The Citizen View of Government Digital Transformation

2017 Findings

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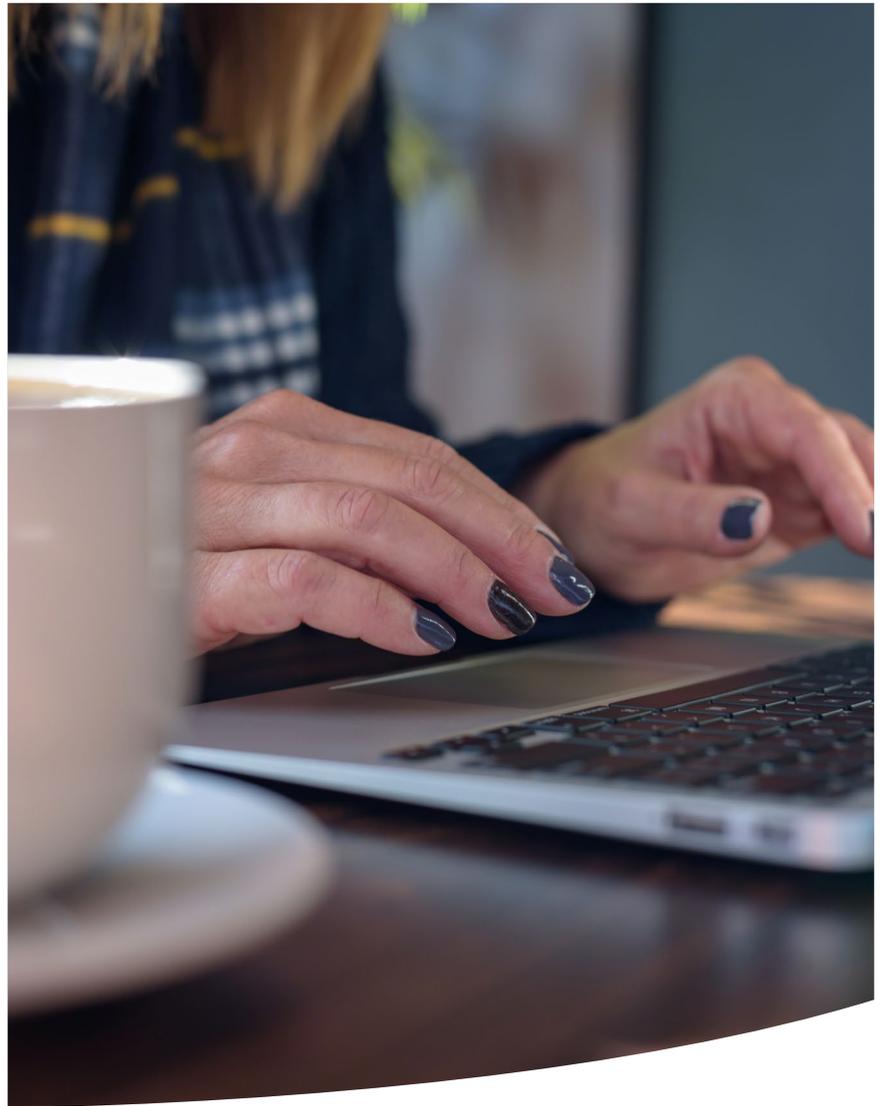
Shining a light on digital public services

Digital technologies are fundamentally changing the way we live, work and interact with each other. They are providing unprecedented opportunities for governments, enabling them to radically transform their complex bureaucracies to become more agile, innovative and user focussed. Sopra Steria's latest research confirms that digital is at the heart of government transformation. The adoption of digital technologies in government is bringing substantial benefits to the economy and society.

What is digital government?

We think of digital government as the optimal use of new technologies to improve citizen satisfaction with public services while enhancing productivity. True transformation is enabled through the digitisation of infrastructure, governance and culture, including front and back office systems. It means reimagining virtually every facet of what government does – from health to education and welfare.

