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FROM THE EDITOR

It seems an age since prime minister Liz Truss stood on the steps of Downing Street, setting out the priorities that she is "determined to deliver". Perhaps it seems that way because an age *has* passed since Truss arrived in Downing Street after a rainy journey from Balmoral and what turned out to be the last formal engagement of Queen Elizabeth II. In the days that followed, as we moved from an Elizabethan to a Carolean age, the value of a permanent, impartial civil service became clear. For a country to change both the head of government and head of state within 48 hours is remarkable and, potentially, de-stabilising. The seamless, automatic succession of the new head of state mitigates against any constitutional wobbles. But so too does the presence of an experienced cadre of officials who not only have meticulously-laid plans covering the days after a head of state dies but close links to the new monarch's team, enabling them to set into motion everything from the mundane (re-naming anything with Her Majesty in

the title, for example) to the grandly symbolic and operationally staggering events of a national mourning period. Whether it was arranging the State Funeral – described by a Foreign Office insider to the BBC as comparable to running 100 state visits at once – or organising a queue of some 250,000 mourners along the banks of the Thames, civil servants demonstrated their ability to mobilise at speed with their partners across the public sector. This was underpinned not only by years of planning but a deep sense of public duty which mirrors the Queen's own. In a special tribute issue of *CSW* – now available online – former officials reflected on the example she set over many decades of service in public and private. Yet even as civil servants were readying themselves for the Queen's death on 8 September, the new head of government and her chancellor Kwazi Kwarteng sent a signal that undermined the impartial civil service which Queen Elizabeth II had supported so unstintingly. It was known that Truss would

want to part ways with Treasury permanent secretary Tom Scholar, a long-serving and widely-respected civil servant, if she became PM. After all, her team briefed out her plans to take on "Treasury orthodoxy" during a leadership campaign which involved near-constant swipes at the civil service. But to sack Scholar so swiftly, just as Kwarteng is about to set in place a state-support package that will dwarf even the Covid furlough scheme, moves beyond the anti-civil service rhetoric which has become the norm among ministers. It also makes Truss's promise to deliver "on the economy, on energy and on the NHS" ring hollow. If the new prime minister is committed to real change then

she and her ministers will need to rely on the experience and expertise of civil servants who can give them honest advice which points out problems as well as weighing up solutions. Once a decision is made, they will expect to rely on those same civil servants to deliver whatever policies and services are required. Sacking Scholar sends the signal that robust advice is not welcomed by Truss and her ministers. Like her choices for Cabinet, it suggests that she values loyalty over experience, and places ideology above the practicalities of making things happen in government. Which may be an excellent strategy when it comes to winning leadership campaigns, but it is an unwise one if you really are "determined to deliver". ∎

INBOX

TALKING TRIBUTES

Former senior civil servants shared their memories of personal encounters with Queen Elizabeth II in a special tribute issue of CSW earlier this month (https://bit.ly/cswqeii). Lord Gus O'Donnell recalled everyone being on their "best behaviour" when the monarch visited a Wednesday Morning perm secs' meeting in 2010 — and CSW dug out the photo.

"GOD has certainly got an I'm on my best behaviour' smile on!" commented **Dr Helen Jeffries**.

Alexis Cleveland, the one-time chief exec of the Pension Service who spotted herself in the photo, commented: "I see this image is back in *CSW*. Sadly too many people here are no longer with us. I wonder if I am standing alongside our next prime minister?" The head of the Crown Prosecution Service at the time, also in attendance? One Keir Starmer.

Bernard Webber replied: "Now I can show this to my wife to prove I know someone really important."

GENTLEMAN, SCHOLAR

Readers were disappointed to hear that Treasury permanent secretary Sir Tom Scholar was asked to step aside when new chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng decided he wanted "new leadership" just days after taking the job.

"Tom will be a big loss to HMT and the civil service as a whole. I enjoyed working with him when we were in chancellor Gordon Brown's private office," **Chris Orman** wrote.

"Gutted to see him go," commented **Sameen**

Farouk. "He's one of our best and was a great mentor. Hope to cross paths."

Tahmid Chowdhury added: "As if there wasn't enough instability in government already! Baffling timing."

SPEAKING TERMS

Readers expressed their frustration at the news, first reported by CSW, that ministers have revived plans to worsen redundancy terms as mass job cuts loom.

"Yet another ideologically driven attack on civil service terms and conditions. This comes on top of more than a decade of wage freezes & below inflation wage increases (any pay rise below the level of inflation is a real world pay cut) and 91,000 job cuts. Most civil servants received a 2% wage increase, compared to today's declared rate of inflation of over 10%. Utterly indefensible and undeniably ideologically driven," **Alan Ramsay** said.

For many, the plans sounded all too familiar. "I've been employed in the civil service since 2008 and I can't think of a year that's gone by without the employer seeking to further cut our redundancy entitlement. I'm glad that my union PCS successfully stopped the most recent detrimental changes via judicial review," **Nick Parker** recalled.

Marcus Chapman added: "Osborne tried this and it was thrown out. Pleased I left under the old rules."

CURIOUS, GEORGE

Speaking of Osborne, the ex-chancellor's comments urging Conservative minis-

ters to stop their "pathetic" civil service-bashing received a mixed response. While it's not the first time he's spoken positively about the civil service, some readers felt his own track record spoke volumes.

"Rich coming from him," commented **Lyndsey Taylor**.

"A case of pot and kettle," **Richard John** agreed.

Reflecting on Osborne's time in government, **Sushi Samant** wrote: "Funny that. I recall him slating civil servants, especially in defence. Even announced civil service manpower reductions before telling secretaries of state… and the trade unions."

Tony Hall added: "Is he the one that froze civil service pay till I found myself on min wage after 20+

years service? I think it is."

But others felt the former politician made a good point. "Well yes indeed. Talk about biting the hand that feeds! Who do the ministers think does the work to deliver on their agenda!? If civil servants start quiet quitting, the country will have some serious problems," wrote **Nia Thomas**.

BUILT TO LAST

Jacob Rees-Mogg's linking of the new Government Property Strategy – which includes plans to sell off 20 more public buildings – to remote working in the civil service by saying taxpayers should not have to pay for "under-utilised buildings" raised some eyebrows. Readers observed that the plan builds on the Places for Growth strategy to reduce the civil service's footprint in London and expand its regional presence.

"How does this tally with those of us who want to work from the office but already find desks in too short supply…? This seems to merely create a veneer of blaming us, who will suffer as a result of this move, for bringing it on ourselves," **Anne J** said.

But **Monika Czaplinska** added optimistically: "Hopefully they will scrap 'you must work from the office' along with this!"

And **Rocio Ferro-Adams** questioned: "Who is buying the buildings? It does matter who owns UK real-estate. Presumably not Russian oligarchs." ∎

WHITEHALL WISDOM
The great and good pass judgement on government

Quote taken from the Royal Archive

ROYAL TREATMENT

"I know that being a member of the civil service… is not always an easy task. Even the best public servants cannot hope to be popular with everyone all the time; and – as in every walk of life – there is often room for improvement and finding fresh ways of doing things. But occasionally it is right that we pause to recognise the vital work being done every day throughout the United Kingdom in the name of public service."

Queen Elizabeth II on a visit to the Home Office in 2015

▼

IN THE NEXT ISSUE
CSW speaks to experts across government to explore the challenge of reducing re-offending. PLUS, What do the latest stats tell us about the civil service in 2022?

ALEX THOMAS CAN TRUSS WIN CIVIL SERVANTS' TRUST?

THE JOHNSON ADMINISTRATION LEFT OFFICIALS BRUISED AND DEMORALISED. THE NEW PM HAS A CHANCE TO SIGNAL CHANGE - BUT WILL SHE TAKE IT?

A change of government can be an exciting time to be a civil servant. Fresh ministers, a new direction and lots of government gossip energise Whitehall, although officials working further from the centre of power follow the news with more wry detachment. For some people the change can mean jeopardy. Relationships are re-wired and positions are threatened.

The transfer of power from Johnson to Truss brings another source of uncertainty – about the future of the civil service itself, and whether Truss can manage the government more effectively than her predecessor. To run a competent administration she needs the loyalty of the civil service: to give their best advice, to be motivated to serve her goals and not to leak sensitive government business. It is in Truss's interest to take this opportunity to reset relationships and the early signals she sends will be crucial.

Truss starts with an advantage over Johnson. While she will need to be flexible in responding to events, her supporters fairly point out that she has a consistent ideological core. This may help her set direction, take decisions that are grounded in the overall mission of her government and resolve disputes between ministers and departments. It is close to a cliché in the civil service, but the government machine responds well to clear instruction. They will be hoping that Truss is able to provide it.

Truss's early moves to slim down No.10 are telling. The good news is that they signal a focus on the nuts and bolts of administration. It will help to create a team with a clear remit to serve up ordered policy decisions to the PM and then communicate them to the rest of the government and the public. The worry is that important No.10 teams are being diluted and moved further from the centre of power and

> **"Truss will win a lot of credit if she prioritises genuine financial efficiency savings over reducing headcount"**

experience is being lost. Truss needs to be careful not to let the functions now transferred to the Cabinet Office drift away from her personal oversight.

During the leadership campaign, Truss tickled the party faithful with attacks on the civil service – including bizarrely suggesting (with no evidence) that parts of it are antisemitic. That is not the best start to relationships with people she will be relying on for her success. But civil servants are used to some rough and tumble. They know that they can be a politically convenient football.

The development that really damaged relationships at the end of the Johnson government was that the attacks seemed to be to no purpose other than to please crowds and set up scapegoats. Officials never understood how Jacob

Rees-Mogg's superficial headcount reduction target would actually make the civil service more efficient or effective.

Truss has also committed to reducing the number of government officials, and the civil service must recognise and respond to that. But she will win a lot of credit if she prioritises genuine financial efficiency savings over reducing headcount, and demands a full workforce plan to make sure the cuts fall in the right places. She needs to sell the benefits of a smarter, smaller civil service rather than slashing and burning.

Nadhim Zahawi and Edward Argar, the new Cabinet Office ministers, should also revive Michael Gove's Declaration on Government Reform. That covered the core elements of how to improve the civil service with better skills, more effective use of data and stronger performance management. It needs a refresh, and to focus more on the trickiest reform issues like civil service accountability, but the plan is there if ministers have the confidence and application to stay the course.

Another lesson Truss and her team can take from Johnson's

time in government is that a "hard rain" falling on senior civil servants is the wrong tactic. Johnson removed half a dozen perm secs in 2020, which did not resolve some of the longstanding problems with the civil service, and left it less prepared for the difficulties it faced in the pandemic. Senior appointments are important, but structural reform is the route to more effective administration.

So Truss should value continuity as well as change, particularly in the coming months of her government. She will need staff with new energy but also people who understand how to pull the levers.

A new government often signals a refresh in civil service leadership, and very senior civil servants need to retain the confidence of their political masters, but sackings do not need to be immediate. Too much deck-clearing sends a worrying signal that promotion depends on personal relationships and playing the game. If the early sacking of Treasury permanent secretary Tom Scholar means that experience is not valued then Truss's new government will run into trouble. We should want senior officials to be offering their best advice to a government that will need all the support it can get. ■

Alex Thomas is a programme director at the IfG

DAVE PENMAN SACKING SCHOLAR SHOWS WEAKNESS

THE TREASURY PERM SEC'S EXIT BODES ILL BOTH FOR MINISTERS AND THE PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING A PERMANENT AND IMPARTIAL CIVIL SERVICE

On the morning of Thursday 9 September I filed my column for this venerable publication, slightly late as usual, but on message as always. What was my ask of the new prime minister for the civil service? By Thursday afternoon it was redundant, mainly because so was Tom Scholar, the permanent secretary at the Treasury.

Despite what many people may think, I'm an optimist. I know it's a bit off brand for a Scottish trade union leader – by design we should give Gordon Brown a run for his money in the dour stakes – but I'm a whisky tumbler-half-full kind of guy.

Maybe my column didn't brim with effervescence, but it was written on the basis that a new PM could herald a new relationship with the civil service. My optimism was based on an assumption that anyone looking at the chaos of the last few years, from ministerial turnover to the deteriorating relationship between ministers and civil servants, must surely recognise that a change of approach was necessary.

Ironically, rather than just focus on the relentless self-defeating attacks on civil servants I instead emphasised the need for stability, experience and competence. I wrote: *"The prime minister inherits a number of fundamental challenges that*

"Good ministers don't fear robust advice; they welcome it"

have either been mismanaged or dodged by her predecessor. Brexit isn't done despite the mantra, as she well knows. The war in Ukraine raises issues for our future security and a reworking of the world order that has to some degree been maintained post-Cold War. Covid still blights our public services, with backlogs and an exhausted NHS having record vacancies on top of the challenges every government faces around funding of the NHS and social care. The cost-of-living crisis, fuelled in part by an energy crisis, could also lead to a prolonged recession and this raises challenges for our net-zero ambitions.

"Liz Truss may or may not have the solutions to these problems, but if this government is to stand any chance of solving them, it needs a civil service that is committed, motivated and given the tools to solve them."

My hope was that, as the new PM moves her focus to governing rather than just winning a vote

among a not-very-typical electorate, reality would bite. She needs to deliver, not just on those big issues, but on the thousands of other pledges that any government needs to if it wants to stay in power.

Instead, just two days into her premiership, the new chancellor sacked the Treasury perm sec with immediate effect. Minutes later, the announcement was made that the Queen had passed away so this seismic decision was naturally overshadowed by those events. It is, though, an extraordinary act – and one that has ramifications not just for the relationship with the civil service, but for the fundamental principles that underpin a permanent and impartial civil service.

Tom Scholar had been Treasury permanent secretary since 2016, he'd served five very different chancellors, and he was reappointed in January 2021 for a further five-year term. He was highly regarded by ministers, borne out in the tributes paid to him by his former chancellors. He has vast experience, not least in dealing with major financial crises. He had been at the Treasury in 2007 during the banking collapse, and during Covid and the – until now – unprecedented financial support delivered via the furlough scheme. Just, you would have thought, the sort of experience needed given the cost-of-living crisis the country now faces.

That he has been sacked so early on, before a new chancellor has even had a chance to build a relationship, says something about the approach of Truss's administration. Policy, after all, is determined by ministers. If Trussenomics is to be different from her predecessors' approach, so be it. The civil service is there to serve governments of different colours, not just personnel. If it can serve Brown and Osborne, it can serve Sunak and Kwarteng who, after all, served in the same cabinet for two years.

Scholar's sacking ultimately shows a weakness in government. Ministers know Scholar is experienced and admired. He would have given his best advice, but ultimately delivered on the government's agenda. He would have tested and challenged any policy direction with evidence – after all, that is what he is obligated to do under the civil service code. Ministers also have "a duty to give fair consideration and due weight to informed and impartial advice from civil servants". But they do not have to follow it.

Good ministers don't fear robust advice; they welcome it. Why then would a confident government and chancellor not want one of the most experienced and admired civil servants of his generation at the heart of government? Was it fear of ministerial directions, as some have speculated? They can only be requested on grounds of regularity, propriety, value for money or feasibility. They are rare – too rare – but they epitomise the democratic basis of government. A civil servant doesn't get a veto, even if they think a policy won't work and a minister gets their name all over it.

