2010–22**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office, Civil Service Statistics, 2010–22. Notes: Ages are published in terms of whole years.

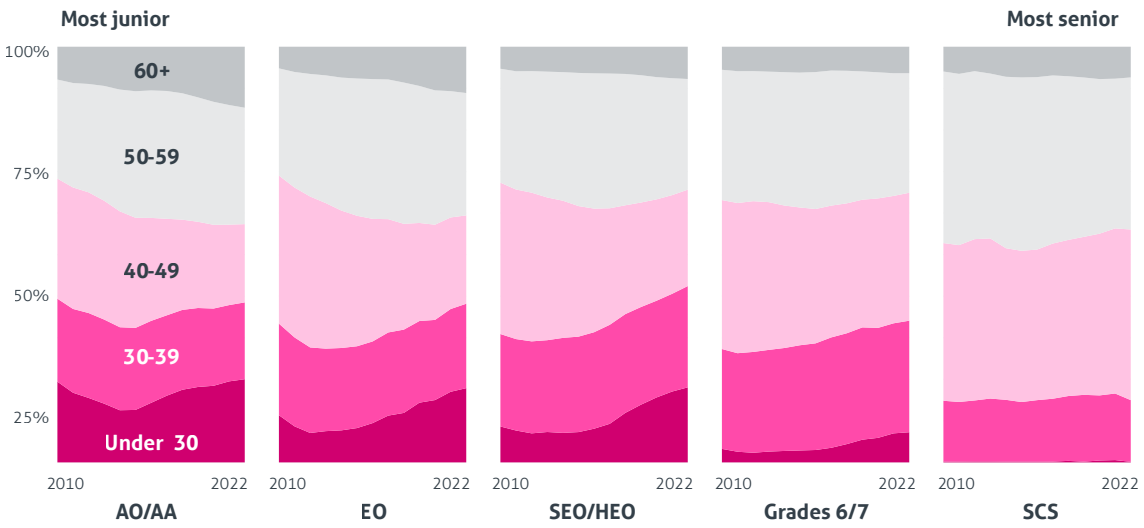
The proportions of civil servants who are younger in age and at more senior levels has increased over the last decade. The median age of the civil service is now 44 – the youngest since at least 2010. And since this time, the percentage of civil servants at the most junior AA and AO grades has decreased by nearly 20 percentage points, while there is a growing proportion of staff at HEO level and above – they make up 47% of civil servants, up from 28% in 2010.

Figure 1.28 **Civil servants in each grade (FTE), 2010–22**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office, Civil Service Statistics, 2010–22. Notes: The percentages shown in this chart exclude those with an unknown grade. AO/AA = administrative officer/administrative assistant; EO = executive officer; SEO/HEO = senior executive officer/higher executive officer; and SCS = senior civil servant.

Figure 1.29 **Civil service age distribution by grade, 2010–22**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office, Civil Service Statistics, 2010–22. Notes: The percentages shown in this chart exclude those with an unknown age or grade. AO/AA = administrative officer/administrative assistant; EO = executive officer; SEO/HEO = senior executive officer/higher executive officer; and SCS = senior civil servant.

At grades 6 and 7 the proportion of staff under 40 has increased from 27% in 2010 to 34% in 2022. And the proportion of civil servants under 30 has gone up in all grades except SCS over the last decade. Meanwhile, the 40–49 age band has shrunk at every level except SCS, but especially at EO (a 14 percentage point decrease) and SEO/HEO (13pp).

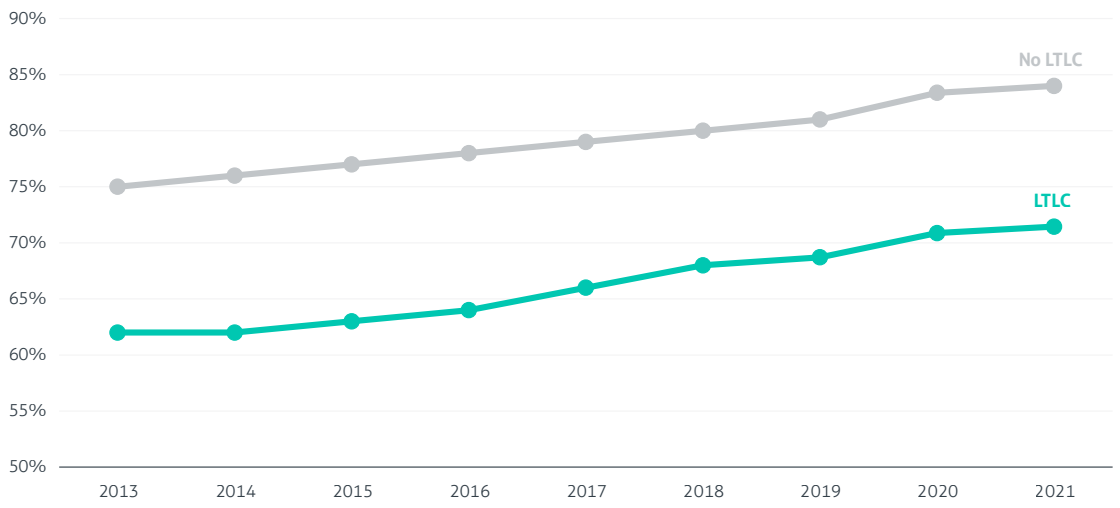
The expansion of SEO/HEO levels and grades 6 and 7, coupled with the relative increase in officials under 40 at these grades, means that younger, more senior staff make up a greater proportion of the total civil service workforce. In 2010, just 8% of all civil servants were aged under 40 and between HEO level and grade 7. This category now makes up 18% of all officials.

Civil servants with a disability have a worse working experience

Civil servants with a disability continue to report lower satisfaction with inclusion and fair treatment compared with other staff. While 84% of civil servants without a long-term health condition are satisfied with inclusion and fair treatment, this figure falls to 71% of staff with one. This gap is much larger than that between male and female civil servants (0.3pp), white and minority ethnic staff (2.6pp) and between straight/heterosexual and LGB+ staff (2.9pp).

There are reasons to suggest civil servants with a disability are more satisfied with inclusion at work than their counterparts working outside the civil service. Only half of people with disabilities in the wider population feel their employer makes sufficient adjustments.[33] But in every year since 2013, a notable gap of at least 12 percentage points has endured between the civil servants with and without a disability. While satisfaction has increased over time, the civil service needs to do more to address the fact that disabled civil servants have consistently been less likely than their colleagues to feel that they are treated fairly or with respect.

Figure 1.30 **Satisfaction with inclusion and fair treatment among civil servants with and without a long-term limiting health condition, 2013–21**

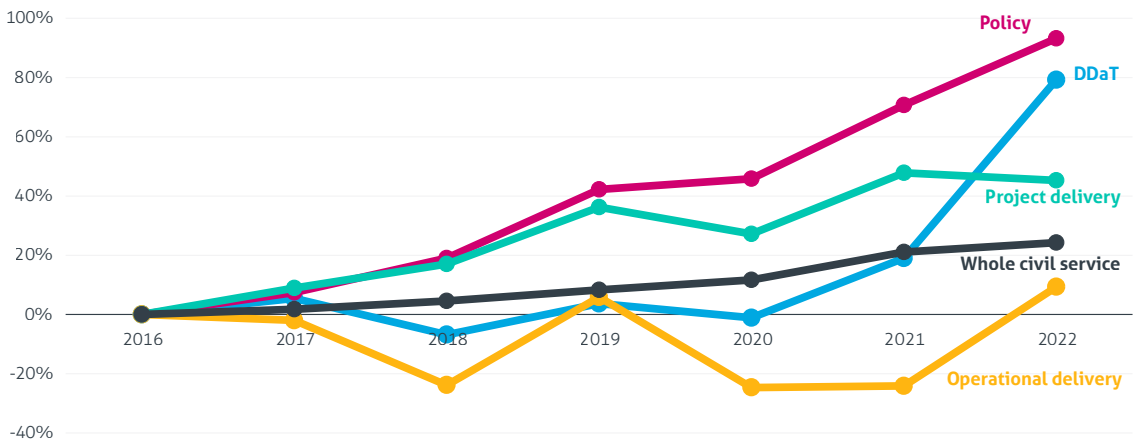


Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office, Civil Service People Survey, 2013–21.

Skills, professions and functions

The policy profession continues to grow

Figure 1.31 **Change in selected professions since 2016**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of ONS, Civil Service Statistics, 2016–17 and Cabinet Office, Civil Service Statistics, 2018–22. Notes: DDaT = Digital, Data and Technology. The numbers of most professions were not reported by DWP in 2018, 2020 or 2021. To avoid distorting the trend, the numbers of each profession for DWP in these years are estimated using the department's reports in 2017, 2019 and 2022.

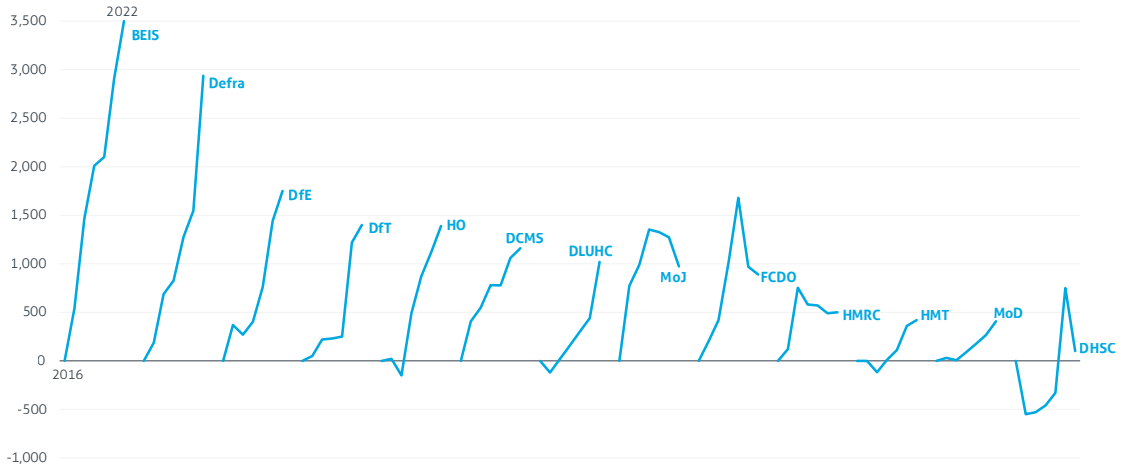
The growth of the civil service since 2016 has not occurred equally between the types of roles undertaken by officials. The changing size of civil service professions* signals the shifting priorities of departments' workforces. The policy profession has experienced the most significant and sustained growth in this time, almost doubling since 2016 (an increase of around 15,500 people, or 93%) compared to the 24% growth of the overall civil service. The biggest increases have been in BEIS and Defra, with approximately 3,500 and 3,000 more policy officials respectively. Conversely, DHSC has only 100 more policy officials than it did in 2016, after having unwound many of the Covid-related policy functions created since 2020. For most departments, the growth of the policy profession reflects the policy demands created in the run-up to and immediately following the UK's departure from the EU.

The project delivery profession and digital, data and technology profession have both also experienced notable growth, of 45% and 79% respectively since 2016. These are welcome developments given the increasing emphasis placed by this and previous governments on increasing the digital skills of the workforce, and the need to resource an expanding major projects portfolio.**

* Civil servants are categorised into 28 'professions', which are groupings of officials with similar expertise, such as policy officials, veterinarians or project delivery experts. Every civil servant belongs to a profession. The operational delivery profession accounts for around half the civil service. The other professions are either cross-departmental – found in each department – or departmental professions particular to certain departments. For a full list of the civil service professions and functions, see the Methodology.

** For further information about the government's major project portfolio, see Part 3 of this report.

Figure 1.32 **Change in policy profession members by department since 2016**

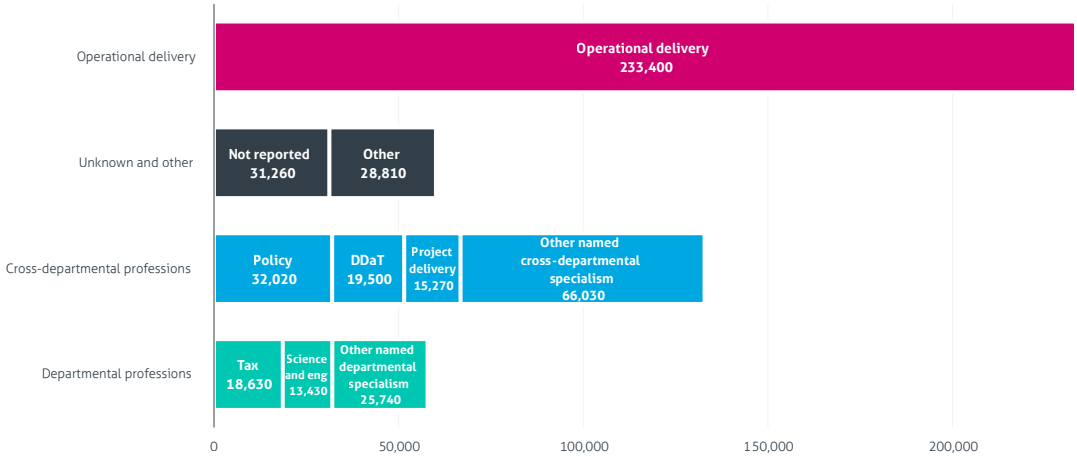


Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office, Civil Service Statistics, 2016–22. Notes: DWP and Cabinet Office are excluded due to inconsistent reporting of professions data. DIT is not shown as it was not in existence on 31 March 2016, when the Annual Civil Service Employment Survey was carried out. Figures for FCDO before the merger of FCO and DfID are the sum of the figures of the two component departments.

Operational delivery roles make up half the workforce but are under pressure

The operational delivery profession, the members of which run front-line services such as in job centres and prisons, is the biggest profession by a substantial margin, making up approximately half the civil service, with 233,400 members. But it has grown by only 9% – just under 20,000 more roles – against the overall civil service's 24% since 2016. And having lost nearly 31,000 roles since 2010, the profession is now 12% smaller than it was at the start of the 2010–16 civil service job cuts.

Figure 1.33 **Professions of civil servants (FTE), March 2022**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office, Civil Service Statistics, 2022. Notes: DDaT = Digital, Data and Technology.

The pressure on operational delivery roles is contributing to pressures on front-line public services across the public sector, including the civil service. The IfG and CIPFA's recent *Performance Tracker* assessed backlogs, workforce problems and poor performance across a range of public services.[34] It found, for example, that many prisons – staffed directly by civil servants – have workforces insufficient to lift Covid

restrictions. And despite the growth of the civil service since 2016, DWP has 7% fewer civil servants in the operational delivery profession, including those responsible for administering welfare services from Jobcentre Plus sites around the country, many of whom are on the front line of the current cost-of-living crisis.

Departments will need to grapple with these workforce trends when making decisions about headcount reductions in 2023. In general, most will find that their non-operational functions, and particularly their policy teams, have expanded significantly in recent years, while their front-line services have been squeezed harder. But this will not make subsequent workforce decisions much easier. Big proportional increases in policy staff translate to relatively small headcount figures, and most of those staff were hired to undertake functions that needed resourcing.

In short, unwinding this growth will be difficult. While large operational teams might seem, at first, to offer the greatest potential for staff reductions by sheer size, most services these teams provide have been squeezed for over a decade, making it more difficult for departments to make further cuts without downgrading performance. Nor will departments find it easy to justify cuts to front-line services at a time when those services are already struggling with backlogs and heightened demand. Where there are opportunities for savings, reducing headcount in these teams will require up-front investment in new digital and other services to improve efficiencies.

Departments' calculations will be helped by the more comprehensive collation and reporting of data on civil service professions, which has improved substantially this year. In *Whitehall Monitor 2022*, we criticised the government for the fact that nearly a quarter (24%) of civil servants' profession group was 'unknown' – the second largest category after operational delivery.[35] In 2022 this fell to less than 7%, particularly helped by more comprehensive reporting by DWP in 2022. This is welcome as it will give ministers and senior officials more usable data on which to base staffing decisions in the year ahead.

Part 2: Government reform

Progress was made in some efforts to reform government last year, such as on the relocation of civil servants outside London, but in many areas the political turmoil of 2022 slowed down reforms and made future work uncertain. This part of the report analyses the reform work done in 2022, particularly to the civil service, looking at what was missing from current efforts, what the priorities should be for change and why the government should revive its focus on reform in 2023.

It covers attempts to reduce the cost of the civil service; progress on improving recruitment, development and interchange; the new civil service diversity and inclusion strategy; data and digital transformation; reviews of public bodies and appointments; decentralisation and devolution; and the relationship between ministers and civil servants.

Efficiency and cuts

Restrained public spending and 2022's 'efficiency' drive will change how the civil service works in 2023

Responding to a deteriorating economic outlook the chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, in November 2022 allowed planned borrowing to increase a little, introducing looser fiscal rules. But the downgrade to the forecast was so large that he also moved to increase taxes and cut planned spending in the medium term relative to the plans bequeathed to him by his short-tenured predecessor.

The decision to announce a big squeeze on departments' spending beyond 2025, and only to top up plans over the next two years a little, means government departments will need to make difficult decisions over how to prioritise their spending on programmes, capital projects and administration.

The current and forecast squeeze on administration budgets in particular (already planned before autumn) means departments will need to decide how to reduce the cost of the civil service. This is having, and will continue to have, implications for the headcount of the workforce, civil service pay and the government's estate.

Despite these pressures, Sunak was right to drop Johnson's 91,000 headcount target

The Johnson administration's approach to reducing the cost of the civil service centred on reducing its headcount to the size it was prior to the EU referendum in 2016 – a 91,000 job reduction.

This was an ill-conceived approach. Headcount targets lead to false economies: they encourage departments to reduce numbers through recruitment freezes and redundancies – meaning cuts come where vacancies happen to arise, rather than where would be most appropriate, creating additional cost. They can cause more talented, mobile staff to leave departments.

The target also led to ministers' decision (since scrapped) to suspend the Civil Service Fast Stream, a move that would have cut off a valuable, and good value, stream of talent and created pressure for increased spend on external consultancies instead.[1]

Setting a pre-Brexit 2016 benchmark was an arbitrary target that implied the civil service could return to resourcing the same responsibilities it held before the EU referendum. The government has changed a lot since 2016, not least because of the range of post-Brexit functions inherited from the EU. We estimate that approximately half the growth of the civil service relates to new, permanent functions the government needed to resource following Brexit.[2]

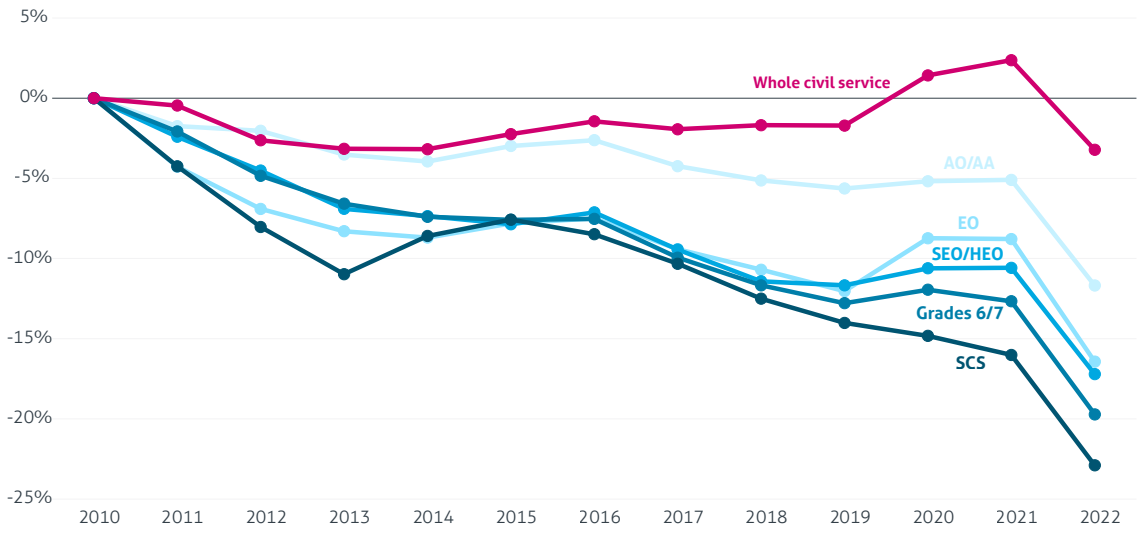
Rishi Sunak has taken a different approach since becoming prime minister. In November he confirmed in a letter to all civil servants that the 91,000 target would be dropped and the Fast Stream resumed, explaining that he did not believe "top-down targets for civil service headcount reductions are the right way" to ensure "every taxpayer pound goes as far as it possibly can".[3]

Every department will instead be asked to "look for the most effective ways to secure value and maximise efficiency within budgets". This will not avoid difficult budgetary decisions, but an approach that seeks genuine financial efficiency and value for money, rather than simplistic headcount reductions, is a welcome shift.

Pay at each grade has substantially decreased in real terms, posing difficult questions for 2023

Civil servants' median salaries at each grade have reduced in real terms by between 12% and 23% since 2010. This has consequences for the civil service's ability to attract and retain talented officials, and affects the morale of civil servants. This worsened in 2022 as the cost of living crisis intensified.

Figure 2.1 **Change in median civil service salary by grade since 2010 (real terms)**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of ONS, Civil Service Statistics 2010–18, Civil Service Statistics, 2019–22. Notes: Real-terms figures calculated using the Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation as the Office for National Statistics uses in its estimates, 2022.

But the overall median salary in the civil service has fallen by a much smaller 3% in real terms. The divergence between the overall median salary and the median salary at individual grades is being driven by the increased seniority of the civil service. It is likely that at least some of this is a genuine change in its composition. But it is also likely that some civil servants are being promoted to boost their salaries, to stop them from leaving the civil service and to manage morale, rather than because their skill-set and responsibilities demand it.[4] This has distorted the management structure of some departments and meant that civil service pay restraint has not led to the overall savings that the government might have expected.

In 2022 civil service pay fell starkly in real terms and relative to the private sector

The current civil service pay remit guidance, covering non-senior civil servants, allows departments to make average pay awards up to only 2%.[*,5] For senior civil servants, the government rejected the Senior Salaries Review Body's recommendation of a 3% across-the-board increase, instead announcing a 2% rise.[**] This increase is ungenerous even compared with other public sector workers, where most pay review bodies awarded 4–5% annual increases, and it is much lower than average pay increases in the private sector of over 6%.[6] Civil servants expressed significant dissatisfaction with pay and benefits in the 2022 People Survey, which a report in *The Times* suggested showed only just over a quarter (28%) of officials felt their pay "adequately reflects" their performance, down from 38% in 2021.[7]

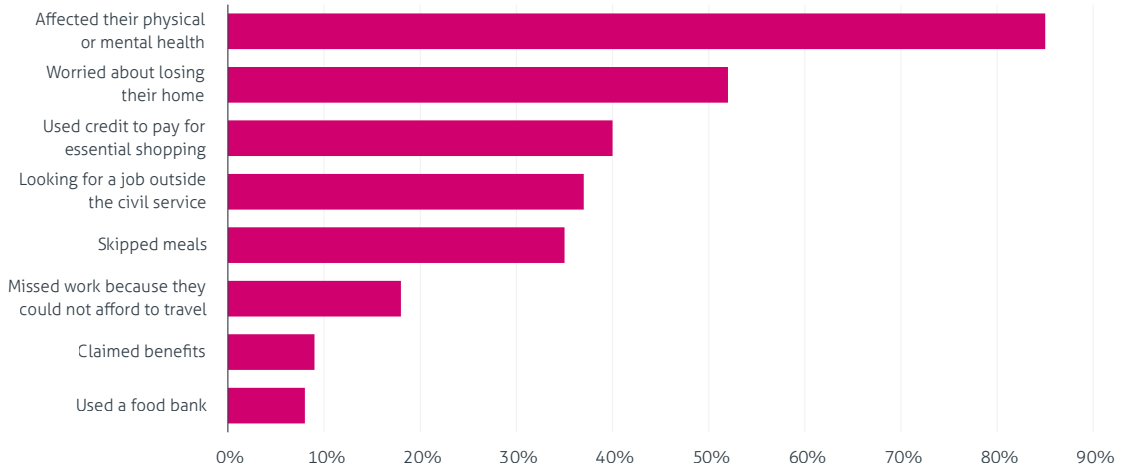
* The 2022–23 Civil Service Pay Remit guidance notes that "departments also have additional flexibility to pay up to a further 1% where they can demonstrate targeting of the pay award to address specific priorities in their workforce and pay strategies".

** With a further 1% to raise pay band minimums and address anomalies.

With inflation reaching more than 11% in 2022, such a large real-terms cut in civil service pay will have a serious impact on the living standards of some employees. In autumn 2022 the PCS union – the UK's largest union representing civil servants – published evidence that among members responding to a survey about the impact of the cost-of-living crisis: 8% of respondents had used a food bank, 18% had missed work because they could not afford to travel and 35% had skipped meals.[8]

This is a problem for departments as employers with responsibility to support employees' wellbeing. But it is a particular problem for the civil service because concern over pay during the cost-of-living crisis could fuel officials' intention to leave the service in search of better-paid equivalent positions in the wider public or private sector, at a time when turnover is already at record highs.