This research was conducted by Ipsos. The study is a comprehensive assessment of the uptake and impact of digital government in the UK, France, Germany and Norway. It is the second year that they interviewed 4,000 citizens across the 4 countries (1,000 in the UK). The research provides a comprehensive view of the citizen's opinion on the development of digital public services, their expectations for the future and confidence in government's ability to deliver on their promises.

The study shows that digital delivery is seen as advanced and services are judged more accessible and easier to use. This results in more satisfied and engaged citizens. But health services are considered a priority for investment and citizens are demanding more streamlined and joined-up delivery.

This report will serve as a benchmark for government leaders and managers to understand their journey to digital delivery and how best to use new technologies to enhance interactions with the public.
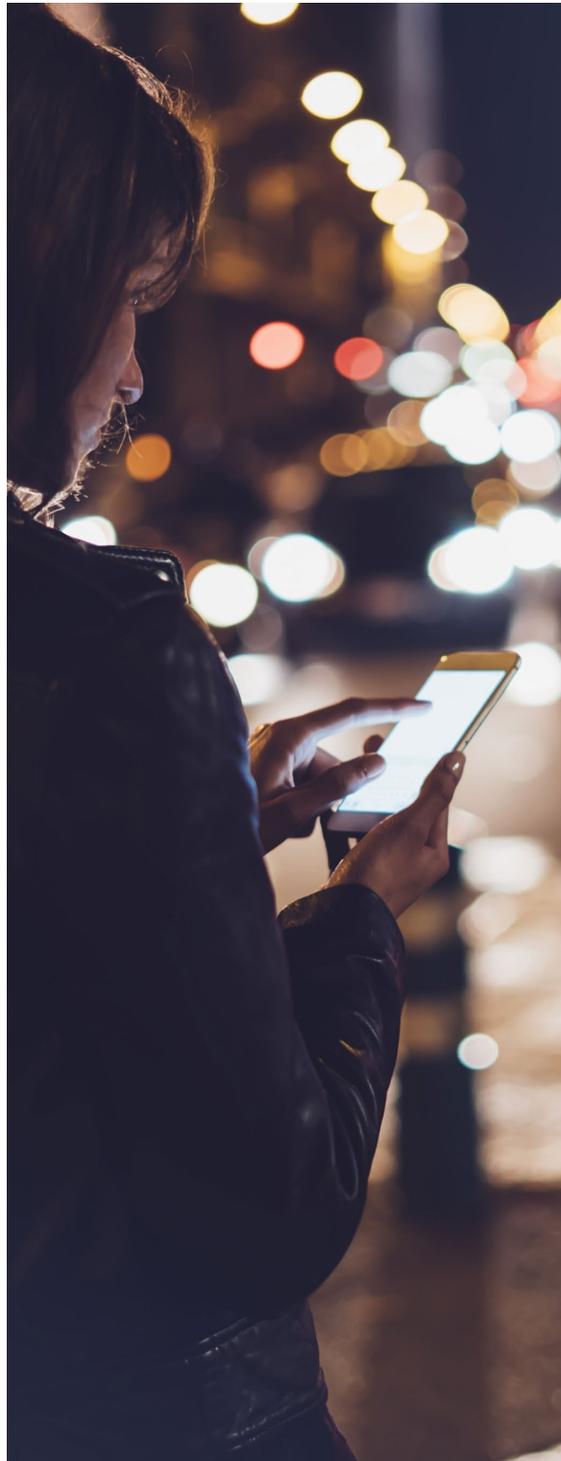
Citizen satisfaction
with digital delivery

Are citizens satisfied?

Through our research we found that citizens in the UK use digital public services several times a year – 17% at least every month and a further 35% every six months. When asked for their view on the degree of digital development, 64% of UK citizens replied that online public services were 'advanced'.

Citizen view of the current development of digital public services

Very advanced	6%
Quite advanced	58%
Not very advanced	33%
Not advanced at all	3%
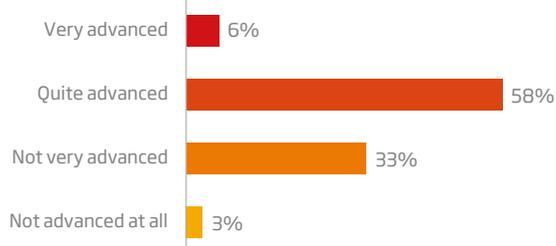
Only Norway scored significantly higher (75%). It consistently rates as a digital government leader in our and OECD research, as it has a highly engaged digital citizenry and does more on communication and social media presence.

