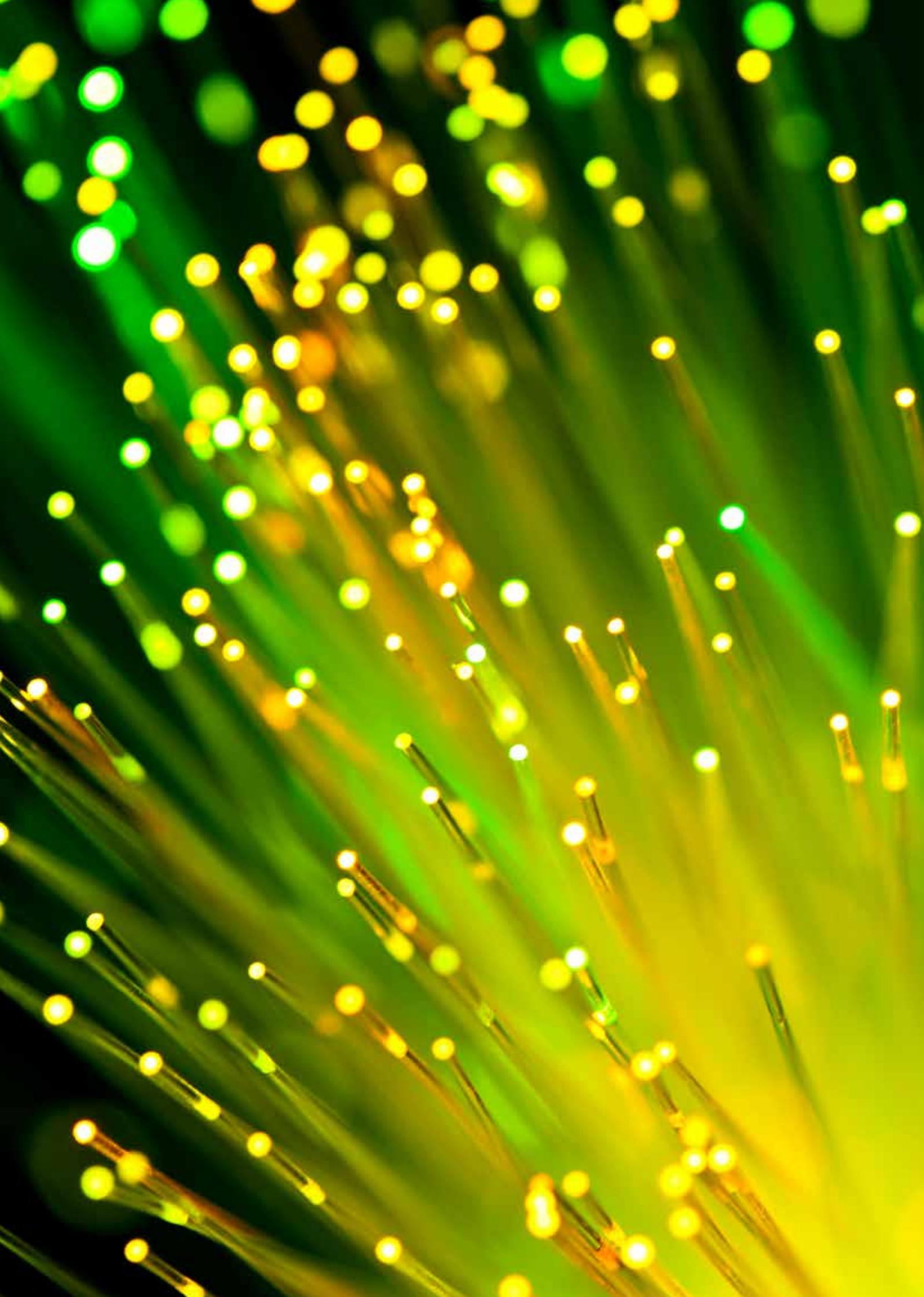


# Research Findings

## Sopra Steria:

*2015 Digital Trends Survey*





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### Introduction

The civil service is in the process of making the transition to digital by default in a challenging financial climate. With ambitious targets to reach, both for services and efficiencies, getting digital transformation right is key to the success of the whole civil service.