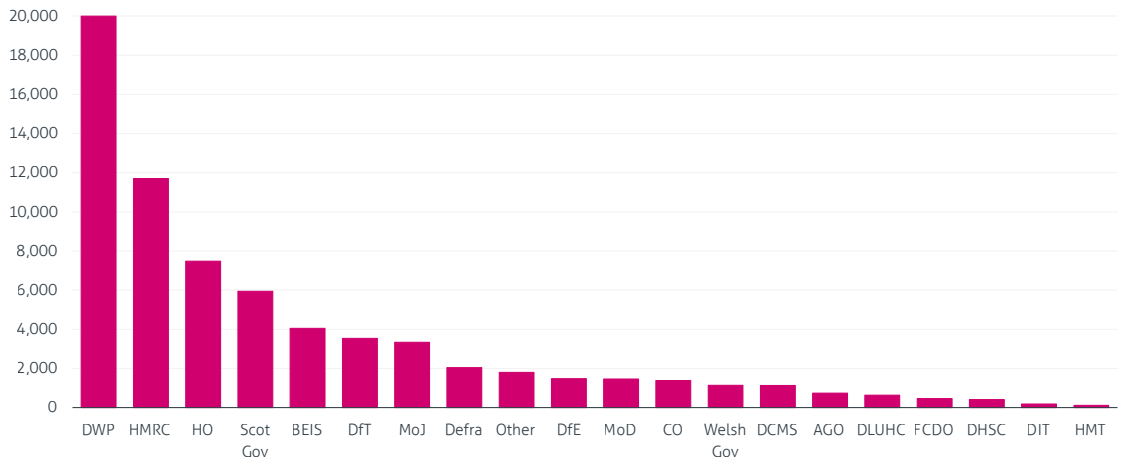
Figure 2.2 **PCS union members reporting financial difficulties, July–August 2022**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of PCS union, Cost-of-living crisis survey results, August 2022.

The difficulty the government will have holding down civil service pay has already been demonstrated by widespread industrial action. PCS members of at least four departments (the Home Office, DfT, Defra and DWP) went on strike in December 2022 and January 2023 over pay, pensions and conditions and a one-day all-member strike has been called for 1 February 2023.[9] Officials on the civil service Fast Stream, who can be members of the FDA union, have voted for strike action for the first time in their history and the Prospect union intends to ballot its staff for strikes early in 2023.[10]

Figure 2.3 **PCS members voting in favour of industrial action, by departmental group, September 2022**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of PCS union, National industrial action ballot results, 2022.

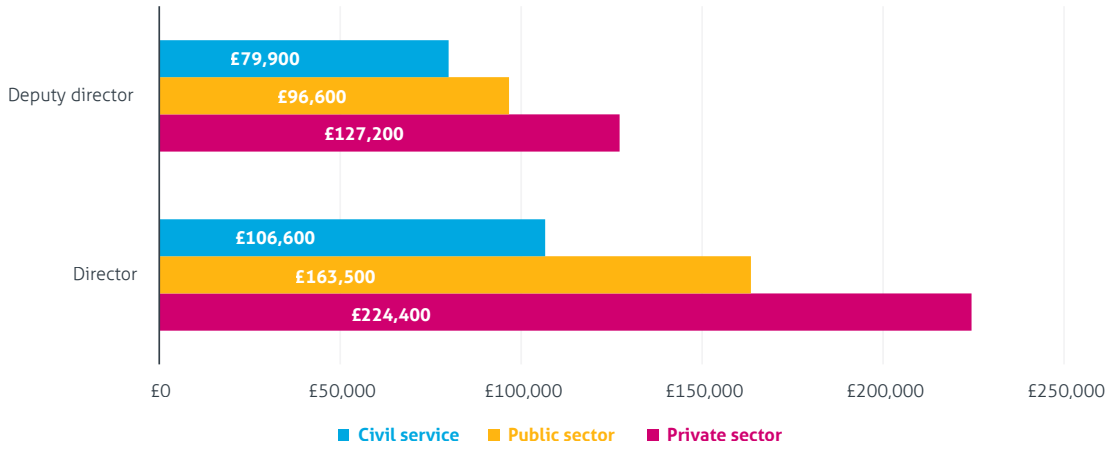
Civil service pay is not attractive enough to top talent

At the highest levels of the civil service, recent Institute for Government research has found that pay restraint has led to a decrease in the attractiveness of working as a civil servant, particularly for specialist roles – substantiating the Senior Salaries Review Body's concern that "the government's focus on keeping the annual pay increase low is eroding the attractiveness of the SCS proposition, which in turn will impact on the quality of those joining and remaining".[11] The senior civil service has faced the biggest real-terms pay cuts of any grade since 2010. This cannot be as readily mitigated by over-promotion to secure higher pay for directors, directors general and permanent secretaries – as it can at lower grades – because there are many fewer roles available at the most senior ranks of the civil service.

One recent example of the impact of uncompetitive pay at the top of the civil service was the government's three-year hunt to recruit a chief digital officer, which concluded in July 2022. The civil service chief operating officer, Alex Chisholm, told the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee that while the proposed salary was "top whack" for the civil service, market research showed that "the sort of people we are looking for would be earning multiples of what we are able to pay" outside government.[12]

Cabinet Office benchmarking has found that the median director-level civil servant's base salary is less than half of their private sector equivalent and only 63% of an equivalent in the wider public sector. This does not account for the relatively generous civil service pensions, but it also does not account for other benefits and payments that are larger in the private sector, from private health care and gym memberships to cash bonuses. At the highest levels, the median permanent secretary earns approximately 10% of the median FTSE 250 CEO.[13,14]

Figure 2.4 **Cabinet Office benchmarking of director and deputy director median base salary, 2020/21**

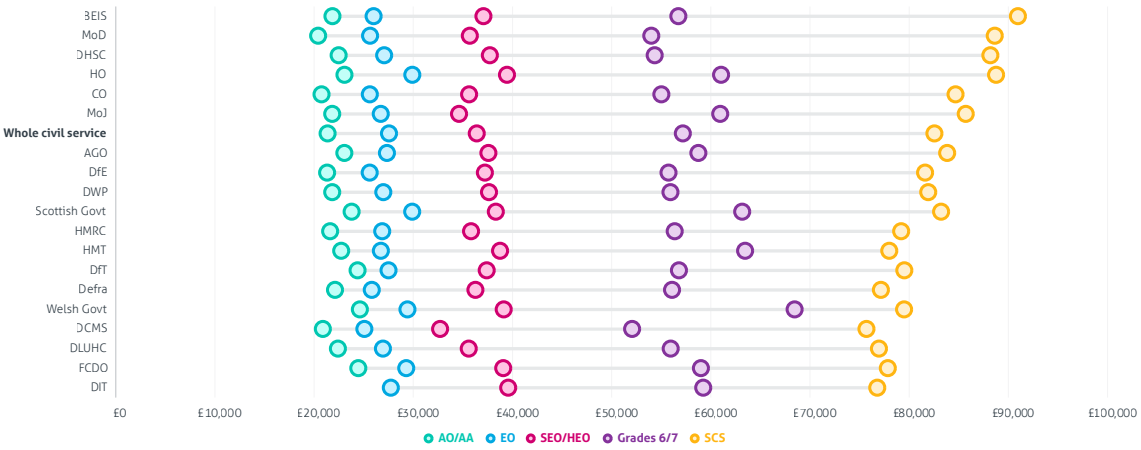


Source: Government Evidence to the Review Body on Senior Salaries on the Pay of the Senior Civil Service, Cabinet Office, 2022, p. 29. Notes: Senior civil service figures are from April 2021 and private and public sector figures are from October 2020. Comparison figures for directors general and permanent secretaries are not available.

Civil service salaries are unlikely to ever be able to compete directly with the private sector, especially at the top levels. But the size of the pay gap is a problem. Ministers need to be aware that continuing to hold down civil service pay in an attempt to save on administration budgets will worsen existing difficulties with the external recruitment and retention of the best talent – particularly of people with in-demand skills who could command much higher salaries outside the civil service. This runs contrary to their stated aim to make the civil service more 'porous' and "encourage entrants with specific, high demand skills", and will have a negative impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of government.[15]

There continue to be differences in departments' pay offers

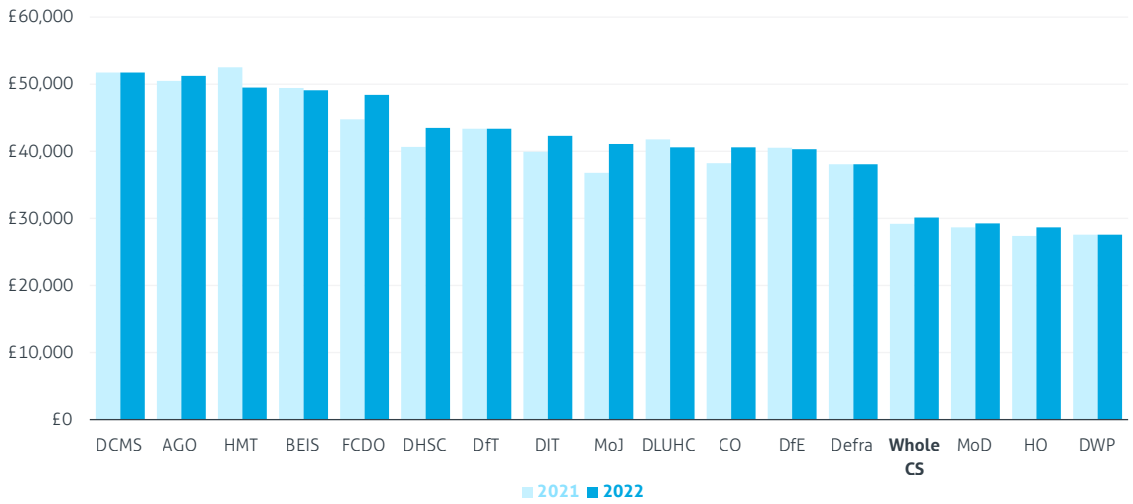
Figure 2.5 **Median salary by grade and department, March 2022**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office, Civil Service Statistics, 2022.

Across Whitehall there remain differences between salaries at the same grade in different departments. This is a consequence of the government's departmental structure and, to an extent, allows departments some flexibility to set pay to attract and retain talent. However, it also helps to drive the churn of staff at grade 6 and below, who are able – indeed incentivised – to 'job hop' in search of better salaries.

Figure 2.6 **Departmental breakdown of median salary, 2021–22**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office, Civil Service Statistics, 2022.

DCMS* is the department with the highest median salary, while the Treasury, which occupied that spot last year, has fallen to third. The departments with median salaries below the civil service median remain the MoD, Home Office and DWP – three large, operationally focused departments. Departments' relative rank on this metric is largely determined by their grade structure. For example, the Treasury's reputation is of a department with relatively low salaries, but it is ranked highly here because it is a disproportionately senior department, meaning the median staff member is of a higher grade (and therefore entitled to a higher salary) than in most other departments.

The government continues to seek savings from its property

The government estate is a further source of savings. In August 2022, the publication of the Government Property Strategy[16] showed that the size of the "central general purpose estate" had reduced by 30% since 2010, delivering annual running cost savings of £1.6 billion. Some £5.2bn was generated by property disposals between April 2015 and March 2020, with the number of central London offices, for instance, falling from 63 to 36 between 2018 and the strategy's publication in 2022. This has had benefits beyond cost savings. The government says it had reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by 57% in 2020/21 compared to 2009/10, with an estimated 38% of this due to improved management of the estate.

In terms of further cost savings, the strategy commits to cut £500 million in operating costs from the estate by 2025, as well as developing a pipeline of property disposals aiming to generate £500m in capital receipts each year. But there are too few details as to how either target will be achieved. In December 2022, the Public Accounts Committee described the operating costs target as "not sufficiently ambitious",[17] noting that it represents roughly a 2% reduction. It also casts doubt on

* A list of departmental initialisms is found at the end of this report.

the feasibility of the property disposals target, noting that departments have previously been falling short of their targets on land disposals, and suggested that "recent market turbulence may also negatively impact the programme".[18] These are valid concerns – particularly around property disposals – to which the government should provide substantive responses.

Beyond property disposals, the government can also use office space more cost-effectively through greater co-location of teams and departments – which can boost performance by breaking down departmental siloes, as the Institute for Government research into the Darlington Economic Campus has found.[19] This is the purpose of the Government Hubs programme, which co-locates teams from different government departments in the same office, aiming to achieve "value for money for the tax-payer and creating a modern, flexible estate, facilitating smarter working for civil servants".[20] The first phase of the programme has been completed, with HMRC delivering 14 hubs across the UK.[21] The government says that through this greater efficiency of space, the department is on track to deliver around £300m of savings up to 2025.[22] Phase 2 of the programme, led by the Government Property Agency, is currently under way.[23] The Government Property Strategy states that the programme is set to deliver up to 50 additional hubs by 2030.[24]

As the government seeks to identify further efficiencies, reduce its office footprint and increase cross-departmental collaboration, it should also consider the impact of changing working practices since the pandemic. It is surprising that the Government Property Strategy does not acknowledge the impact that dramatically changed post-pandemic patterns of working will have on the way the government estate is used, nor set out plans to make strategic changes in response to this.

The government should take a long-term approach to efficiency

Real savings from administration budgets in the civil service can only be small in the context of wider public spending – the whole civil service pay bill is around 1% of total government spending.[25] And ministers will need to be clear, and make clear, that there are few fast, easy 'efficiencies' to be saved from the civil service. Cuts will mean the government not doing work it might otherwise have done.

But the civil service should not be immune to spending restraint and it should always aim to become more efficient. Sunak's more constructive tone on civil service efficiency is welcome, and it is right that he has asked departments to target 'pounds' – in the form of actual budget savings – not 'people' in terms of headcount alone. But there are further steps he and his ministers should take to achieve genuine civil service efficiencies and make cuts with minimum damage to the government's capabilities.

First, any cuts should be made over a long-term time frame. Few efficiencies are achievable in the short term. Instead ministers and senior officials should identify the workforce the government will need over the next five, 10 and 15 years rather than the next two to three. This will require the government to identify the skills it will need more and less of in years to come, to translate this into departments' workforce plans and recruitment policies. Doing so will help to avoid the 'boom-and-bust' cycle of civil service expansion and retrenchment that has prevailed in recent decades.

Second, ministers should be prepared to invest to save. The most valuable savings require up-front spending. This is particularly true for digital investments, such as efforts to replace legacy IT infrastructure and create the GOV.UK One Login system,* which have potential to improve service provision, minimise duplication and enable officials to be reallocated to other tasks. Another example is the asylum system – improvements to speed up decision making will require up-front investment, but stand to save public spending elsewhere, such as on hotel accommodation for individuals awaiting decisions.

Without a long-term plan for efficiency and workforce management, the civil service risks another period of staffing retrenchment without the strategic decisions necessary to avoid additional costs and risks.

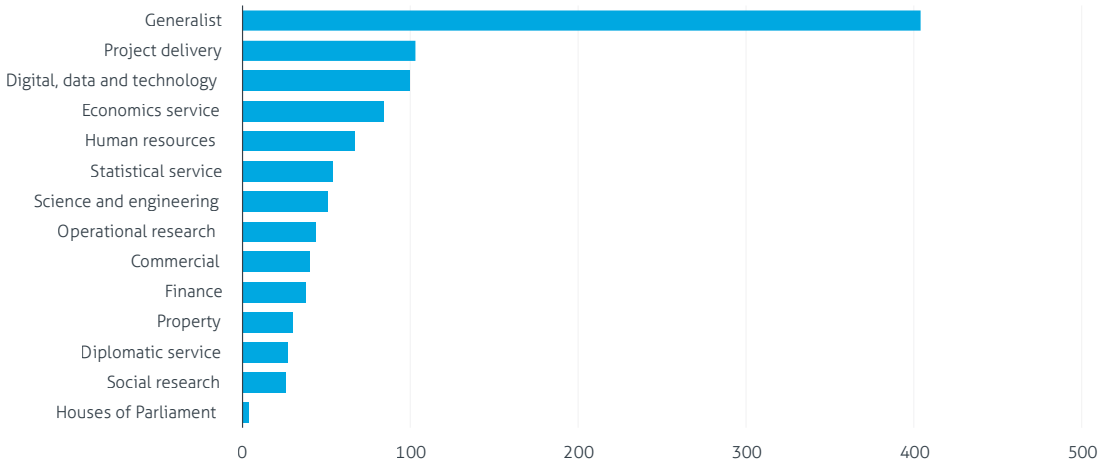
* A single sign-in system that would allow users of GOV.UK services to log in with a single email address, password and two-factor authentication, reducing the need to keep separate records for different government services.

Recruitment, development and interchange

It was right to resume the Fast Stream – now it should be improved

In May 2022 the Johnson administration announced it would pause recruitment to the Civil Service Fast Stream for at least one year, as part of efforts to meet the 91,000 headcount reduction target.[26] Later in the year, after becoming prime minister, Rishi Sunak reversed this decision and resumed the Fast Stream without a year's recruitment being missed. Around 1,000 graduates are recruited on to the 16 'streams' across the civil service each year, at a cost of approximately £41m.[27,28] The 'generalist' stream across departments is the biggest, taking in 38% of graduates in 2021.[29] Other streams focus on high-priority technical areas such as project delivery, data and economics.

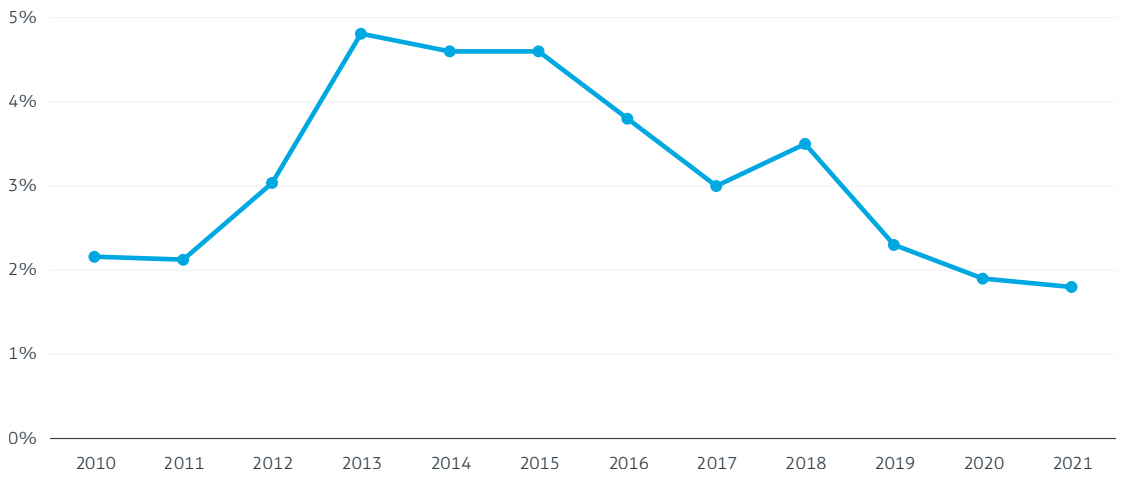
Figure 2.7 **Applicants recommended for appointment by Fast Stream scheme, 2021**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office, Civil Service Fast Stream Recruitment Data, 2021.

While the Fast Stream can be improved, it is an asset to government. It is a highly competitive scheme, with a successful application rate of less than 2% in 2021, and has been named *The Times*' top graduate employer for the last four years in a row.[30] Suspending the Fast Stream was a mistake and a good example of the false economies created by headcount targets.

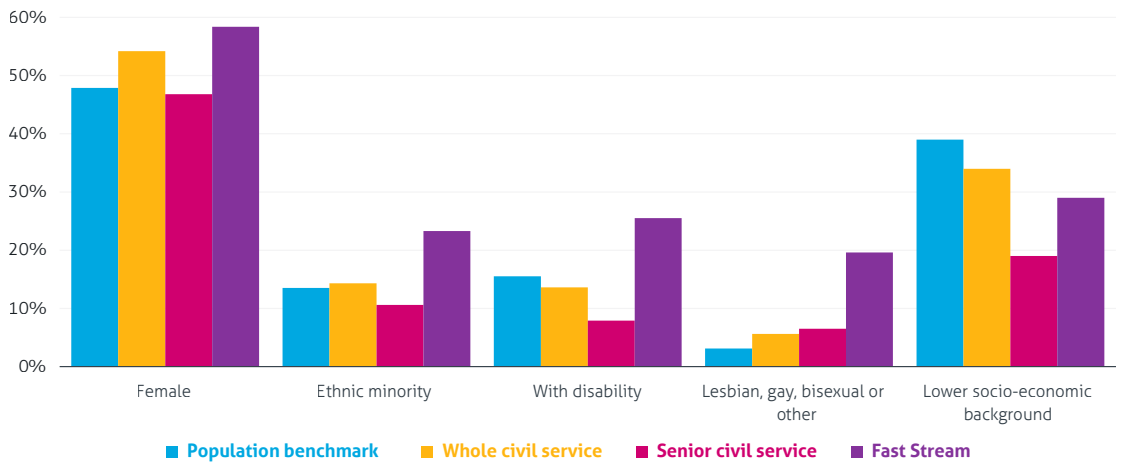
Figure 2.8 **Success rate for applicants to the Fast Stream, 2010 –21**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office, Fast Stream Annual Reports, 2010–18; Cabinet Office, Civil Service Fast Stream Recruitment Data, 2019–21.

The Fast Stream is also an effective tool the civil service has used in recent years to make its workforce more representative of British society, to help bring fresh perspectives into departments and policy making. The scheme is at least as, or more than, representative of the working population on the grounds of sex, ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation. It also outperforms the wider civil service and senior civil service on these characteristics. However, the scheme continues to under-represent people from low socio-economic backgrounds, making up just 29% of Fast Streamers compared to 39% of the UK workforce.

Figure 2.9 **Diversity of the fast stream, civil service, senior civil service and UK population, 2021**



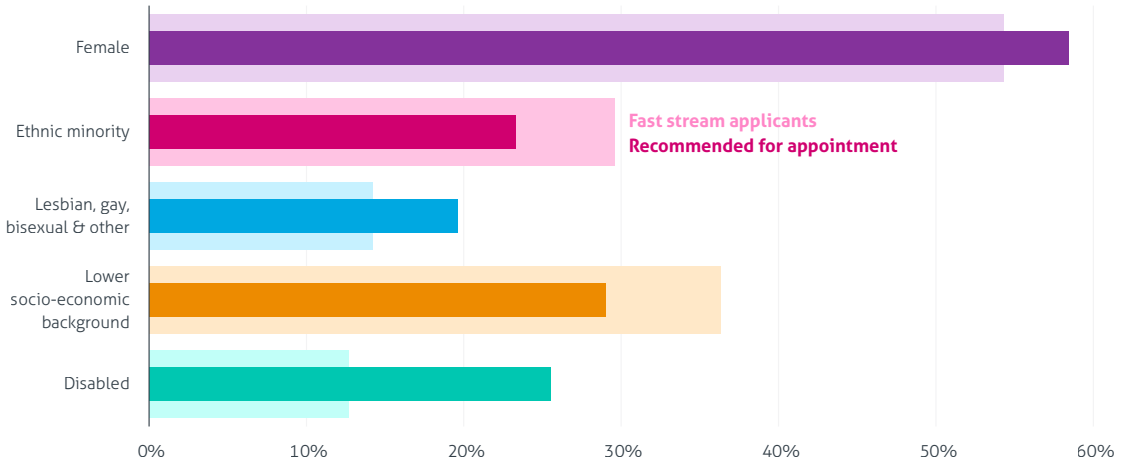
Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office Civil Service Fast Stream Recruitment Data, 2021; Cabinet Office Civil Service Statistics, 2021; the most recent ONS labour market statistics 2020–2022; and the Social Mobility Commission's 2021 'Navigating the Labyrinth' report. Note that the estimated population benchmarks denote: economically active female population aged 16–64; economically active 'Ethnic Minority' population (comprised of those stating ethnicity as 'Mixed', 'Indian', 'Pakistani', 'Bangladeshi', 'Chinese', 'Black/African/Caribbean' or 'Other'); economically active population with a disability; the proportion of the population aged 16 years and over identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual; the proportion of the UK workforce coming from a low socio-economic background identified by Social Mobility Commission research. Note that the proportion of civil servants identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual or other reflects the percentage of those who reported any sexual orientation.

Sunak's decision to cancel the planned suspension of the Fast Stream will allow ministers and officials to focus on improving the programme. Progress has been made over the past decade; for example, with the introduction of dedicated, technical schemes in high-priority areas such as digital, data and technology, commercial and project delivery.