Unless, of course, that's exactly what you're afraid of. ∎

Dave Penman is the general secretary of the FDA union
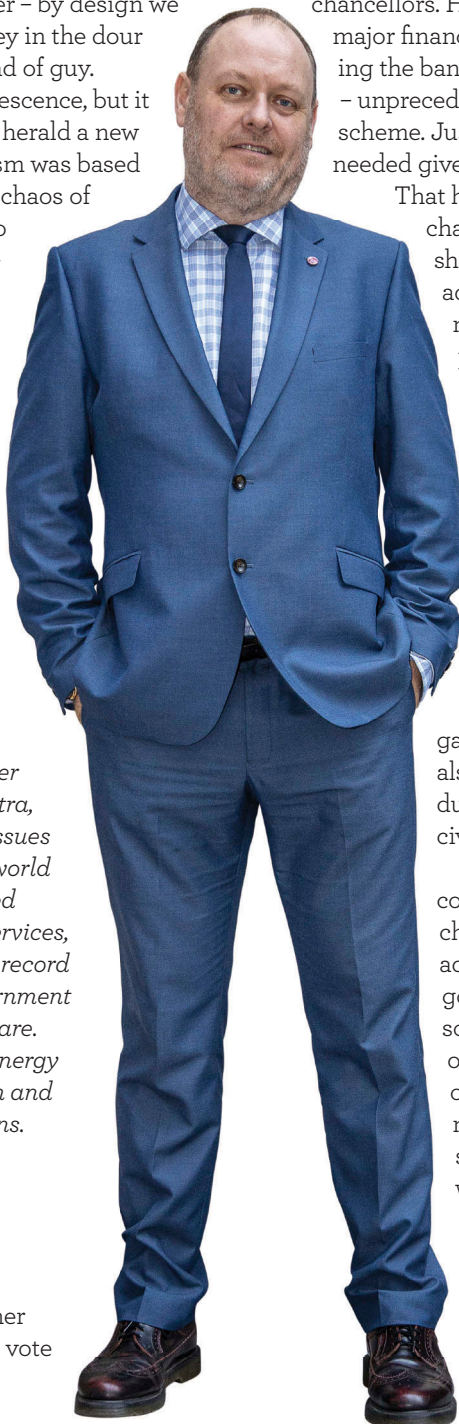
BART VAN ARK FITTER, HAPPIER, MORE PRODUCTIVE

PUBLIC SERVICES NEED ADEQUATE FUNDING, BUT THEY ALSO NEED A STRONG STRATEGIC FOCUS ON PRODUCTIVITY TO IMPROVE SERVICE DELIVERY

In times of significant economic and societal challenges, the public sector plays a critical role. Public services are essential for ensuring people's health and wellbeing, paving the way for economic recovery, and creating improvements in living standards across the country. The role the NHS played throughout the Covid-19 pandemic – from providing emergency care right through to the rapid rollout of the vaccine – was a prime example of this in action.

However, the pressure on public sector organisations to raise output and improve outcomes has become almost unbearable with the challenges created during the aftermath of the pan-demic, the post-Brexit environment and the cost-of-living crisis.

In a new report by The Productivity Institute headquartered at the Alliance Manchester Business School, *Making Public Sector Productivity Practical*, we argue that productivity growth in the public sector is key to improving service delivery.

Growth pressures

There is no doubt that adequate funding is a precondition for high-performance public services. Yet many services have experienced years of funding pressure.

Despite this, public sector productivity has continued to grow. Productivity compares growth in the total output provided with the total inputs used. If the growth rate of output exceeds the inputs (such as labour and capital), productivity increases, meaning that more output is being produced for each unit of input.

According to the Office for National Statistics, between 2010 and 2019 output in the public sector in the UK increased by 1.2% a year on average, whereas inputs increased by 0.5%
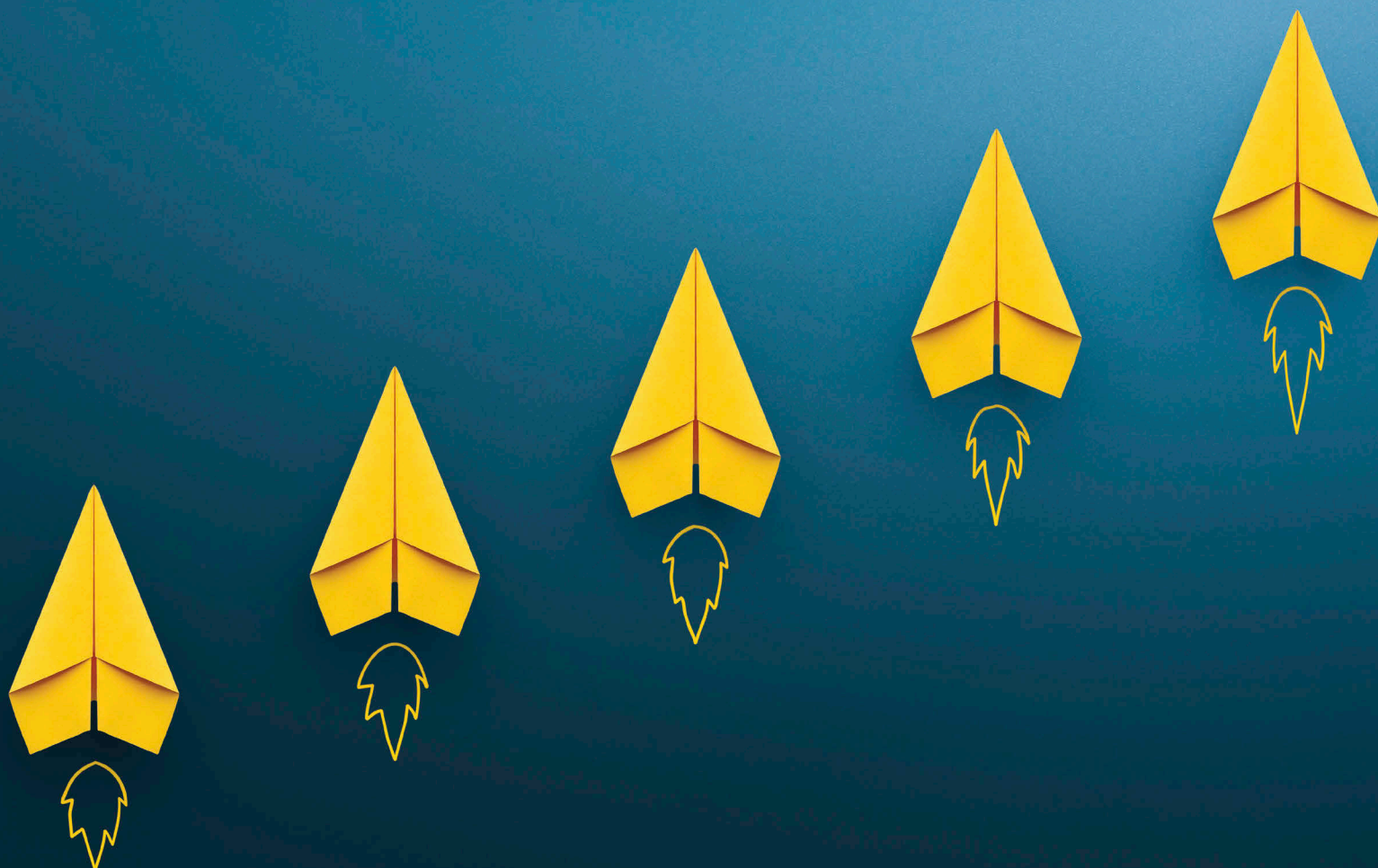
a year. This means productivity growth, at 0.7% a year, was a large contributor to growth in public sector output. Interestingly, a good deal of that productivity growth (0.2 percentage points) is the result of measured improvements in the quality of public services. Productivity growth has therefore not only led to more output but also to better outcomes.

However, there is a real concern that these types of productivity gains, as seen in the past decade, cannot be sustained without further funding. A report by the Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Accounting and the Institute for Government in 2019 argued that limiting staff pay increases and prompting workers to be more productive is "approaching – or has already reached – its limit". And this was before the impact of the pandemic.

Moreover, a single-minded focus on efficiency gains, or cost cutting, has in some cases been detrimental to the quality of services and people's livelihoods. A zealous implementation of private sector management techniques has limitations and has backfired where the focus was on hitting specific targets while missing the real goals.

Making public sector productivity practical

While much has been written about public sector productivity – what it is, how to measure it, and what makes it grow – we have only limited understanding of how to best improve it in practice. Our new report aims to connect our knowledge about concepts, measurement, drivers and barriers to productivity growth in the public sector with practical insights into how to improve it.

First and foremost, there needs to be a better understanding within the public sector of service delivery processes. It is important to recognise that value for money can be created in different ways. The three key elements we identified are:

- Effectiveness – maximising the outcomes by producing the right outputs.
- Organisational productivity – optimising the combination of inputs – labour, capital, technology – to generate the required outputs.
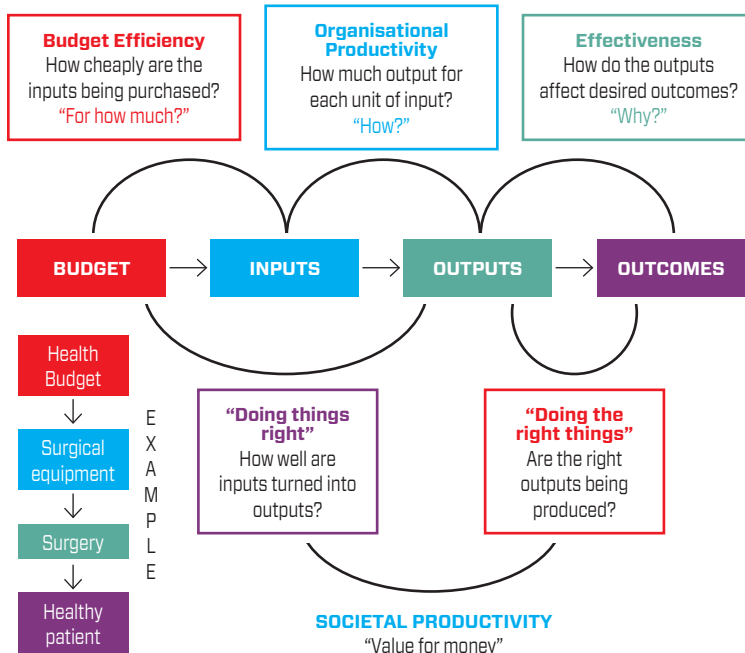- Budget efficiency – obtain inputs in a cost-efficient manner.

As not everything can be improved at once, leaders of public sector organisations need to prioritise. One method is to identify and focus on the tightest bottleneck constraining productivity improvement, earmarking the resources needed, and de-prioritise other pressure points. Such prioritisation can only be done if the process of change is owned by the senior leadership and the entire organisation gets on board. Frontline workers – such as those in healthcare, social care or education – usually have the most knowledge about where the service delivery processes succeed or fail.

There needs to be strong consultative processes and ownership of new working arrangements by these workers to ensure the best outcomes. This is key to creating a more agile workforce – one that is outcome driven, open to new technology and flexible to change. This tends to generate greater employee satisfaction and higher morale, which in turn has a positive impact on productivity.

Digital transformation is also critical in driving continuous innovation in public sector organisations. When utilised effectively, technologies can simplify, streamline and enhance the delivery of products and services. It also leverages the new

> **"Any improvements to productivity levels significantly impact society more widely by improving the quality of services for everyone"**

THE PUBIC SECTOR DELIVERY CHAIN
How public money is turnd into inpouts, outputs and outcomes

technologies and, importantly, the data they generate to connect organisations, physical assets, processes and people.

How public policy can support public sector productivity gains

There is, of course, no substitute for adequate funding of public services, especially when funding is under pressure, so first and foremost the government must commit the funds that are needed to support the public services. But it is also vital that money is spent effectively in the right areas.

To ensure this happens, decision making should be based on firm knowledge of what is happening on the ground. Therefore, this should be devolved to the organisations themselves. They are the ones who can identify exactly where pressure points are and should have more freedom to reallocate budgets to meet these needs.

Organisations must have the ability to plan for future challenges as well as immediate challenges. Policy churn is highly damaging for investment and productivity in public services, so the government needs to create an environment that enables public services to set multi-year budgets and create a stable environment for service delivery.

Any improvements to productivity levels significantly impact society more widely by improving the quality of services for everyone, and by providing more effective foundations for private enterprise and economy-wide productivity growth. These outcomes will ultimately help to reduce tax burdens and support fiscal responsibility.

That's why we must support public sector organisations in creating robust strategies to boost output and quality, to identify bottlenecks, implement real-time measurement and cultivate a culture of continuous innovation and collaboration. ■

Bart van Ark is professor of productivity at Alliance Manchester Business School

DASHBOARD CONFESSIONAL

The Covid-19 Dashboard team scooped a prestigious statistics award this summer for their vital work tracking the spread and effect of the virus. **Clare Griffiths**, who leads the project, takes *CSW* behind the scenes
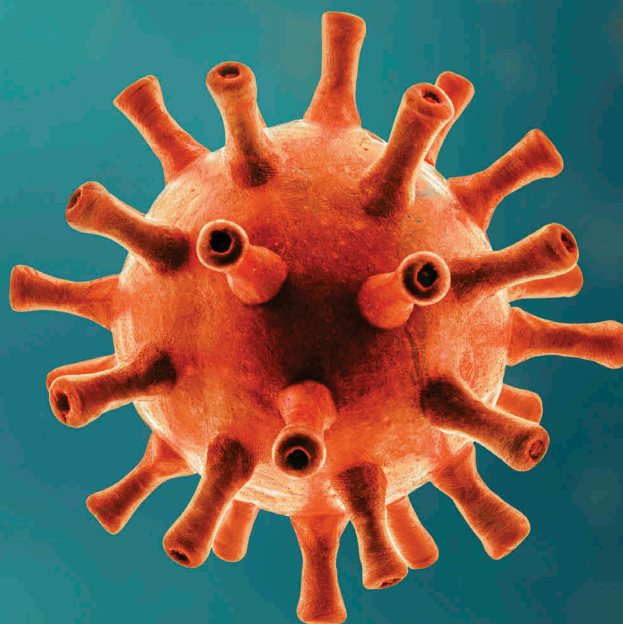
Clare Griffiths is a name you might not know, but you know her work – and the work of her team. The Covid-19 Dashboard became daily reading for many across the UK at the height of the pandemic as people turned to stats to understand the spread and severity of the virus, and has since grown with more data sources and tracking of vaccination rates.

Earlier this summer, the Covid-19 Dashboard team took home the Royal Statistical Society and Office for Statistics Regulation's Statistical Excellence in Trustworthiness, Quality and Value Award, in partnership with *CSW*, for what judges described as "essential work".

The accolade recognises organisations that have voluntarily adopted the regulator's code of practice, upholding its three pillars of trustworthiness, quality and value. Griffiths talks to *CSW* about how she pushed to embed those principles from the start; the UK Health Security Agency team behind the project; and what it was like having the eyes of the nation on public stats.

How does it feel to have the team recognised in this way?
It feels really great, actually, it's really nice to know that the Office for Statistics Regulation appreciates our work in particular – regulators are not necessarily that easy to please. The fact that they really like how we voluntarily applied the code of practice to the dashboard was pleasing for me because I really pushed for that right from the very start. That felt like vindication.

What is the Covid-19 Dashboard?
We started in March 2020 as a daily update on cases and deaths in the pandemic, bringing together data across the four nations. That moved on slightly in summer 2020, when we began with a wider range of measures, like testing and healthcare. When the daily press briefings stopped, we took over as the main way that the Covid data was reported. Then when the 5pm briefings started up again, we published an hour beforehand, so they followed the data.

We carried on expanding and then in

October and November 2020 there was a lot of focus on local measures. We weren't providing a huge amount of that on the dashboard. But we expanded all the local measures and created a local view so people could search by their postcode. If you remember alert levels you could find out what level your area was in. That exploded interest in the dashboard from the general public, it was easily the most-used part of the site after the homepage.

In December 2020, the vaccination programme kicked off so we started reporting. And we've just carried on since then reporting, expanding the range of things we report, refining user research.

Following the *Living with Covid* strategy we update once a week, rather than daily, but using the same range of metrics.

Where does all the data you're using come from?

We use over 20 different sources of data, but we arrange them in five topics: testing cases, health care, deaths and vaccinations. Within each of those topics, there'll be a source for each nation of the UK. We're the sole source of the UK figures, so we combine all that to get that UK figure. Within nations it varies so in Scotland, pretty much all the data comes from Public Health Scotland; within England, some of the data is internal to UKHSA, some of it's from NHS England, and

»

"It's really rewarding to see what you do being used. Every civil servant says they want to make a difference – but for a statistician, it can be quite hard to say how you've done that"

Daily update
Testing
Cases
Healthcare
Vaccinations
Deaths

Interactive maps
Metrics documentation
About the data
Download data
What's new
Developer's guide

UK Summary

The official UK government website for data and insights on coronavirus (COVID-19).

See the simple summary for the UK.