Sopra Steria, a leader in digital transformation, has examined the progress that the civil service has made in implementing digital services, identifying areas of success and the challenges yet to be overcome, and put forward some suggestions to assist with further development.

The journey to becoming a digital enterprise is fundamental to the evolution of the civil service and will have a profound impact on both its own processes and its interaction with the public. For this reason we carried out this survey to develop a clearer picture of how civil servants view and value the digital enterprise, both to their organisations and to themselves, how it contributes to their plans for the future and their self-assessment of their progress to date.

We commissioned Dods Research to conduct an online survey comprising 14 questions designed to provide insight into the progress of digital within the civil service. This report contains a summary of the 2,374 responses received between 16th and 30th March 2015, providing us with a robust assessment of current status of digital transformation as understood by civil servants from all levels of seniority and from across the country.

## Headlines

Much progress has been made, but challenges remain. The start of the digital journey is well underway with the first step of putting services online being largely tackled, and wide recognition of the impact of digital services. Progress is also being made towards sharing tools and processes, which is the beginning of Government as a Platform and the transformation of the government middle office. However challenges remain, particularly around skills and training, and around measuring the benefits of digitising services.

**75%** say that the digital transformation agenda had impacted their work

**37%** report they are not receiving adequate digital skills training

**67%** state that the public will benefit from putting services online

**27%** believe that the government is giving insufficient support to help them provide digital services; roughly the same proportion thought that it was doing enough to help

Only **3%** say that their organisation has not started putting services online; lack of resources and training were seen as the biggest barriers to progress in general

## Digital trends in context

Since the last Parliament the civil service has been committed to an ambitious programme of reform. This programme has many aspects, but at its heart lies the aspiration to make public services “more agile, more focused on delivery and on getting results”.<sup>1</sup>

The transition from Coalition government to Conservative majority rule has, if anything, intensified this process. Speaking to the Institute for Government on 22nd May, Cabinet Office Minister Matthew Hancock pledged to “accelerate” efforts to drive forward the modernisation agenda.<sup>2</sup> Central to this aim is digital transformation, described by Mr Hancock as the “biggest revolution of our times”.

This accords with the emphasis given to the digitisation of public services by the Conservatives’ 2015 manifesto, one of whose pledges was to “ensure digital assistance is always available for those who are not online, while rolling out cross-government technology platforms to cut costs and improve productivity”.<sup>3</sup> The latter issue will be given even greater emphasis in George Osborne’s Productivity Plan, expected to be published alongside the Budget on 8th July.

Digital transformation has a vital role to play in ensuring that service delivery continues to evolve, both to meet the changing needs and expectations of citizens and to contribute toward the Treasury’s desire to make £15-20 billion in efficiency savings by the end of the current Parliament. Already, focus is shifting beyond the citizen

centric services of the 25 Exemplars towards putting in place common platforms to be shared across government – the Government as a Platform initiative.<sup>4</sup>

By standardising platforms, the civil service can drive consistent, interoperable services and processes across government leading to significant potential efficiency and productivity gains and a consistent user experience. We believe that Government as a Platform will be a cornerstone of the enabling efficiency drive from the centre.

## Findings

### Attitudes towards the digital agenda

Our study found that the digital agenda has made a significant impact on the civil service: three quarters of those we spoke to confirmed that it had had an influence on their work, and within this group 735 respondents – nearly a third of the total sample – told us it was a major focus of what they did. By contrast, only ten per cent of the 2,374 people we spoke to said the agenda had not affected them with a similar proportion being unsure. Only three per cent of respondents said that their organisation had not started to put any of its services online, while over ten per cent said that both internal and public-facing services were now online.