The Government Skills and Curriculum Unit (GSCU) has now been tasked with making further improvements. Recent work has included broadening outreach across universities and targeting STEM subject backgrounds in outreach, introducing a new STEM generalist stream, piloting new data and digital skills provision for graduates on the generalist scheme and a plan to change the management arrangements for new graduates. But there remains further to go.

The Fast Stream still struggles with a legacy dominated by white, middle-class Oxbridge graduates. In 2021 Oxbridge applicants to the scheme had a success rate of 2.8%, a full percentage point up on the overall success rate of 1.8%.[31] The scheme also under-represents people from lower socio-economic backgrounds.[*] The success rate for minority ethnic candidates, at 1.4%, was by contrast lower than both the average and the 2.1% for white applicants. Tackling these problems in recruitment should be a priority for the scheme.

Figure 2.10 **Diversity of applicants and appointees to the Civil Service Fast Stream, 2021**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office, Civil Service Fast Stream Recruitment Data, 2021.

The biggest stream by some margin remains the 'generalist' programme. This continues to incentivise generalist policy careers with rapid turnover between roles, at the expense of the accumulation of deeper subject matter expertise and operational experience. Recent Institute for Government research analysed this trend as a problem for policy making across the civil service and recommended ways in which it could be addressed, including by encouraging officials to 'anchor' policy careers in areas of specialisation.[32] Reflecting this in the Fast Stream and ensuring graduates undertake more operational placements would be a good next step. Plans to support generalist Fast Streamers to anchor their placements in climate policy are a welcome step in the right direction.[33]

* Applicants from 'intermediate' and 'routine and manual' socio-economic backgrounds had a success rate lower than the average (1.8%) and those from 'higher managerial, administrative and professional' backgrounds (2.1%), at 1.5% and 1.3% respectively.

The government also intends to increase the exchange of knowledge and talent between the civil service, other sectors and other parts of the public sector.[34] Doing so would help to improve the often poor working relationships between Whitehall and other parts of the state, in particular local government.[35] This could be an opportunity for the Fast Stream and mutually beneficial with equivalent schemes. There are many other successful graduate schemes across the public sector, including the Local Government Association's National Graduate Development Programme and the NHS Graduate Management Training Scheme.

As part of efforts to reform the Fast Stream, the GSCU should work with their counterparts in other parts of the public sector to develop a cross-public sector option between the Fast Stream and its public and social sector equivalents. Giving some graduates the chance to experience public service in local government, the NHS and other settings, as well as the civil service, would improve understanding between layers of government. It would have a lasting impact as those graduates develop their careers with a broader experience of public service.

The Government Skills and Curriculum Unit has real potential to improve training and development in the civil service

A high-quality training offer is essential if the civil service is to recruit and retain talented staff, while giving existing civil servants opportunities to develop. The GSCU was established to this end in 2020, as a 'one-stop shop' for all training in the civil service, including an induction for new civil servants and leadership programmes. The unit set out a new curriculum, launched online courses, and began piloting an online induction course and data masterclass for senior civil servants.[36]

The GSCU continued to make progress in 2022. More than 10,000 new civil servants have now completed the online induction, recently fully launched. The unit established the Leadership College for Government in April 2022, with a prospectus following in June, and has tested a foundation management programme with five early adopter cohorts. It led the development of a new apprenticeship strategy. The unit is also responsible for the College for National Security, announced by the government in March 2022, and has secured seed funding for the college as it prepares a business case for later in 2023. The development of civil service-wide Campus Online, a new digital learning platform to replace existing, unpopular services, continues.

While this is overall a positive picture, building skills in the civil service is a long-term aim and has not yet been realised. It may not yet have been recognised by civil servants themselves: the 2021 Civil Service People Survey[37] showed no substantial increase in civil servants' satisfaction with their learning and development opportunities since the unit was created.[*] And while the unit's induction package is undoubtedly useful, it amounts to roughly six hours of online content.

* In the 2021 survey, across four questions related to learning and development, two questions saw an increase in the proportion of respondents expressing agreement or strong agreement with a positive proposition, compared to 2020. These proportions increased from 65.8% to 67.1%, and from 51.8% to 53.6%. Two questions saw a decrease – from 51.5% to 49.7%, and from 51.9% to 51.4%.

The Institute has previously argued that the government should set its sights higher, particularly for new senior hires, and follow through on the recommendation of the Baxendale report[38] (an independent report commissioned into how to attract, induct and retain talent into the senior civil service) to develop a standard five- to ten-day induction that all senior external hires attend.

It is also important the unit's progress is treated as a positive start from which to build. Departments must make comprehensive use of the resources created, ensuring staff engage with them and managers understand professional development of their teams is an indispensable part of their role. Only by leading this kind of culture change more broadly across the civil service will the GSCU achieve the objectives for which it aims.

There are also risks to the future of the GSCU. Its headcount has already been reduced, raising concerns over whether it has the resources it needs to deliver its commitments, including its plans for the Fast Stream. As elsewhere funding pressures are a concern: in the recent autumn statement, Cabinet Office RDEL was scheduled to fall (excluding depreciation) from £700m in 2022/23 to £400m in 2024/25;[39] the impact on the unit's funding allocation is not clear. If the civil service is to attract and retain the staff it needs, the GSCU needs stable and adequate resources.

The civil service must get better at external recruitment

The government has said that it wants to bring in more external talent. June 2021's *Declaration on Government Reform* contained specific actions to "establish new, appropriately and consistently managed, entry routes for professionals from outside government" and "encourage entrants with specific, high demand skills".[40] The cabinet secretary, Simon Case, wrote in November 2021 that the government was intent on "bringing in more outside expertise from business, industry and academia", a call he reiterated in an interview with *Civil Service World* in December 2022.[41] And the government strengthened its policy of advertising all senior civil service jobs externally by default in May 2022.[42]

However, little progress has been made. The number of senior civil servants recruited externally in fact fell from 20% in 2019/20 to 18% in 2020/21.[43] And inward secondments still prove difficult to organise on an individual basis, let alone at scale, despite the government's target that 2% of roles at grade 7 and above should be either on secondment or filled by a secondee by 2023.[*]

The civil service is particularly poor at bringing in specialists, especially into senior roles. More external recruitment of specialists would be especially beneficial for two main reasons. First, it would increase the technical expertise available to the civil service, making it better equipped to deliver ministers' priorities. Second, as a result of hiring people with different professional experiences who have been trained to approach problems in different ways, it would increase the cognitive diversity of the civil service. A convincing body of research suggests that would improve the way it identifies problems and operationalises solutions.[44]

* An evolution of a previous target that 2% of roles grade 7 and above should be filled by secondees.

The Institute for Government has recommended changes the government should make to increase external recruitment, including establishing new senior specialist roles, making provision for exceptional external candidates to be 'poached' by the government without a full recruitment process where appropriate, reforming the recruitment process to level the playing field between internal and external candidates, and fixing problems with onboarding civil servants.[45]

Capability-based pay reform has stalled

The Institute for Government has previously recommended reforms to how civil servants are paid to discourage churn, incentivise the acquisition of subject-specific knowledge, improve retention and make the civil service more attractive to external recruits.[46]

Salaries should be increased (where there is a business case) to facilitate the attraction and retention of staff with in-demand skills. A greater proportion of pay should come in the form of bonuses for good performance. Financial incentives should be used to help to reduce churn. And the government should introduce properly funded capability-based pay – increasing the base salary of civil servants as they become more capable at their job. This is something the *Declaration on Government Reform* committed would be delivered for senior officials by the end of 2021, but has not happened. While not a transformative reform on its own, a well-designed capability framework, if funded, would signal to civil servants that the government values deeper subject expertise and specialist skills and that these are helpful for career progression.[47]

However, the emphasis on pay restraint has meant that any system introduced now could not be funded properly – and Institute for Government research has found that introducing this model with inadequate funding would be counter-productive.[48] Failing to match capability assessments with requisite pay levels will undermine confidence in the system and its ability to motivate staff to improve their capability.

With the government's proposed limited average pay award of 2%, there is instead a stronger case for using any headroom in the civil service's pay envelope to boost pay for roles that require in-demand skills and offer financial support to civil servants in precarious financial positions – with many struggling due to the cost-of-living crisis, as outlined above.

Improving diversity and inclusion

A broader definition of diversity in the civil service should not mean a reduced focus on protected characteristics

In February 2022 the Cabinet Office published its new *Civil Service Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022–2025*, with the aim of promoting fairness and better performance within the institution.[49] The previous strategy ran from 2017 to 2022 and concentrated on improving the representation and inclusion of staff based on legally protected characteristics such as disability, ethnicity and sexual orientation.[50] The 2022 strategy was a change in direction, placing greater emphasis on socio-economic background (SEB) and for the first time incorporating the geographic location and professional background of civil servants under a new, broader definition of workforce diversity. It aims to go "further than the current Equality Act provisions by building on and expanding a previous focus on Protected Characteristics to deliver for all".[51]

Improving the diversity of geographic, professional and socio-economic backgrounds in the civil service is welcome but should not mean a reduced focus on protected characteristics, especially where disparities remain at senior level. The progress the civil service has made over recent decades in its representation of ethnicity, disability, sex and sexual orientation is not self-sustaining. This year, the proportion of minority ethnic officials in the senior civil service declined for the first time since 2015;[52] there are no longer any permanent secretaries from minority ethnic backgrounds. The new strategy includes no specific mention of gender, sexual orientation, age or faith; and, beyond a single reference – in the foreword – to people from minority ethnic backgrounds, includes no further mention of race. There is just one action specifically geared towards staff with disabilities: increasing the number of civil service organisations signed up to the Disability Confident Employer scheme.

The Cabinet Office should demonstrate to civil servants that the strategy's broader definition of diversity does not mean a reduced focus on protected characteristics by explicitly recognising where work still needs to be done to improve the representation and inclusion of staff from these demographics. And all departments should have clear targets and plans to improve the recruitment, progression and inclusion of staff based on protected characteristics, particularly where their workforces are falling below benchmarks for the economically active population.

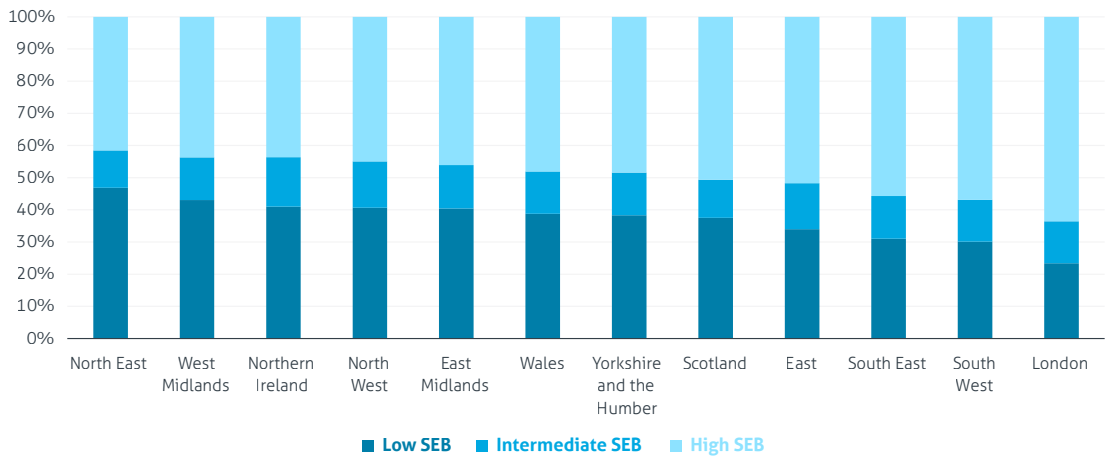
The new strategy makes a start on socio-economic diversity, but could go further

The new diversity and inclusion (D&I) strategy included some sensible plans to improve socio-economic diversity in the civil service. For instance, it reaffirmed a previous commitment to relocate 50% of senior officials outside London and the South East, recognising the strong links between geography and socio-economic diversity in the civil service. According to the Social Mobility Commission (SMC), promotion in the civil service is linked to securing certain high-profile jobs – 'accelerator roles' – with exposure to ministers and senior officials, such as in a private office or running a bill team.[53] Ministers and senior officials are based mainly in London, but only 23% of London-based civil servants are from a lower SEB compared to 47%

in the North East.[54] Staff in this grouping who are based outside the capital may lack the economic resources to move there, making it harder for them to take prestigious positions based in Whitehall.[55]

The strategy also set out promising new plans to regularise the process for temporary promotions and to deliver an induction making explicit some of the 'unwritten rules' around accessing career development opportunities in the civil service – which the SMC argues is a major barrier to progression for working-class officials.[56]

Figure 2.11 **Socio-economic background of civil servants by location, 2021**

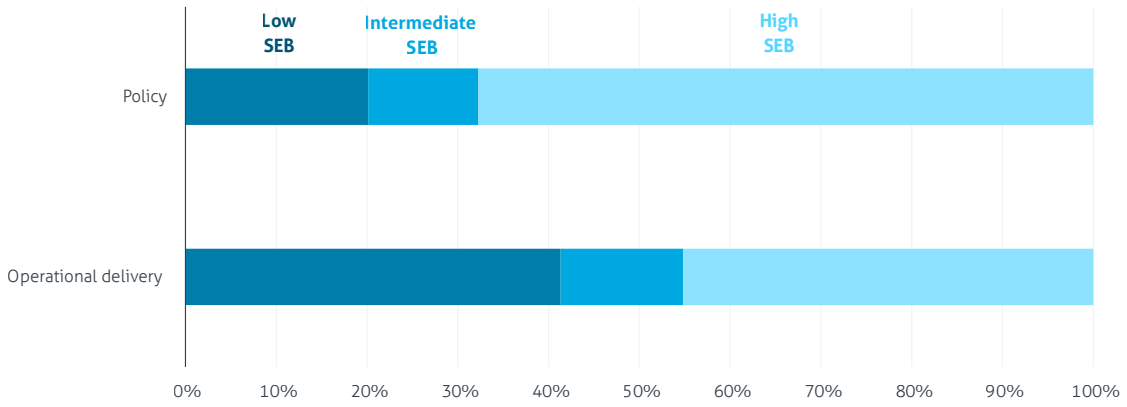


Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office, Civil Service People Survey, 2021. Notes: Socio-economic background (SEB) is approximated using civil servants' parental occupation when they were aged 14 and grouped according to the three-class National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) scheme. The figures shown here exclude civil servants with an unknown socio-economic background.

But the new strategy does not include plans to target the recruitment, retention or progression of lower SEB staff directly. Nor does it address barriers to progression based on the tendency of staff from lower SEBs to 'self-sort' into operational career paths in the civil service.[57] Some 42% of civil servants in operational roles are from a lower SEB, twice the proportion as in policy roles (20%). Operational career paths often have 'bottlenecks' – a large number of junior staff competing for a small number of senior roles – and promotion elsewhere in the civil service usually requires demonstrating a broad range of skills, including experience of policy.

More needs to be done to provide opportunities for lower grade operational staff to gain policy experience and 'demystify' policy work. For instance, the civil service should review how hiring processes can help those who might self-select into operational career paths consider policy roles, and set up a cross-government scheme to support lower grade staff in departments and directorates that are heavily tilted towards operational roles in gaining policy experience.

Figure 2.12 **Socio-economic background of civil servants working in policy and in operational delivery, 2021**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office, Civil Service People Survey, 2021. Notes: Socio-economic background (SEB) is approximated using civil servants' parental occupation when they were aged 14 and grouped according to the three-class National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) scheme. The figures shown here exclude civil servants with an unknown socio-economic background.

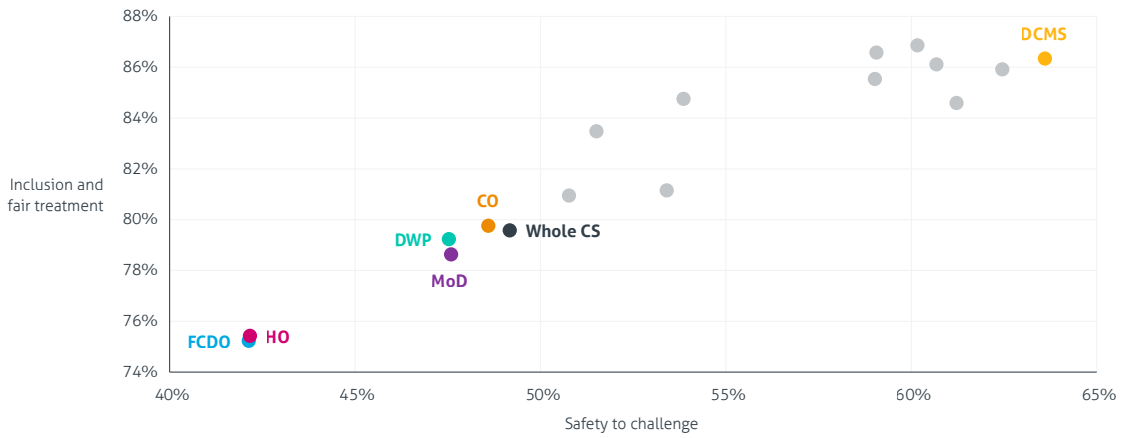
The civil service must take action on inclusion if it is to achieve 'diversity of thought'

The 2022–25 D&I strategy mentions the importance of "diversity of thought" in teams, meaning drawing on a range of backgrounds and experiences to improve policy making.[58]

This partly entails recruiting people from different demographic backgrounds who can use their experience to consider how government policy affects different groups. It will also involve more external recruitment of people with diverse professional experiences and training who can approach problems in different ways to find and operationalise solutions.

It is not enough to improve the way the civil service recruits, however. The 'groupthink' in the civil service – both in the sense of demographic background and professional experience – also results in people feeling unable to fully participate in the decision making processes. According to the Civil Service People Survey for 2021, only a little over half (55%) of civil servants felt "safe" to challenge the way things are usually done in their organisation. There are a number of reasons for the civil service to become a more inclusive working environment, and one of the most important is that it would help the civil service tap into a variety of perspectives.

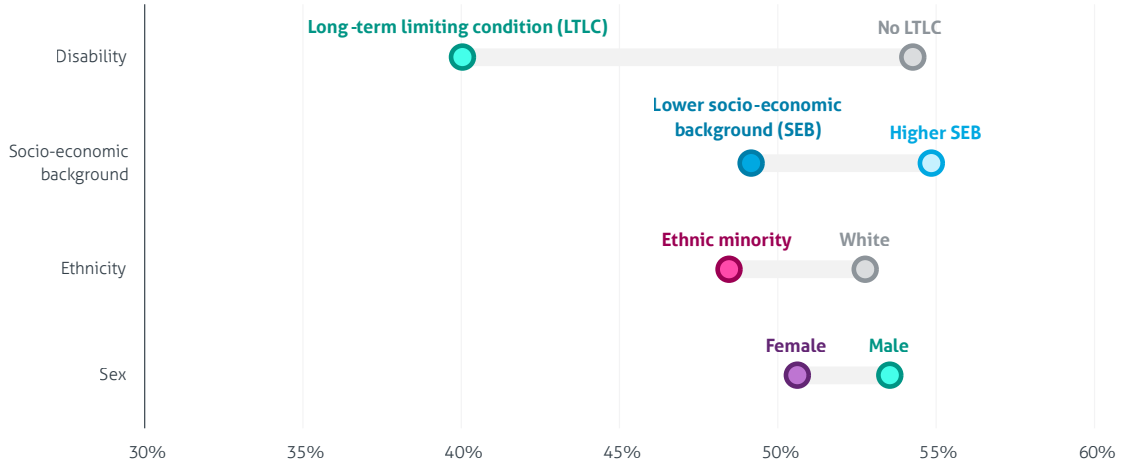
Figure 2.13 **Civil servants feeling "safe to challenge the way things are done" and satisfied with inclusion and fair treatment, by department, 2021**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office, Civil Service People Survey, 2021. Notes: 'Safety to challenge' is measured as the proportion of civil servants agreeing or strongly agreeing that "I think it is safe to challenge the way things are done in [my organisation]". The score for the whole civil service is the mean score for all civil servants.

Departments with lower scores on inclusion and fair treatment tend to have a lower proportion of staff who feel comfortable challenging the way things are done. The FCDO and the Home Office have the lowest proportions of employees satisfied with inclusion in their department – and in both only 42% of staff feel "safe" challenging the way things are done. Since the merger of FCO and DfID, the department's scores have fallen for both safety to challenge (15 percentage points) and inclusion (5pp), suggesting the organisation needs to improve its culture to increase 'diversity of thought'.

Figure 2.14 **Civil servants feeling "safe to challenge the way things are done" by demographic, 2021**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office, Civil Service People Survey, 2021. Notes: Socio-economic background is categorised based on civil servants' self-description "compared to people in general". 'Safety to challenge' is measured as the proportion of civil servants agreeing or strongly agreeing that "I think it is safe to challenge the way things are done in [my organisation]".

The strategy also emphasises varied geographical, socio-economic and career backgrounds to avoid 'groupthink'. This is evident in the 6 percentage point difference between the proportion of civil servants from lower (49%) and higher (55%) SEBs who feel comfortable challenging their organisation's practices.

But the civil service should not overlook protected characteristics such as disability, ethnicity and sex in its focus on 'diversity of thought'. Only 40% of civil servants with a long-term limiting condition feel able to challenge the way things are done, compared with 54% of those without. Minority ethnic (48%) and female (51%) civil servants are also less likely to feel comfortable voicing dissenting opinions than their white (53%) and male (54%) colleagues.

If the civil service wants to promote innovation, it should ensure that staff from different backgrounds – including minority ethnic, female and disabled civil servants – feel supported to draw on their experiences and provide their insight. But the strategy sets out few specific plans to achieve this. For example, the Institute recommended in December 2022 that the government's new 'Inclusion at Work Panel' should proactively research and trial interventions to address staff experiences of exclusion and unfair treatment.[59]

Data and digital

In 2022 the government launched its roadmap for digital and data, *Transforming for a Digital Future*, which runs to 2025.[60] This gave some overdue clarity to digital leadership in government, with the Central Digital and Data Office (CDDO) taking charge of overall digital strategy and the Government Digital Service (GDS) given a supporting role in helping departments digitise their operations and public services. The shift acknowledged that digital skills, through Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT) professionals, are more embedded in individual departments than previously and are responsible for providing services at the department level.

To implement a unified digital approach, the CDDO has said that it aims to normalise departmental practices towards data, specialist recruitment and skills. The strategy sets ambitious 'missions' about where the civil service wants to be in its digital operations, but is less explicit about how it will achieve these goals. However, it adopts a realistic, staggered approach to prioritise frequently used public services and "critical" data assets. It is sensible that senior leaders have been named responsible for each mission and that achievements will be measured through six-monthly reviews.

The strategy recognises the need to recruit, develop and retain digital technology skills more consistently between departments. Historically, DWP and GDS have been seen as performing well at recruiting DDaT professionals, while departments with less developed technical strengths have found recruitment difficult. In response, the CDDO strategy identifies the need to standardise recruitment processes across Whitehall through the creation of a single 'front door' for technical applicants before being assigned to specific departments, as well as the need to bring salary levels for DDaT professionals closer to equivalent industry standards across departments, and improve consistency across the civil service, using the DDaT Pay Framework. But these initiatives will require commitment from all departments.

The strategy also gave an insight into how government intends to use digital skills in the future – namely to provide more than £1bn in efficiency savings by 2025 via better use of data and technology, including wider use of automated systems. The roadmap rightly explains that this requires more consistent data storage and systems and improved data quality, which government has struggled with in the past. Incompatible security systems and equipment that had to be resolved during the DfID and FCO merger in 2020, for example, hampered the government's response to the Russia–Ukraine conflict,[61] while data gaps and poor data quality limit the government's understanding of front-line public service performance.[62] To improve, the government requires more consistent data and collaboration between departments.

Disruption at the top of CDDO has slowed reform

To achieve the desired pace of digital transformation there needs to be less turnover of CDDO leadership. The civil service has struggled to fill senior digital leadership roles. After failing to hire a chief digital and information officer in September 2019 and August 2020, an executive director of the CDDO was appointed in January 2021 on a fixed 18-month contract. A chief digital officer was then appointed in September 2022 following the executive director's scheduled departure in summer 2022.

However, the change in leadership also saw both the interim chief data officer and the interim chief technology officer leave in 2022 without replacements in place. Salary constraints have made recruitment and retention of digital leaders particularly challenging and CDDO was only able to temporarily fill these initial positions by attracting people on short-term contracts, effectively as secondments.

Despite this, some progress has been made, including building the legitimacy of the CDDO by creating the chief technology officer council (in late 2021)[63] and chief digital officer council in 2022[64] to bring together digital leaders from across departments to support the sharing of best practice. But the personnel changes across most senior roles will inevitably disrupt key digital reforms, especially standardisation of data schema (essential for achieving better digital services and data sharing initiatives) or finding and assessing the risks and costs of outdated and unfit-for-purpose legacy IT equipment across departments. Consistency in digital leadership is important, especially when managing large-scale system updates, so it will be in the government's interest to prioritise this in 2023 and beyond.