A majority of citizens (58%) believe that digital has a positive impact on the quality of public services - they are judged to be more frequent and easier to use. They also recognise the potential benefits to them as taxpayers, particularly in terms of reducing fraud and error.

83%
recognise that public sector has increased the number of digital public services

66%
believe that digital tools and services are increasingly easy to use

Taxation is judged the most advanced online public services in the UK (65%), and all other countries, followed by education (63%) and civil status (including passport applications, 61%). Public safety (44%) was judged the least developed but there was an 8% increase from our last survey. This might reflect the recent introduction of new and emerging technologies, such as digital evidence collection and sharing that aids investigation.

What future digital services do citizens want to shape?

Citizens want more

Citizens' hopes about public service for the future provide a strong argument for governments to expand digital service provision. When asked for their opinion on how important it is for governments to provide more digital public services in the future, 75% said it was a priority (just 4% said it was not a priority at all).
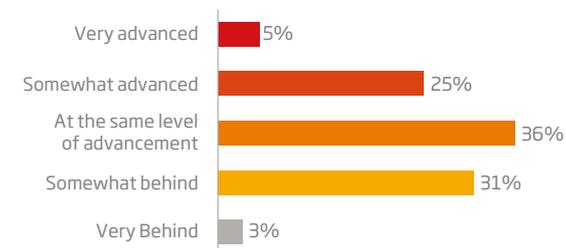
Prioritising the development of digital public services

An absolute priority	25%
Somewhat a priority	50%
Not really a priority	21%
Not a priority at all	4%
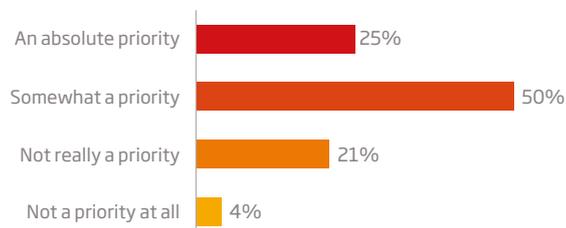
The vast majority of citizens (89%) are ready and willing to use additional services when they become available. When asked whether they were willing to carry out all relevant administrative tasks online, 78% of UK citizens replied that they would (digital is increasingly the default option).

The expectations of citizens of their governments have risen in recent years, encouraged by their experiences with the private sector, such as banking, consumer goods, media and entertainment. Citizens told us that governments still need to catch up.

In comparison to digital services from private companies, citizens told us digital public services are

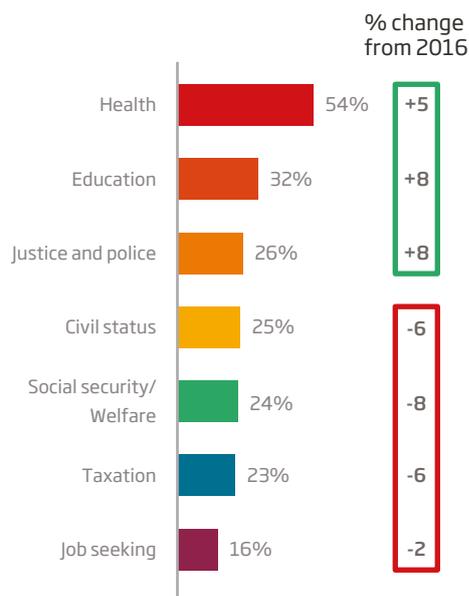|	
Very advanced	5%
Somewhat advanced	25%
At the same level of advancement	36%
Somewhat behind	31%
Very Behind	3%

Digital leaders in the private sector have rapidly adopted technologies such as mobility, social media and big data, powered by analytics and cloud. And the transformation will only intensify as digital rapidly makes its way into the physical world through internet enabled devices. Although significant progress has been made, governments still run the risk of becoming irrelevant where they adopt top down, one-size-fits-all service delivery.