Is your work being impacted by the digital transformation agenda?

**31%** Yes, it's a big focus

**44%** Yes, we are moving toward it

The general feeling from respondents was very much one of a work in progress, as is to be expected from a relatively recent initiative such as this. Many responses focused on the fact that the pace of change has been uneven, with some areas moving forward rapidly while others risk being left behind. Other respondents pointed to the slow pace of change within their organisation or highlighted problems with new IT systems. Taken together, the responses illustrate that the digital agenda has already made a substantial impact on the civil service and suggest that this impact will grow in force during the present Parliament.

Given that the effects of digital transformation are already being felt, what do they mean for ordinary civil servants? For the vast majority – 70 per cent – putting services online was the factor they most associated with digital transformation. Forty-six per cent also said it meant making existing services easier to use. In their responses, senior civil servants also highlighted the need to reduce costs and streamline service delivery for staff and the public.

That senior civil servants should focus on the efficiency aspect of digital transformation should come as no surprise given the continued pressure on public services to deliver savings. Indeed, during the last Parliament the

<sup>1</sup> David Cameron, Foreword to the Civil Service Reform Plan, June 2012

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Hancock, Making the civil service work for modern Britain, speech delivered on 22 May 2015

<sup>3</sup> The Conservative Party manifesto 2015, p. 52

<sup>4</sup> As discussed in That was 400 days of delivery, Mike Bracken, head of the Government Digital Service, 10 February 2015

Thinking about your role, what does “digital transformation” mean to you?

70% Putting services online

46% Making existing services easier to use

civil service reduced its headcount by 18 per cent for a saving of £2.49 billion.<sup>5</sup> As substantial as this was, there is no prospect that the drive for efficiency will abate in the foreseeable future: as mentioned above the Treasury is looking to make savings of at least £15 billion over the course of the Parliament, with some reports suggesting that the true figure could be twice this amount.<sup>6</sup> While some of the spending cuts will fall outside the civil service proper – local authorities and the police will bear their share of the pain – the fact that some departments, such as education and health, have been explicitly exempted serves only to focus the pressure on the rest. Given this it is small wonder that senior civil servants are looking to the digital agenda to help meet the challenge they face.

Beyond issues of cost, there is a recognition among the majority of civil servants that both they and the public will benefit from being able to access services online. Two thirds of respondents said that ordinary people would benefit from online service provision, while 60 per cent thought that they and their colleagues would also be better off as a result.

### Progress and remaining challenges

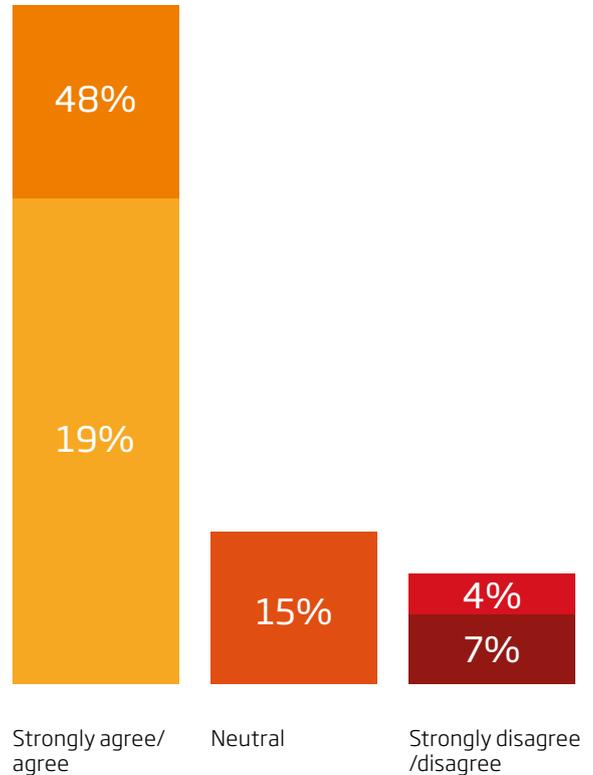
The ability to deliver effective digital services depends greatly on how well the civil service understands its user base. Our study found that the majority – 62 per cent – of respondents have a high degree of confidence that their organisation had a good understanding of typical service users and a slightly smaller proportion – 55 per cent – added that they also gathered information about users to ensure a good service.