Fair progress has been made on digital skills, services and security

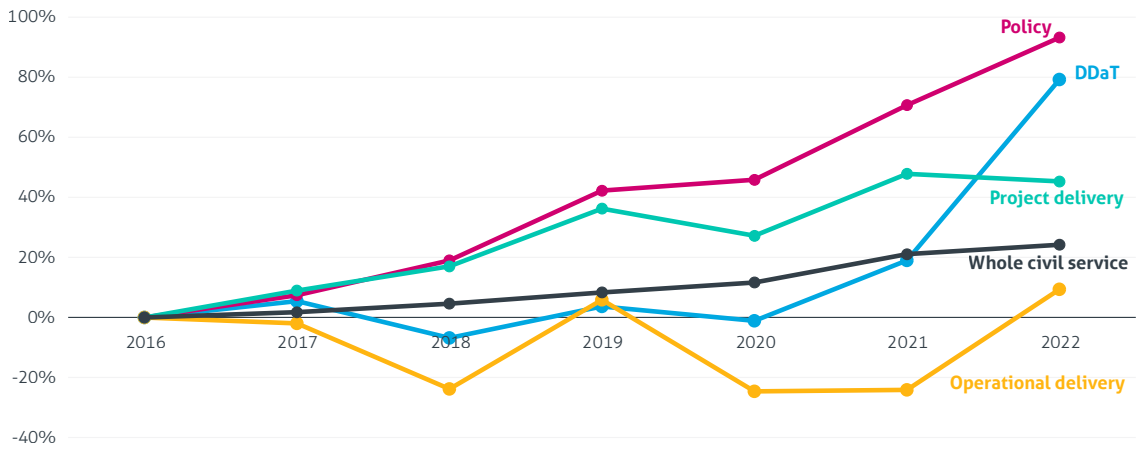
Skills

A recurring limitation in achieving digital reform in the civil service has been a lack of digital literacy. A 2022 poll on digital skills by the Global Government Forum found that 40% of officials have basic, very little or no knowledge of how data and technology could transform public services.[65] Therefore the civil service must do more to improve digital literacy. The CDDO launched a minimum set of Digital, Data and Technology Essentials for all civil servants to meet and hosted an 'Autumn of Digital Learning' for senior leaders.[66,67] It is also arranging regular meetings of its chief data officer and chief technology officer councils every month, and permanent secretaries every two months, to better share best practice across departmental leadership.

The CDDO will need to keep up this work if it is to meet its target of improving the skills of 90% of senior civil servants on digital and data awareness – and its next task, of rolling out training at scale across all civil servants, will be much bigger.

While general data literacy continues to improve, if slowly, it has coincided with the number of DDaT professionals in the civil service continuing to grow. DDaT is the third largest civil service profession (after operational delivery and policy) and has grown by 80% since 2016. This has come as departments increasingly see the benefit of working with data to evaluate policy decisions or allocate resources – this was especially important during the pandemic response[68] and will be integral to better targeting of policies and public services in the future. For example, the policy of universal energy bill support in 2022 could have been targeted more efficiently by improved use of various government datasets.[69] In acknowledgement of these trends, the Treasury appointed its first chief data officer in 2022.[70]

Figure 2.15 **Change in cross-departmental professions since 2016**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of ONS, Civil Service Statistics, 2016–17 and Cabinet Office, Civil Service Statistics, 2018–22. Notes: DDaT = Digital, Data and Technology. The number of DDaT professionals in DWP was not reported in 2020 or 2021. To avoid distorting the trend, the number of DWP DDaT professionals for these years was interpolated from the 2019 and 2022 numbers reported.

However, it is not clear how the civil service aims to achieve the digital skills needed to support longer-term public service reform. Repeated claims have been made about the potential of automation of services, making use of machine learning or artificial intelligence, but awareness of these technologies across the civil service remains low and training in them even lower, at just 5% of polled civil servants.[71] Given the risks and opportunities of utilising these technologies in public services, the civil service must work harder and faster at building skills and confidence in their application.

Services

In 2022 the Government Digital Service (GDS) started beta testing its GOV.UK One Login for government services, a long-term priority project intended to simplify how the public accesses government services, such as applying for and monitoring a criminal records check or ordering a birth, death or marriage certificate. The Disclosure and Barring Service and Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency both started to use One Login last year, with the first users experiencing the service in July 2022.[72] This has been complemented with a One Login identity checking app launched in August.

The previous Verify government account system can no longer open new accounts for users, with the eventual goal of transferring existing Verify accounts into One Login. GDS believes 3.2 million users will have had access to the One Login service by the end of 2022, creating an opportunity to learn and continue to refine the product. There will need to be ongoing security testing and public engagement, such as the public consultation into departmental data sharing for online government services.[73]

The government has also made progress in its Shared Services Strategy, after stalling between 2015 and 2021.[74] The strategy is an attempt to combine core digital functions from various departments to a central cloud-based operation that will save time and cost associated with administrative functions, and will group 20 departments into five clusters by 2028 (previously 2025). Two of these have started to implement new systems.[75] Ultimately, the government aims to have five cloud-based shared service centres, delivering efficiency savings of 10–15% in operation costs. This work is being complemented by developing common data standards, but remains in an early stage

and the Cabinet Office currently has no means of or metrics by which to monitor progress.[76] Given the difficulties in achieving this programme, the government must set out and track milestones to identify and correct any problems as they occur to prevent further delays.

Identifying problems early on will be essential given the difficulty with delivering government-wide data platforms on time. For example, the Office for National Statistics' Integrated Data Service was scheduled to be accessible to researchers outside of government in spring 2022, but this has now been delayed to 2023.[77]

Security

In line with the 2022 Government Cyber Security Strategy,[78] departments will have their cyber resilience externally audited to better understand risk across government.[79] This is in response to an increasing number of cyber threats, including a serious attack on the FCDO in January 2022.[80] In 2021, the National Cyber Security Centre responded to 777 incidents, 40% of which were targeted at public sector entities. The government is right to aim to improve cyber resilience and increase awareness of cyber risk across the state, especially when tightened budgets may otherwise prompt departments to seek to make savings on cyber security investment.

Legacy IT investment must be protected to safeguard future efficiency

Despite these successes in developing digital literacy and digitised public services, legacy IT issues remain a key stumbling block for digital reform. For instance, legacy technology in DWP was reportedly responsible for restricting the uprating of benefits to once per year, preventing any additional increase until April 2023 despite rapid inflation throughout 2022.[81] While this issue will eventually be corrected by the renewed migration of benefits claimants on to Universal Credit, it shows the degree to which certain public-facing departments are directly affected by outdated IT systems.

But finding and upgrading legacy IT systems* is hard. The civil service is yet to complete its legacy IT mapping exercise, begun in 2021, and so is unaware of where these systems exist in departments and the subsequent risk they create.[82] Unknown legacy IT issues frequently cause programme delays and overspend, and were partly responsible for delays in implementing common data standards within the Ministry of Defence during its work on the *Digital Strategy for Defence*.

While some could continue to function adequately until their retirement, others would benefit from replacement to make the public service they support more robust and reliable, sooner. This will require sustained investment over time – projects will often take longer to upgrade than a four- to five-year spending review period. Upgrading the most at-risk legacy systems is a key aspect of the CDDO's roadmap for digital and data, but before that it needs to know which these are. At present the method for assessing legacy risks remains uncertain.

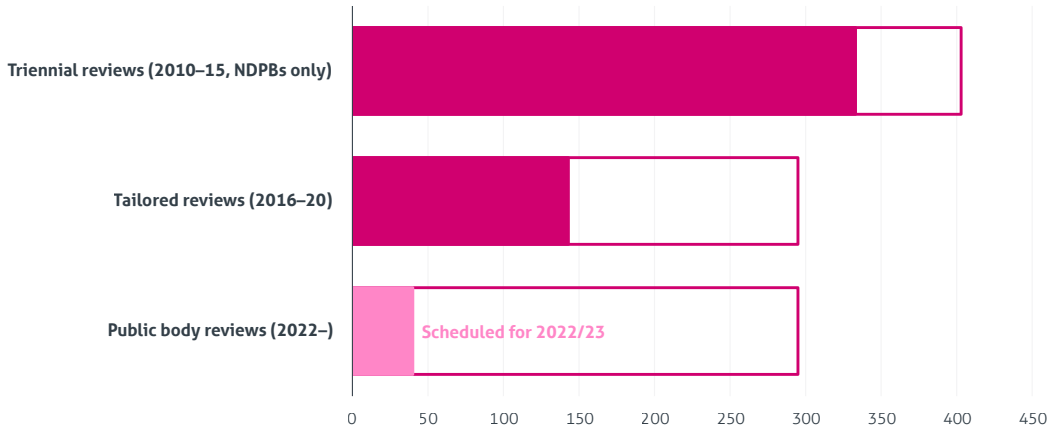
* Legacy IT systems are classed as IT systems that run on outdated or obsolete technology and that are no longer fit for purpose.

Public bodies and appointments reform

The government has made progress with its public bodies review programme, despite ministerial churn

The *Declaration on Government Reform* published in June 2021 included a commitment to a create a new "review programme for Arm's Length Bodies".[83] This commitment was met in April 2022 when the Cabinet Office published new guidance on how public body reviews should be carried out.[84] This guidance launched the latest in a series of review programmes that have sought to identify unnecessary bodies and improve the performance of those remaining.[85] Previous review programmes have been criticised for failing to meet their targets (fewer than half of bodies in 2020 had been reviewed in the previous five years).[86]

Figure 2.16 **Progress of public body review programmes, 2010–22**



Source: Cabinet Office public bodies reports, 2015 and 2020. Notes: Does not include bodies that were abolished during the period reviews were in place, but only those in existence at the end of the review period.

These changes to the review programme are welcome and should result in more effective reviews than in previous waves. However, while the guidance makes clear that reviews should consider the whole "delivery system" of departments, including the way departments sponsor their bodies, there is still a strong focus on examining the body itself, and particularly on cost-saving. The guidance requires lead reviewers to give an indication of where 5% of day-to-day savings can be found within one to three years, and is particularly focused on increased efficiency and reducing the "burden on the taxpayer".[87]

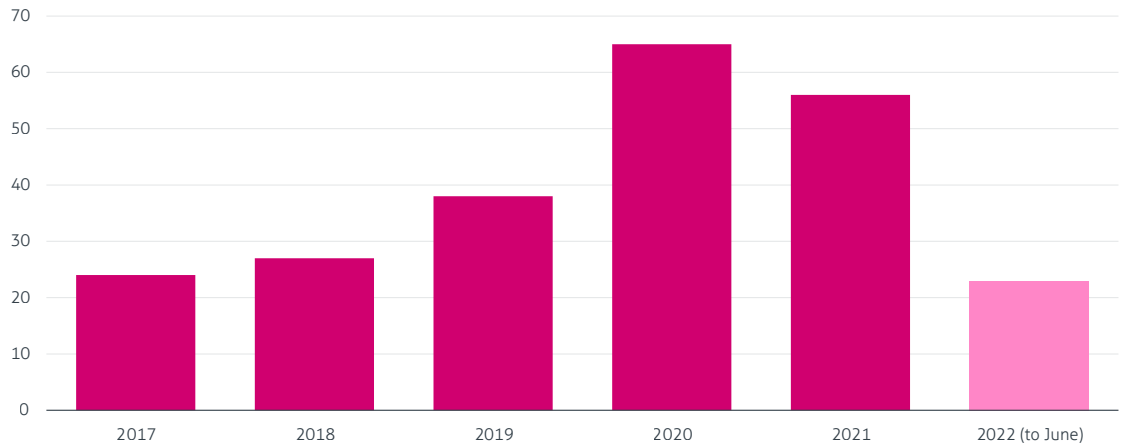
Improved value for money is welcome, although the government should be wary of setting arbitrary financial targets without strong reason as a way to improve performance – particularly as both efficiency and performance improvement may require more investment in the short term. The latest reform programme has not so far focused on the so-called 'numbers game' – trying to reduce the number of public bodies as an aim in itself. This is welcome as a focus on numbers alone can lead to simply recategorising bodies, or merging functions that do not necessarily work well together, rather than on improving delivery and value for money. It is also welcome that the initial list of bodies to be reviewed as part of the programme is focused on relatively large organisations and ones whose responsibilities have changed after Brexit, such as Ofcom and the Civil Aviation Authority.[88]

Improvements have been made in the public appointments process, but problems remain

The government has committed to making improvements to the way the public appointments system works, in response to increasing criticism of the slowness, opacity and potential for patronage in the current system. The Institute for Government's 2022 report found problems with delays in appointments and a growing number of unregulated appointments. The Institute recommended government publish data on the causes of delays and a list of unregulated appointments, among other changes.[89] Many of these recommendations were echoed more recently in a report by the House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee.[90] The government intends to respond to this report, as well as the Committee on Standards in Public Life's report that made similar recommendations,[91] in 2023.

The government has made some progress in resolving these problems. The number of exceptional appointments, generally made to fill gaps left by delayed appointments processes, seems to be falling. However, this progress may have been stalled by ministerial churn and a 'caretaker' government in office over the summer that was (rightly) cautious about making appointments. It is difficult to assess the impact of this period as the latest data on exceptional appointments runs only until June 2022.

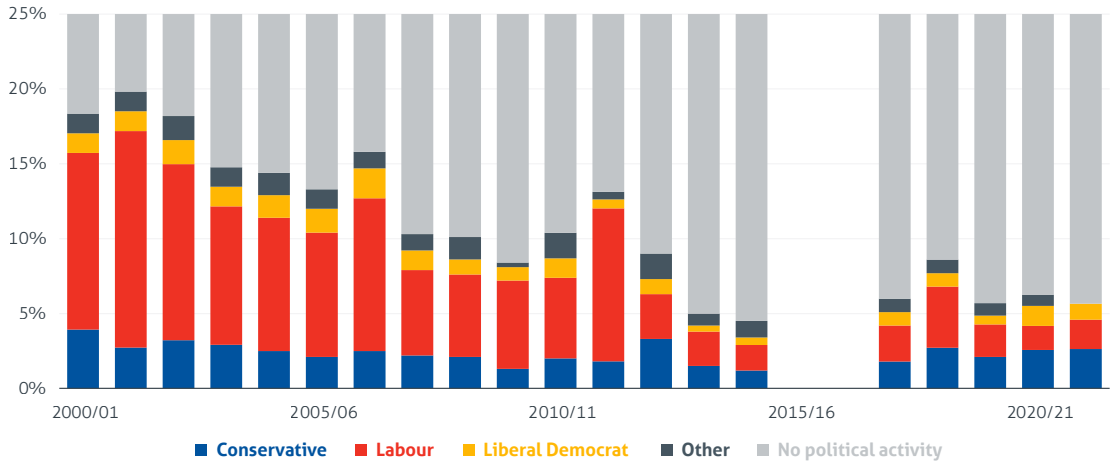
Figure 2.17 **Exceptional, usually temporary, appointments made each year, 2017–22**



Source: Office for the Commissioner for Public Appointments, exceptional appointments made without competition, as of 7 December 2022. Notes: When the same person has been extended in role multiple times, each extension has been counted; joint office-holders have been counted only once.

The government has made some positive steps in professionalising the appointments system over the past year, including launching a new website to list jobs,[92] a new scheme to help aspiring board members,[93] and a better training and induction offer to new appointees. There have also been some encouraging noises from government on policy changes, including a commitment to regulate the appointment of government non-executive directors, and the suggestion that government could publish a list of other non-regulated jobs.[94] This should happen as soon as possible, and be accompanied by a clear rationale as to why each role is unregulated.

Figure 2.18 **Proportion of public appointees declaring significant political activity, as a proportion of total declarations**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments, annual reports 2011/12 to 2021/22. Notes: Data for 2015/16 and 2016/17 is not available.

These commitments do not, however, go far enough in tackling the problems in the system. The proportion of appointees declaring 'political activity' remains low, but this declaration is only voluntary. More importantly, the pressure put on the appointments system under the Johnson government, and its consistent failure to deliver appointees to key positions on time, demonstrate that change is still needed. The latest data from the Commissioner for Public Appointments suggests just a quarter of appointments processes were completed within the government's three-month 'aim' in 2021/22.[95]

To tackle these issues, the government should collect, and eventually publish, data to track appointments properly and identify the causes of delays. And to restore trust, it should extend and formalise the powers of the commissioner for public appointments to regulate the system.[96]

Devolution and decentralisation

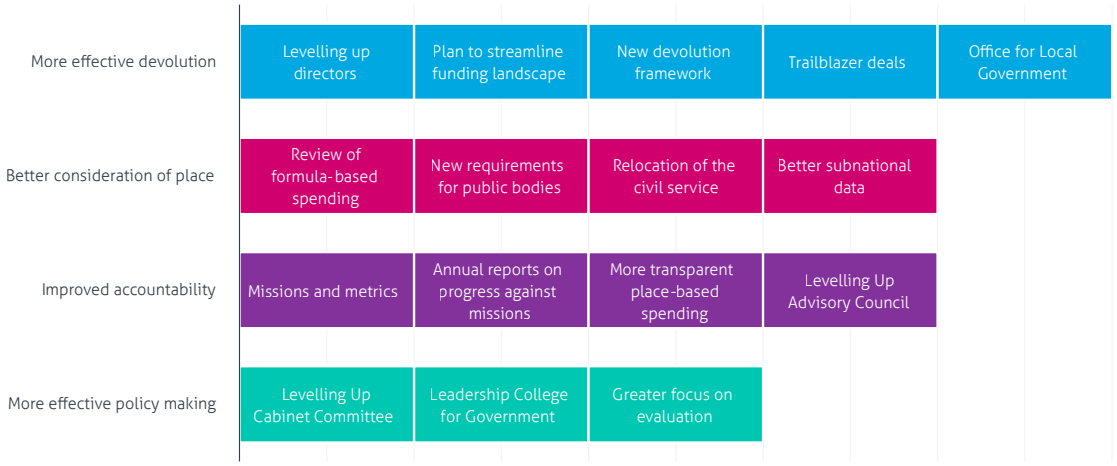
Whitehall must recognise the push for devolution and decentralisation

The belief that England's system of government is overly centralised, and the push for further devolution and decentralisation within England, has been a constant throughout both successive governments and the political turmoil of 2022. It is a position advocated by both the Conservative Party, in the form of 'levelling up', and the Labour Party, most recently in Gordon Brown's report of the Commission on the UK's Future and the shadow secretary of state for levelling up, housing, communities and local government Lisa Nandy's speech at the IfG's annual conference.[97,98] Both approaches argue that government can better address long-standing regional inequality by distributing power more evenly throughout the layers of English government, shifting the focus away from Whitehall and Westminster.

The Johnson government set out its approach to regional inequality, devolution and decentralisation in England in the February 2022 white paper, *Levelling Up the United Kingdom*, which outlined a long-term approach to this challenge the government claimed would "boost productivity", "spread opportunity and improve public services", "restore a sense of community" and "empower local leaders and communities".[99,100] Progress on this policy agenda was slowed by the political uncertainty created with the fall of the Johnson government and the subsequent leadership contests in which levelling up seemed to slip down the agenda. But with Michael Gove back as levelling up secretary, having launched the white paper back in February before a short period out of government later in the year, it seems that the white paper remains government policy under Rishi Sunak.

The paper implies substantial changes to the way the civil service works both directly, through its specific recommendations, and indirectly, through the ways of working described. It contains at least 16 particular "systems reforms" that aim for "a fundamental rewiring in the system of decision-making, locally and nationally, across the UK". These reforms, if undertaken, will be an important part of attempts to improve the civil service in 2023 and beyond, and should be understood within the government's wider reform agenda.

Figure 2.19 **Systems reforms outlined in the levelling up white paper**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, *Levelling Up the United Kingdom*, 2022.

These reforms would affect the way the civil service co-ordinates its work and supports ministers to make policy, and can be categorised across devolution, consideration of place, accountability and policy making.

The government has made progress on some of these reforms. The new framework for devolution in England came with the white paper itself. Ministers and officials have since used this in their negotiation of devolution deals with local areas, such as in the agreement of the North East deal in December 2022.[101] A new spatial data unit in DLUHC has been created to improve the use of spatial data in policy making. A levelling up advisory council was established.[102] Work is ongoing to create a new Office for Local Government.

Progress towards other reforms has been slow or moved backwards. The new levelling up cabinet committee, chaired by Gove, has been disbanded. Regional levelling up directors are yet to be appointed, despite a round of recruitment in 2022.[103] Little progress has been made towards simplifying the local government finance landscape by streamlining competitive bid processes.

But beyond these specific changes, the white paper envisages a fundamentally different system of English government, one which has sought to "expand devolution to more places, deepen current devolution deals and enable the devolution process to be simpler and more transparent". It sets the target that by 2030 "every part of England that wants one will have a devolution deal with powers at or approaching the highest level of devolution". This will require equally fundamental changes to how civil servants work. Much more policy will be made outside Whitehall, and decision making in the capital will have to better incorporate other layers of government.

Getting to grips with what this area of reform should mean for the civil service will be a key test for its leaders in 2023 and 2024. And civil servants should expect the same push for devolution and decentralisation if Labour lead the next government. At the heart of Gordon Brown's report of the Commission on the UK's Future was a critique of Whitehall as an "over-centralised way of governing that leaves millions of people complaining they are neglected, ignored, and invisible", and calls for a similar reform of the civil service, including the transfer of 50,000 civil servants out of London.[104]

Relationships between the civil service and local government need to improve

One of the major barriers to greater devolution and decentralisation is the poor working relations between central government and local government across England. Institute for Government research into the handling of the pandemic found that, while constructive partnerships exist, in many areas co-ordination and collaboration was undermined by limited understanding of local government in Whitehall, a "tick box" culture of insincere consultation, and "bitterness" and "suspicion" on both sides.[105]

One way to address this problem would be by increasing the exchange of skills, understanding and resources between the layers of government. An example would be to increase the secondments between departments and local authorities or reforming public sector graduate schemes, as described earlier in this report.

The working relationships between the levels of government in England are also affected by the lack of independent institutional apparatus to co-ordinate work between central government and combined and local authorities. Research by the Institute in 2022 into the development of metro mayors in England recommended that "the government should launch a joint review of its relations with metro mayors, along the lines of the review of inter-governmental relations conducted with the devolved administrations".[106] This would "establish a published framework for consultation, co-operation and dispute resolution between government departments" and local government, and could lead to the creation of a supporting committee structure.

These or equivalent reforms to intergovernmental relations in England are long overdue and would make possible some of the more ambitious changes described in the levelling up white paper. And again a Labour-led government could be expected to take a similar approach. Brown's review called for a "Council of England", bringing together representatives of central and local government to assess "whether there is effective co-operation" across England.

Ministers and civil servants

Ministerial churn has set the context for reform

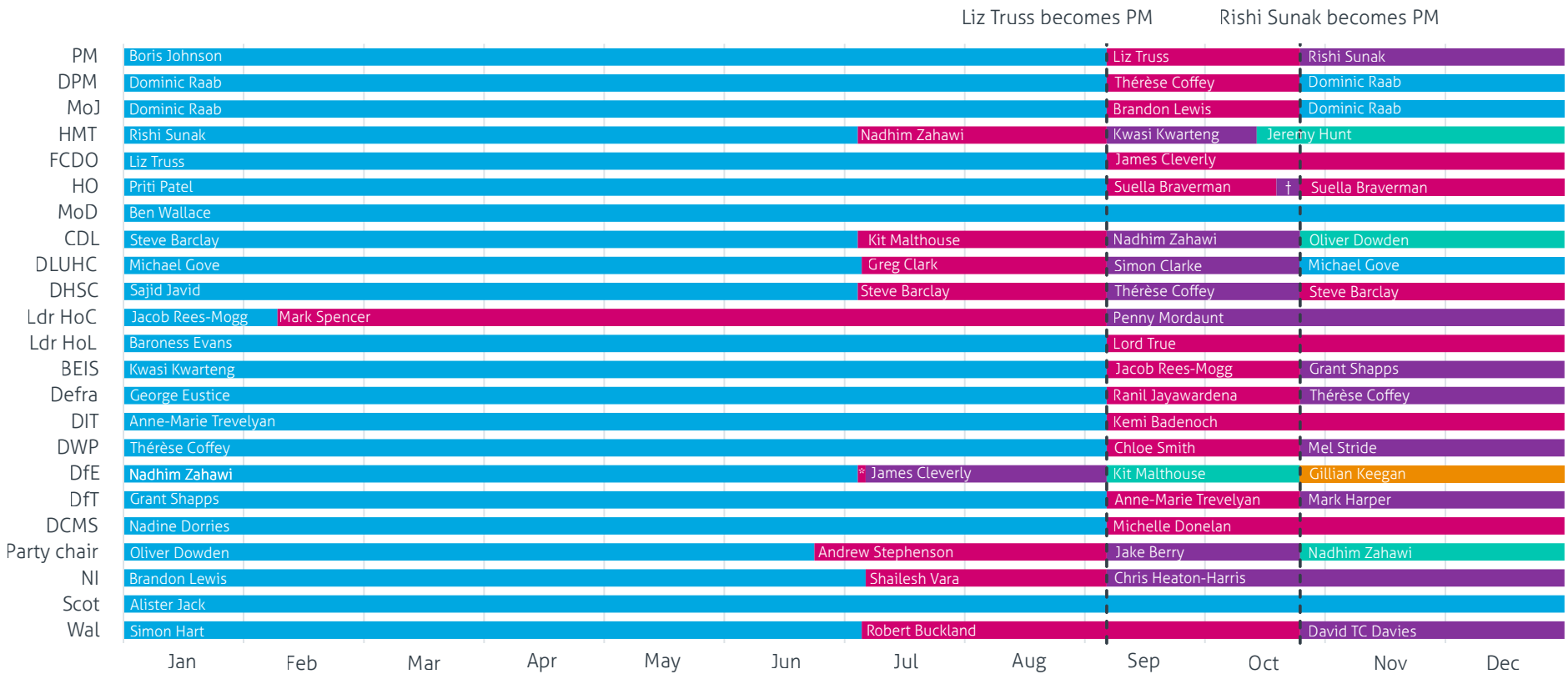
Government reform is a joint endeavour between ministers and civil servants. So the success of attempted reforms is naturally affected by the relationship between the two. The political tumult of 2022, and the ministerial churn it caused, severely frustrated reform efforts. Two changes of prime minister led to three almost entirely distinct cabinets in one calendar year, though changes of personnel have occurred outside of changes of prime minster too.

