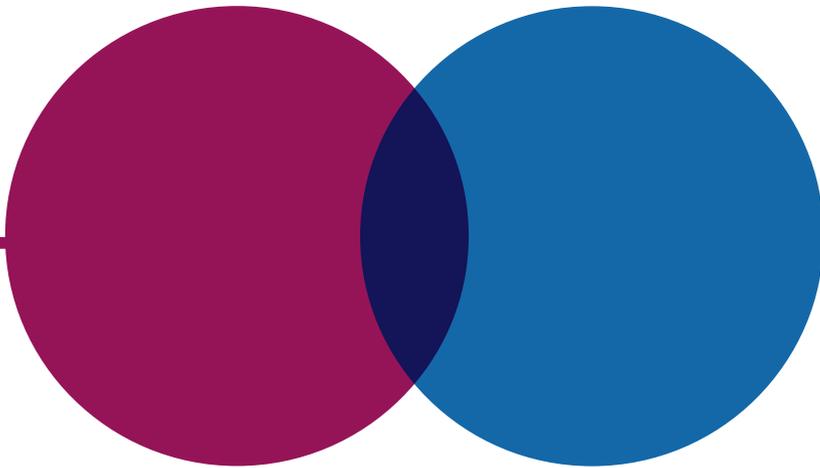




National Audit Office



REPORT

Leadership development in the civil service

Cross-government

SESSION 2022-23
21 OCTOBER 2022
HC 798



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Leadership development in the civil service

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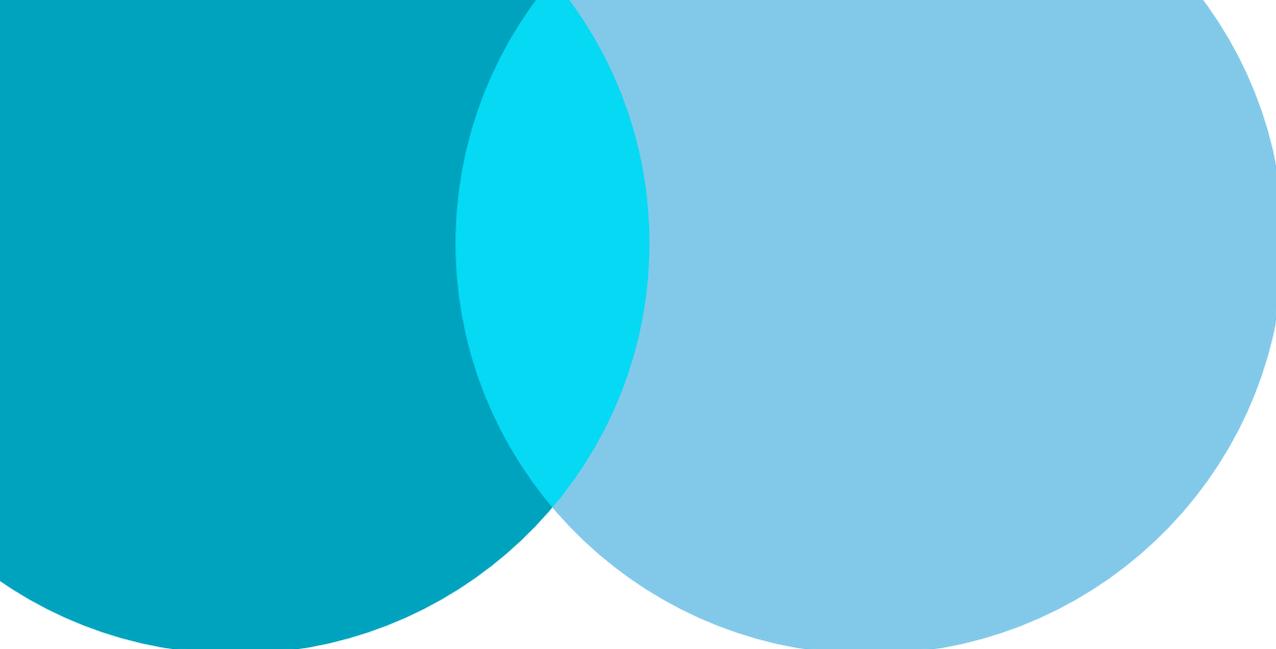
Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General

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Gareth Davies
Comptroller and Auditor General
National Audit Office

17 October 2022



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The National Audit Office study team consisted of:

James Comer, Richard Douglas, Danielle Lumetta, Marianne O'Neill, Tunmise Usikalu and David Williams under the direction of Kate Caulkin.