Vaccinations
People vaccinated
Up to and including 3 January 2022

	Daily – first dose	Daily – second dose	Daily – booster or third dose
	19,158	29,295	141,825
	Total – first dose	Total – second dose	Total – booster or third dose
All vaccinations data	51,820,652	47,482,789	34,363,986

Percentage of population aged 12+
90.1% ■ First dose
82.6% ■ Second dose
59.8% ■ Booster or third dose

Cases
People tested positive
Latest data provided on 4 January 2022
Daily
218,724
Last 7 days
1,269,878 ↑ 428,537 (50.9%)
▶ Rate per 100,000 people: 1,596.9
All cases data

Deaths
Deaths within 28 days of positive test
Latest data provided on 4 January 2022
Daily
48
Last 7 days
909 ↑ 310 (51.8%)
▶ Rate per 100,000 people: 1.1
All deaths data

Healthcare
Patients admitted
Latest data provided on 27 December 2021
Daily
1,924
Last 7 days
9,958 ↑ 3,325 (50.1%)
All healthcare data

Testing
Virus tests conducted
Latest data provided on 3 January 2022
Daily
1,703,612
Last 7 days
10,255,503 ↑ 123,550 (1.2%)
All testing data

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we get data from the Office for National Statistics as well. There's a huge range.
What does the team look like?
It's a multidisciplinary team. In the past, when some organisations have designed data dashboards, it's been data analysts designing them, so they tend to be designed for other data analysts. We wanted this to be designed for the general public, so we have someone who specialises in interaction design; a user researcher whose job is to interview members of the public, find out what their needs are and reflect those back to the design team; a content designer who makes sure everything's written in plain English. That's our research and design team.

We have an analytical team pulling together the data, but because it's such a big project with so much data, it's hosted on high-performance computing platforms in the cloud. So we have specialist data engineers who work all the data pipelines and make sure they work. That's becoming a really important role in government.

Then we have a technology team who are doing all the stuff to make sure what you see on the front end works. They put the interaction designer's designs into practice. We've also got a programme manager, keeping us all on track.
You mentioned user research – what did that look like?
Part of it was that we did quite a lot of

user surveys throughout this to find out what people wanted. We had huge responses – 40,000 people filled in our surveys telling us what they wanted from the dashboard, which is just phenomenal. For other products that I've worked on, we felt like if we got 100 responses we were doing well. So to get that many people who took time out to respond is just amazing.
You said you really wanted to get the code of practice embedded

> **"Timeliness is a big challenge. You start processing the data at 8am, so you haven't got a huge amount of time. If anything goes wrong, you have to spring into action"**

throughout the whole thing. What did that look like in practice?
There are three pillars of the code – trustworthiness, quality and value – so we were considering all of those aspects in how we developed it.

One of the reasons that the dashboard isn't badged as official stats is that some of the data quality is not as good as it would be if it were official statistics. That's because we're using surveillance data and the key thing here

is to turn things around quickly so that quick decisions can be made. But that said, it's still really important to make sure that data are fit for purpose and the quality is as good as it can be.

The value aspect is all about the user research and delivering what your users need. Trustworthiness is all about how we operate as civil servants, making sure we're free from interference.
With so much public interest in the stats, did that feel like a lot of pressure?
It is quite a lot of pressure, but it's also quite enjoyable in a strange way. Obviously the topic isn't a cheerful one, but it's really rewarding to see what you do being used. When you go into a job interview about why you want to work in the civil service, everyone says they want to make a difference – but for a statistician, it can be quite hard to say how you've done that. Whereas for us, whichever analyst was on the rota that day saw the data they'd been working with on the 10 o'clock news. Everyone found that very rewarding.
What are some of the biggest challenges that you've had to deal with?
The timeliness of it is a big challenge. You start processing the data at 8am, so you haven't got a huge amount of time before the thing comes out at 4pm. If anything goes wrong with any of the pipelines, you have to be quick to spring into action. And as you bring more data sources in, because there's so many it
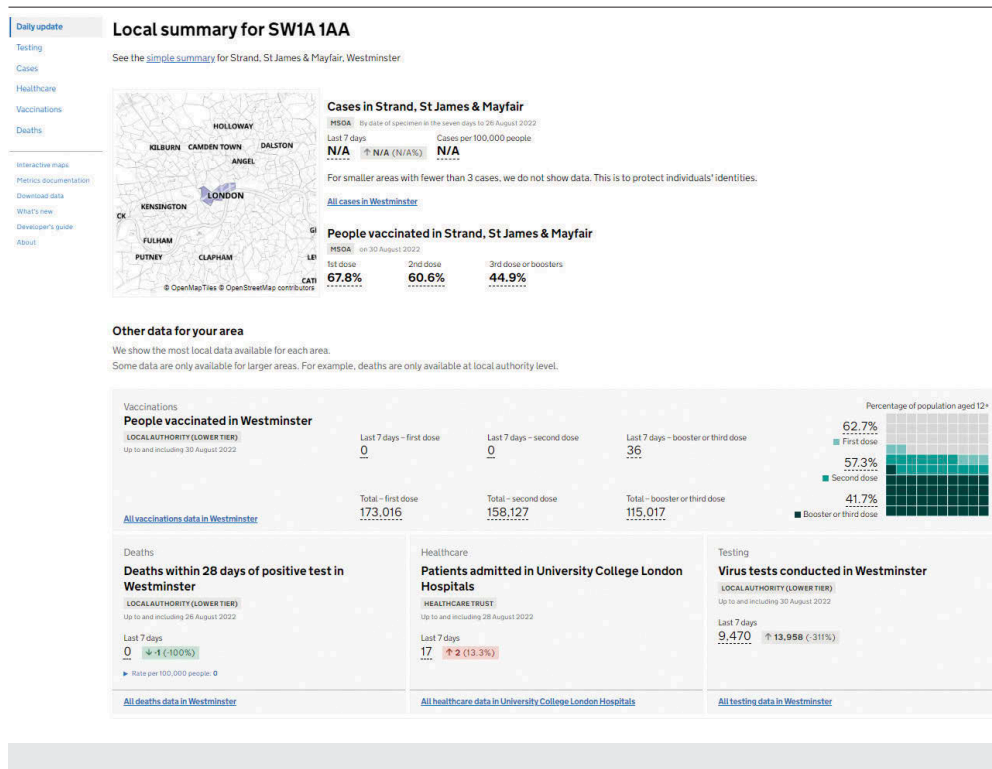
means that even if any one of them only goes wrong very, very rarely, something can go wrong fairly often. You build that into the planning as much and as early as possible, but you're up against the fact that you're bringing together four nations' data, you're waiting for the other three nations who are all doing the same things you are with their data and if anything goes wrong for them, there's a knock-on effect. Relationship building across the four nations is hugely important to address that challenge.

How did you keep morale up in the team during the pandemic?
We were all working remotely since the start of the pandemic, so a lot of people had never met each other face to face. It was really important to build a sense of being together as a team with regular calls, chat channels where you can laugh and let off a bit of steam, that kind of thing. The other really important thing is to allow people some downtime. We always had a rota so people weren't working days and days straight without taking a break. To have a seven-day response that means you need a big enough team so

that people can take a break from it. That's essential for keeping people's morale up.

What lessons have you learned that can be taken forward into other programmes or projects?
We've learned that we need to build reproducible pipelines from the start and get those working properly. So having data engineers onboard for your project and having sufficient computing power to make that work is essential. You can't possibly do daily reporting without it. Keeping morale up by making sure that it's sufficiently resourced with the right number of people with the right skills is hugely important. And I think we've learned that we need to have really good relationships with our data sources, making sure that everyone's on board with supplying the data that's needed and that they understand why it's needed – trying to get alignment from the start. You tend to get quite embedded in whatever you agree at the beginning and then it's quite hard to change some things.

Do you think the availability and profile of statistics about the pandemic changed people's awareness or opinion of the statistics profession?
It's definitely raised awareness. We've just advertised some roles for people to come and work on our team on a more permanent basis to help take the dashboard forward. We've had a really, really good response to that with lots of people wanting to work in the area. I think people do see the value of it.

What has been your personal highlight of this work?
Doing something that's had so much value to the public.

What does the future hold for the dashboard?
At the moment, we see it continuing over the winter. Then the plan is really to build on the lessons learned and look at what other topics that UKHSA deals with could be represented using dashboards. The obvious one is flu data – every flu season there are a lot of similarities and parallels with the Covid surveillance. As Covid moves away from an incident response and into ongoing business-as-usual surveillance, then there's a lot more parallels with how we do other surveillance programmes, and those surveillance programmes could probably benefit from that more public-facing representation of it.

Another obvious one is vaccination programmes. We do report on other vaccination programmes, not just Covid, so the way we present the data could be applied. ∎
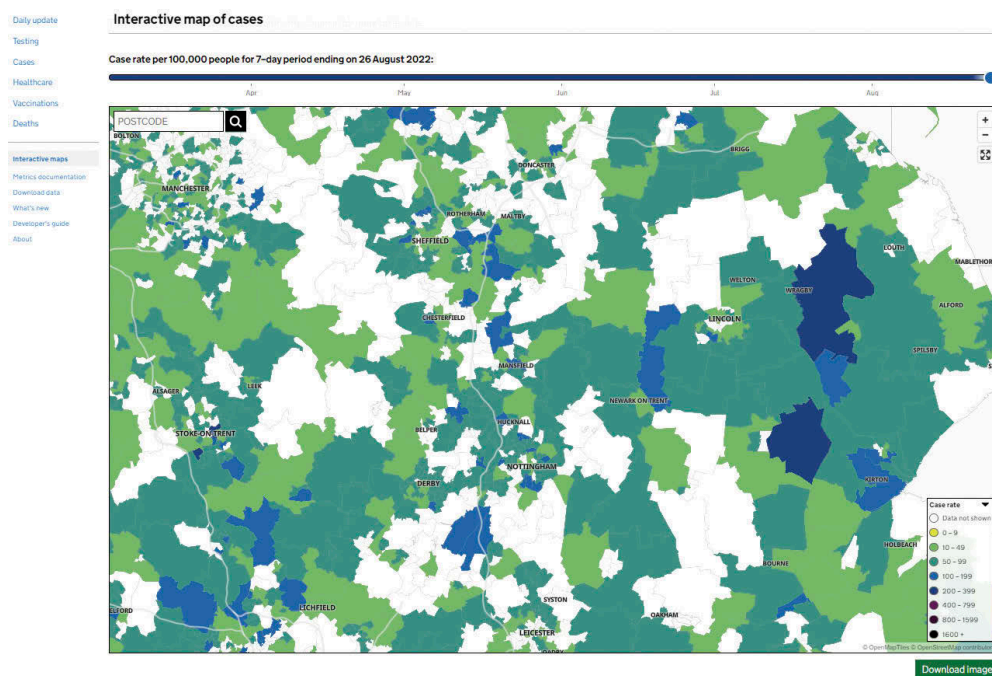
Wokery in the civil service

Separating fact from fiction

Jess Bowie takes a personal look at a divisive and highly politicised topic, to uncover the real issues which lie behind it

Diversity and inclusion roles in the civil service are a "job creation scheme by the woke for the woke"; the civil service needs "focused learning, not woke folderol"; it should "ditch the woke witch-trials" and, while it's at it, "address a woke civil service culture that strays into antisemitism".

These are just a few choice highlights from this summer's Conservative leadership contest.

A word that rose to prominence alongside the Black Lives Matter movement, defined roughly as an awareness of social problems such as racism and inequality, "woke" had already been hopelessly warped in certain parts of the press. Then it became a watchword among the Tory contenders for prime minister. Not just any old wokery though.

It was the pernicious effect of wokery *in the civil service* that really got juices flowing on the campaign trail. So often did it crop up that, at times, it felt as if this was the only issue facing Britain.

Now that Liz Truss is safely ensconced in No.10, she might have one or two other things to fret about. But, given that many of the above claims were made by her (or in her name), this issue is not going to go away.

The nebulous concept of "wokery" – and its relationship to civil service learning and development – isn't straightforward. Here, *CSW* attempts to separate fact from fiction and explore the actual challenges around efforts to improve equality in departments.

Why now, and why *this*?
Over the last decade, political culture in the UK and elsewhere has increasingly become about stoking culture wars rather than bridging divides.

Separately, and more positively, an interest in diversity and inclusion is growing among all employers (public and private), and with it initiatives to make workforces more reflective of society.

Finally, we have a government that loves bashing the civil service. Anonymous briefings – or overt attacks – have been almost a hobby among cabinet ministers for years.

On this last point, however, even Whitehall-watchers were scratching their heads during the campaign at the sudden outrage over civil service L&D – an issue which, against a backdrop of soaring inflation, a cost of living crisis, drought, floods and war in Europe, surely didn't feature among the top 10 concerns of Conservative Party members.

A cynic might be tempted to use phrases like "dead cat" or "dog whistle" to describe what was going on (although in so doing they would have to be relaxed about mixing their domestic animal metaphors). After all, appealing to ideas that the British identity is under threat by hordes of diversity zealots and selling yourself as the great defender of liberty in the face of political-correctness-gone-mad feels a lot easier than pitching concrete solutions to the intractable problems facing the UK economy.

It's also tough to run on a "fresh start" ticket when your party has been in power for 12 years. A recent *Private Eye* cover summed up this dilemma by featuring Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak saying in unison: "Only I can sort out the mess left by the government I was in."

If you need to trash something and your own record as a politician is off limits, why not focus on civil servants who have no right of reply?

Witchcraft, crystal healing and 'Check Yo' Privilege'
Various stories have emerged in recent months which undeniably cast civil service training in an unfortunate light. Witness a wellness session called "A

Beginners Guide to Crystal Healing and Deep Relaxation"; an online event called "Lunch with a witch – with Q&A", and a toe-curlingly titled Cabinet Office course called "Check Yo' Privilege".

Let's take these in reverse order, as despite being lumped together in the political mind (woke folderol), they are in different categories. Yes, "Check Yo' Privilege" isn't the best name for a training course, but having civil servants consider their own advantages in life before making policy that affects the wider population – which, *CSW* understands, was the point of the training – is not just sensible but vital. The same applies to many of the 250-plus courses which then-Cabinet Office minister Jacob Rees-Mogg told the *Telegraph* in early September he had proudly axed in a crackdown on "indoctrination". One, called "De-biasing Decision-making" aimed to counter cognitive biases in government to produce "better project planning, delivery and policy outcomes". God forbid.

And so to crystals and witches. Granted, both events were in officials' own time, costing the taxpayer nothing, and the witch Q&A never ended up happening – possibly because of media scrutiny. But such courses aren't a great look.

> **"Ministers should examine what D&I roles actually do, rather than assuming they are window dressing"**
> *Lucille Thirlby*

How typical are they? A senior source in civil service HR offers some context: "There has been a group of spads actively scouring the D&I world of the civil service looking for examples of wokery that they can ridicule, so of course these things get rooted out. And, frankly, they are deserving of ridicule, not least because they don't meet the civil service value of being evidence-based. But they're not badly intended – this is well-meaning people, often from staff networks, filling a vacuum."

In the end, the centre made it clear to officials that crystal healing courses should not form part of the civil service learning offer. "Like most large organisations, the civil service runs events aimed at improving the wellbeing of staff," a statement read. "We are putting in place additional due diligence

to ensure our internal offer to staff is appropriate and value for money."

The "large organisations" part here is key. According to the HR official, the centre's policy on training is clear: it should be evidence-based and impartial. But the civil service headcount is currently over 450,000. In the words of another civil servant who has been following the wokery wars closely: "You're always going to find something batshit somewhere."

"Look at large private sector companies," they say. "There's always going to be an away day where managers are hugging trees or something. The question is, what are you going to do about it? If all you want to do is exploit them for your own purposes, there'll never be a shortage of things you can weaponise."

Whether the best way to serve citizens is to raise awareness of diversity, rather than fundamentally change the makeup of officialdom itself, we will come to later.

Ministers don't hate D&I – but some kinds of diversity might be preferable to others
Leaving aside any sense of moral obligation, it is now accepted that diverse workforces help organisations perform better. The business case for this has been proven time and again and it's hard to imagine any politician in 2022 disagreeing.