The first cabinet change came in February, when Jacob Rees-Mogg became minister for Brexit opportunities and was replaced as leader of the Commons by Mark Spencer, who was in turn replaced by Chris Heaton-Harris as chief whip.[107] Cabinet positions then remained stable until July, when eight posts changed hands – one, at the Department for Education, twice – during the breakdown of Boris Johnson's government.[108]

The informal caretaker period between the announcement of Johnson's resignation in July and his replacement by Liz Truss on 6 September created some short-term stability in the ministerial ranks, albeit while the government drifted. Having said it would not make any large spending decisions, the outgoing Johnson government left expensive but urgent policies, such as energy bill assistance, to the autumn.

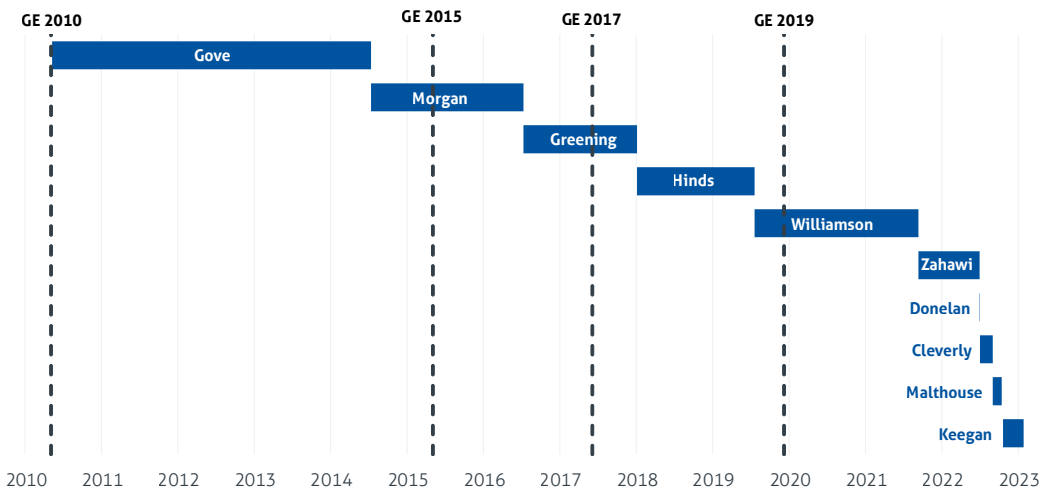
Cabinet churn accelerated in the final quarter of the year: 19 full cabinet posts changed hands when Truss became prime minister.[109] This was followed by a slightly smaller reshuffle of 13 cabinet posts when she was replaced by Rishi Sunak in October.[110] Only two departments – the Ministry of Defence and the Scotland Office – have retained one secretary of state throughout the year. Four departments – the Treasury, the Cabinet Office, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, and the Department of Health and Social Care – have had four secretaries of state in the last year. The Department for Education had five – a record.

Figure 2.20 **Tenure of full members of cabinet, 2022**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of IfG ministers database. Notes: * Michelle Donelan, † Grant Shapps.

Figure 2.21 **Timeline of secretaries of state for education, 2010–23**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of IfG ministers database and Butler and Butler's *British Political Facts*.

This high turnover has been matched at a junior ministerial level – it is not uncommon for ministers to have had more than three jobs in the last year. Andrew Griffith, for example, started 2022 as parliamentary private secretary to the prime minister, after which he became director of the Number 10 Policy Unit, then parliamentary under-secretary of state in DIT, then financial secretary to the Treasury and finally, in October, economic secretary to the Treasury. Stuart Andrew began the year as deputy chief whip, before moving to be minister of state at DLUHC. He then moved to the MoJ, before ending up as parliamentary under-secretary in DCMS. At the end of the year, the junior equalities portfolio was added to his brief. A more typical example is Mims Davies, who began the year as a parliamentary under-secretary in DWP, before moving to the Home Office and eventually back to DWP.

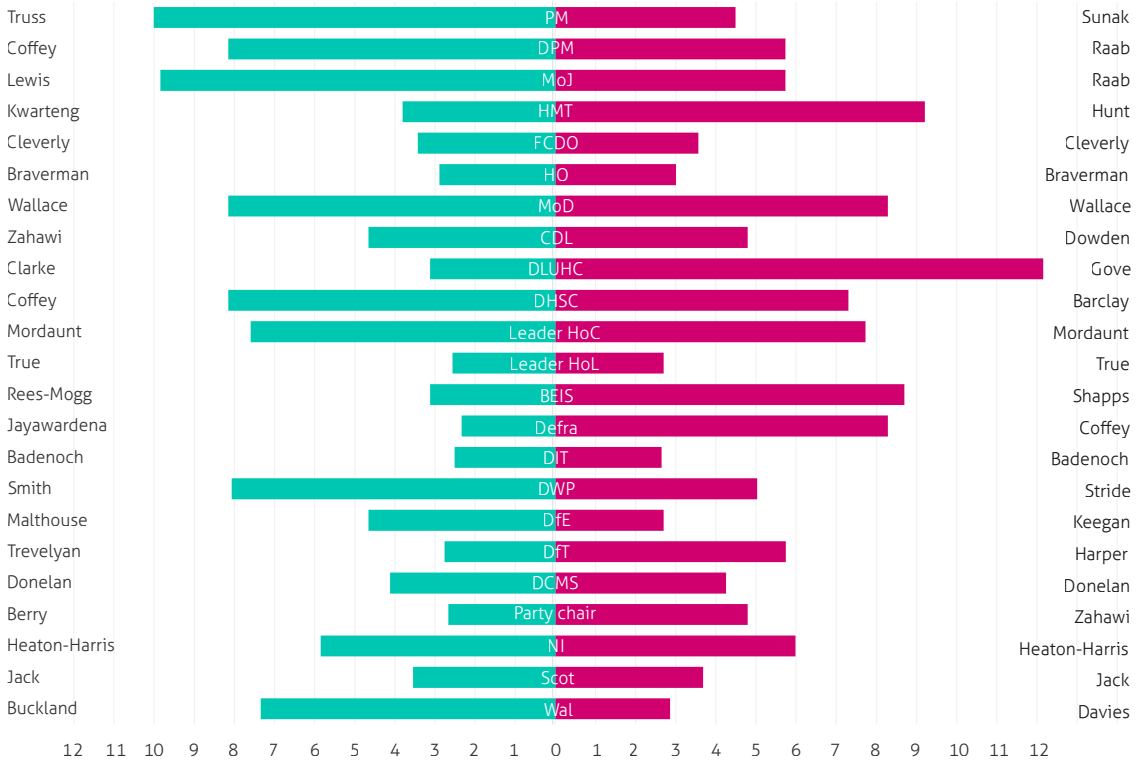
Even during periods of the year when ministers were not frequently changing post, the prospect of an imminent reshuffle was common; Johnson's minimal reshuffle in February, for example, was often briefed to be much wider-ranging.[111]

Ministerial churn has brought uncertainty to policy and delayed reform

Such high levels of ministerial churn prevent ministers from getting on top of their brief, in turn limiting the ability of departments to achieve their priorities. Ministers frequently tell the Institute's Ministers Reflect archive[112] that rapidly changing jobs prevented them from properly getting to grips with their policy area.

Very few recent ministers have had the luxury of time to settle into the job, preventing them from gaining the knowledge, expertise or familiarity with the department to carry out their priorities effectively. The Institute for Government has argued that long-term reform is impossible when departmental leadership is constantly changing, preventing governments from delivering ambitious promises.[113]

Figure 2.22 **Ministerial experience (years) at date of appointment, full members of Truss and Sunak cabinets**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of IfG ministers database. Notes: Kemi Badenoch also serves as minister for women and equalities under Sunak. Thérèse Coffey served as both health secretary and DPM in Truss's government. Dominic Raab is both justice secretary and DPM in Sunak's government. Experience shown at date of appointment, meaning ministers in the Truss cabinet reappointed by Sunak are represented as having greater experience in his government.

Frequent reshuffles have also pushed those with little experience of ministerial office to the top. Liz Truss's ministers were relatively inexperienced on average – 21 were in government for the first time. Some were given little opportunity to get to grips with their portfolios before leaving government: no fewer than 40 of her ministers left when she was replaced by Sunak in October. His government retained 81 of her ministers, largely at junior levels and many from the Lords – 50 of those 81 stayed in the same posts they had been appointed to by Truss. Sunak has also brought in more experience at all levels, including the noted return of Michael Gove to cabinet, and Nick Gibb to the schools brief he has held in 11 of the last 13 years since 2010.

High turnover makes it harder for government to achieve its objectives. Priorities can only be properly articulated and pursued if ministers believe they will remain in office to achieve them or, at least, set them significantly in train. Without clarity over the direction of travel, civil servants are unable to effectively pursue the government's priorities. The multiple crises government faced throughout 2022 mean that this problem has been particularly acute.

As noted the energy crisis was a clear example of this. Having been anticipated from earlier in the year, full-scale energy bill support could not be announced until September due to the uncertainty of the summer caretaker government arrangements. This left civil servants without direction for three months, followed by a period of rapid activity as energy policy announcements had to be quickly delivered.[114] A public energy efficiency campaign was similarly delayed, after being rejected by the Truss government and ultimately signed off by Sunak in December.

Government policy on reforming the civil service has suffered particular problems. The different attitudes of the Johnson, Truss and Sunak governments to questions of reform left officials working on various schemes uncertain of that work's future and struggling to make progress. Initiatives relating to capability-based pay for senior officials, secondments into and out of the civil service, and moves to pause, resume and reform the Civil Service Fast Stream are all examples of this. By contrast, areas of reform that have received more consistent backing from ministers have made better progress, such as the Places for Growth programme's efforts to relocate officials outside London.

The relationship between ministers and civil servants has come under strain

Two particular inflection points underscored the strained relationship between ministers and civil servants in 2022. First came with the criticism of officials' involvement in the 'partygate' scandal, which raised questions about their own standards and relationships with ministers, created negative publicity, damaged the perception of civil service impartiality, and weakened the authority of the cabinet secretary, Simon Case.[115] Second was Liz Truss's high-profile sacking of the Treasury's permanent secretary, Sir Tom Scholar, on her first day in office, as she followed through on her rhetoric during the leadership campaign of attacking "treasury orthodoxy".[116] Both incidents contributed to the end of Johnson's and Truss's premierships.

Relations were strained even outside these particular flashpoints. Jacob Rees-Mogg repeatedly criticised civil servants for working from home: in April, he made news for leaving "sorry you were out when I visited" notes on empty Cabinet Office desks.[117] And in the summer, he briefed papers against what he saw as "absurd" and "ridiculous" civil service diversity and wellbeing courses.[118] Sunak and his ministerial team have so far taken a more constructive, less confrontational, approach to their relations with civil servants than their predecessors in the Johnson and Truss administrations.

But Sunak's ministers, like those of his predecessors, have faced allegations of misconduct. Sir Gavin Williamson resigned after complaints of bullying were made against him by both parliamentary colleagues and civil servants.[119] Bullying allegations, too, forced an inquiry into the conduct of the deputy PM and justice secretary, Dominic Raab.[120] And questions surrounded the reappointment of Suella Braverman as home secretary just days after her resignation in the final days of the Truss government for multiple breaches of the ministerial code. As the next election nears, Sunak will have to decide whether he wants to stick with his current team or go for further, potentially destabilising, change.

Civil servants need a long-term responsibility for government capability and high quality advice

While political turmoil and ministerial churn hinder government effectiveness, and should be avoided or mitigated where possible to keep policy programmes on track, they are inevitable, and indeed perhaps sometimes essential, aspects of a democratic system. For instance, in 2022 long-awaited reforms to social care, local government finance and the planning system were delayed once more. These are legitimate policy decisions for ministers to make even if repeated delays to tackling long-term problems are unfortunate and unwise.

Equally, responding to unexpected shock events is a core part of the civil service's role. The disruption of the last few years has set the context in which government has operated, whether the pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine or, in different ways, Brexit and the political tumult of 2022. But this context should not be seen as distinct from what the civil service should be expected to navigate. And unstable geopolitics and climate change mean that external shock events are, if anything, likely to disrupt domestic government more frequently in the future.

One lesson to take from 2022, and more broadly over the past decade, is that the unavoidable uncertainty of international and domestic politics makes it even more important that the civil service provides a degree of continuity to government. As external shocks shift the government's priorities, or ministerial turnover means policy positions change rapidly, it is imperative the civil service is able to provide certainty over two issues: the long-term capability of government and the provision of advice about the long-term implications of policy.

The civil service should have more responsibility for, and say over, the long-term capability of departments. In practice, this means the resourcing and management of 'horizontal', shared functions and professions departments use to deliver their responsibilities for ministers – such as finance, legal support, HR, project delivery and policy advice. And it means a greater say in the size and make-up of departmental workforces required to maintain those capabilities. Short-termist debates over the precise headcount of the civil service briefed to the media throughout the past year show why government should reconsider the civil service's own role in these questions, as they neglect the long-term demands on the workforce to support future governments.

The civil service should also be responsible, and held accountable, for the provision of long-term policy advice to ministers. As explained in Part 3 of this report, electoral incentives and churn among both ministers and officials skew policy decisions towards activity likely to have an effect in the short term, rather than that which is most likely to serve the country best in the long term. To mitigate this risk, the civil service should always maintain its capability to provide transparent advice on the implications of policy decisions for future governments and the long term. In the past year, for example, it would still have been within ministers' remit to decide to delay social care reforms, but if the responsibility to ensure long-term advice on the implications of that move was incorporated into considerations, it would help to mitigate against the unavoidable short-term incentives at play.

Those two roles, to maintain long-term capability and provide high-quality advice, would make up a responsibility to steward the capability of government that the UK civil service currently lacks. Other countries and governments have tried to address this problem in different ways. The Well-being of Future Generations Act, which came into force in 2016 in Wales, gave public bodies a public duty to ensure their work did not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their needs, and created a Future Generations Commissioner to help public bodies do so.

While New Zealand's Public Service Act 2020 established stewardship as a principle for the public service, and requires departmental chief executives, the equivalent of UK permanent secretaries, to publish "a long-term insights briefing at least once every three years".*

In March 2022 the Institute for Government published *A new statutory role for the civil service*, arguing that the civil service should be put on a new statutory footing.[121] One of the benefits of this approach is that it would allow the government to learn from similar international examples, give the civil service its own stewardship responsibility, defined in law and bestowed on the head of the civil service.

In practice this could work by giving the head of the civil service a specific statutory duty to maintain the long-term capability of the government and a long-term view of policy. The head of the civil service would have the authority to make decisions about functional standards and the workforce. They would have greater authority to manage 'horizontal' capabilities across government in, for instance, HR, project delivery, legal, financial management or analysis.

If the head of the civil service felt unable to undertake this duty because of resourcing or policy decisions by ministers, they would have a means to broker resolution with ministers or, failing that, to seek a direction. But, in turn, they would be expected to demonstrate how the civil service is meeting this duty, and would be held to account by ministers and parliament for doing so. This would sit alongside and complement the publication of more civil service policy advice.

* The principle of stewardship requires the public service to consider: "Long-term capability and its people; Institutional knowledge and information; Systems and processes; Assets; Legislation administered by agencies". See Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, New Zealand Government, 'Stewardship', last updated 17 March 2022, https://dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/policy-project/policy-advice-themes/stewardship

Part 3: Civil service effectiveness

The final part of this report assesses how well the civil service fulfilled its key roles and responsibilities in 2022, and how it could improve its performance in the future. It covers making and implementing policy, managing tight budgets, delivering large projects, working and communicating transparently and, lastly, leading an engaged, motivated workforce.

Making and implementing policy

Ministers are responsible for deciding policy but rely on – and should engage with – good advice from civil servants

The relationship between ministers and civil servants, how responsibilities are divided and accountability is practised, is too ambiguous. Institute for Government research in 2022 assessed the ways this confusion is making government less effective.[1] But in broad terms, ministers are the ones with a democratic mandate and so are responsible for making policy decisions. Meanwhile, civil servants are responsible for advising ministers on those decisions and helping government to implement policy and administer services.

To make good policy decisions, ministers require good advice from their officials. This is frequently the case, and departments do often produce policies that improve people's lives. But the experience of government in 2022 demonstrated the long-standing problems with Whitehall policy making (more on which below).

The past year also demonstrated the risks of what can happen when the ministerial–official relationship at the heart of policy making breaks down. Nothing made this more clear than the lead-up to and delivery of the disastrous 'mini-budget' by Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng in September 2022.

The Treasury permanent secretary, Sir Tom Scholar, who had been in post since 2016, was sacked immediately after Truss and Kwarteng took office. This prevented him from advising ministers on how best to implement their risky proposals[2] (and, ironically, deprived them of his expertise in managing economic crises in the aftermath). In addition to that, the Office for Budget Responsibility, the government's independent forecaster, was sidelined in the preparations for the budget.

It is ministers' responsibility to set policy, even if officials advise against certain decisions. But the approach taken in the mini-budget to ignore official advice and remove any barrier that might adhere to perceived Treasury 'orthodoxy' contributed to the undermining of the UK's fiscal credibility in response to the statement, which saw the pound fall, gilt yields soar and the Bank of England intervene to protect pension funds.[3] There are ways in which the chancellor could have challenged institutional 'orthodoxy' while engaging with, and taking account of, officials' advice, even where it ran counter to his view. Ensuring the relationship between ministers and officials works, even and especially when ministers do not ultimately agree with officials' conclusions, is an important part of good policy making. 2022 should serve as a warning of the risks of letting that relationship slide.

The civil service should be responsible for providing long-term policy advice

Though much of the disruption of the past six years has been brought about by the twin shocks of Brexit and the pandemic, many of the major problems the UK faces are chronic and long term. The challenge of providing for an ageing society with increasing demand for health and social care, tackling low productivity outside London and the South East, and addressing regional inequality or the climate crisis all predate both. Successive governments' failure to address such problems was shown again in 2022.

The government's work towards net zero may prove to be one of the few examples of effective long-term policy development, helped by innovative legislation that locked in a system of regular advice and monitoring, strengthening scrutiny and making the cost of inaction higher, but still ultimately under parliamentary oversight. This helped to ensure policy development could look beyond the parliamentary cycle and survive successive governments. And later in 2022, the chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, helped to improve long-term policy making in the NHS by announcing a new, "independently verified" forecast of workforce needs to inform planning.[4]

But such cases of long-term policy making are too rare. Ministers and officials lack incentives to take a long-term view. Personnel turnover is a problem on both sides of the relationship – in the UK ministers in particular stay in post for less time than their counterparts in many other countries.[5] 'Permanent civil servants' are supposed to provide more continuity but also move roles too frequently, often between departments with markedly different briefs. As covered in Part 1, 2022 saw a peak of 13.6% of civil servants either moving between departments or leaving the civil service.

Churn is a problem for institutional memory and departmental knowledge management, and it incentivises both ministers and officials to focus on work that might have some effect in the short time they are likely to be in post, rather than what would be most beneficial in years to come. The preference for immediate outcomes rather than lasting change is compounded for ministers by the four- to five-year cycle of parliamentary terms.

The resulting difficulties to tackle long-term policy problems were demonstrated clearly within just the last three months of 2022:

- In October the then local government minister, Paul Scully, announced that the 'fair funding review' – a 2016 initiative intended to improve the allocation of resources to local authorities – would again be delayed, not to be completed during this spending review period.[6]
- In November's autumn statement Jeremy Hunt announced that long-planned reforms to social care charging, including a cap on costs, would once again be delayed for two years from 2023 to 2025 as a result of the country's weaker fiscal outlook.[7]
- In December the housing secretary, Michael Gove, watered down the target to build 300,000 houses per year in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill in the face of opposition from Conservative MPs, instead making it an "advisory... starting point".[8]

It is true that policy making has been disrupted by global events, such as higher-than-expected inflation and war in Ukraine. But none of these events were wholly unforeseeable. Even if their confluence is clearly difficult, long-term policy making must mitigate for wider economic circumstances or shifts in a government's focus.

It is clearer than ever that civil servants must help ministers ensure they are able to take a long-term view. This means giving the civil service its own responsibility for the long-term capability of government and for maintaining a long-term perspective on key policy issues, incorporating that evidence into the advice given to ministers. As set out above, the Institute argues that the government can give the civil service this stewardship responsibility by putting the civil service on a new statutory footing.[9]

This would mean the civil service, and the head of the civil service specifically, ensuring more evidence is available and given to ministers on the long-term implications of policy. The UK can learn in this approach from that taken by the New Zealand government as part of its public service reforms. Departmental chief executives, the equivalent of the UK's permanent secretaries, have a statutory duty to publish long-term insights briefings to inform policy making.[10]

More evidence, advice and analysis should be published

There is a strong case for regularly publishing more civil service policy advice, analysis and evidence during and after the policy making process. Previous Institute for Government research has found that opening the policy making process up to greater external input and scrutiny can prove a key factor in successful policies.[11]

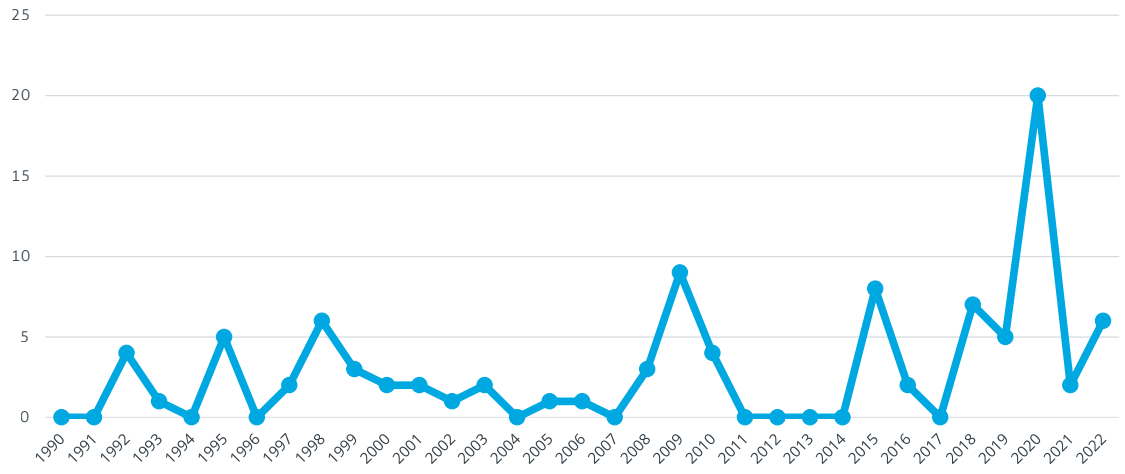
Knowing policy advice would be published would encourage officials to include a high standard of evidence and analysis, and would disincentivise civil servants from telling ministers what they think they want to hear. It would also encourage ministers to engage with official advice and evidence when making their decisions. It would open Whitehall policy making up to better scrutiny from parliament, the wider public sector and beyond.[12] And it would encourage high-calibre external entrants to come into government, some of whom are currently dissuaded from doing so because they fear being forced to defend policies that disregard their recommendations, damaging their professional reputation.[13]

Ministers and senior officials should learn from other parts of government to identify how central government could publish more policy advice in the future. For example, reports for local government cabinet meetings are published ahead of public executive meetings, except in specific circumstances. These papers set out the analysis and business case for decisions before they are formally taken, and often feature named official authors with contact details.[14] Doing so does not prevent local government officers from providing councillors with private advice earlier in the decision making process, but does arguably improve the standard of analysis and evidence used. A similar approach could be taken in Whitehall departments and the UK cabinet.