A majority of the civil servants we spoke to said that their organisation now published all appropriate information online and only one per cent said that there were no plans to do so in their role. However, one senior civil servant noted that there was a tension between a drive for simplicity – associated by the respondent with digital services – and the ability to provide additional contextualising information.

In addition, 57 per cent of respondents said that their organisations were hoping to move more services online in the next 12 months.

Although there is recognition of the value provided by digital services, our study found that a sizeable minority of civil servants believe that they lack adequate skills training for their roles. Nearly four in ten of those we spoke to thought that the skills support they received was not adequate, a slightly higher proportion than those who said they had had appropriate training. Furthermore, forty-three per cent of respondents said that a lack of digital training for staff was impeding the move towards digital public services.

I think the public will benefit from my organisation's services going online:



Even some of the respondents who worked directly on digital transformation programmes reported that they had received no training, and among all respondents the most common methods of skill acquisition – informal best-practice sharing; self-directed study in their own time; and learning on the job – suggest that this is an area that could benefit from a more considered approach.

And it is not only civil servants who may lack the capacity to fully embrace the benefits of the digital agenda. Twenty-nine per cent of respondents disagreed with the notion that their customers had the necessary technical literacy to be able to engage with online services. Indeed, this is a point recognised by the Conservatives in their 2015 manifesto pledges to tackle digital exclusion and “ensure digital assistance is always available to those who are not online”.<sup>7</sup> The success of these efforts will be critical to realising the potential of digital services.

Unsurprisingly given the wider financial context, lack of resources emerges as the most-frequently cited barrier to moving towards digital public services. This obviously poses a dilemma for the Government: on the one hand the digital agenda promises to help organisations realise the efficiency savings they are committed to, but to do so requires investment that is difficult to come by in the current climate.

<sup>5</sup> Figures are for the period 2010 to 2014, see Central government staff costs, p. 4, National Audit Office, June 2015

<sup>6</sup> Treasury asks top civil servants to find £30bn in public service cuts, the Guardian, 10 November 2014

<sup>7</sup> Conservative Party manifesto 2015, p. 51

*“Our measure is the extent to which citizens and employers are able to self serve in accessing information, advice and guidance about their engagement in learning and skills. The facility to self serve should result in channel shift and therefore an increasing proportion of digitally capable customers working online and an increasing proportion of funding for delivery being released due to online activity.”*

- SCS, Skills Funding Agency

Indeed, over a quarter of our sample reported that the perceived cost of delivering digital public services - at least in the short-term - was a barrier to their development.

Finally, the study found that many civil servants - including three at the very top of the service - reported that there was no measure of success for the progress of digital transformation. This was by no means a universally-held belief - other respondents said that they measured the success of the programme with regards

to customer satisfaction or savings made - but it does indicate that there is a problem in at some departments regarding what success looks like and what organisations should be aiming for.