Indeed, earlier this year ministers signed up to a new strategy which sets out a standard of how to enact D&I in the civil service. Its objectives include employing officials from a wider range of backgrounds, experiences and locations and reviewing the training on offer – especially for managers – to help them better understand the value of diverse viewpoints.

However according to one civil servant *CSW* spoke to, not all types of diversity are made equal in the eyes of politicians. "Ministers' favoured diversity is social exclusion, because they believe the civil service is too metropolitan elite/Remain," the official claims. "They recognise that action needs to be taken to bring about diversity, just as long as it suits the diversity they want to promote."

A speech delivered by then-Cabinet Office minister Michael Gove in the summer of 2020 seems to support this theory. During the Ditchley Annual Lecture on "the privilege of public service" Gove said that his "driving mission" was to make opportunity more equal.

But he also painted departmental leaders as out of touch with the general population and "more sensitive to the harm caused by alleged micro-aggressions"

»

when the public were more interested in tougher sentences for people found guilty of "actual physical aggression".

Gove suggested government should be asking how it could be "less southern", "less middle class" and "closer" to the 52% of people who voted to leave the European Union in 2016's referendum.

Is there an issue with "performative wokery" in the senior civil service?
Some, including inside the civil service, have muttered about this – privately complaining that for all their rallying speeches to staff networks, senior leaders rarely end up taking concrete action to address the challenges affecting underrepresented groups.

One senior official *CSW* spoke to does not deny the issue exists, but argues that it is structural, rather than the fault of "virtue signalling" senior leaders.

"It's the classic thing in the civil service: because there isn't enough diversity at the top levels, you end up with a white middle-aged permanent secretary as the race champion, or with an able-bodied permanent secretary as the disability champion. And it's absolutely not part of their day job, it's an addendum to everything. So

they end up being attracted to the performatively woke stuff, because they need to be seen to be doing something," they say.

"You're meant to be the champion for this protected characteristic for the whole civil service but you've not got the tools to

> **"We can't rely on just boosting the confidence and skills of applicants from the protected groups... huge problems still exist with people recruiting in their own image"**
> *Richard Hillsdon*

genuinely make any difference. When it comes to anything remotely meaningful, how are you going to make a decision that affects everyone? You can't. Because it's up to individual departments. And so they end up with the performative wokery as a result. They're in an invidious position."

Scrapping dedicated diversity officers
D&I roles in the civil service "distract from delivering on the British people's priorities," Liz Truss said in August. According to our new prime minister, there are at least 326 diversity and inclusion roles in government departments (*CSW* asked around and no one had any idea where this figure came from) and scrapping them all will "save around £12m a year".

Sent out to defend Truss's announcement on *Sky News*, Rees-Mogg described D&I roles as a "job creation scheme created by the woke for the woke", saying he did not believe those employees were "doing anything useful" or "adding to the diversity of the civil service." Ensuring diversity "is the job of people making the employment decisions, not somebody who is employed as a diversity officer," he added.

Lucille Thirlby is assistant general secretary of the FDA, which represents the SCS and other senior managers. She specialises in equalities for the union and takes a dim view of these statements.

"Why would ministers choose to take a regressive step and 'rid' government of HR specialists, who advise and provide guidance on how to en-

sure Equality Act compliance, building policy and practice?" she asks.

Thirlby also points out that if saving money is what ministers are after, then it is these same D&I-focused officials who help managers handle complex grievances, and disciplinary or harassment cases – which ultimately should mean employers save on the cost of litigation.

"Ministers should examine what those roles actually do, rather than assuming they are window dressing," Thirlby says. "HR diversity and inclusion specialists are a fundamental part of the governance and delivery function of the recent civil service D&I strategy, which was agreed by ministers. We can all pretend to be experts, but when it comes to making decisions we would urge all ministers to look at what they need to deliver and make those decisions based on facts, rather than their own bias."

However *CSW*'s civil service HR contact is more glass-half-full about Truss's proposed cull, and echoes Rees-Mogg's thoughts about D&I being "the job of people making the employment decisions". They say: "Probably you don't need lots of D&I specialists because actually they are a form of management of failure demand [namely the demand caused by a failure to do something]. It should just be the job of business partners and line managers.

"HR, particularly the central function, should be much more of an assurance function which says: here are the standards, let's help you make sure they're embedded into your processes."

Is it possible to implement a centralised strategy – however good – across a workforce this large?
Maybe not. In an ideal world, there would be no separate D&I roles. Standards would be embedded and line managers would follow the guidance. Indeed, efforts are underway, led by the highly-thought-of Cabinet Office deputy director Jason Ghaboos, to implement the D&I strategy.

But when *CSW* puts this to one senior official (albeit one of a slightly jaded disposition) they point out that the delegated structure of the civil service means that trying to implement overarching changes across the whole organisation – on any issue – is hugely challenging.

"Just ask [former Cabinet Office minister] Francis Maude. And he was a rare breed of politician who was personally dedi-

cated to civil service reform and had the luxury of being in post for five years. It's still murder," the official says.

"And why are you stopping at diversity and inclusion? If you've got all your policies right, why don't you scrap all of HR? Performance, discipline – you don't need that expertise because all your line managers can just go to the *Big Book of How to Do It Properly* and that will cover it."

What is the solution?
Richard Hillsdon, a former senior civil servant and occupational psychologist who has spent years coaching members of underrepresented groups for selection and promotion into all levels of the civil service, believes we must move away from just D&I awareness towards real process changes – and audit. He calls this "cultural rebuilding".

Hillsdon, who has been a speaker at numerous Ethnic Minorities into Leadership conferences (run by *CSW*'s parent company Dods) points out that – despite all the training courses and strategies – black and minority-ethnic job applicants are disadvantaged in their success rate at every level of the civil service. They are disadvantaged at the interview stage, he says, and "extraordinarily, in these days of anonymous applications", at the sifting stage as well.

"We can't rely on just boosting the confidence and the skills of people who are applying from the protected groups," Hillsdon says. "We spend a lot of time trying to 'build the muscles' of BAME or women candidates and so on, but huge problems still exist with people recruiting

Civil Service Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022-2025

Promoting fairness and performance

in their own image. What we have to do is to start working with the other side of the table as well: with the selector side."

During his training sessions with employers who have vacancies, Hillsdon says he constantly asks them: "What might diversity look like for this job and how would we capture that in an advert that is attractive to people?"

One senior civil servant, whom Hillsdon is fond of quoting, got to the heart of the problem. That official said: "I am increasingly convinced that inclusion will not be achieved by programmes to make people more like me, and that we need a much greater focus on making people like me shift our thinking and change our behaviour."

The D&I strategy is, Hillsdon says, "fine". But he, too, believes that putting it into action is not in the gift of the centre.

"This is about line managers at a local level. There's that middle or lower senior management – senior executive officers, grade sevens, grade sixes – who are responsible for recruitment campaigns. It's for them to say: 'We want to shift this, we want to make sure that we are genuinely diverse and inclusive and that means every advert in our whole campaign must be focused around that.'"

People at the recruiting level must internalise "that almost knee-jerk reflex that D&I has to be built in, and lived and breathed", Hillsdon says, adding that "at the moment, that is just not happening".

The trouble is, this stuff is painstaking and can take years to achieve. Like any change that needs to happen across the civil service, it requires a relentless focus and political will behind it. Which brings us back to the crusade against wokery. For Dave Penman, general secretary of the FDA, it serves as a useful distraction.

"There are times when this fake culture war around wokery suits both ministers and employers because actually, when they're talking about that, they're not dealing with the reality of diversity and inclusion issues in departments," he says. "What does D&I mean in terms of promotion, pay, performance and all of the things that 'equality of opportunity' mean in a workplace? That's what they should be concentrating on. Not the name of an event or who's attending it."

Sadly to the ministerial mind, that might seem a bit too taxing. After all, wokery and witches make for a far better soundbite. ∎

MAJOR

What is government doing to improve the way it runs its most innovative and high-risk projects? *CSW* takes a look at the latest data on the Government Major Projects Portfolio to find out

LEAGUE

From replacing the country's nuclear warheads and reforming how prisons test for drugs among their inmates, to widening a 10-mile stretch of the A428 and building a new supercomputer for the Met Office – the Government's Major Projects Portfolio is a snapshot of the varied work that goes on across government every day.

The GMPP brings together government's most ambitious, costly and – often – high-risk schemes. Though each project is run by a department, the GMPP as a whole is managed by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority which provides, according to its annual report, "robust oversight" for these "complex and strategically significant" projects and programmes.

Each year, the IPA publishes, alongside its annual report, an update on the GMPP and the projects within it. Over the next 14 pages *CSW* uses the data from this update to give an overview of the four categories within the GMPP: infrastructure and construction, ICT, military capability, and transformation and service delivery. But first, let's take a look at the GMPP in 2022.

Size

When the GMPP was first created in 2013, it comprised 191 projects. After rising slightly in 2014, this number fell gradually for several years as projects finished or were stopped – the largest drop was in 2016 when 76 projects left and just 31 joined. By 2020, there were just 125 projects in the portfolio. In 2021, however, the GMPP started to grow again, with 95 new projects added by March 2021 and 76 the next year, taking it to 235 projects by March 2022 when the IPA's latest data was collected.

This growth reflects a commitment made in the 2021 Declaration on Government Reform, which set out a plan to "move all eligible major projects into the Government Major Projects Portfolio". The rise in 2022 follows a review into major project governance and, according to the IPA's annual report, "ensures that rigorous oversight of project management and delivery is applied to all eligible projects meeting GMPP criteria." This oversight includes data tracking and assurance reviews, which take place at regular intervals and are required before the Treasury will approve new or continued funding for the projects.

Inclusion on the GMPP brings greater oversight, but also increased support, as an IPA spokesperson told *CSW*: "The increased size of the GMPP will allow departments to better access support and assurance from the IPA, increasing the chances of successful delivery."

While 95 projects have joined the GMPP since the last report, 25 have left. Most of these left because they were on track to deliver their objectives and no longer need continuous IPA oversight – though the IPA maintains involvement with these teams as needed. Other leavers were merged or replaced with a new GMPP project – for example, a single Borders and Trade Programme, run by HMRC, has replaced three separate projects working on different aspects of borders and trade reform.

Four projects left the GMPP because they were stopped or closed early. The IPA says it has seen an increase in this type of closure in the last 12 months "for strategic, operational reasons or to support departmental prioritisation".

Cost – and benefits

As the size of the GMPP has grown in recent years, so too has the total cost of the projects within it. Standing at £481bn in 2020, by March 2022 it had risen to £678bn, almost twice its value in 2013. For this money, government plans to realise £726bn of monetised benefits.

How likely is it that all of this spending will deliver the objectives – and benefits – which government hopes for? This is where the IPA's system of oversight and support comes in, and in particular its system of assessing the likelihood that a project will deliver its objectives on time and within budget. Each project on the GMPP is given regular Stage Gate Assessments (previously known as Delivery Confidence Assessments) and rated either red (successful delivery appears unachievable), amber (successful delivery appears feasible but significant issues need to be addressed) or green (successful delivery is highly likely).

These ratings are, according to the IPA's annual report, "not a comprehensive reflection of project performance, but reflect a project's likelihood of success at a specific snapshot in time if issues and risks are left unaddressed."

In March 2022, 24 projects – 10% of the total portfolio – were rated green while 170 (72%) were amber and 27 (11%) were red. This is the highest level of red-rated projects since the GMPP was created, and is in part due to a change in the way SGAs are categorised.

In the past, there were five ratings, including amber-green and amber-red, but this year the IPA has removed these in-between tiers to enable it to, according to its annual report, "more easily identify the projects with high deliverability risk". These projects are then given targeted support through the Response to Red process (*see p.31 for more*).

A spokesperson told *CSW* that the new approach to ratings allows it to "proactively intervene in and better support GMPP projects".
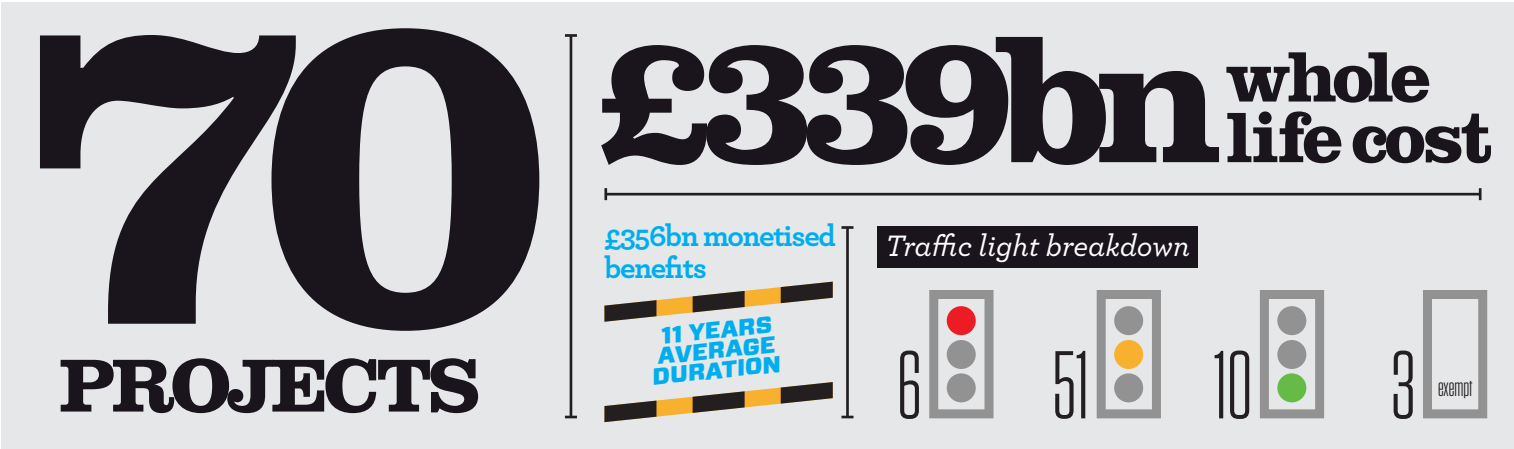
"The update to the rating system will enable this to happen, and has already proven to successfully drive the improvement and performance of our major projects and programmes, with the majority of red-rated projects over the past year moving to amber or green within the first 12 weeks of receiving our support," they said.

Despite the change in SGA ratings, the IPA is still able to monitor the overall "health" of the GMPP by calculating the "average project rating". It does this by giving each project a number according to its SGA rating, and averaging these numbers across different categories, departments, or the portfolio overall.

Using this rating the IPA says that while there were more red-rated projects in the GMPP at March 2022, the average score of the portfolio was in fact slightly higher than last year, with 22% of projects showing an improved rating and just 15% worsening. ∎

INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONSTRUCTION

70 PROJECTS

£339bn whole life cost

£356bn monetised benefits

11 YEARS AVERAGE DURATION

Traffic light breakdown

6   51   10   3 exempt

With a combined whole-life cost of £339bn, the 70 projects that make up the infrastructure and construction section of the GMPP account for half of its total price tab.

According to the IPA, the projects, which include three phases of HS2, the Ministry of Justice's Additional Prisons Programme and the Department for Education's Priority Schools Building Programme will also bring £356bn in "monetised benefits".

This year's snapshot shows six infrastructure and construction projects are red-rated. For two – the Department for Transport's East West Rail Connection Stage 2 and 3 Project and the Ministry of Justice's Rapid Deployment Cells Project – it is their first year on the GMPP.

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy's Replacement Analytical Project at Sellafield was downgraded from amber last year; the Department for Health and Social Care's PHE Science Hub was downgraded from amber-red; and the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities' Building Safety Programme – Non-ACM Remediation Programme was also downgraded from amber-red.

A second DLUHC project, the proposed UK Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre – which is earmarked for a site next to the Houses of Parliament – is now rated red after being given exemption from public rating last year, although its actual rating was amber.

The project has suffered legal challenges, including the High Court quashing planning consent granted for the scheme. In July, the Court of Appeal refused the department leave to appeal the decision.

In September last year, the IPA refreshed its Transforming Infrastructure Performance programme, which aims to increase the effectiveness of its investment by improving productivity – particularly in the GMPP's infrastructure and construction projects.