The need to publish more policy advice and evidence was reiterated in 2022 in the criticism of the Home Office for its closed development of the controversial Rwanda asylum scheme[15] – during which it inadequately engaged with other departments, parts of the public sector or other stakeholders. The Home Office subsequently lost a court battle to prevent the publication of some of the evidence and analysis related to the scheme.[16]

It was the lack of evidence to support ministers' belief that the Rwanda scheme would deter asylum seekers from crossing the Channel in small boats that led the Home Office permanent secretary, Matthew Rycroft, to request a ministerial direction – a formal instruction from a minister to their permanent secretary to proceed with a spending proposal despite the latter's objections – from the home secretary. He did so on the grounds that the civil service was unable to confirm the value for public money that would be achieved by the scheme, in the absence of such evidence.[17]

Figure 3.1 **Ministerial directions by year since 1990**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of *Following the Pound* (2013) based on correspondence with HMT, and of Gov.uk since. Notes: Chart includes technical directions.

Ministerial directions are not a sign that a policy has failed. They have been used in recent years in support of policies most would deem necessary, such as the energy price guarantee and energy bill relief scheme in 2022, or various aspects of government spending on coronavirus in 2020.[18] But they are nevertheless a useful mechanism available to the civil service to identify when there is an absence of evidence in support of a particular aspect of a policy, as with the Rwanda scheme.

However, ministerial directions have never been used on the grounds of feasibility alone, and only rarely on the grounds of feasibility alongside other criteria.[19] Permanent secretaries could make more use of directions on the grounds of feasibility to identify cases where ministers' policy decisions do not align with officials' views of plausible implementation. Complementing the publication of more policy advice, this would allow officials to ensure their expertise regarding delivery is taken fully into account, improving Whitehall policy making.

The Institute also argued in *A new statutory role for the civil service* that the feasibility criterion could be expanded, in the context of the new civil service statute, to give permanent secretaries a means of requesting a direction when ministers' instructions contradict officials' ability to maintain the long-term capability of the civil service and government.

The civil service should make more concrete plans to embed effective models of policy making across government in 2023

The quality of civil service policy advice is affected by the methods used to design and decide policy. So it is important for the civil service to continue to experiment with different models for making policy, spreading and embedding those found to be effective. Doing so can help to incorporate diverse perspectives and experiences, and defend against the risks of 'groupthink'. Examples include the use of multidisciplinary teams[20] and 'red teams'[21] to stress test proposals, and using deliberative methods[22] to involve the public in policy design and decision making – all of which the Institute for Government has argued that the civil service should deploy more frequently and comprehensively.

These methods are sometimes used in government already. For example, since 2014, Policy Lab has worked with almost every government department on more than 180 projects.[*,23] In 2022 it published its first prospectus and innovation strategy, setting out plans to promote new experimental policy design methods across Whitehall.[24,25]

The Policy Profession Standards, used as the competency framework for policy professionals, now include references to the importance of multidisciplinary and multi-professional teams in ensuring diverse inputs in the process of designing policy, and of involving those affected by it. They also refer to formal, written consultations as just "part of a broader, richer process of public dialogue", as well as testing and prototyping ideas, subjecting options to challenge, and the importance of mitigating bias or groupthink.[26]

There are signs that these methods are being used more regularly in parts of the civil service. Multidisciplinary teams, for example, are used on a regular, if ad hoc, basis. In 2020, the cabinet secretary commented to *Civil Service World* that the pandemic had pushed the government to improve its use of red teams to challenge policy choices;[27] in 2021, the Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre of the Ministry of Defence published the third edition of its *Red Teaming Handbook*,[28] while the defence secretary has also referred to red-teaming activities by a new body in the department.[29]

These developments are welcome, but momentum must be kept up across government if these efforts are going to translate into sustained changes to the way departments make policy on a day-to-day basis. High-level political and official advocacy will be essential if positive examples are to be built upon.

It was encouraging that the 2021 *Declaration on Government Reform* committed to improving the range of disciplines and backgrounds in teams that focus on more complex policy issues, as well as using 'red teams' and outside secondees to provide challenge in policy making, and considering 'radical alternatives'. However, it was unfortunate these areas did not feature in the government's planned actions to deliver the declaration in 2021 and since. This is a shame. The actions also included no mention of more closely involving citizens in decision making through deliberative methods, something the Institute has previously argued can both avoid a 'tick box' approach to consultation and enable citizens to shape and make policy more robust.[30]

Concrete plans are required for how these methods will be mainstreamed into regular departmental practices, and robustly upheld as indispensable elements of policy work. So to continue to improve the quality of its policy advice to ministers, the civil service should focus in 2023 on building on good practice highlighted by the likes of Policy Lab and the policy profession.

* Policy Lab is a dedicated team of officials that works with policy teams across the civil service to implement new policy making processes, aiming to embed evidence, participation and experimentation, while drawing on different perspectives.

The recent focus on evaluation is welcome and should now go further

The *Declaration on Government Reform* introduced a renewed focus on improving the evaluation of policy. It stated the government's aim to improve performance included "modernising the operation of government, being clear-eyed about our priorities, and objective in our evaluation of what is and is not working".[31] This translated in part into the creation of the Evaluation Task Force (ETF) the same year.

The ETF is a joint Treasury and Cabinet Office unit established to "put evaluation at the heart of government decisions", which it seeks to achieve by working in three ways:[32]

- Embedding evaluation into decision making – such as by advising Treasury spending teams on what they should expect from departmental evaluations, setting expectations for the role of evaluations and evidence in outcome delivery plans,* and owning *The Magenta Book*.[33]
- Supporting the delivery of priority evaluations – such as by directly helping departments with key evaluations in 10 agreed priority areas,[34] managing the Evaluation Accelerator Fund,[35] and signposting to other relevant support such as the What Works Network for which the ETF is secretariat.
- Promoting the importance of evaluation across government – such as by collating best practice examples of evaluations [36] and designing a new, public registry of evaluations due to be launched in 2024.

The ETF has made good progress. Its mix of promoting good practice, requiring transparency from other parts of government and providing direct support for key priorities is the right approach. But that is yet to lead to a step-change in the quality or prevalence of evaluation in government. As the ETF's strategy explains, "high quality evaluation of government policies is still the exception rather than the rule" – only around half of core Whitehall departments (9 of 16) have published an evaluation strategy.[37]

The ETF has targets that, by 2025, every department will have published an evaluation strategy; every major project and ETF-priority project will have robust evaluation plans; the public registry of evaluations will have launched; and 90% of departments will be compliant with the Treasury's evaluation settlement conditions allocated at spending reviews.[38] These are laudable aims but departments will need to push for better evaluations and greater transparency if they are to be achieved.

* Outcome delivery plans (ODPs) are the government's principal planning document for each department, in which priority outcomes and metrics are agreed, and through which progress is monitored. For further information on the government's ODP framework in Part 3.

This will require sustained political, administrative and financial support. Ministers at the centre of government and in departments will need to make clear that improving evaluation of policy and spending remains a priority. This must filter through to departments such that senior officials expect the approval of submissions and spending proposals to depend on the inclusion of effective evaluation plans. The former national 'What Works' adviser, David Halpern, recently asked whether the Treasury should make departments' spending settlements conditional on the delivery of agreed evaluation plans, with the threat of reduced budgets for those that fail to do so.[39]

Halpern also stressed the importance of external evaluation, arguing that this would improve if an independent body is given the ability to scrutinise public evaluations for each line of government spending agreed at spending reviews. To achieve this level of transparency, departments will need to publish full evaluation plans for each priority outcome in the public version of their next outcome delivery plans, which they did not for the first published round of ODPs.

And if the government is going to expect this improvement in evaluation from departments, the resource needs to be allocated to make it happen. This means long-term support for teams such as the ETF. But it also means R&D resource across departments to enable them to deliver their promised evaluations. During a time of fiscal constraint, such plans will be even more important to inform decision making and ensure that public funds are spent well.

Managing tight budgets

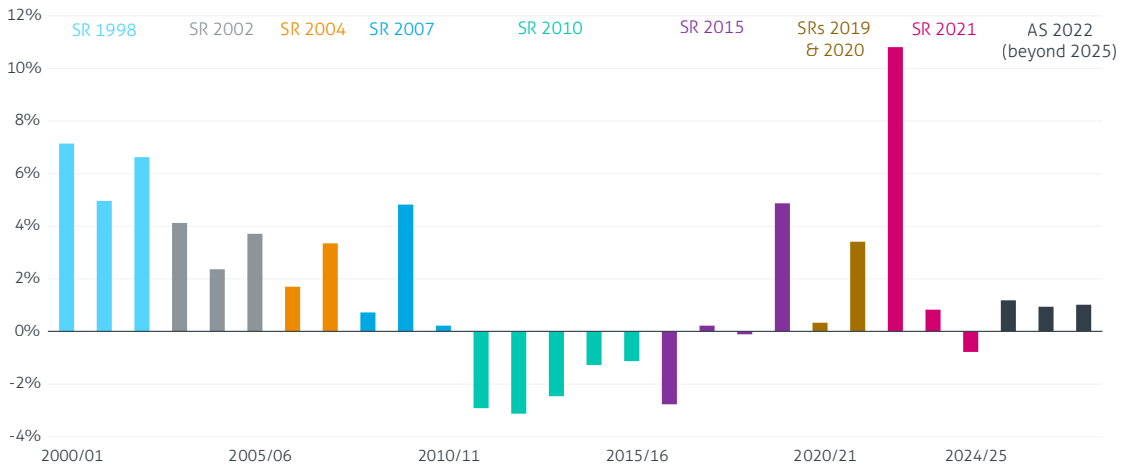
Public spending will barely grow in most departments under current plans

It is a core responsibility of civil servants to manage and administer their department's budgets in support of their ministers' priorities. Departmental budgets are set through Treasury-led spending reviews. As well as administration budgets spent on the running of departments (see Part 1), these allocate day-to-day and capital budgets for departments to spend on their projects, programmes and services.

The October 2021 spending review was described as relatively generous at the time. The settlements announced then implied average annual increases in day-to-day spending of over 3% per year. However, those increases were front-loaded, with big increases in 2022/23 but more modest rises after that. And despite some additional money announced at the autumn statement in November 2022, the generosity of departmental plans have been squeezed by inflation and associated cost pressures, especially on pay.

The front-loading of the 2021 spending review in combination with tight spending plans beyond 2025 mean that overall day-to-day departmental spending is set to increase only very slowly over the next five years, at a pace not seen since the 2010s' austerity era.

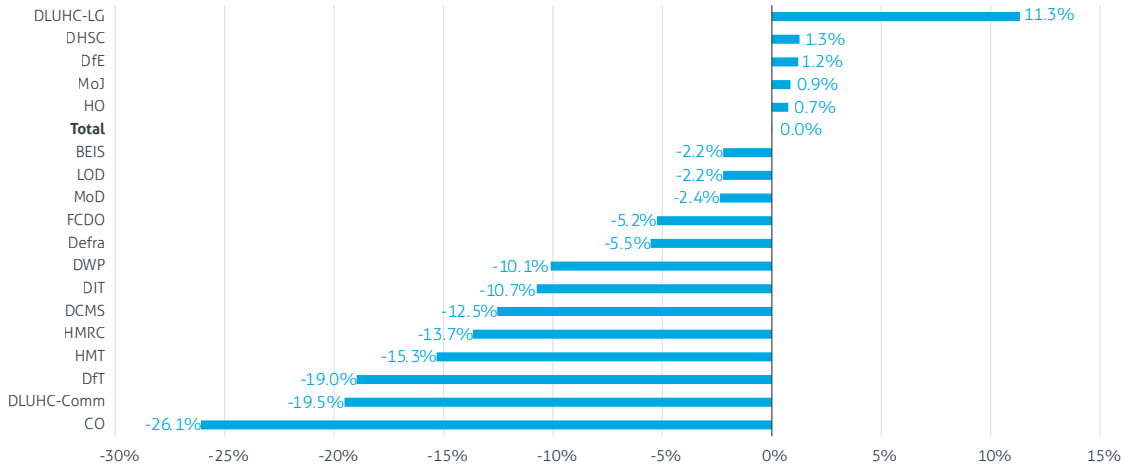
Figure 3.2 **Real-terms annual increase in departmental day-to-day spending (RDEL) excluding temporary covid spending, 2000/01 to 2027/28**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of successive HM Treasury Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses. Notes: SR denotes spending review; AS 2022 denotes autumn statement 2022, which set out provisional overall spending totals up to 2027/28.

Detailed departmental settlements are only available for the next two years. But excluding grants to local government, all departments will see at best modest increases and many will see cuts in real terms in that time period. The context is important: increases are so small over the next two years because the increase this year was so large. If departments want to improve the performance of the programmes and services they oversee beyond this year, they will need to rely on making better use of the money they have rather than being able to increase funding further.

Figure 3.3 **Average annual increase in day-to-day departmental spending (RDEL), 2022/23 to 2024/25 (real terms)**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of HM Treasury, Autumn Statement, November 2022. Notes: DLUHC-LG refers to DLUHC spending on grants to local government. DLUHC-Comm refers to spending out of the housing and communities budget.

The performance framework will be key to managing spending decisions

The government's performance framework, built around a set of 'priority outcomes' and annual outcome delivery plans (ODPs) for each department, is the means by which ministers can make difficult trade-offs, agree priorities and plans, monitor implementation, evaluate impact and change approach where required. It is the civil service's primary tool with which to manage the delivery of the government's priorities.

In winter 2022 the chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Oliver Dowden, confirmed that the government would retain the existing performance framework, rooted in ODPs, as recent Institute work recommended.[40,41] This meant ministers avoided the common mistake made by new administrations to dismantle their predecessor's performance framework and spend valuable time and effort creating their own (often similar) alternative.

Retaining the performance framework was a sensible decision for two principal reasons. First, recent changes have improved the framework: the measurement of objectives in terms of real-world impacts helps to avoid a narrow focus on bureaucracy, while its joint ownership by the Treasury, Cabinet Office and No.10 helps to view financial management alongside wider performance. And the inclusion of evaluation plans has the potential to make government more efficient by enabling departments to learn from what is and is not working.[42]

Second, the framework will be an important means by which civil servants and ministers can manage tight budgets and restrained public spending in years ahead. The Institute and CIPFA's annual *Performance Tracker* found there is "no meaningful 'fat' to trim" from public services, and that further spending reductions are "almost certain to have a further negative impact" on performance.[43] By agreeing plans in departments' priority outcomes and ODPs, ministers and officials can make these difficult trade-offs clearly. And the regular reporting between departments and the centre of government provides a means through which risks can be monitored and the impact of spending decisions can be understood.

Departments were tasked with agreeing any changes to their priority outcomes, first set at the 2020 spending review and updated in 2021, early in 2023. Their new ODPs are expected to be published in the spring. This means that, now ministers have decided to keep the framework, they and senior officials can focus on improving it. Institute for Government research in September 2022 recommended a range of ways it could do this, including by:[44]

- improving the combination of metrics used to measure performance and publishing accompanying targets
- using greater input from the front line, experts and citizens with lived experience to make plans more robust
- publishing the more detailed, internal versions of ODPs and quarterly dashboards detailing departmental performance, to open the framework up to outside input and scrutiny.

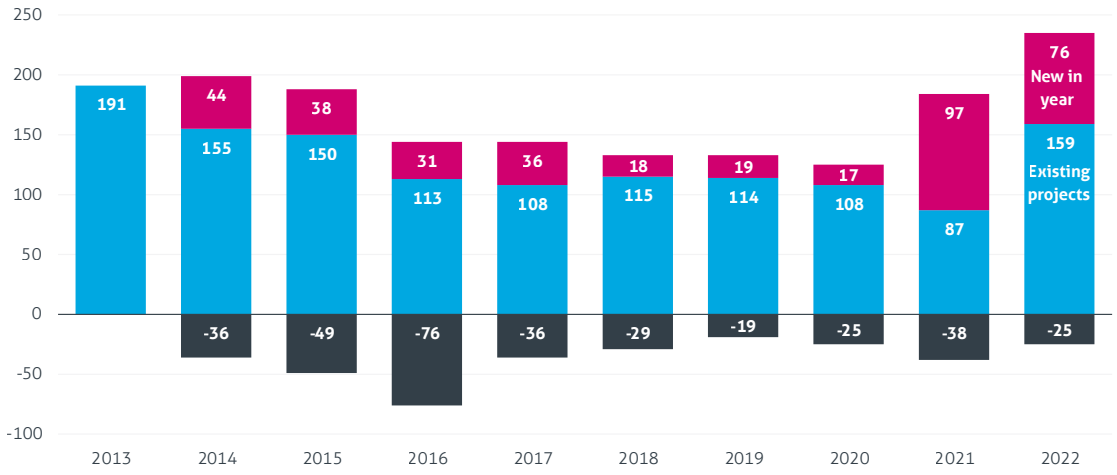
Delivering large projects

The size and cost of the major projects portfolio has grown and remains risky

The delivery of the government's major project portfolio (GMPP)* is a useful indicator of how well the civil service is undertaking its responsibility to implement ministers' priorities. For its part the government sees the portfolio as a key means by which to achieve economic growth and meet the UK's net zero targets.[45] In 2022 the former Cabinet Office minister Jacob Rees-Mogg said that the GMPP overall is expected to deliver more than £700 billion of benefits.[46]

In 2022 the portfolio contained 235 live projects, the largest it has been since its inception in 2013 and almost double its 2020 size. Such projects include the Crossrail programme, which launched London's new Elizabeth line, and the HM Passport Office transformation programme – originally launched in 2016 with the estimated cost of £107 million but retroactively moved to the GMPP in 2021 due its growing scope – costings for which now stand at £289m. Some 76 projects entered the portfolio this year, including the Meteor project, a multinational programme between the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden and Spain on sustaining missile capabilities. Most of the recently added projects started between 2020 and 2022, though some are older. A review into major project governance led to all eligible projects being added to the portfolio, regardless of start date.[47]

Figure 3.4 **Size and composition of the Government Major Projects Portfolio, 2013–22**

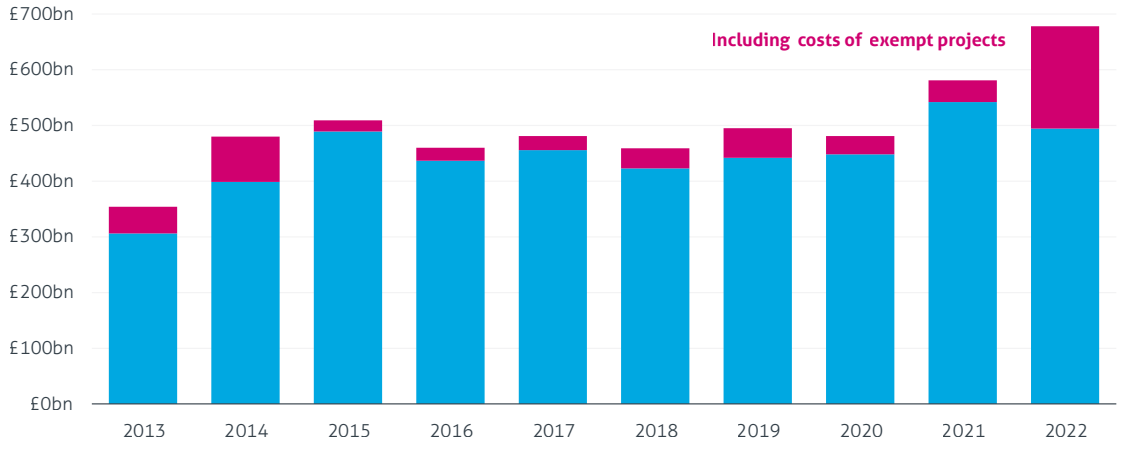


Source: Institute for Government analysis of the Infrastructure and Projects Authority, Annual Report on Major Projects, 2013–22.

* This portfolio is a list of complex projects delivered by government departments. Monitoring the progress of projects and providing support to aid successful delivery is the responsibility of the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA). The GMPP includes the government's main projects in infrastructure, government transformation and service delivery, military capabilities and ICT, so tracking how it develops gives us insight into how the civil service is faring in its delivery of major projects across government.

The portfolio has also grown in total value. The lifetime cost of projects in the portfolio has grown by £97bn this year and now totals £678bn, the largest in the portfolio's history and almost 30% of one year's UK GDP. Of these, the largest projects by value are in the DfT, the MoJ and the MoD. Such projects include the high-profile Phase One of HS2, the high-speed railway line connecting London to the West Midlands, or the MoJ's Accelerated Houseblock Programme, a project aimed at delivering 2,500 new houseblocks in prisons to accommodate the forecasted rising prison population. Many MoD projects are exempt from providing individual costings for security reasons, however some are known, such as the Land Environment Tactical Communication and Information System programme, a tactical military communications project, which will cost more than £13bn.

Figure 3.5 **Whole life cost of Government Major Projects Portfolio by year, 2013–22**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of the Infrastructure and Projects Authority, Annual Report on Major Projects, 2013–22. Notes: Exempt projects are projects with data (including costings) that are exempt from publication; for example, for national security purposes. While the costings of individual exempt projects are not available, the total costings are.

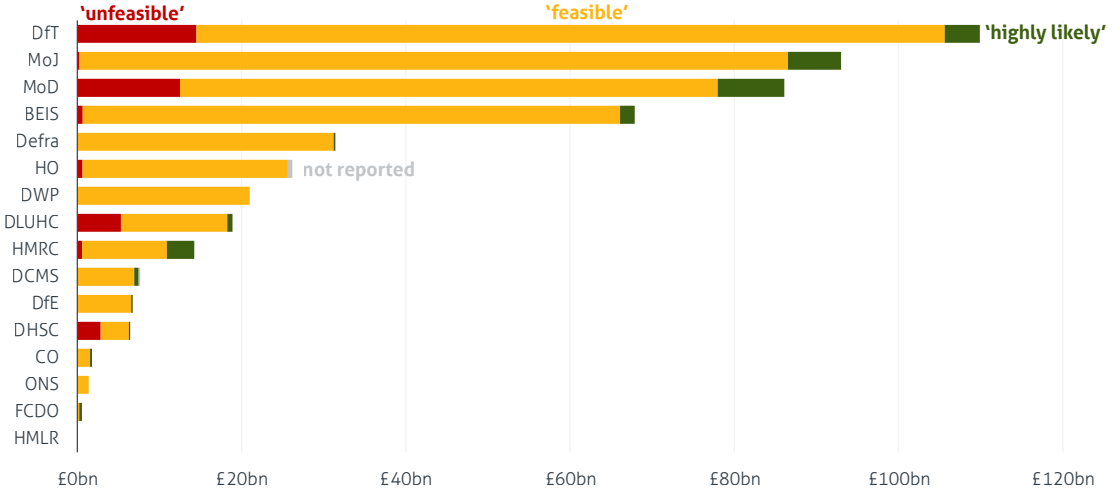
The purpose of placing projects in the GMPP is to monitor the most important strategic, long-term projects the government is delivering and ensure those projects are managed as effectively as possible by the civil service. This is made more difficult as the portfolio grows. It has also been made more difficult by changes to the risk rating system. Previous years used a five-category system from Red, Amber/Red, Amber, Amber/Green to Green.* This has been replaced by a three-category system of Red, Amber and Green. With recategorisation many previous and new projects have moved into the amber category, which now accounts for 72% of projects in the portfolio.

This change is explained as helping to make high-risk projects more easily identifiable.[48] By highlighting projects most at risk (27 red projects in total) the rationale is this enables resources to be focused on these projects so they can leave the GMPP on schedule. However, with so many projects grouped into one category, this makes the system less nuanced and so less useful for distinguishing which projects warrant greater attention within that grouping.

* The colours indicate the likely success of a project achieving its aims and objectives on time and on budget. Red = unachievable. Amber/Red = Doubtful due to major or numerous risks. Amber = Feasible, however significant issues exist. Amber/Green = Probably, however constant attention is needed to prevent risks materialising. Green = Achievable.

Despite this, it still indicates the inherent riskiness of the portfolio. Only £27bn worth of projects are rated green (that is, expected to finish on time). That means over 90% of the portfolio value is rated amber at best, meaning there is some risk that the majority of projects in the portfolio will not be delivered on time. Some £37bn by value are rated red, meaning that successful delivery of these projects is judged to be unachievable.