Where should government focus its time and investment?

An important aspect of successful digital delivery is to build trust and engagement by aligning initiatives with citizen expectations and preferences. Our study found that health is judged the most important public service to digitise

Priority areas for digital development of public services

		% change from 2016
Health	54%	+5
Education	32%	+8
Justice and police	26%	+8
Civil status	25%	-6
Social security/ Welfare	24%	-8
Taxation	23%	-6
Job seeking	16%	-2

This is the second year that health has been identified as a priority by UK citizens but the number has increased from 49% in 2016 to 54% in 2017. Our view is that citizen demands will only increase as the benefits of digital interventions, including empowering people to fix acute or chronic problems or using data to model risk factors associated with a procedure or patient, are better understood.

How to improve public services for the future

Some ideas from citizens

We asked citizens to select the top priorities they felt governments should focus on to improve public services. In the UK, citizens selected the use of new technologies to streamline services (88%). We found that citizens wanted a reduction in the duplication and overlap of systems and processes. They highlighted the need for a one-stop digital portal (87%) or online citizen account (85%) that summarises and allows changes to personal details.

We found that having to retype the same information multiple times was the largest frustration when using digital public services (40%). If departments used the same systems and shared data with one another, many of these time consuming and repetitive tasks would vanish. Interaction with government becomes quick and efficient when common capabilities such as hosting and analytics become common. This also reduces costs as duplication and overlaps in IT systems ends.

40%
Need to repeat the same information many times

35%
It is too complicated and not intuitive enough

24%
It is hard to find the website to start my query or transaction

Increasing participation through digitisation

The development of new collaboration technologies has opened up new ways for citizens and communities to participate in the public sector. A number of public services, particularly local authorities, are promoting citizen consultation and participation through online platforms. This consultative process potentially enhances policy making and performance.

Nearly half of UK citizens said that their participation in online discussions and consultation will improve the way democracy works. But this was significantly less than France (61%), Norway (67%) and Germany (70%). One way to increase participation is to move from publication of documents, applications and reports on GOV.UK to more collaborative sites that engage the collective wisdom of people outside of government. 59% of UK citizens said they were willing to participate in online dialogues.

There is a move to encourage citizens to take matters in their own hands and for communities to solve problems themselves. For example, local authorities have set up platforms to enable citizens to submit ideas and information, rank priorities and allocate public resources. In certain circumstances citizens may be able to bypass government. New technology makes this more feasible than ever, including through an open application programming interfaces or API and new applications. 62% of citizens said they are ready to be consulted and use public data to play a more active role as a citizen.

What are the barriers to digital delivery of public services?

Three quarters of UK citizens told us that they had confidence in the government's digital policies. But to deliver digital services effectively and efficiently, government must be equipped with the necessary skills.

We found that UK citizens hesitate to place their complete trust in the capability of government to respond to future challenges. We found that 4% of UK citizens told us that government had both the will and capacity to transform public services through digital.

Even the most promising technology can fail to realise its objectives when the intended recipients resist change or lack skills. Our other research, where we surveyed over 4,000 UK civil servants over the past three years (the Government Digital Trends Survey), has highlighted skills as the most significant barrier to digital transformation. Citizens tend to agree with this finding.
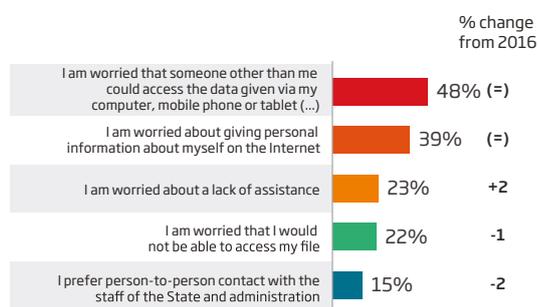
Citizen view of digital skills in the public sector

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Absolutely	8%
Somewhat	45%
Not really	28%
Not at all	7%
I don't know	12%
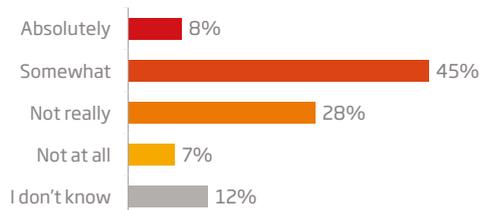
Significant efforts have been made in recent years to ensure that all parts of the population are 'digital literate' and have access to fast and reliable broadband. Over half of the surveyed citizens told us they are completely autonomous users of digital public services but a significant minority (40%) sometimes needed help and 9% had more significant difficulties. So, greater efforts are need to promote access and assist citizens to navigate and understand digital public services.