The updated version places stronger emphasis on the role infrastructure and construction should play in supporting cross-cutting objectives, such as the carbon-reduction commitments now enshrined in law and the levelling up agenda.

Programme head Nick Yandle says the core substance of TIP hasn't altered since it launched in 2017, but the world in which projects are operating has changed a lot.

"When TIP was first launched, the focus on net zero and environmental transformation wasn't anywhere near the level that it is now," he says.

"The digital agenda has moved on quite significantly in that five-year period. So it was definitely ripe for a refresh."

The growing size of the GMPP was another driver.

"The level of ambition in terms of the quantum of infrastructure investment over that period has increased," Yandle says. "If you're trying to push through the largest-ever infrastructure portfolio and you've got some pretty complex policy goals that are going to be relevant to those projects, we felt that it was right to take a bit of a system-view and think about how we reconcile these things and bring them together in a way that's coherent."

Yandle readily acknowledges that TIP is a long-term project to drive change, standing in contrast – although not at odds – with the HM Treasury-led Project Speed, which has focused more on acceleration and reforming delivery.

Although elements of TIP have direct relevance for departments and the way they manage projects, the IPA's role is not limited to driving change within government. It is also seeking to drive change across the industry.

Steve Lee, a policy fellow at the Institution of Civil Engineers and a programme manager with global technical professional services firm Jacobs, is supportive of the IPA's work.

"TIP is an ambitious action plan and it's really a case of trying to champion that and use it across governments and departments," he says.

"Clients need the autonomy to be allowed to think differently if projects are going to be delivered differently."

Lee acknowledges the IPA's ongoing efforts to upskill and improve professional expertise across government with the Major Projects Leadership Academy, commercial assessments, and dedicated training for leaders of major projects.

However, one area where Lee believes the IPA could do more would be taking a leaf out of Infrastructure Australia's book and conducting an audit of construction-industry skills.

"They produced their inaugural market capacity report last year, which was designed to provide the Australian government with an idea of skills, labour and material to support their major projects pipeline," he says.

"We've yet to produce something similar in the UK. Everyone talks about skills issues and challenges. But I'm not sure we've got a full understanding of where that actually is."

Lee says industry is "very much geared up" for investing in skills and development, but stresses it needs a level of certainty from the government about the pipeline of work that will be available.

"What they don't want is the tap being turned off after they've committed to investing in skills in particular sectors," he says.

Yandle says that Australia and Hong Kong have things to teach the UK, the latter for its "strong mandate" for using digital approaches and offsite construction wherever possible.

But he is also keen for homegrown project-delivery excellence to be better understood and learned from – citing DfE's use of standardisation and offsite construction to speed up the delivery of schools »

and increase their environmental performance at the same time as reducing cost.

He is also a big fan of the MoJ's Additional Prisons Programme, which used a ground-breaking alliance between four Tier 1 contractors to deliver four new prisons using modern methods of construction two and a half years quicker than traditional processes would have allowed.

"They were essentially collaborating within that structure so they learn from each other," he says. "The whole idea being that the fourth prison is going to be delivered much better than the first because the learning has been shared across the whole supply chain. Quite an innovative approach from MoJ."

Yandle is also clear that at a time when inflation in materials prices has been significantly outpacing consumer prices, transformation in the way major projects are delivered is a way to respond.

"If you're thinking beyond the standard way the system works, you're trying to drive change in a sustainable way, you can absorb and respond to these shocks more effectively than if you've got quite a narrow tactical lens," he says.

"The most effective way to address some of these pressures is to get more productive through delivery, so that – again – is using more digital technologies or shifting to modern manufacturing approaches which are more predictable and reliable." ∎

Jim Dunton

CASE STUDY - HS2

Infrastructure projects don't come much bigger, more relatable, or more controversial than HS2. The high-speed rail programme designed to link London with Birmingham, then Crewe and Manchester, accounts for three separate entries on the GMPP. It's also referenced by a further two projects that will feed into it.

The budget for Phase 1 of HS2, connecting London's Euston Station with a new Birmingham terminus at Curzon Street is £44.6bn at 2019 prices, although the government's target cost for the project is £40.3bn. Whole-life costs for Phase 2a and the "western leg" of Phase 2b are not given in the GMPP. However, an update to parliament in March gave estimates of up to £7bn for Phase 2a and up to £22bn for Phase 2b to Manchester. The update said HS2 was supporting 22,000 jobs at that time.

HS2 was categorised as a single project on the GMPP until 2019-20, when the whole of the project was given a DCA rating of red after several years at amber-red. Phase 1 has moved from amber-red in last year's report to amber this year.

The IPA said the move was primarily due to a reset of the project's schedule and "positive progress" with closing out residual enabling works and mobilising construction activity. Nevertheless, the latest information released with the IPA annual report said the scale of the project meant "significant risk" is outstanding.

Phase 1 has an estimated opening range of 2029 to 2033. The anticipated project end date had been pushed back from November 2029 to June 2030 over the past year as a result of delays.

Nevertheless, during the period covered by the report, boring machines completed more than three miles of tunnels in the Chilterns and a third machine was deployed in the West Midlands. The government also awarded a £2bn contract for rolling stock to a joint venture between Hitachi and Alstom.

The IPA has previously highlighted the examples of offsite construction delivered as part of the supporting infrastructure for HS2 and its new stations, such as a new road bridge over the M42 that will give access to the new Interchange Station at Solihull.

This year, it flagged HS2's commitment to "digital twin" software as an opportunity to lead transformation in construction and rail systems by providing a realistic digital version of built and natural assets to support business-critical decisions.
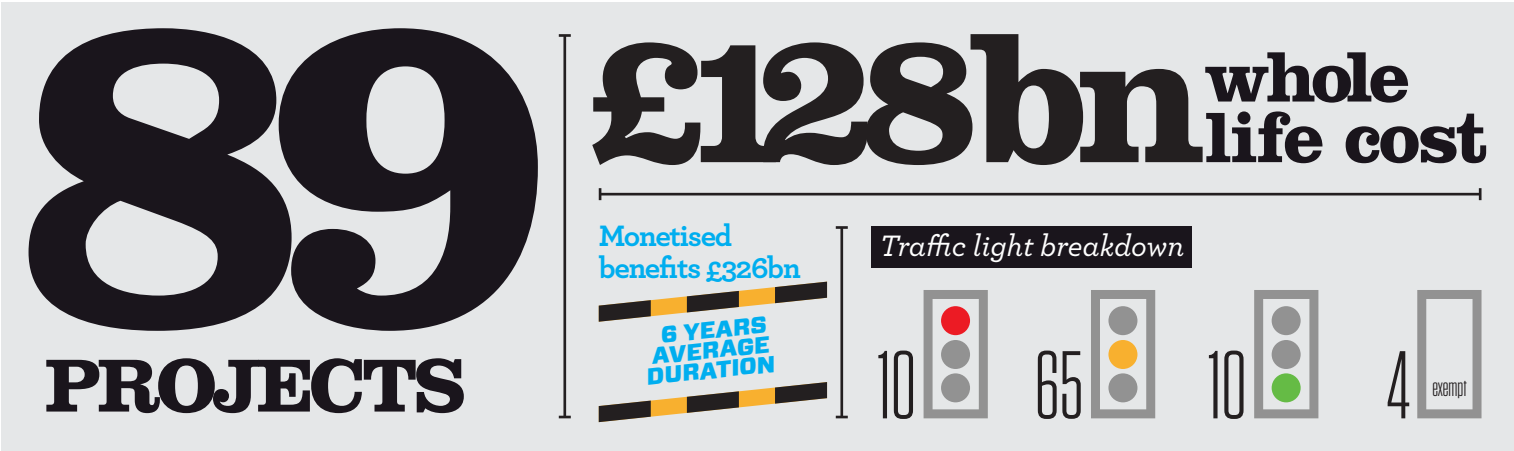
DfT-owned delivery body HS2 Ltd wants to be able to run the railway's infrastructure virtually at least two years before it is possible physically – improving how the real-life railway will be run and maintained once it is in operation.

Elsewhere, the project's HS2 Innovation programme is trialling a new form of piling that uses significantly less concrete than traditional methods and can provide zero-carbon renewable energy. The system could be used on the new stations at Euston and Curzon Street.

TRANSFORMATION AND SERVICE DELIVERY

89 PROJECTS

£128bn whole life cost

Monetised benefits £326bn

6 YEARS AVERAGE DURATION

Traffic light breakdown

10 | 65 | 10 | 4 exempt

Government transformation and service delivery projects make up the largest GMPP category numerically with 89 projects in 2021-22.

This has risen significantly over the last few years, going up from 34 and 62 in the two years before, even though this was the category which had the most projects removed from the list for successful delivery in 2020-21.

Projects in this category cover a wide variety of policy areas but mostly fall within two themes: those with a primary aim to deliver a new policy or change the way government interacts with people through service reform; and those which are mainly aimed at changing the way departments work through transformation projects. Many of the programmes are a mix of the two.

The former camp includes projects such as the HMRC Debt Recovery Scheme (see box); the Vaccine Taskforce, which was set up in set up in response to the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure that the UK population had access to safe and effective vaccines; and the National Tutoring programme, part of the government's Covid catch-up response for schools.

The latter includes large-scale work such as DWP's 10-year Workplace Transformation programme, which contains both estate and operational reforms; and the Rail Transformation programme, a reform project based on the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail, which the GMPP describes as "probably the largest and most complex transformation programme in government today".

Despite being the largest category in the portfolio, the total whole-life cost (£128bn) is only the third-highest of the four categories because of the relatively low average cost of transformation and service delivery projects (£1.4bn). However, these kinds of projects also have the highest expected net benefit, with the £128bn spend from the projects in this year's portfolio expected to generate monetised benefits of £326bn, a £198bn net benefit.

Transformation and service delivery projects tend to have quite short timescales, with an average duration of five-and-a-half years, the lowest of any category.

Explaining these short lifespans, Andrew Baldwin, head of public affairs at the Association of Project Managers says: "Transformation projects are always going to be a quicker turn around than, say, an aircraft carrier or an infrastructure project. The design and build phases, if they have them, are likely to be a lot shorter, with much-reduced supply chains. Ultimately, of course, a transformation project is supposed to transform, so would need to be implemented relatively quickly in order to achieve the desired benefit."

As one might expect for the largest category, transformation and service delivery has the most projects with a red rating: 10 projects this year were judged to be at risk of failing to deliver on time and at cost.

Budget uncertainty was to blame for three of these projects' red ratings. Other reasons included a lack of expertise and delayed legislation.

Explaining some of the difficulties that

can come with these projects, Baldwin says: "Transformation in an uncertain environment is quite difficult. It's a time when everyone hunkers down, thinking 'there's a storm coming, so we need to keep what we've got'. It's not really the time to start advancing or doing something different."

An APM survey of 1,000 project professionals, published in August, found that 76% say they were concerned that the UK's political instability will have a negative impact on projects that they or their organisation are currently working on.

The biggest concerns around project delivery were rising costs, including the cost of living; budget reductions; the energy crisis; and wars and associated uncertainty.

Baldwin says these issues are likely to affect project managers in governments as much as the rest of the industry. Indeed, the chartered body also conducted a survey of government project managers, which found that more and more projects are failing to keep to their original budget and not managing to keep to the planned schedule.

In January 2021, 86% of respondents said their project was on budget or under budget. By July 2022, that had gone down to 68%. The percentage of government project managers who said their main project was on schedule fell from 77% to 65% in that same timeframe.

Baldwin says project management is also facing another of the difficulties that is being felt across industry in the UK – recruitment and retention struggles.

"We're certainly finding that people are struggling to recruit project managers. There's certainly a skills gap and a number of government and parliament reports have mentioned that we're not training enough project managers in the country, there aren't enough project professionals out there, and others, for various reasons, aren't coming into the country as well."

The transformation category has contributed significantly to the rise in the overall number of projects in the GMPP, and Baldwin warns it is possible the portfolio "could get so big that there aren't enough project professionals".

He says APM is working on boosting the numbers going through the pipeline from university, including trying to get more universities to offer standalone project management degrees.

For its part, the IPA reports that it has been "recruiting major project experts to fill critical gaps in professional delivery roles across the GMPP, and introduced new performance-related allowance arrangements for SROs to improve retention."

Alongside this it is investing in skills through the new Major Projects Leadership Academy (MPLA), which Baldwin describes as "a really good thing – making sure that in the civil service you've got time to develop foundation practitioners, practitioners and senior practitioners, and they're all qualified to a certain level".

The growth in size of the GMPP reflects in part the IPA's aim to support projects across government by getting involved as early as possible.

"Rather than waiting until a project potentially starts to veer off course, they're getting in at the start and bringing in the expertise and the support that civil servants would need or would like at the very start to make sure that it doesn't start to veer away," Baldwin says.

By doing this, Baldwin says the IPA can help to ensure there are "the same standards throughout every project and in every government department, so they are all working on the same kind of lines".

"What I hope we'll see is, over time, more green and more amber rather than [projects going] straight to red, which I think has happened with a lot of the new ones simply because the IPA weren't there before they started front loading," Baldwin adds.

HMRC's Single Trade Window, which

aims to simplify UK border processes is an example of the IPA coming in early to support departments with projects.

The IPA says it "worked hand-in-hand" with the STW "from the outset" to ensure the £180m programme draws on best practice and the project has subsequently "seen success". The programme is rated amber despite this early success because it is still relatively young – it's not due to finish until 2027 – and has various elements hat are yet to be finalised

Baldwin is positive about the impact of the IPA's work on improving project delivery across government, noting that the number of red-rated projects had been starting to fall in recent years as IPA interventions took place. For the future, he says, the IPA could be looking at building 'soft skills' among project managers, and – relevant for transformation work – considering how to best implement projects at speed. ∎

Tevye Markson

CASE STUDY - HMRC DEBT TRANSFORMATION

HM Revenue and Customs' debt transformation programme is one of the many (65) amber-rated projects. The five-year programme, which HMRC's deputy director for debt transformation James Buckley describes as a "complex piece of IT change", involves moving from legacy IT to a new debt-management system with the aim of creating a better user experience.

This will include making the system more adaptable and responsive to the changing needs of the officials who run the service and members of the public who use it to help manage their debt.

The IPA rated the project amber due to concerns over funding, supplier capacity and capability.

Buckley, who is the programme's delivery director, says the funding issue has been "fully resolved", with the programme granted the full allocation it requested at the 2021 Spending Review, while supplier capacity and capability have been addressed and continue to be worked on.

"Improving how we deliver with our partners isn't a static thing. It's something we constantly review and improve," he says.

"And we make continuous improvements to the delivery model. Our main supplier has a dedicated team working to the programme on a continuous basis. And we've made improvements in how we engage and work with and design what we're building as part of a multifunctional team, where we take expertise from across HMRC and from our external suppliers and we all work together as one team in order to meet our objectives."

A basic version of the new system has now been built, Buckley said, with the department's work now focused on scaling that up and expanding it.

Asked if he expects the programme to move to green next year, Buckley says: "I would certainly be more confident of that. It's a large programme and what we're doing is a complex piece of IT change. So there will always be some complexities. But certainly, in terms of those recommendations and those challenges from the review that we had in the new year, we have definitely met them."

The programme is also an example of a project that only joined the portfolio last year.

Buckley says the scheme joined the portfolio after the department had developed its business case, which gave it a better idea of how much funding it would need and brought the project into "the purview of the IPA as a major project".

Buckley says the relationship with the IPA has been "really constructive" and "on point". He adds that gated reviews have provided "what I would expect to see from an IPA review, which is a constructive and honest challenge with the right intentions to help us identify areas where we can improve".

Baringa

Tackling the backlog burden through people-led change

By Mark McLeary

Dealing with crises will always be part of the Government's DNA — recent years simply highlight that the ability to adapt rapidly and act with agility is vital. What's important is to learn from each crisis and address the root causes of problems to prevent them recurring and worsening backlogs further.

Future-proofing departments and teams means empowering people on the ground to shape solutions and drive change. When individuals and teams feel ownership and accountability, productivity and morale increase. Quite simply, people power works.

People are your strongest resource
Government objectives can be influenced just as much by media headlines and public opinion as they are by strategy. Priorities can be swiftly changed and focus lost, causing backlogs to reach an all-time high.