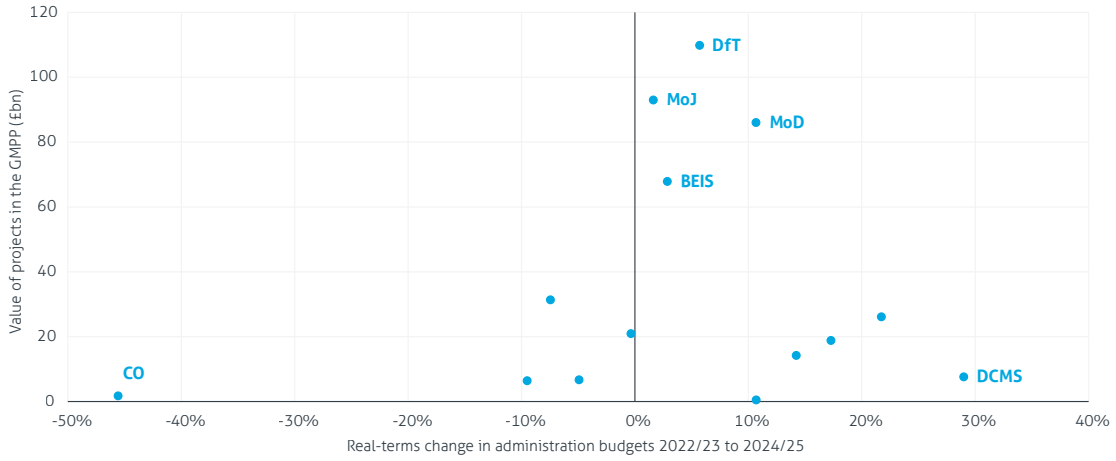
Figure 3.6 **Cost of Government Major Projects Portfolio by department in 2022 with the confidence rating compositions**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of the Infrastructure and Projects Authority, Annual Report on Major Projects, 2021–22. Notes: Excluding projects where cost and risk ratings are exempt. HMLR refers to HM Land Registry.

Squeezed administration budgets will make managing the portfolio more difficult

Figure 3.7 **Size of major projects portfolio and change in administration budgets across departments**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of successive HM Treasury, Online System for Central Accounting and Reporting annual publication, and Infrastructure and Projects Authority, Annual Report, 2022. Notes: Only includes projects where cost and risk rating are not exempt.

As noted in Part 1, spending on civil service administration is set to fall over the next few years. Managing projects effectively requires sufficient civil service resources within departments devoted to those projects, so these cuts could pose a risk to delivery if they fall on teams managing projects. Previous Institute for Government research has highlighted that a lack of administration resource during the 2010s hindered efforts to spend departmental investment budgets well; for example, MHCLG had to delay spending money through the Housing Infrastructure Fund in 2018 and 2019 as it took longer than expected to evaluate bids.[49]

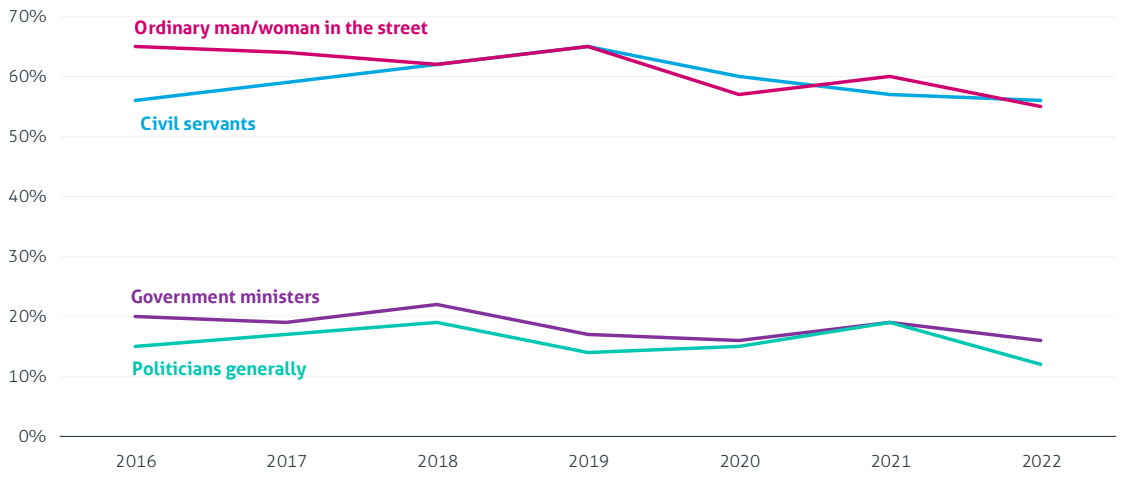
The departments with the largest project portfolios – including DfT and MoJ – all have administration budgets that are relatively protected over the next few years, which reduces the risk that insufficient attention will be paid to these projects within Whitehall. But in an era of tight spending, the government should be wary of excessive cuts to delivery teams: this could prove to be an expensive false economy if high-cost projects get into trouble as a result.

Working transparently and communicating effectively

Trust in civil servants to tell the truth continues to fall

The No.10 press office faced criticism in 2022 for misleading journalists about lockdown-breaking parties in Downing Street. The cabinet secretary, Simon Case, suggested that the official spokesman's subsequent apology was important for the relationship between press officers and the media[50] – but such incidents risk damaging the reputation of the civil service. Honesty is one of the values of the civil service code – officials must not "deceive or knowingly mislead ministers, Parliament or others" and the cabinet secretary should ensure that civil servants uphold that duty.[51]

Figure 3.8 **Public trust in professions, 2016–22**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of Ipsos MORI, Ipsos Veracity Index, 2016–22. Notes: Trust is measured as the percentage of people trusting each profession to tell the truth.

Public trust in civil servants continues to fall from the high of 65% in 2019 – currently 56% of people trust civil servants to tell the truth, slightly more than the proportion who trust the 'ordinary man or woman in the street' (55%). This figure is also much higher than that for government ministers (16%) and politicians in general (12%).[52] People in Great Britain are more likely to consider civil servants to be trustworthy than people in Germany, the United States and South Korea, though they are less likely than people in Canada, France and Denmark.[53]

Some groups are less likely to trust civil servants: half or fewer of people from the lowest socio-economic background (41%) and people in the north of England (50%) now trust civil servants. Clear, effective communication and transparency over the way government works are two means by which trust in ministers and officials can be improved.

Communication remains vital to the government's priorities, despite fewer ministerial press conferences following the acute phase of the pandemic

The end of the acute phase of the pandemic meant direct communication to the public by ministers reduced substantially, both in quantity and urgency, compared to 2020 and 2021. But throughout 2022, government communications remained important to policy outcomes, albeit in different form.

In response to the Russia–Ukraine war, the Government Communication Service (GCS) established the Government Information Cell, which the GCS chief executive, Simon Baugh, said worked to "identify and counter Kremlin disinformation targeted at UK and international audiences", including via quickly declassifying intelligence and communicating it publicly.[54] In response to the cost-of-living crisis, the government launched a 'Help for Households' campaign, which Baugh said helped to promote 50,000 more claims for pension credit than in the previous six months.[55] And the death of the Queen required a carefully choreographed 12-day communications campaign to make the public aware of the commemorative activities.

However, in some instances the importance of communication to the government's policy goals was not adequately recognised. For example, the delay in launching an energy saving campaign, which eventually began on 17 December 2022 almost nine months after Russia's invasion of Ukraine precipitated further difficulties in the supply of energy, was partly caused by ministerial churn preventing a decision being made (and stuck to). But that does not excuse the lack of action for months prior, during which many expert observers, including the Institute for Government, had called for such a campaign.[56]

Government communicators need to consciously guard ethical boundaries

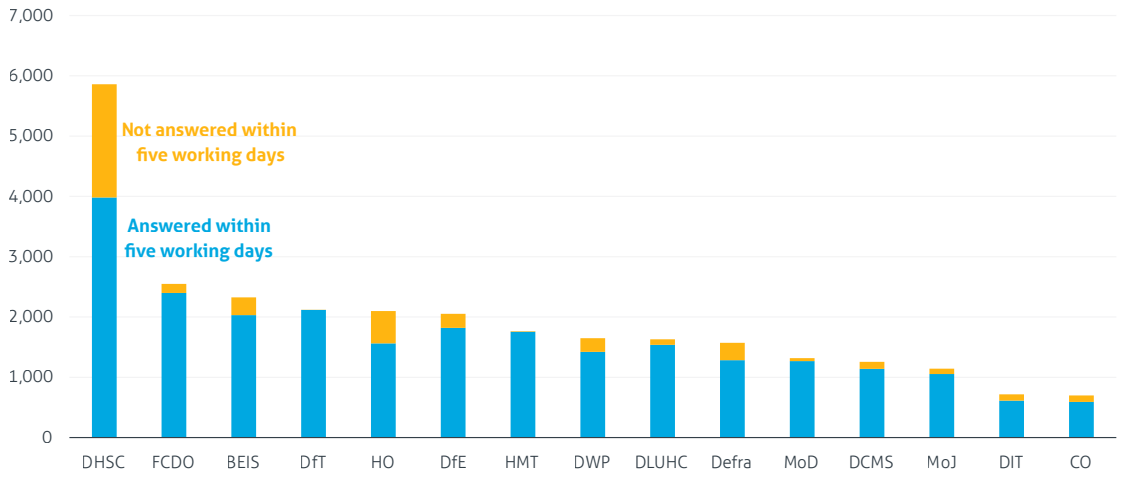
The role of the GCS is to communicate the activities of the government to citizens, not to engage in partisan communication. As the service's 2022–25 strategy puts it: "Any statement that comes from official government channels should be justified by the facts. It should be objective and explanatory."[57]

However, government communications sometimes fell short of this standard in 2022. The No.10 press office repeatedly denied that parties took place in Downing Street during the coronavirus pandemic – only for the prime minister's official spokesperson to subsequently admit they in fact had, and to apologise on record once fines were issued and Sue Gray's report was released. Government communicators need to be aware of their ethical responsibilities as set out in the GCS propriety guidance, and held to account for meeting them.

The government has yet to return to its pre-pandemic levels of transparency

The demand for information from government has remained high since the start of the pandemic. In the 2021–22 session, 334 written parliamentary questions (WPQs) were tabled per Commons sitting day, slightly up from 331 in the 2019–21 session but much higher than 279 from 2017–19.

Figure 3.9 **Written questions (for ordinary answer) tabled per government department, 2021–22 session**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of House of Commons Procedure Committee, 'Written parliamentary questions: Departmental performance in Session 2021–22', July 2022.

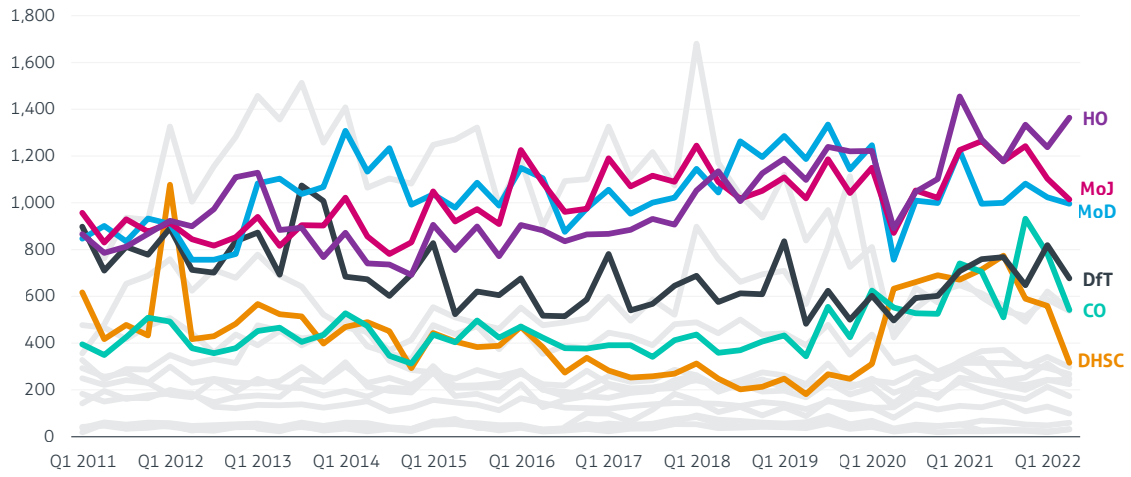
There was an increase in the proportion of answers provided by government departments on time – up from 79% to 85% of ordinary questions. But this is still short of the 2017–19 session, in which 92% were answered on time.

Departments that performed poorly from December 2021 to March 2022 attributed their slow response times to higher volumes or greater complexity of the WPQs received. DHSC performed the worst out of any department, answering just two thirds (68%) of questions within five working days, but the department also received the most ordinary questions at 5,859. This can understandably be attributed to increased demand for information about Covid and the government's response, though the department tended to receive more WPQs than other departments even before the pandemic. In the 2017–19 session it received 8,843 ordinary questions (the closest department was the Home Office, with 5,127) and it answered 98.5% on time. DHSC has increased the number of civil servants responding to WPQs,[58] but as of July 2022 the Commons Procedure Committee had not considered the department to have reached an acceptable level of performance.

Other relatively slow responders were the Home Office, which received 2,098 WPQs of which 74% were answered on time, and Defra (82% of 1,572). But the Treasury (1,764) and DfT (2,121) received comparatively high volumes of WPQs and answered all of them within five working days.

The Commons Procedure Committee has argued that answering WPQs should be treated as a "core delivery task" by departments.[59] Responding to written questions is an important way for the civil service to support ministers in demonstrating their accountability to parliament, including during periods of high demand.

Figure 3.10 **Freedom of Information requests received by government departments, Q1 2011 to Q2 2022**

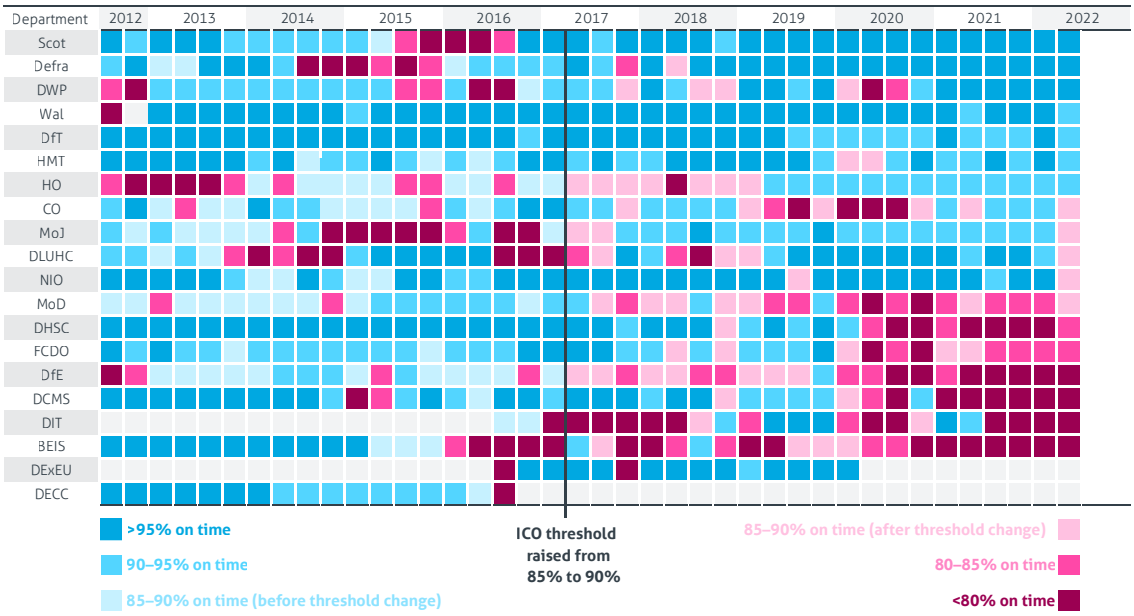


Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office, Freedom of Information Statistics, Q1 2011 to Q2 2022.

The government continued to receive a high volume of Freedom of Information (FoI) requests, though the demand has decreased since the height of the pandemic. Central government received 12,152 requests in the second quarter of 2022, a 6.4% decrease from Q2 2021 but still greater than the 11,137 requests during the same quarter in 2019.

In the last year, DHSC maintained its high level of FoI requests before falling from 559 in Q1 2022 to 316 requests in the next quarter, close to pre-pandemic figures. The Department for Education received 305 fewer FoI requests in the year to June 2022 than in the same time the previous year, as school disruption due to Covid was reduced. The Home Office received 238 more in this period as the department continued to face greater scrutiny, including for its controversial Rwanda asylum deal.

Figure 3.11 **Timeliness of responses to FoI requests by department, Q3 2012 to Q2 2022**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office, Freedom of Information statistics, Q3 2012 to Q2 2022.
Notes: DECC, DExEU and DIT are partial series due to the creation and/or dissolution of these departments.

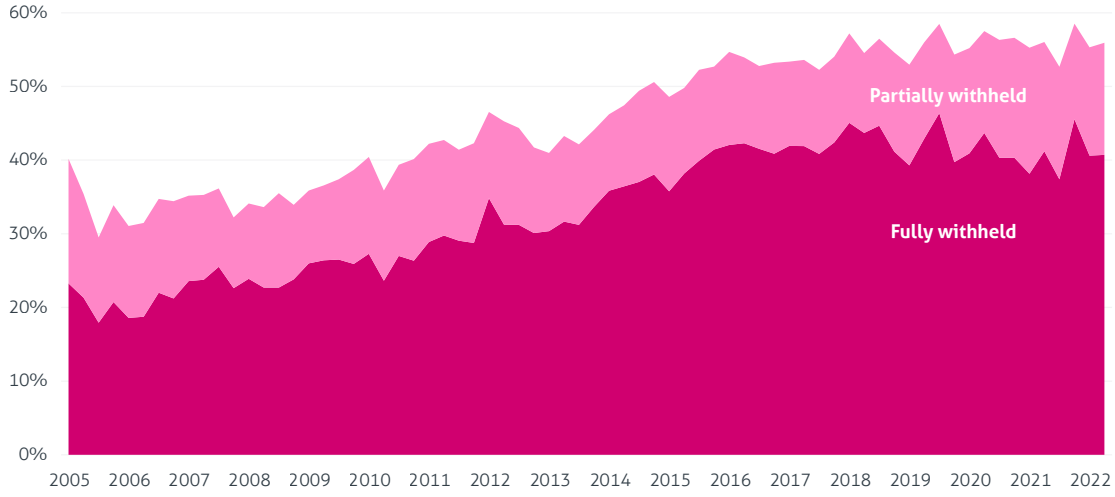
Government departments are required to respond (or claim extensions) to FoI requests within 20 working days if their response is considered to be 'on time'. If a department does not meet this target for at least 90% of its FoI requests, the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) may place it under special monitoring. In the second quarter of 2022, only seven of 18 government departments (39%) met the 90% target.

In September 2022, the ICO issued an enforcement notice to DIT for persistently failing to meet the statutory time limit – in the first quarter of 2022, the department responded late to 55% of its FoI requests.[60] This requires DIT to address its backlog of FoI requests and to publish an action plan to prevent against future delays – or risk being found in contempt of court.

DHSC and FCDO continue to perform poorly – they have not met the target since before the pandemic. Conversely, the Scotland Office and Defra's FoI responses have all been within 20 working days since Q2 2021.

At a recent Institute for Government event the information commissioner, John Edwards, suggested that the government takes too long to respond to FoI requests, pointing to the potential to establish a network of FoI practitioners to learn lessons and share best practice between departments.[61]

Figure 3.12 **Freedom of Information requests partially or fully withheld by government departments, Q1 2005 to Q2 2022**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office, Freedom of Information Statistics, 2005 to Q2 2022.

In the second quarter of 2022, 15.2% of FoI requests were partially withheld and a further 40.7% were fully withheld. The proportion of withheld FoI requests by the government rose to 58.5% in the last quarter of 2021, the highest level since Q3 2019. This reflects a long-term trend since 2005 – when the Freedom of Information Act came into effect – of a sustained increase in the proportion of partially or fully withheld FoI requests. Indeed, the last time that more than half of FoI requests were fully granted was in 2015.

There were signs that the Johnson government was more hostile than its predecessors towards transparency. In July 2021 the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) launched an inquiry into the Cabinet Office's use of a 'clearing house' to co-ordinate responses to FoI requests across government, following campaigning by the openDemocracy media organisation.[62] The inquiry found a number of problems in the FoI process, including poor communication and delays and the criteria by which 'public interest' is evaluated.[63] PACAC suggested the Cabinet Office's position as lead department on FoI means it should set an example of best practice across government by proactively advocating for a culture of transparency.

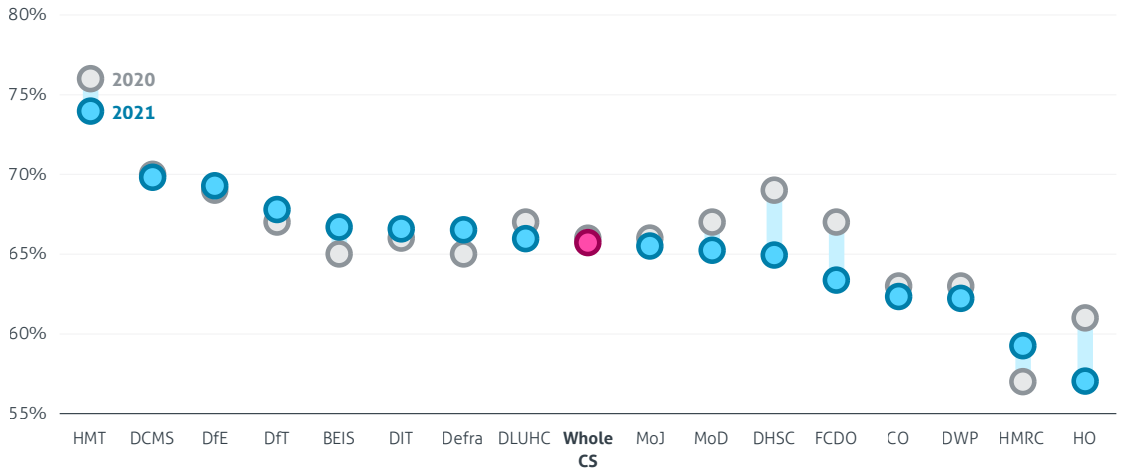
The government largely rejected the committee's recommendations but instead did accept the recommendations from a separate, internally commissioned review into the clearing house.[64] Some of the recommendations of the internal review were similar to PACAC's, such as ending the sharing of FoI requesters' names around departments – but they did not include the committee's recommendation for advocating a culture of transparency, nor a proposed audit by the information commissioner. The Cabinet Office has piloted the exclusion of requester names but it is unclear whether the new system has been implemented.[65]

Leading an engaged, motivated workforce

Engagement scores have stalled, signalling a problem for civil service management

After rising consistently since 2015, the civil service's engagement scores in its 2021 staff survey stalled at 66%. And in a letter to civil servants in December 2022, the cabinet secretary, Simon Case, revealed that the headline summary scores of the 2022 staff survey had fallen in most departments since 2021.[66]

Figure 3.13 **Employee engagement by department, 2020–21**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of Cabinet Office, Civil Service People Survey, 2020–21.

The survey's employee engagement index reflects civil servants' attitudes to their organisation, measuring pride, advocacy, attachment, inspiration and motivation.

Engagement has fallen by four percentage points in the Home Office (57%), FCDO (63%) and DHSC (65%). The FCDO's engagement score is lower than it was in 2010 (68%) and is below the civil service average for the first time, following a downward trend since the merger of FCO and DfID. Other departments, however, improved from 2020 to 2021 – engagement has increased by two percentage points in BEIS (67%), Defra (67%) and HMRC (59%).

The People Survey results in part reflect increased workload due to the pandemic. But since the 2021 survey was conducted, there have been two changes of prime minister, and civil servants have faced tension with government ministers over flexible working arrangements, proposed headcount reductions and pay and conditions. In the 2022 survey, civil servants expressed significant concerns over pay and benefits, as well as uncertainty in a period of rapid change. Worryingly, a minority of civil servants (41%) now report that their organisation motivates them to help achieve its objectives, down from 51% in 2021.[67]

Senior officials and ministers should see improving workforce engagement as a key priority for 2023 because poor morale undermines the effectiveness of the civil service and, by extension, the likelihood that the government's priorities will be achieved. Low staff engagement highlights the importance of the government's reform programme, and in particular in areas such as career progression. The appointment in September 2022 of the new chief people officer, Fiona Ryland, presents an opportunity to renew efforts to raise morale.

The civil service has found that engagement is driven primarily by organisational leadership and the way in which change is handled.[68] Both ministers and senior leaders in the civil service have an important part to play in managing change well and factoring in the views of staff, to ensure the workforce is committed to their organisation's objectives.

The year ahead

Managing tight budgets and workforce morale will be a key test for civil service leaders

The government is planning to cut spending on departmental administration by 8% by 2024/25. Unless plans are updated in the spring budget, departments' pay bills are still expected to be cut even more starkly – a 25% fall in two years. Even if those plans shift now that Rishi Sunak has dropped the target of cutting 91,000 roles from the civil service in favour of a more nuanced approach to efficiencies, departments will still face difficult decisions about how to manage tight administration budgets during a period of high inflation.

This will be a key test for civil service leaders in 2023. The pressure to meet the 91,000 target has eased, but efficiencies are still on the table and it will be for departments to decide the best way to manage their budgets while safeguarding their capabilities. This will not be easy. A decade of real-terms pay cuts, a period of acute inflation and a winter of industrial action across the civil service have demonstrated how difficult the government will find maintaining pay restraint as a method of making savings in 2023.