### What more can be done

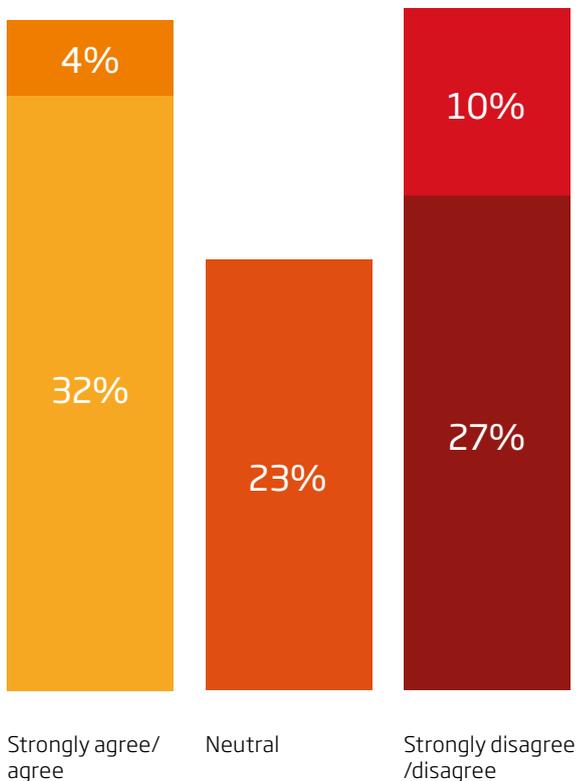
As we have seen, there has already been considerable progress towards the goal of digital transformation, but this must go further and deeper if the civil service is to meet its goals of delivering greater efficiency over the course of the current Parliament.

First and foremost, civil servants must be fully involved in the process, looking upon it not as something imposed upon them from without but as a means of enabling them to better carry out their jobs and serve their customers. This requires building on the already gratifyingly high levels of belief that digital transformation will benefit both themselves and the public who use their services, but it also requires making them feel valued and empowered. More consideration must be given to the level of digital skills present in the civil service and measures must be taken to address shortfalls. Informal skills training can only do so much, and should be supported and supplemented with more formal process as well as encouraged and recognised for the benefit it certainly is.

By the same token, any measures brought forward to ensure that the public - and vulnerable groups in particular - can make full use of the range of digital services on offer is to be welcomed and we applaud the publication of the 2014 digital inclusion strategy - and its aim of practically eliminating exclusion by the end of the Parliament - in this context.

Finally, the lack of credible measures of success for the progress of digital transformation in some areas of the civil service is both a concern and something that can be rectified reasonably easily. If given sufficient momentum and strong leadership from the top of the service there is no reason why every part of the civil service should not have a clear sense of what digital transformation is seeking to achieve, and hence what part they can play in realising this vision.

I receive adequate digital skills training to do my job:



## Conclusion

It is clear that the digital transformation agenda is having a marked impact across the civil service, to the benefit of both staff and the public. Seven out of ten of those we spoke to confirmed that they had seen the effects in their role and nearly half of these report that it is a big focus of their current work. Digital transformation is not merely a rhetorical pipe-dream, it is reality for tens - if not hundreds - of thousands of civil servants and for millions of citizens throughout the UK.

Much progress has been made, and indeed has been welcomed. However, our study also found that that challenges remain to be addressed. First and foremost is the lack of sufficient skills and more importantly a lack of provision to up-skill existing staff. Forty-three per cent of those we spoke to identified this as a problem and in light of that it is small wonder that the most popular methods of training were all informal. Given the financial pressures on departments it is perhaps unrealistic to expect them to embark on major training efforts, but even steps to formalise existing training methods should be welcomed.

Our study found that there is a considerable amount of goodwill towards the digital transformation process, with a majority of respondents believing that it will bring benefit to both staff and service users. This progress must be built upon, with robust performance measures established and disseminated so that everyone within an organisation knows what is being attempted and what part they can play in it. In light of this, we look forward to learning more about the development of Government as a Platform. In March the Government Digital Service revealed that it would bring forward three prototypes for further development early into this Parliament and it is clear that by sharing expertise in common areas - such as payment processing, appointment booking and case management - significant efficiencies can be realised.

Digital transformation offers the civil service the opportunity to confront the challenges it will face over the course of the new Parliament, enabling it to become more efficient, effective and responsive to citizens' needs. Although this is an ambitious goal it is achievable given the progress that has already been made, provided the challenges set out in the findings are properly addressed. The result of doing so will be of benefit to us all.

## About Sopra Steria

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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