The situation has been exacerbated by redeployment of people into new roles during the pandemic, shifting societal challenges and funding gaps. Technology, digital innovations, and automation are commonly cited as solutions. But unclogging backlogs needs people to shape these solutions and deliver results faster.

Five practical ways to tackle backlogs
Reducing the backlog burden requires focus and commitment, but it can be achieved by:

1. Prioritising leadership development
Provide real opportunities for people to demonstrate leadership capabilities, removing barriers to achieving their goals. When leaders empower their teams to be autonomous, continuous improvement follows.

20 of the NAO's value-for-money reports, and 21% of their total recommendations, are related to problems with government's operational management capability. (Improving operational delivery in government – NAO, 2021)

2. Increasing visibility of planning, reporting and governance
Feature KPI dashboards in offices and meeting rooms and make accessible virtually. Daily visibility of caseload numbers coming down gives teams direct accountability. Sharing reporting increases engagement, identifies opportunities and drives results. Teams who collectively set their own goals are happier and achieve better results.

3. Developing universal ways of working
Training leaders along with their teams ensures skills are shared and leaders understand pinch points, barriers and opportunities. Future coaching can then be done in-house with focus on supporting people rather than directing them. Take a 'team by team' approach to ensure uniformity in ways of working, reaching across and through departments.

4. Implementing process change and operational readiness at every level
Deploy both top-down and bottom-up approaches – tactical improvements can be more effective than strategic change. Leaders gather insight from those at the coal face, looking across teams and departments to find common issues and synergies. Small and simple tweaks to processes can make a dramatic difference.

Baringa's work with HM Land Registry to tackle service backlogs, saw planning ownership returned to each of their 14 regional offices. Through direct involvement in shaping ways of working and removing process inefficiencies, caseworker engagement levels have consistently increased, delivering 15%+ uplift in productivity.

5. Creating a Centre of Service Excellence
Build a culture of independence and ownership to establish a sustainable model of continuous improvement. Create matrices of skills and experience so that everyone works to their strengths. Take a truly people-led approach by measuring and celebrating success – driving productivity through reward and recognition.

People-led change enables faster outcomes and increased benefits
Building a culture that recognises hard work and great ideas improves retention. Retaining vital skills and experience makes teams more effective; recognising and rewarding talent makes people stay. Change and progress are only possible by harnessing the civil service's greatest resource – people. Backlogs will only be brought down by empowering and engaging individuals and teams. It's time to put your people first – develop individuals, support teams, and finally beat the backlog burden.

About the author
Mark McLeary works in Baringa's Government and Public Sector team. He specialises in operational excellence and managing legislative and operational delivery programmes across government departments.
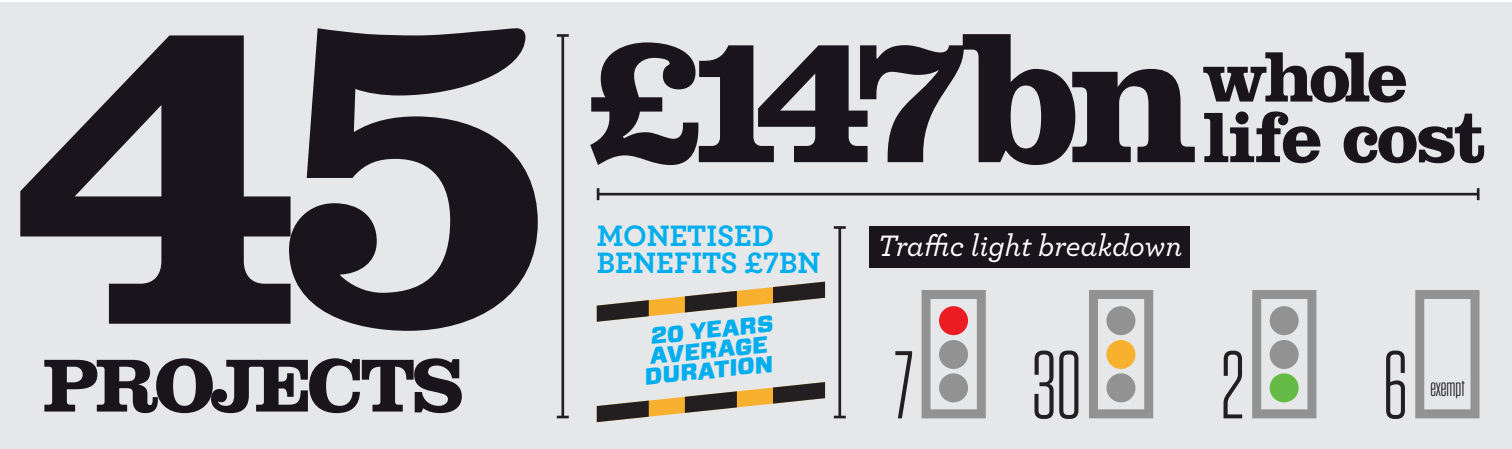
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Certified B Corporation

MILITARY CAPABILITY

45 PROJECTS

£147bn whole life cost

MONETISED BENEFITS £7BN

20 YEARS AVERAGE DURATION

Traffic light breakdown

7 · 30 · 2 · 6 exempt

The military capability category includes the longest projects on the GMPP – lasting two decades on average. Some take far longer and will be running for 50 more years.

The average cost for these long-running projects is £3.9bn, and the category is the second most expensive in the GMPP, but it has the lowest level of monetised benefits. Military projects, as the IPA report says, have a "principal purpose... to promote national security, the benefits of which are often hard to articulate in financial terms."

An MoD spokesperson expressed this to *CSW* in a different way. "Alongside our work to support Ukraine, this government is deeply committed to investing in our remarkable Armed Forces," the spokesperson said. "Through record defence spending, we are equipping our personnel to be more lethal and more agile to face the threats of today and the future."

Although the IPA report explains that monetised benefits are generally not the main focus for military projects, that doesn't mean that economic benefits are entirely ignored. Particularly in light of the 2020 Integrated Review and the subsequent 2021 Defence Industrial Strategy, which emphasised the role that defence procurement can play in supporting and stimulating economic growth. For example, the Type 31 Boats project is not only delivering "general purpose frigate capability" but is the pathfinder project for a newly refreshed National Shipbuilding Strategy, which aims to revitalise the UK's shipbuilding industry.

The number of military projects has increased significantly this year – from 31 in March 2021 to 45 a year later. Some of this increase came from reviews which pulled new projects out of wider programmes to give them better, targeted support. In 2021 the category included an amber-rated "Complex Weapons" project that was in reality a portfolio, covering a range of projects focused on different types of weapon. In 2022 some of those are now GMPP projects in their own right, which means they get assurance at a more detailed level and enables the MoD to better track and manage dependencies between them. It also allows the department to monitor spend and performance more clearly, and target interventions as needed.

These new projects include the amber-rated and evocatively named Brimstone, SpearCap, Martlet and Meteor projects, as well as the red-rated Sea Venom and Future Cruise Anti Weapon. The latter project illustrates how military capability programmes can offer wide-ranging strategic benefits: the weapons it delivers will be, according to the MoD's data, a "cornerstone" of bilateral cooperation between the UK and France as part of the Lancaster House Treaty and "supports UK Freedom of Action, prosperity and critical UK industrial capability."

Looking through the transparency data provided by the MoD and published alongside the IPA's annual report, several themes emerge as recurring challenges for these military projects. Workforce issues are mentioned in several including the amber-rated Armed Forces recruitment programme, and the Land Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR) project. The Clyde Infrastructure project, meanwhile, is rated amber because, although it is "well led and managed locally", there are "significant external factors which challenge its delivery including wider programme dependencies, market shortage of suitably experienced personnel and supply-chain issues".

Supply-chain challenges are mentioned in several projects. As part of its work to mitigate this risk, the MoD has created a department-wide supply-chain mapping programme, working with partners across government and internationally to share information on common critical supply chains and materials. It also works with industry through the Defence Suppliers Forum and the Strategic Partnering Programme to support better joint management of these risks.

These projects are also dealing with incredibly complex and advanced technical challenges. The Submarine Dismantling Project, for example, is rated amber in part because it is doing something very difficult – taking apart a nuclear submarine – which has not been done before. As the MoD data puts it, there is "general uncertainty with the novel task being undertaken" which creates an "inherent risk to the delivery estimates."

These projects are often closely connected, so delays in one will impact another. The Lightning Programme to introduce new fighter planes to the RAF, for example, is running late. The MoD's data explains that slow force growth is part of the challenge, since the planes need a new squadron to fly them. This in turn is compounded by the fact that a project aimed at building infrastructure for a new squadron is "not yet affordable".

To manage this kind of interconnected work, the department takes what it calls a "pan-defence approach" to delivering these projects, continually monitoring performance to see how they may be impacting each other. Where an interdependency is identified, it might be escalated to the department's board, as happened with the Lightning project, which the MoD says now has an increased delivery-confidence rating.

An example of how projects are managed together can also be seen in the Naval Support Integrated Global Network (ISIGN) project. This has an amber rating primarily, according to the data, because of delays and by "availability of suitably qualified and experienced people resource." However, the MoD data notes that the "outlook is improving" for this project as it is able to take on resource being released by the Future Maritime Support Programme, which is nearly completed.

Despite all these challenges, military capability projects saw the most improvement in average DCA ratings this year. According to the IPA's calculations, the

average DCA rating for military capability projects has climbed by 7%. Although some of this may reflect the shift from five to three-stage ratings, it also reflects targeted work from both the IPA and MoD.

For example, the MoD has established a lessons-learned programme which it hopes will not only improve delivery but foster innovation.

The department is also working to ensure that each project has sufficient attention from its dedicated Senior Responsible Officer. The IPA and MoD policy is for a Senior Responsible Owner to commit at least 50% of their time to leading their projects. The most recent MoD Equipment Plan acknowledged this was not yet the case, but *CSW* understands that the department is on course to achieve this target for all major project SROs (unless more or less time is formally agreed) by April 2023. ∎

Suzannah Brecknell

CASE STUDY - CHINOOK CAPABILITY SUSTAINMENT PROGRAMME

The Chinook Capability Sustainment Programme joined the GMPP as part of the 2021 review set up to ensure all relevant projects were included in the portfolio, but had been running since 2017.

As such, it has the rare honour of being a newcomer to the portfolio which is already rated green, since it is already at an advanced stage with robust governance, finance, and solutions in place.

The programme aims to ensure the UK's fleet of Chinook helicopters – currently comprising 60 aircraft – will remain in action until the 2040s.

In the first tranche of the project, the oldest helicopters in the fleet will be retired and replaced with new models procured from the US government. The 2020 Defence Command Paper described this process by saying the UK government would be "investing, alongside the US, in newer variants of this operationally proven aircraft, enhancing capability, efficiency and interoperability."

The £1.4bn contract for these 14 new helicopters was signed in May 2021, and they are expected to be delivered from 2026 onwards,

Alongside the purchase of new models, the Chinook CSP will see newer craft in the fleet updated to contain the latest technology developed by manufacturers Boeing, and the fleet is expected to reduce in size to around 51 craft. The programme has a budget of £1.52bn to the end of 2030, when it will formally end – though the total cost of keeping the Chinook fleet in action until 2050 is expected to be £2.15bn.

The programme was originally budgeted to spend around £30m in 2021-22 but by the time the MoD data was gathered it was forecast to spend over £103m – a huge overspend which the department said was the result of "the bring forward of long lead time item and the confirmation of requirements against the existing agreements".

Long lead time items are those which will take the longest to design or build and which should therefore be ordered as soon as possible to avoid delays later in a project.

Accordingly, the MoD information suggests that overspending in 2021-22 to bring forward this item "is expected to reduce cost growth in later years".
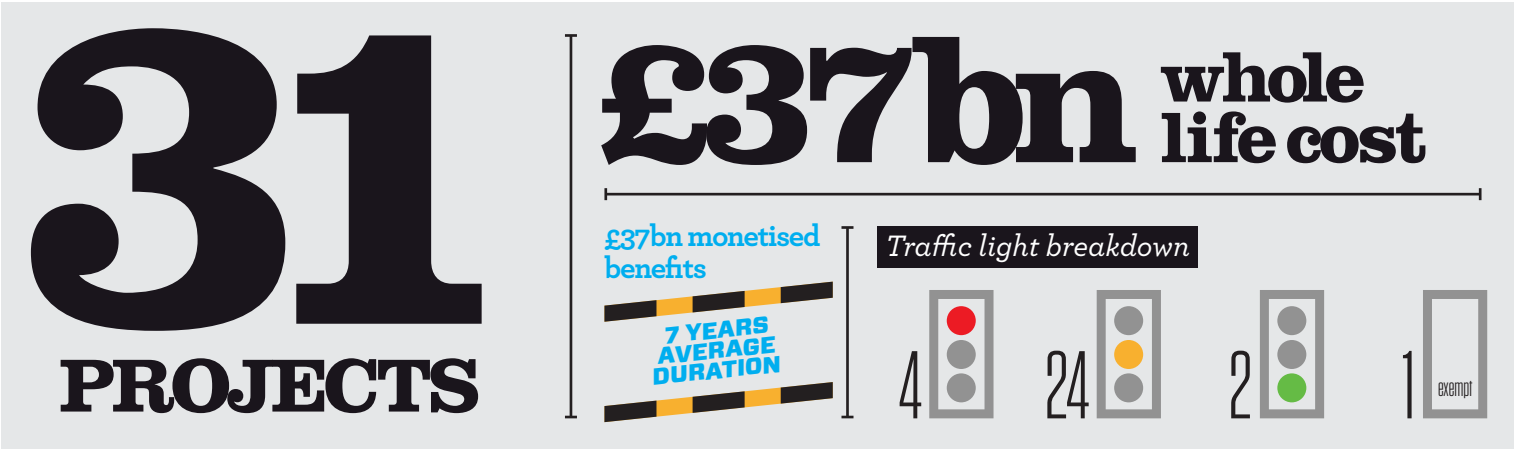
Chinook helicopters, with their characteristic double rotor blade, have been in action in the RAF for over 40 years, and the story of their arrival in the UK demonstrates that challenges in defence procurement are nothing new. The UK government first ordered 15 Chinooks in March 1967, only to cancel them 10 months later in a round of defence budget cuts. Another order was placed soon after, but cancelled again in 1971.

Finally, a successful procurement began in 1978 and the UK's first Chinooks arrived at RAF Odiham in 1981, seeing action just a few months later in the Falklands war.

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

31 PROJECTS

£37bn whole life cost

£37bn monetised benefits

7 YEARS AVERAGE DURATION

Traffic light breakdown

4   24   2   1 exempt

Information and Communication Technology is the smallest and lowest-cost category in the portfolio, accounting for just 31 projects with a whole-life cost of £37bn.

But the IPA says it is "still an important part of the portfolio with many projects in other categories having significant digital components". For example, HMRC's Debt Transformation programme *(p31)* and many other service reform programmes require new digital systems to achieve their aims.

ICT projects range from those supporting communication and network infrastructure, such as Emergency Services Mobile Communications or FCDO Echo 2 *(see box)*; to those those which support other transformation work, such as the HMCTS Decommission and Legacy Risk Mitigation (DLRM) programme; and those which are in themselves significant reform projects, such as DHSC's Frontline Digitisation programme.

Projects in this category do not generally have a high cost-benefit ratio, with the £37bn worth of projects expected to break even at £37bn of monetised benefits, although they still offer a better financial return than military programmes.

But, as the APMs Baldwin explains, "generating profit is only one of many ways of measuring the success of a project".

"It may be that these projects represent an investment in technology to benefit employees or end users, or to future-proof themselves," he says. They may not be expecting a financial return from that investment, but they will know it will contribute to greater operational effectiveness and productivity, which does generate an indirect return."

In contrast to the improvement in military projects' average DCA rating of 7%, ICT category programmes worsened, with their average DCA rating dropping by 7% compared to the year before.

There are only four red-rated projects in the ICT category, though at 12% this represents the second biggest proportion of red ratings (15% of military capability projects are red rated). An IPA spokesperson said that projects can be rated red for a variety of reasons and often reflect the scale and complexity of large projects at early stages of delivery, or at a specific point in time should an identified challenge not be addressed.