For further information about the National Audit Office please contact:

National Audit Office
Press Office
157-197 Buckingham Palace Road
Victoria
London
SW1W 9SP

 020 7798 7400

 www.nao.org.uk

 @NAOorguk

Summary

Introduction

1 Any organisation must have effective leadership if it is to deliver its objectives. Leaders must set a clear direction and harness the talents of employees and delivery partners towards achieving that vision. In the civil service, leaders must focus on delivering the objectives set by ministers, and also on leading their organisation well. How they do that is important too – as public servants they must act in accordance with the civil service code and seven principles of public life.

2 There are many things government can do to secure the leadership it needs, including through recruitment, performance management, pay and reward, and training and development. The government is currently implementing reforms to the senior civil service, including the introduction of capability-based pay and assessments of leadership capability, which will change the environment in which leaders work.

3 This report on leadership is part of a wider programme of work from the National Audit Office (NAO) on better people management in government. Our reports to Parliament frequently include findings and recommendations on leadership, workforce and skills because of their importance to achieving value for money. The Committee of Public Accounts also recognises the importance of leadership. For example, the chair of the Committee recently reported that government’s digital programmes often suffer from a “lack of senior leadership with the right skills who can stay in post long enough to see them through”.¹

Scope of the report

4 In this initial, factual report we describe the civil service’s training and development of its leaders, focusing on the senior civil service and the pipeline of future senior leaders. We outline the reforms currently under way, led by the Cabinet Office, and the roles played by government professions and departments in the wider system of leadership development. While leadership is the focus of this report, we acknowledge the interplay between leadership and management, recognising that senior leaders also need effective management skills.

¹ HC Committee of Public Accounts, *Sixth Annual Report of the Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts*, First Special Report of Session, 2022-23, HC 50, May 2020.

5 Our aim is to improve clarity and transparency of a complex landscape, involving multiple organisations, initiatives and ongoing change. This report will be useful to anyone wanting to understand the leadership development available across the civil service, the roles and responsibilities of different organisations and what they offer, and the direction of travel of current reforms. This will include the HR community across the civil service and the wider public sector, chief operating officers of government organisations and members of Parliament.

6 Our report is structured as follows:

- **Part One** sets out the importance of leadership development in the civil service, and the background to how this is organised.
- **Part Two** describes the leadership development offer and how that is being changed by the Cabinet Office's current reforms.

Key findings

7 Leadership is vital to delivering value for money. Leaders need to deliver ministers' priorities, while also meeting their responsibility to Parliament to safeguard public money. In our work we have seen leadership working effectively. For example, the COVID-19 vaccination programme built a team with the right leadership, skills and experience to make clear, timely and reliable decisions, and also recognised the uncertainties of delivering at speed and managed these. However, we have also seen examples of policy initiatives not realising their potential or even failing entirely when effective leadership is not in place. Leaders need the knowledge, skills and networks to lead well, supported by healthy ways of working in the organisation (paragraphs 1.7, 1.8 and Figure 1).

8 In recent years the Cabinet Office has articulated its expectations of leaders in different ways. The latest examples of the expectations of leaders include eight attributes of leadership described in Leadership in Action in 2020 and the seven core areas of leadership and management described in 2022 by the Leadership College for Government (paragraph 1.10 and Figure 3).