This context is affecting the morale of the civil service workforce, which declined in 2021 and 2022 for the first time since 2015, further weakened by a year of strained relationships between ministers and officials. Good morale and engagement are integral to how well the civil service performs and to the talent it can attract and retain. Civil servants who feel valued, supported and developed are more likely to achieve ministers' objectives. Creating the environment to improve morale will be the other key test of civil service leaders in the year ahead.

The civil service's work will be affected by Sunak's performance in parliament

The civil service is responsible for implementing ministers' priorities – but these will in turn be heavily determined by what the Sunak government is able to pass through parliament. The difficulty of Conservative Party parliamentary management in 2022 set the terms for what the Johnson and Truss governments could, and could not, achieve. Record levels of ministerial resignations brought Johnson down in July; by October, chaos in the division lobbies following a vote on fracking accelerated Truss's downfall.[1]

Sunak has succeeded in slowing the pace of Westminster's political drama, the government's working majority remains above 70, and its control of the order paper gives it some ability to affect how controversial bills are put to MPs. Nonetheless, his

government must recognise that its priorities continue to be determined by what its increasingly restive and organised backbenchers – many of whom backed the prime minister's rivals throughout 2022 and have developed a taste for rebellion – will tolerate. This will continue to shape the priorities for the civil service in the two years remaining of this parliament.

At the end of 2022 Sunak was forced to give in to backbench rebellions on onshore wind and housebuilding. As the government returns to difficult manifesto pledges including planning reform, and seeks to use legislation to make progress on new pledges such as Sunak's commitment to legislate on small boat crossings, parliamentary numbers will continue to determine how much the government can deliver before the next election.

Reform took a back seat last year – leaders should revive momentum in 2023

After the publication of the *Declaration on Government Reform* in the summer of 2021, efforts to reform the civil service, and government more broadly, lost momentum amid the political turmoil and ministerial churn of 2022. Some areas, which enjoyed continued ministerial support, managed to make progress, such as on public bodies and appointments, relocating officials outside London and improving the training and development offer for civil servants. But many others stalled or made slower progress, such as in reducing churn of officials between roles, improving external recruitment and interchange, or mapping and replacing legacy IT.

Reform is crucial to making government more effective in the future. Now that the ministerial ranks are, for the time being, more stable, Oliver Dowden and Jeremy Quin – the two ministers in the Cabinet Office responsible for reform – should demonstrate their commitment to the agenda and refresh momentum behind the unmet aspirations in the declaration. They and civil service leaders should go further: for example, by plugging some of the gaps left by the 2022–25 diversity and inclusion strategy, going further to spread best practice in policy making and evaluation, and taking concrete steps to improve external recruitment and interchange. They should safeguard the progress being made by the Government Skills and Curriculum Unit and towards key digital reforms such as GOV.UK One Login, which stand to make the civil service more efficient in the future. Beyond that, the civil service should use the lessons of 2022 to build a strategic case for long-term improvement and reform.

Methodology

Throughout report

Defining departments

Where possible, we categorise bodies into 'departmental groups' according to where ministerial responsibility lies, even when these are reported under a separate departmental heading in the original ONS Public Sector Employment data. For instance, we group Ofsted with the DfE departmental group and not as a separate department.

In such cases where source data reports organisations as independent from core departments, we have identified the departmental group to which those organisations belong by using the 'sponsor department' identified by the most recent (2020) Public Bodies report published by the Cabinet Office.

We then make the following distinction within each departmental group:

- **Department:** the core department, and other bodies within and linked to it, that are directly line managed by the department (for example, HM Prison and Probation Service within MoJ, and the Education and Skills Funding Agency within DfE).

- **Other organisations:** other bodies employing civil servants – executive agencies, non-ministerial departments and crown non-departmental public bodies – for which ministers in the department have responsibility (for example, Ofsted in DfE, the DVLA in DfT) but which are not part of the department's line management structure.

We have made these distinctions using publicly available evidence of organisations' governance and structure, such as departmental organograms and governing documents.

We use this distinction as most appropriate in specific parts of the report, for example:

- We use the wider 'departmental group' in our analysis of staff numbers, grade, location and profession.

- We use the department as defined by the cited source data on pay, turnover and Freedom of Information.

A table listing the departments and their associated organisations is found overleaf. We have not included organisations which no longer exist, for example because they have been merged with other bodies or renamed. However historic organisations are counted in our figures for change over time, and details of those used in our analysis is available upon request.

List of departments and associated organisations

Abbreviation	Department	Other organisations
AGO	Attorney General's Office	Crown Prosecution Service; Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate; Government Legal Department; Serious Fraud Office
BEIS	Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy	Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service; Companies House; Competition and Markets Authority; HM Land Registry; Insolvency Service; UK Intellectual Property Office; Met Office; Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem); Ordnance Survey; UK Space Agency
CO	Cabinet Office Government Property Agency	Crown Commercial Service; UK Statistics Authority
DCMS	Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport	Charity Commission; National Archives; Building Digital UK
Defra	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	Animal and Plant Health Agency; Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science; Ofwat; Rural Payments Agency; Veterinary Medicines Directorate
DExEU	Department for Exiting the European Union (created July 2016, to be abolished January 2020)	N/A
DfE	Department for Education Education and Skills Funding Agency; Standards and Testing Agency; Teaching Regulation Agency	Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation; Ofsted; Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education
DfT	Department for Transport	Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency; Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency; Maritime and Coastguard Agency; Office of Rail and Road; Vehicle Certification Agency; Active Travel England
DHSC	Department of Health and Social Care	Food Standards Agency; Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency; UK Health Security Agency
DIT	Department for International Trade	Export Credits Guarantee Department
DLUHC	Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (formerly the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government)	Planning Inspectorate; Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions	The Health and Safety Executive

FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office Wilton Park Executive Agency	FCDO Services
HMRC	HM Revenue and Customs	Valuation Office Agency
HMT	HM Treasury	Debt Management Office; Government Actuary's Department; Government Internal Audit Agency; National Savings and Investments; Office for Budget Responsibility; National Infrastructure Commission
HO	Home Office	National Crime Agency
MoD	Ministry of Defence Defence Equipment and Support; Defence Electronics and Components Agency; Submarine Delivery Agency	Defence Science and Technology Laboratory; UK Hydrographic Office
MoJ	Ministry of Justice HM Courts and Tribunals Service; Legal Aid Agency; HM Prison and Probation Service; Office of the Public Guardian; Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority	UK Supreme Court
NIO	Northern Ireland Office	N/A
Scot Gov	Scottish Government	Accountant in Bankruptcy; Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal; Disclosure Scotland; Education Scotland; Food Standards Scotland; Forestry and Land Scotland; National Records of Scotland; Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator; Registers of Scotland; Revenue Scotland; Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service; Scottish Fiscal Commission; Scottish Forestry; Scottish Housing Regulator; Scottish Prison Service; Scottish Public Pensions Agency; Social Security Scotland; Student Awards Agency for Scotland; Transport Scotland
Welsh Gov	Welsh Government	ESTYN; Welsh Revenue Authority
WO	Wales Office	N/A

Defining civil servants

We define civil servants as politically impartial, appointed officials of the UK Home Civil Service, which supports the work of the UK's central government departments. This includes agencies that employ civil servants such as executive agencies, non-ministerial departments and some non-departmental public bodies.

Our definition includes staff of the three Whitehall-based territorial offices that manage the UK's relationship with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. And we include the civil servants employed by the devolved governments of Wales and Scotland, but not the staff of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, which is administratively distinct.

In this way, civil servants are defined more narrowly than public sector workers: police, teachers, NHS staff, members of the armed forces or local government officers are not counted as civil servants. Nor do we include the UK's diplomatic service in our analysis since it, too, is administratively separate from the UK Home Civil Service.

Civil service grades

Broadly, there are five civil service job grades:

1. **Administrative Officer/Administrative Assistant (AO/AA)** – the most junior civil service grade. These roles tend to comprise administrative support and operational delivery roles, such as prison officers and caterers.
2. **Executive Officer (EO).** Civil servants in this grade offer business and policy support and include roles such as executive assistants, finance, HR, IT and communications specialists.
3. **Senior Executive Officer/Higher Executive Officer (SEO/HEO)** includes policy officers and officials with specific policy responsibilities.
4. **Grades 6 and 7 civil servants** tend to be experienced officials with significant policy responsibilities.
5. **Senior Civil Service (SCS)** is the most senior grade of the civil service made up of the senior management team. Generally, directors are ultimately responsible for the policy work of their team and directors general oversee directors and work closely with the department's ministers. Each department also has a permanent secretary as part of the SCS who supports the minister at the head of the department, acts as the accounting officer and is responsible for the day-to-day running of the department.

Inflation/real-terms figures

For government spending information that spans multiple years, we use the GDP deflator to present numbers in consistent prices. The GDP deflator is a measure of economy-wide inflation and so is appropriate for considering changes in government spending. We use the GDP deflator published alongside the November 2022 autumn statement, adjusting the figure for 2020/21 to be the midpoint of the 2019/20 and 2021/22 values as the pandemic affected the deflator's measurement. For information on pay, we use the Consumer Price Index (CPI) to present numbers in consistent prices as this is the relevant measure to understand how much pay packets are worth to households.

Overview

Ministerial resignations

Our tally of resignations includes only those outside of reshuffles; those during reshuffles are often difficult to discern from sackings (although we do include Jonathan Aitken's resignation in 1995, where he resigned to fight a libel action).

We do not count those who announced in advance they would step down at the next reshuffle, or those who were sacked, except Johnny Mercer, who was planning to resign before being sacked. Firings are, however, listed in our open spreadsheets of resignations at http://bit.ly/2OXZ81a and http://bit.ly/2D0Vxr6. This means our numbers may differ very slightly from others'.

We also do not include Alok Sharma's resignation from the post of secretary of state for BEIS in January 2021 as he did not leave the government but resigned to focus on his other post, president of the COP26 climate conference, and he still attended cabinet until Rishi Sunak became prime minister.

Part 1

Civil service staff numbers

To analyse civil service staff numbers, we use Table 9 from the ONS's quarterly Public Sector Employment series, which contains staff numbers (headcount and full-time equivalent, FTE) in all public organisations that employ civil servants. Unless stated otherwise, we use FTE figures, which count part-time staff according to the time they work (e.g. a person working two days a week as 0.4 FTE); this is more accurate than headcount, which does not distinguish between full-time and part-time employees.

Our calculated rates of change in each period for each department are adjusted for reclassifications of staff between bodies. Reclassifications are usually noted by the ONS in footnotes to the data tables. We adjust for reclassifications in our rates of change calculations to more accurately portray the changing size of departments, rather than changes to the way officials are counted and reported.

Our figures exclude temporary Census Field staff.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for International Development (DfID) were merged to form the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) in Q3 2020. Our calculated rates of change for FCDO over time are assumed to be equivalent to the sum of the figures for the two component departments for quarters prior to Q3 2020; the same applies for BEIS before the merger of BIS and DECC.

For operational security reasons, staff from Central Government Security (formerly Security and Intelligence Services) have been excluded from civil service statistics published since Q2 2016. We adjust for this by manually excluding Central Government Security staff from our datasets before this date, too.

To analyse other characteristics of the civil service, such as age, pay, profession, location and ethnicity, we use the Cabinet Office's annual Civil Service Statistics release. To analyse the engagement and experience of civil servants, we use the Cabinet Office's annual People Survey.

Staff numbers are generally reported to the nearest 10. The ONS and the Cabinet Office (for its Civil Service Statistics) report staff numbers lower than five as "..". We have rounded any staff numbers lower than five to three.

For further information about the Institute's analysis of civil service staff numbers, see our explainer on the topic.

Turnover

Data on civil service staff turnover is derived from the annual Cabinet Office Civil Service Statistics dataset (Tables 20, 42 and 43). We use headcount rather than full-time equivalent staff for all staff turnover calculations. Figures relate to the core department and do not include agencies within the departmental group.

External staff turnover is calculated as the number of civil servants who left the civil service entirely over the course of a given year, as a percentage of the average civil service headcount during that period. Average civil service headcount is calculated as the mean of civil service headcount at the beginning and end of the interval (for instance, headcount in March 2021 and March 2022 for the period 2021–22). We use average headcount to account for the fact that the number of civil servants changes over the course of the year.

Internal staff turnover ('churn') is calculated as the number of civil servants who transferred to another department over the course of a given year, as a percentage of the average civil service headcount during that period. This is an underestimate of real internal turnover in the civil service because it does not include civil servants who transferred to another role within the same department. Unfortunately, data on staff transfers within departments is not publicly available.

Total staff turnover is calculated as the number of civil servants who either left the civil service entirely or transferred to another department over the course of a given year, as a percentage of the average civil service headcount during that period. This is an underestimate of real total staff turnover in the civil service for the same reasons detailed above.

Public bodies

Throughout this report we use 'public bodies' which includes public corporations, unclassified bodies and parliamentary bodies, to encompass the widest possible group of organisations. However, in a number of charts we are relying on Cabinet Office data which is limited to a narrower subset, 'arm's length bodies'. This category only encompasses non-departmental public bodies, executive agencies, and non-ministerial departments.

To calculate the 2022 number of arm's length bodies, we looked at 2020 figures and added in the abolition of Public Health England, and the creation of the UK Health Security Agency, the Office for Environmental Protection and the Trade Remedies Authority, all of which came into being or were officially classified between March 2020 and March 2022. We did not include the abolition of NHS Improvement, which was only completed in the summer of 2022.

Budgets, spend and cost

Our analysis uses the Online System for Central Accounting and Reporting (OSCAR) II annual data taken from three releases (2022 for 2017/18–2021/22, 2015 for 2015/16 and 2016/17 and 2015 for 2010/11–2014/15) to assemble financial returns from 2010 through to 2022.

We used final out-turn figures and excluded so-called 'non-budget' and 'non-voted' expenses, as these are more likely to include double-counted figures or revaluations. This means that the data does not include spending granted directly away to the devolved administrations or local authorities.

Pay spending data includes spending on the recovery of pay costs. When calculating total arm's-length body pay, we excluded teachers' pay ('Academies') and those employed by NHS trusts ('NHS Trusts' and 'Foundation Trusts') as these staff are not directly employed by public bodies. For spending by departmental group figures, we have excluded the pension schemes which appear as separate spending lines in the data, including the Teachers' Pension Scheme and Civil Superannuation, as these are not always allocated accurately to the right department and so can cause some distortions. HMRC, although it is a non-ministerial department, is included as a departmental group of its own in this data, to be consistent with other IfG analysis, while smaller departments have been excluded from the chart for the sake of visualisation.

This analysis is necessarily imperfect, and some spending by public bodies (particularly executive agencies which are closely integrated into their departments) is categorised as departmental spend. Similarly, spending by non-ministerial departments is categorised as departmental, despite them being a type of arm's length body. This means that, for instance, the OSCAR dataset suggests that most spending by the Ministry of Justice is directly spent by the department. This is incorrect, as the MoJ's annual reports consistently show most money is spent by its arm's length bodies, such as HM Courts and Tribunals Service and HM Prison and Probation Service.

This dataset also underestimates the scale of spending by public bodies as it does not consistently include public corporations, or includes only their net rather than gross spending.

Diversity

Workforce diversity and population benchmarks

The benchmark for the economically active working-age UK population that is female is calculated from the ONS 'A02 SA: Employment, unemployment and economic inactivity for people aged 16 and over and aged from 16 to 64 (seasonally adjusted)' dataset. It is the economically active female population aged 16–64 as a percentage of the total economically active population aged 16–64.

The benchmark for the economically active working-age UK population that is from a minority ethnic background is calculated from the ONS 'A09: Labour market status by ethnicity' dataset. It is the economically active population aged 16–64 which self-identified as of 'Mixed', 'Indian', 'Pakistani', 'Bangladeshi', 'Chinese', 'Black/African/Caribbean' or 'Other' ethnicity, as a percentage of the total economically active population aged 16–64.

The benchmark for the economically active working-age UK population that has a disability is calculated from the ONS 'A08: Labour market status of disabled people' dataset. It is the number of economically active people aged 16–64 who meet the Government Statistical Service harmonised standard definition of disability, as a percentage of all economically active people aged 16–64 whose disability status is known (i.e. excluding those respondents who did not state their health situation).

To adjust for season variations in employment data, we calculate the average for each of these benchmarks over the last four quarters up to 31 March 2022 (to match the publication date of the 2022 Civil Service Statistics dataset which is the source of our data on civil service diversity).

The benchmark for the working-age UK population that is LGB+ is drawn from the ONS Census 2021 dataset. The census question on sexual orientation was a voluntary question asked of those aged 16 and over. Our benchmark is calculated as the number of respondents who self-identified as 'Gay or lesbian', 'Bisexual' or 'Other sexual orientation', as a percentage of respondents who answered the census question on sexual orientation. Our use of the term LGB+ refers to staff who report belonging to one of the last three groups. The term 'LGBT+' is not used because this data only refers to sexual orientation. The Annual Civil Service Employment Survey does not collect data on the gender identities of civil servants.

Professions and functions

We have grouped the 29 civil service professions reported by the Cabinet Office into three overarching categories: operational delivery; departmental specialism; and cross-departmental specialism.

Profession	IfG category
Commercial	Cross-departmental specialisms
Communications	Cross-departmental specialisms
Corporate finance	Cross-departmental specialisms (included in the finance sub-category)
Counter fraud	Departmental specialism
Digital, data and technology (DDaT)	Cross-departmental specialisms
Economics	Cross-departmental specialisms (included in the analytics sub-category)
Finance	Cross-departmental specialisms
Geography	Departmental specialism
Human Resources (HR)	Cross-departmental specialisms
Inspector of education and training	Departmental specialisms
Intelligence analysis	Departmental specialisms
Internal audit	Cross-departmental specialisms
International trade	Departmental specialisms

Knowledge and information management	Cross-departmental specialisms
Legal	Cross-departmental specialisms
Medicine	Departmental specialisms
Operational delivery	Operational delivery
Operational research	Cross-departmental specialisms
Planning	Departmental specialisms (included in the planning sub-category)
Planning inspectors	Departmental specialisms (included in the planning sub-category)
Policy	Cross-departmental specialisms
Project delivery	Cross-departmental specialisms
Property	Cross-departmental specialisms
Psychology	Departmental specialisms
Science and engineering	Departmental specialisms
Security	Departmental specialisms
Social research	Cross-departmental specialisms (included in the analytics sub-category)
Statistics	Cross-departmental specialisms (included in the analytics sub-category)
Tax	Departmental specialisms
Veterinarian	Departmental specialisms

Additionally, we classify legal professionals from the Crown Prosecution Service separately under the 'prosecutor' profession (as a departmental specialism).

The Cabinet Office includes 'other' professions as a category in their annual Civil Service Statistics dataset. Where civil servants' profession is not recorded at all we classify them as 'unknown'. In 2018, 2020 and 2021 DWP failed to report the professions of many of their civil servants. In order to estimate changes in professions over time, we have calculated assumed average sizes of each profession in DWP for those years using the reported numbers in 2017, 2019 and 2022.

Reforms since 2013 have helped to develop a series of centrally managed, cross-government 'functions' to improve the way the civil service conducts activities that rely on specialist skills. These functions overlap with the civil service's existing professions, but there are some differences between the two. Professions are groupings of officials with similar expertise, such as veterinarians, and focus on skills. All civil servants are members of a profession. Functions are instead focused on activities that occur across departments, such as finance, commercial or project delivery. They provide expert advice, and are responsible for setting cross-government strategies and standards to ensure that activities are delivered widely and consistently across the civil service. Around a quarter of civil servants belong to a function.

Functions

1. Analysis
2. Commercial
3. Communications
4. Counter fraud
5. Debt
6. Digital, data and technology (DDaT)
7. Finance
8. Grants
9. Human resources (HR)
10. Internal audit
11. Legal
12. Project delivery
13. Property
14. Security

The number of individuals in particular functions or professions is calculated based on the data reported by officials on their departmental HR system, rather than an objective classification. Since it is based on individuals' decisions to self-identify with a specific function or profession, changes in numbers over time are likely to be caused in part by an increase in the number of people self-identifying, as well as increases in the objective numbers, although this is difficult to untangle.

Part 2
Improving diversity and inclusion
Socio-economic background

As no workforce statistics are currently published on socio-economic background (SEB) in the civil service, our analysis draws on the number of responses by group in the 2021 Civil Service People Survey to illustrate distribution of SEB by seniority.

SEB is approximated using civil servants' parental occupation when they were aged 14 and grouped according to the three-class National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) scheme. Figures exclude civil servants with an unknown socio-economic background.

Part 3
Major projects

The analysis of the Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP) comes from data collected by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA). The latest IPA data set (2021-22) contains data on whole life costings of individual projects unless where given exempt as in accordance with the government's transparency policy e.g., national security. However, total whole life costings of projects delivered by individual departments include the costs of exempt projects. Our analysis for Figure 3.5 includes costings of exempt projects while Figures 3.6 and 3.7 do not include projects with exempt costings as well as projects that are exempt from providing a risk ratings.

List of abbreviations

Departments and organisations

Abbreviation	Organisation name
AGO	Attorney General's Office
BEIS	Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
BERR	Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform
BIS	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (until the creation of BEIS)
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CDDO	Central Digital and Data Office
CIPFA	Charted Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy
CO	Cabinet Office
CQC	Care Quality Commission
DCA	Department for Constitutional Affairs
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government (now DLUHC)
DCMS	Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
DECC	Department for Energy and Climate Change (before BEIS and Defra)
Defra	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DETR	Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
DExEU	Department for Exiting the European Union
DE&S	Defence Equipment and Support
DfE	Department for Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DfID	Department for International Development (before merger with FCO to form FCDO)
DfSS	Department for Social Security
DfT	Department for Transport
DHSC	Department of Health and Social Care
DIT	Department for International Trade
DIUS	Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
DLUHC	Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
DNH	Department for National Heritage
DPCP	Department for Prices and Consumer Protection
DTLR	Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions

ETF	Evaluation Task Force
EU	European Union
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office (before merger with DfID to form FCDO)
FDA	Association of First Division Civil Servants union
GCS	Government Communication Service
GDS	Government Digital Service
GSCU	Government Skills and Curriculum Unit
HMCTS	HM Courts and Tribunals Service
HMRC	HM Revenue's and Customs
HMT	HM Treasury; the Treasury
HO	Home Office
HoC	House of Commons
HoL	House of Lords
ICO	Information Commissioner's Office
IfG	Institute for Government
IPA	Infrastructure and Projects Authority
Law	Law officers (AGO, Office of the Advocate General for Scotland)
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (before the creation of DLUHC)
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MPA	Major Projects Authority
NAO	National Audit Office
NHS	National Health Service
NDA	Nuclear Decommissioning Agency
NICS	Northern Ireland Civil Service
NIO	Northern Ireland Office
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
OBR	Office for Budget Responsibility
OCPA	Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments
ODM	Ministry of Overseas Development
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
ONS	Office for National Statistics
OPS	Office of Public Service
OPSS	Office of Public Service and Science
PCS	Public and Commercial Services union

PHE	Public Health England
Scot	Scotland Office
SG/Scot Gov	Scottish Government
SMC	Social Mobility Commission
UKHSA	UK Health Security Agency
UN	United Nations
Wal	Wales Office
Welsh Gov	Welsh Government

Other abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
ALBs	Arm's length bodies
AME/RAME	Annual managed expenditure/Resource AME
AO/AA	Administrative officer/administrative assistant (civil service grade)
CEO	Chief executive officer
CS	Civil service
D&I	Diversity and inclusion
DDaT	Digital, data and technology profession
DEL/RDEL	Departmental expenditure limit/Resource DEL
EO	Executive officer (civil service grade)
FTE	Full-time equivalent
FTSE 250	Financial Times Stock Exchange 250 index
FoI	Freedom of Information
G6/G7	Grade 6 and Grade 7 (civil service grades)
GDP	Gross domestic product
GE	General election
GMPP	Government Major Projects Portfolio
HR	Human resources
HS2	High Speed 2 railway project
IT	Information technology
JSS	Job Support Scheme
LBTT	Land and buildings transactions tax
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender

LGB+	The Annual Civil Service Employment Survey (ACSES) invites civil servants to record their sexual orientation as 'Heterosexual/straight', 'Gay or Lesbian', 'Bisexual' or 'Other'. Our use of the term LGB+ refers to staff who report belonging to one of the last three groups. The term 'LGBT+' is not used because this data refers only to sexual orientation. The ACSES does not collect data on the gender identities of civil servants.
LTLC	Long-term limiting condition
MoS	Minister of state
MP	Member of parliament
NDPB	Non-departmental public body
ODP	Outcome delivery plan
OSCAR	Online System for Central Accounting and Reporting
PACAC	Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PM	Prime minister
Q (Q1 etc.)	Quarter
R&D	Research and development
SCS	Senior civil service/ senior civil servant
SEB	Socio-economic background
SEO/HEO	Senior executive officer/Higher executive officer (civil service grades)
SoS	Secretary of state
SR	Spending review/Spending round
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
VAT	Value added tax
WPQs	Written parliamentary questions

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The year ahead

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Any errors or omissions are our own, except where the quality of the data could be better...

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