The IPA has recently developed a new process, called Response to Red, which was developed and tested with a number of projects to both inform HM Treasury decision making and provide a "bespoke, assurance informed, support driven, system approach" for projects at risk of failing to deliver.

The first step in this process is for the IPA to carry out an Assurance of Action Plan reviewing whether "actions taken and/or plans developed since the previous review have significantly improved the likelihood of successful delivery".

Of 30 red-rated projects across the GMPP, 19 undertook AAPs before the annual report was published, with most returning a new rating of amber or green. Two projects remained red-rated and so the IPA implemented the next step of the process – case conferences which bring together project leadership to make crunch decisions about the project.

An IPA spokesperson said of this process: "By taking the right steps and managing any challenges effectively after a review, future stage gate assessments are often improved and a project's likelihood of delivery is increased." ∎

Tevye Markson
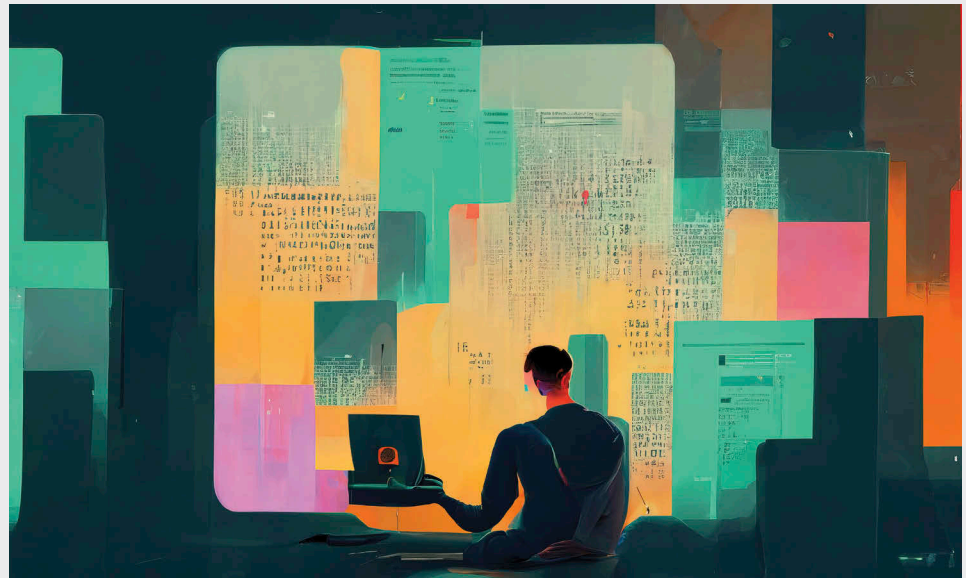
CASE STUDY - ECHO 2

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's Echo 2 programme is one of two green-rated projects in the ICT category, although it has taken a while to get to this position.

Echo 2 will provide secure networks for Britain's diplomats. It will replace its predecessor, Echo 1, which is expiring and which is made up of two contracts: one for a Network Services Integrator and the other a Dynamic Purchasing System for the provision of internet connectivity. The communications network will enable the FCDO to collaborate with staff around the world

more easily and cost effectively. It is also expected to be used by the National Crime Agency, the Ministry of Defence, HMRC and the National Health Service.

Vodafone, which inherited the company that ran the Echo 1 NSI, was initially awarded the contract by the Foreign Office in November 2018 to run the network's successor. However, the department abandoned the procurement after rival firm Fujitsu launched a legal challenge around the process because of "arithmetic errors and other manifest errors of assessment".

The FCDO re-ran

the procurement process and awarded the £184m contract to Fujitsu in July 2021, with Vodafone turning the tables and taking legal action, arguing that Fujitsu's bid had "significant deficiencies". Fujitsu won the case and the contract was signed in March 2022.

The transition to Echo 2 has begun, with the initial phase completed on time, and the other part of the programme – the DPS procurement – is on track, according to the FCDO.

Echo 2's rating has changed from amber-green to green following the change from five to

three DCA ratings.

While the legal challenge delayed the start of the transition by four months, the programme is still on track to finish on time, with "work underway to identify options for accelerating delivery with a view to reducing the impact of the four-month delay", according to the data published with the IPA's annual report.

The FCDO told *CSW* that the programme and its key suppliers are working as one team to ensure the completion of the transition from ECHO 1 to ECHO 2 is delivered on time and on budget.

THE SAVVY SHOPPER

The Crown Commercial Service has helped the public sector achieve record commercial benefits of almost £3bn, as well as respond to new global crises. Here, CCS chief executive **Simon Tse** shares his lessons from the past year

Back in July, the Crown Commercial Service published our accounts for 2021/2. The last 12 months have seen the continuation of many of the challenges that the Covid-19 pandemic presented but the success of the vaccination campaign means that, in many places, the public sector is now refocusing our efforts to face new challenges.

It has been the first full year of operating post the UK's exit from the EU. Last summer saw evacuations from Afghanistan, and as it drew to a close, another global crisis emerged following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. While these have undoubtedly been exceptional challenges, CCS has remained committed to supporting our customers with their commercial requirements in trying circumstances.

For example, during the Afghanistan crisis we supported the repatriation of thousands of people. We also set up a 24/7 service to procure 150,000 emergency essential items, including food, blankets and nappies, for Afghan evacuees arriving at UK airports.

In March we worked round the clock with our customer support teams to help customers identify Russian-linked firms within their supply chains and allay their concerns regarding price increases, closely monitoring Government policy and providing guidance on the Procurement Policy Note 01/22.

Overall, CCS continues to help even more customers across the public sector through delivering almost £3bn in commercial benefits. This includes £4m in savings for 14 NHS trusts on

mobile voice and data services.

At a time of rising inflation and squeezed budgets, the savings and better terms we are able to offer through our agreements is invaluable – supporting vital services being delivered

right across the public sector.

During 2021/22 we recorded strong spend growth – £27.6bn of public sector spend was channelled through our agreements, doubling our spend from five years ago.

The more spend that comes through our agreements, the more money we can generate to re-invest in raising the bar, building our own commercial capability and sharing that knowledge and expertise with our customers. For example, our new Contract Management Pioneer Programme, in partnership with the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities, provides training for local authorities to effectively manage the key stages of commercial delivery.

And we want to continue to do more in adding real and further value to our customers as they work with us. Our strong spend growth figure means we can continue to invest more in the customers that use CCS. In July 2022, working in partnership with NHS England and the Department of Health and Social Care, we announced the roll out and £12.8m of funding for the Atamis e-commerce system, enabling one common procurement platform for all NHS trusts in England.

The sheer scale of activities that we have been involved in over the last 12 months has been exceptional. Early in the year, our focus was on continuing to support the Covid-19 response on behalf of our customers. Now we must look to grasp the opportunities of the Covid-19 recovery and do even more to support our customers across the wider public sector and to help the Government build back better, fairer and greener and to grow the economy.

Our priority always has to be on creating more value for our customers but we also continue to support them with key policy priorities, such as levelling up, carbon net zero and delivering social value.

CCS currently has 18,000 customers across the length and breadth of the UK. The opportunity for social value to be generated by our customers through our procurement solutions is clear. Many of our frameworks, including our recently awarded Facilities Management and Workplace Services, now require suppliers to report on social value metrics including modern slavery, carbon net zero, small and medium-sized enterprise and prompt payments.

In November we published our first annual modern slavery statement – setting out the positive steps CCS is taking to identify, prevent and mitigate the risks of modern slavery in our operations and supply chains.

In January we published our first SME action plan, outlining how we're helping the public sector to meet the government's aspiration to level the playing field for SMEs. In the last year alone SMEs have benefited from £2.2bn in direct spending through CCS agreements, an additional £687m directly compared to 2020/21.

And we're continuing to help customers right now to understand their biggest carbon net zero challenges. In July 2021 we launched our first Carbon Net Zero working group – delivering expert advice on CNZ issues in the run-up to COP 26.

We've identified dozens of agreements that can be used to help customers with their journey – from the obvious areas like fleet and energy, to technology hardware and even, in future, food. Further investment in internal training and governance continues to bring new agreements into focus too.

CCS is now helping suppliers to build Carbon Reduction Plans (CRPs) into their bids, in line with the latest government procurement policy guidance. Our CCS sustainability team has already trained thousands of suppliers to help them produce, release, and maintain CRPs that conform to new requirements. CCS itself is one of the first government departments to develop and publish our own CRP.

Our vision for Carbon Net Zero is that we will achieve an integrated offer with easy buying solutions. We will only do that by continuing the conversation with customers and suppliers.

Once again, we've been able to demonstrate how CCS can assist customers to deliver on their priorities, achieving record commercial benefits for the public sector while achieving our target to double spend through our agreements.

But we won't stop here. We're working towards a target spend of £30bn through CCS agreements by 2024 and ever increasing commercial benefits for our customers. Fundamental to our continued success and delivery of all of our objectives is ensuring that our commercial agreements are simple and easy to access and use, increasingly through digital means. This remains complex when delivering the wide range of products and services that we do, but we have had notable successes this year including delivering a "guided match" solution for our active commercial agreements, as well as launching the Low Value Procurement Solution and the complementary Tail Spend Framework.

Our focus for the next 12 months is preparing ourselves for the upcoming rules reform and its implementation in 2023. We're working collaboratively with the Cabinet Office's central commercial teams to support the delivery. Our key priority is making sure that we understand how we will grasp the opportunities that the new regime offers so we can bring even more power to our customers' procurement.

Now more than ever, as the government works to grow the economy to address the cost of living, procurement has a vital role to play in supporting and strengthening our country and our public sector. The approach we've taken and the lessons we've learned over the past 12 months will stand us in good stead to respond to the next set of challenges in 2022/23. ■

> **"Many of our frameworks now require suppliers to report on social value metrics including modern slavery and carbon net zero"**

Simon Tse

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Letter from SINGAPORE

The Government Digital Service recently renewed its collaboration agreement with an overseas counterpart whose achievements it would surely love to emulate. **Sam Trendall** finds out more

When the Government Digital Service first signed a collaboration agreement with its Singaporean counterpart, Theresa May was prime minister, the first case of Covid-19 was still six months away, and the England women's football team lost 1-0 in a Brighton stadium where 10,000 tickets remained unsold.

For good and for ill, a lot has changed since then.

But the relationship between GDS and GovTech Singapore has endured. The initial memorandum of understanding between the two agencies was recently renewed for a further three-year term, with the aim of extending and strengthening their co-operation.

Since 2019, the two countries have engaged in "knowledge exchanges" focused on how digital services can be made accessible and inclusive, and designed around citizens' lives – rather than the structures of government. Notes have also been compared on the two nations' cloud strategies and work has begun on forging a path to mutual recognition of government-backed frameworks for digital-identity documents, while GDS has supported a review of data security processes in Singaporean public-sector entities.

Visiting London to sign the renewed MoU, Kok Ping Soon, chief executive of GovTech Singapore, tells *Civil Service World* that, while collaborative with one another, the two agencies' approaches in the last few years have proceeded down "parallel paths".

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GDS, which is currently engaged in creating the first GOV.UK app, through which users will ultimately be able to access a comprehensive range of government services, would appear to be a little less far down the road than its Singaporean counterpart.

There are, of course, contextual reasons that make progress more complicated in this country.

Singapore is a city state of about six million people, with a government that has been led by the same, socially conservative party for 63 years and counting.

Politics in the UK is, clearly, somewhat knottier. And, whoever is in charge, it is typically set against a wider landscape soundtracked by a low hum of anti-government dissent and protest – something which has typically accompanied the failed attempts of various administrations through the years to introduce mandatory national identity cards.

The incumbent national ID system of Singapore, meanwhile, has played a key role in underpinning the digital services of its government, and enabling citizens to connect to them – as well as to a growing array of private sector entities.

The Singaporean government's LifeSG app, which offers more than 100 services, grouped by areas such as health, parenting, and retirement – rather than by government department – was first launched in 2018.

"We recognise that citizens do not interact with government very regularly," says Dominic Chan, head of GovTech's digital identity programme. "They will usually come to us at a key moment of life... and, in those moments, we want to make it as seamless and frictionless as possible for them."

Prior to creating the LifeSG plat-

> ## "We recognise that citizens do not interact with government very regularly. They will usually come to us at a key moment of life... and, in those moments, we want to make it as seamless and frictionless as possible for them"
> *Dominic Chan, GovTech Singapore*

form, research conducted by the tech agency identified three main difficulties citizens previously faced in their interactions with the state, the first of which is the departmental boundaries that create siloed services.

The second issue was "poor discoverability" of the services they required.

Chan says: "We asked citizens: 'how do you search for certain services when you need them?', and the most common response we always got was Google. Which is okay, and we can, of course, take the approach of trying to get better at SEO (search engine optimisation). But, given

the current landscape – where there are so many scams or phishing sites out there – I think there's a certain amount of risk that we expose citizens to, if they try to figure this out themselves. If we can put all content together in a trusted place – and be able to make that easier for them to discover – I think that's really much better."

Bringing services together in one place also allows for tighter integration which, in turn, enables greater personalisation for users, allowing the government "to present the right information to citizens at the right time," according to Chan.

This then helps to address the third issue previously faced by service users, he adds.

"A lot of times, citizens are not aware that they're entitled to certain benefits, or there are certain existing services that they could use that would make life a lot easier for them," he says.
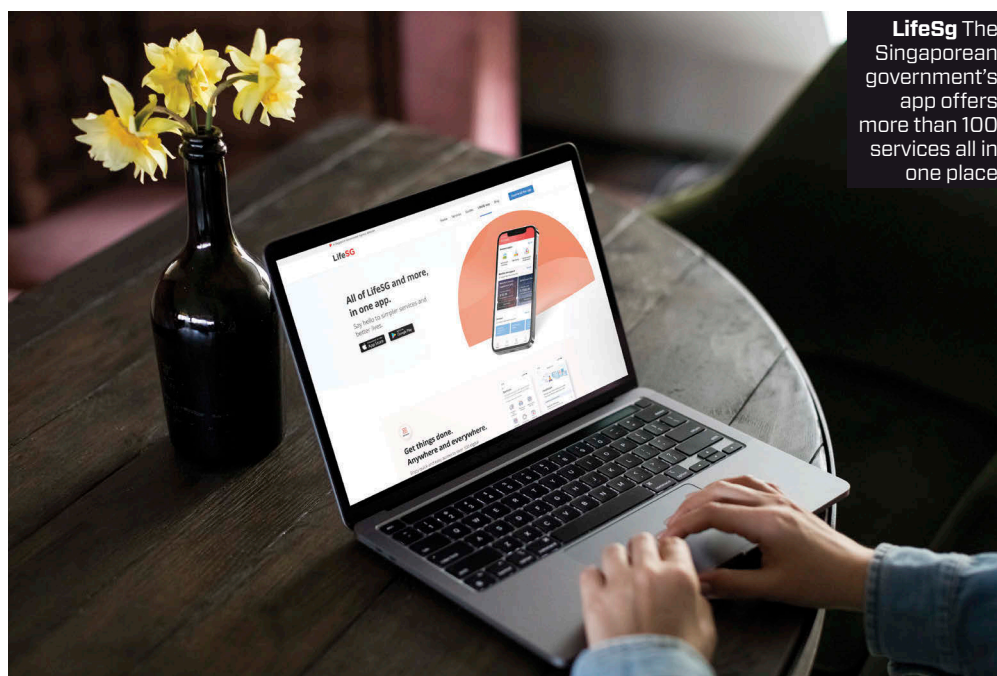
The GovTech exec points to the example of the government's current suite of digital services for new parents – which did not exist 14 years ago, when Chan and his wife had their first child.

"We had to figure out where to go for registration. So, I went downstairs, and I had to get a nurse to help me fill out the forms and tell me where to submit them," he says. "And, thereafter, I wasn't aware until my friends told me that, actually, we were entitled to a 'baby bonus' [payment] I had to go to another agency to apply for. And, before doing that, I had to apply for a child development account. All of this actually took a lot of navigation and asking friends.

"But, fast forward to today: this whole process can be completed in 15 minutes, in the comfort of the ward – where parents should be spending more time with their child, rather than grappling with government services. These three processes are now all woven together in a single place: LifeSG."