And even when digital literacy issues are addressed, citizens express concerns over data privacy and security. Concerns about how personal data is safeguarded and shared across third party environments was once again identified as the number one obstacle to the use of digital public services.

Top obstacles to using digital public services

		% change from 2016
I am worried that someone other than me could access the data given via my computer, mobile phone or tablet (…)	48%	(=)
I am worried about giving personal information about myself on the Internet	39%	(=)
I am worried about a lack of assistance	23%	+2
I am worried that I would not be able to access my file	22%	-1
I prefer person-to-person contact with the staff of the State and administration	15%	-2

Digital strategies inevitably introduce new risks. To customise services to the needs of citizens, governments need to leverage big data and analytics as key enablers. So, government must redouble efforts to enhance controls, detect violations and return quickly to normal operations after any attack.
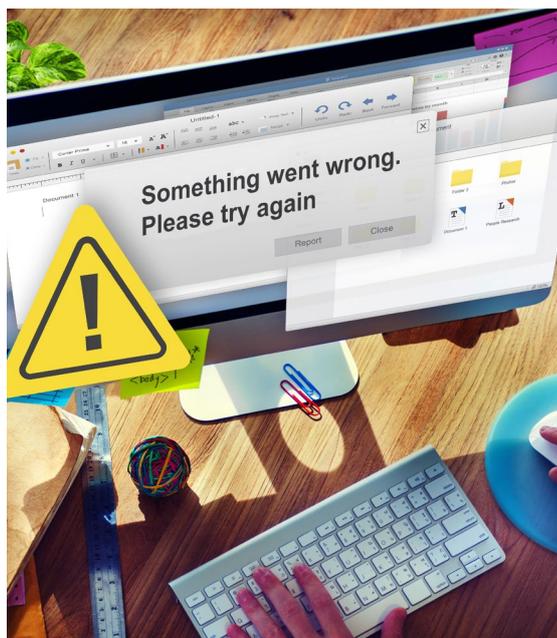
What next for Digital Government?

The first phase of digital managed to construct some pretty 'storefronts' – in the form of websites – as the entrance to government systems built for an industrial age. Few fundamental changes altered the structures, systems and processes of government behind those websites.

But high performing governments are transforming services. They are providing citizen centric public services at a time and place needed, driving high levels of citizen engagement and satisfaction. Digital native citizens are now consumers of public services. They will not tolerate poorly designed and disconnected systems. And they will let the world know through social media when dissatisfied.

Truly changing government through the power of technology will be a journey. All governments, across Europe and beyond, are still in the early or developing stages of transformation. Legacy systems, culture, procurement rules, missing workforce skills and cyber threats are considerable hurdles.

There are encouraging signs that citizens recognise the benefits of more and better delivery of digital public services. The next step is to accelerate the agenda through a simple, convenient single point of access for citizens, such as integrated portals or websites, shut down or replacement of redundant or duplicative systems, and the continuation of transactional services to online channels.

In the long term, government should maintain its push toward productivity while driving significant innovation. They should leverage technologies, such as cloud, mobility and social media, to create a leaner operating model and help gain the agility to respond swiftly to citizens' needs as well as actively involve citizens in policymaking and design of public services.

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Sopra Steria, European leader in digital transformation, provides one of the most comprehensive portfolios of end to end service offerings in the market: Consulting, Systems Integration, Software Development and Business Process Services. Sopra Steria is trusted by leading private and public organisations to deliver successful transformation programmes that address their most complex and critical business challenges. Combining high quality and performance services, added-value and innovation, Sopra Steria enables its clients to make the best use of information technology.

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