ID high
Underpinning the cross-government services app is the SingPass digital identity system, which GovTech claims has 4.2 million registered users. The system is

LifeSg The Singaporean government's app offers more than 100 services all in one place

PT Public Technology.net

powered by information from the country's national identity card programme which citizens are required to register for within a year of their 15th birthday.

SingPass App registrants can use the digital login platform to access 1,700 services delivered by 460 organisations, across both government and the private sector.

Again, this is an area where the UK has similar ambitions – but is yet to make quite as much progress.

The GDS-developed One Login system is intended to provide government departments with a single unified means through which citizens can access services. It will eventually replace an existing patchwork of almost 200 separate accounts that can be used to log in to services, incorporating 44 different sign-in methods. One Login is due to go live this month, on a pilot basis, with its first five services. Departments are required to draw up an adoption roadmap by March 2023, and the target is for comprehensive uptake across government by 2025.

Even if it is a few years behind its partner in the MoU alliance, the good news for the UK is that, if it makes good on its ambition of establishing a universal digital identity, the benefits for citizens and government can proliferate from there, Chan says.

Embedded within SingPass is a My-Info profile for each citizen, which enables people to view – and, where applicable, edit – all the information held on them by various parts of government. This includes data such as addresses, passport information, demographic details, and family relationships. Updates can be automatically shared across agencies and, with the user's content, can also be used as part of authentication services in areas such as financial services.

"MyInfo is like a sister product of SingPass," Chan says. "We moved on to solve another problem, and to enable citizens to tell us things once only. So, if you were to tell the agency responsible for [keeping records of] your address, then all the other agencies – when they need to send a letter or reach out to you – can then go to the 'single source of truth', and reach you accordingly."

The collation of all this data in one place also means that using SingPass to log in to a service means that all infor-

mation is pre-verified, and can be automatically used to populate the relevant fields on a registration form – whether provided by the government or one of the many commercial entities that incorporate the system in their login process.

The utility of the data repository has helped drive uptake of the Sing-Pass app which, although linked to the government's mandatory identity card scheme, is a discretionary optional extra, according to Chan, who claims that about 83% of over-15s have registered for the software – equating to six of every seven eligible users.

"Something helpful to us in terms of growing [SingPass] was that we were focused on solving citizens' problems," he says. "We never really went out there to wave a flag to say that we were introducing digital identity – because our focus was never that; our focus was to solve very specific problems one step at a time."

A new blueprint
Alongside the launch of the LifeSG app in 2018, GovTech also published a Digital Government Blueprint, which laid out the government's ambitions "to better leverage data and harness new technologies", and set targets against which progress could be measured.

This includes more than 90% of services "completed digitally from end-

> **"People who are digitally excluded can now walk into the ServiceSG centres, and have the same sort of experience as citizens would get on the digital shop front"**
> *Kok Ping Soon, GovTech Singapore*

to-end", 20,000 public officials trained in data science and analytics, the delivery of at least 30 "transformative" digital projects, and 70% of eligible government systems moved to a commercial cloud environment. Also included in the plan were 100% targets for the electronic completion of incoming and outgoing payments, the pre-population of forms with verified government data, and the provi-

sion of digital options for services which previously required an ink signature.

With the plan's five-year lifespan concluding next year, GovTech CEO Kok says that his organisation is "on the cusp of reaching" what seemed like "wild KPIs" at the time of the blueprint's publication.

Looking beyond 2023, GovTech will "certainly be continuing our journey to create more moments-based, more anticipatory services for citizens and businesses" – but also wants to start doing more with emerging technologies.

This includes building on its work with smart sensors and other internet-of-things technologies.

In a country where close to 80% of people live in housing built and managed by the government, GovTech has supported the deployment of personal alert buttons in the homes of elderly residents. The devices – which Kok says have already saved lives – enable users to press a button to issue a immediate distress signal which, along with a recorded description of the problem, will be automatically sent to local support services.

Other planned deployments of IoT tech include working with Singapore's sports ministry to fit sensors in gyms and leisure facilities, and supporting the efforts of the education agency to install sensors in schools; in both these cases, the technology will be used to enable "predictive maintenance and facility management", according to the GovTech CEO.

"We are looking for other opportunities to deploy sensors more aggressively in different contexts to improve operational efficiency, improve regulatory compliances and, where possible, to improve the lives of citizens," he adds.

Artificial intelligence and machine learning is another area of emerging tech where GovTech is ramping up its work. This includes expanding the use of automated speech-to-text tools – which are already used to transcribe proceedings in Singapore's parliament, and will now be trialled in the courts system.

Singapore's Ministry of Education is among the pioneers, and GovTech is currently supporting experiments with the use of automated processes to support "adaptive learning" in some schools.

"This is an assistive-learning tool for English language students," Kok says. "It can do automated marking of written

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100%

Target to be achieved by next year for electronic completion of government incoming and outgoing payments

Three years

Length of the initial MoU between GDS and GovTech Singapore – and the length of time for which it has been renewed

1,700

Number of services – delivered across 460 government and commercial organisaitons – that use the SingPass digital identity for user login

4.2 million

Number of users of the SingPass digital identity app, equating to 83% of all possible registrants nationwide

assignments, and pick up common mistakes of grammar and sentence structure, and provide [an immediate] response to the students. The theory behind this is that, the more you get feedback, the more incentivised students will be.... But this doesn't mean the teacher is out of a job! These low-level corrections right can be done by the automated learning tool, then the teacher can focus on persuasiveness and tone, and how to be more expressive in English. And, very importantly, statistics have been collected, and the teachers can then pace [learning] and know who to target for more personalised education experience."

Whatever new innovations the two agencies pursue in the years ahead, Kok says that GovTech and GDS share an understanding that the tech is only the beginning of the solution, and that "you need organisations to move alongside" the technological developments to ensure they are delivering the potential benefits.

To which end, Singapore has created a new entity – dubbed ServiceSG – which describes itself as a "government concierge".

The unit is a joint venture of the government's Public Service Division, whose remit is to ensure excellence in public-service delivery, and the People's Association, a body which promotes community initiatives and social cohesion.

ServiceSG operates in-person customer-service centres that, similar to the LifeSG app, offer a means to access all government services in a single place.

"People who are digitally excluded... can now walk into the ServiceSG centres, and have the same sort of experience as citizens would get on the digital shop front," Kok says. "If they call in on the phone, they can also get that. And, if they need to navigate across from the call centre, to the physical centre, to the digital platform – we will know who that customer is. That is omnichannel, integrated service delivery; and, in order to do that, we needed to change the government structure."

GovTech's partners in the UK could be forgiven for assuming that a similar revamp of the long-standing structures of Whitehall might be much harder to achieve.

But, then again: a lot can change in just a few years. ∎

THE HISTORY BOYS AND GIRLS

Tough times often prompt politicians to seek lessons from the past. **Andrew Southam** explores government's use of historians

Many historians have served their country as soldiers, politicians, civil servants or statesmen. Current chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng is a trained historian who's published on the British Empire.

Yet historians advising governments are a different matter. Despite infrequent calls to incorporate them into policymaking, only a few have helped past governments.

Victorian-born historian James Headlam-Morley led Britain's first world war Political Intelligence Department, helped draft the Versailles peace treaty
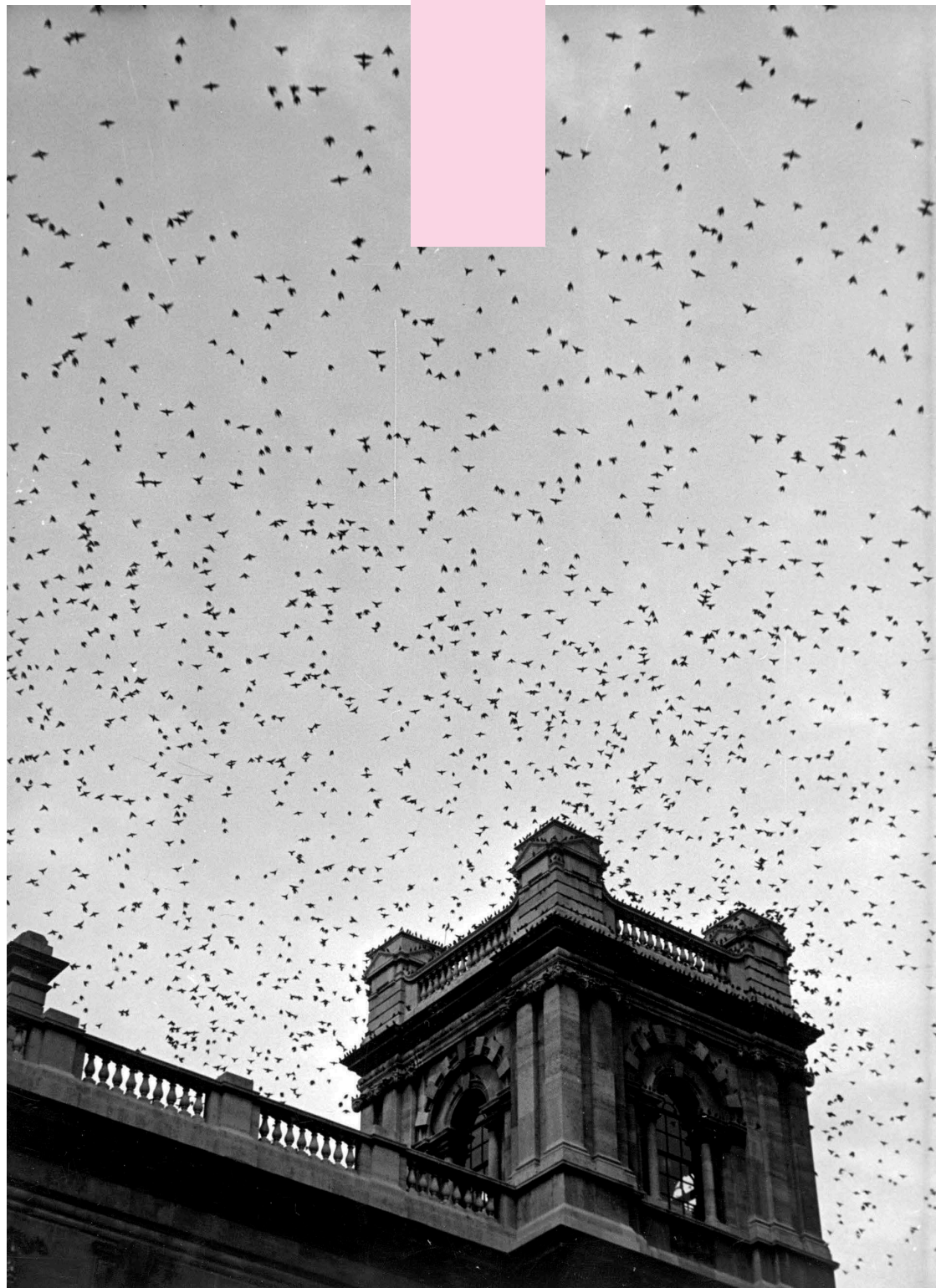
and advised the government on foreign policy. Versailles probably had the largest pool of historians ever to influence policy.

Archaeologist-turned-British Army officer and Foreign Office staff member Thomas Edward "Lawrence of Arabia" Lawrence proved his support for the Arab cause by strolling around in their traditional costume.

International affairs historian Arnold Toynbee played his role as a Near East adviser and then became Chatham House's first director of studies. During the second world war, government funded him to explain why peace had failed and suggest ways to make a better post-war future. Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe ended his ideas for a "Danubian" solution.

In 1945, Prof Sir Charles Webster, diplomatic historian and expert on Castlereagh, helped draft the United Nations charter.

US president John F Kennedy appointed history expert and public intellectual Arthur Schlesinger Jr as his "court" historian in 1961. Schlesinger's opposition wasn't enough to stop the Bay of Pigs venture that same year. And the bow-tied and bespectacled professor had to adjust quickly to Kennedy informality – which once saw him thrown fully clothed into a swimming pool at a family party.
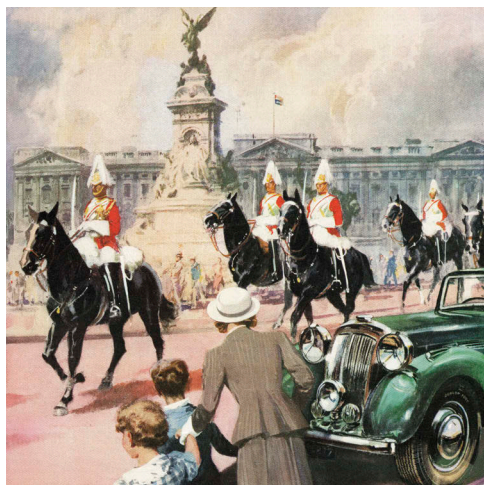
Some British government departments had their own historians when the 1958 Public Records Act required them to create archives. The UK Atomic Energy Authority employed Margaret Gowing as in-house historian. She later became an Oxford professor of science history.

Cutbacks changed things, however. The Treasury Historical Society closed in 1976 with the impact felt 30 years later: there were few recession-experienced mandarins able to advise chancellor Alistair Darling during the 2008 economic crash.

"Are the Germans dangerous?" Margaret Thatcher famously asked in spring 1990. Wary of German reunification from her wartime childhood, one Sunday she held a Chequers brainstorming session with leading historians for answers.

Prominent among them was colourful Oxford professor Norman Stone, who served as her speech writer and adviser on European affairs. He tried persuading her of German merits, saying that West Germany was not a powerhouse and had to take on "12 enormous Liverpools ... in a tatty cardboard box, with a great red ribbon round it, marked 'From Russia with love'".

The session described German characteristics as "angst", "aggressiveness", "anxiety", "assertiveness", "bullying", "egotism", "inferiority complex", and "sentimentality". But it nonetheless rec-

ognised the benefits of a united Germany and that "we should be nice" to them.

Details of the session leaked out, making history itself. German newspapers feigned outrage. Participants claimed the conversation was more optimistic than suggested. Six years later Norman thought Thatcher's instincts were right and that there were "more grounds for worrying about Germany than we allowed for".

When Labour returned to power in 1997, foreign secretary Robin Cook commissioned Foreign and Commonwealth Office chief historian Gill Bennett to solve Britain's foremost conspiracy, the fall of Ramsay MacDonald's 1924 Labour government.

This intrigue involving emigres, diplomats and spies included so-called "Ace of Spies" Samuel Riley. It arose from the Zinoviev letter, a supposed message from the fledgling Russian Bolshevik government encouraging revolution by Britain's working-class, which was leaked to the Daily Mail.

Bennett found the letter was probably forged, the culprit a likely White Russian spy, the leaker unclear and that there wasn't an establishment conspiracy against the Labour Party.

Another historian, Sir Martin Gilbert, was called on to explain a later dark episode as one of five Chilcot inquiry experts probing the UK's involvement in the Iraq War. Gilbert, the eminent biographer of Churchill, was knighted for his 80 historical works and his Middle East advice to John Major. He died in 2015,
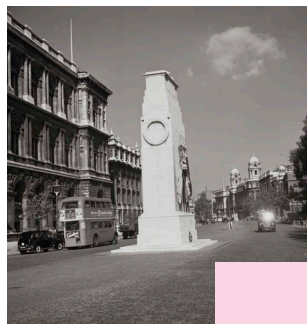
aged 78, a year before the report came out.

Soon to depart PM Boris Johnson has brought in Northern Irish history professor John Bew to advise the Downing Street policy unit. Bew, the youngest holder of the Congressional Kissinger Chair in Foreign Policy and a Clement Attlee biographer, previously advised Johnson on Brexit negotiations and applied a "grand design" to the Integrated Review of security and defence.

More historians are becoming involved. London and Cambridge Universities' history policy network connecting historians to policymakers is a decade old. Even television's favourite historian, British Harvard professor Niall Ferguson, has established his own consultancy giving top corporations historical perspectives on contemporary events.

Arnold Toynbee said there were limits to using historians as "our knowledge of the variables will never be complete enough". But they are probably more informed than most. As Winston Churchill once said: "The farther back you look, the farther forward you can see." ∎

Andrew Southam is a freelance history correspondent and writer