9 A wide range of leadership development is available to senior civil servants. This includes a central offer designed by the Cabinet Office, alongside other development delivered by departments, by government professions and by other organisations external to government. Departments decide what development their leaders need, drawing on all of these, as well as creating their own bespoke programmes (paragraphs 2.1, 2.2 and Figure 5).

10 In 2020, the Cabinet Office announced its latest round of reforms to learning and development, aiming to create a more coherent offer and to support consistent quality of delivery. The Cabinet Office is now creating a new Government Campus, both physical and online, to deliver some of the ambitions outlined in the 2021 Declaration on Government Reform.² In 2022 the Cabinet Office also launched a new Leadership College for Government, replacing the Civil Service Leadership Academy and National Leadership Centre, which had both been established in 2018. The Leadership College for Government is updating and re-designing programmes and introducing a new universal management offer (paragraphs 2.3 to 2.5 and 2.8 to 2.14).

11 The Cabinet Office has conducted research to identify problems with its existing leadership development offer and will formally evaluate the impact of its leadership development programmes. The Cabinet Office has consulted with government professions and departments on the design of its approach, for example through user groups and a design authority. Cabinet Office found weaknesses in data on leadership development spend across government. The Leadership College for Government has developed a “case for change” and will evaluate the benefits of its new programmes against the outcomes described in its educational standards (paragraphs 2.7, 2.15 and Figure 7).

12 Government professions vary in their approach to training and development, and the extent to which they include leadership development. Some of the larger professions include significant programmes for senior leaders, such as the Project Delivery profession’s Major Projects Leadership Academy (paragraphs 2.16, 2.17 and Figure 8).

13 Government departments face similar challenges in developing their leaders but take different approaches. We spoke to four government departments to hear their perspective on how the system works. They set expectations for leaders in different ways, drawing on different models or frameworks. In designing their own leadership offer, some of the departments we spoke to were trying to do similar things and were not aware of what other departments were doing. Not all were familiar with the central offer (paragraph 2.18 to 2.24 and Figure 9).

14 We intend this report to inform more detailed and evaluative scrutiny of government’s approach to leadership in the future, including its progress with implementing reforms. In future work we will also look at specific aspects of leadership, such as digital leadership, and the combined impact of government’s overall approach, including on the diversity of leaders.

² Cabinet Office, *Declaration on Government Reform*, June 2021.

Part One

Leadership in the civil service

Why leadership matters

1.1 Leadership is important to the success of any organisation and the achievement of its objectives. Leaders need to set a clear vision for their organisation, and effectively mobilise their people to deliver that vision. The Cabinet Office, in designing its National Leadership Centre in 2018, found broad agreement across academic studies that effective public leadership is defined by the actions of leaders to:

- drive performance;
- set clear expectations for their teams and establish a shared vision for their organisation;
- promote collaborative working internally and externally; and
- demonstrate integrity and authenticity.

1.2 Which characteristics of leadership are most important, and how they are best developed, may vary according to the context. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) describes leadership as “the ability to influence people by demonstrating positive personal attributes and behaviours”.³ It goes on to describe how different leadership styles and qualities may be needed in different circumstances. For example, the leadership skills needed to turn around a failing organisation may be different from those needed to maintain or enhance performance in a successful organisation. The skills needed to develop and articulate policy clearly on behalf of ministers are different from those needed to deliver services to the public through complex operations.

³ Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, *Information on leadership, 2022*. Available at: www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/strategy/leadership (accessed 12 June 2022).

1.3 Leaders also need capability in more specialist areas, such as digital, commercial, and project delivery. Again, the level of capability required varies by context. In these more technical areas, while leaders are supported by government's professions and functions, they must have sufficient understanding to ask the right questions of experts, and to understand the implications for all aspects of their business. Our recent report on implementing digital change found that only a small proportion of permanent secretaries and other senior officials have first-hand experience of digital change.⁴ As a result, many lack sufficient understanding of the technical and delivery risks for which they are responsible.

1.4 The definition of leadership can be refined by contrasting it with management, as highlighted in our conversations with organisations outside government. The Leadership Centre described the role of leaders in dealing with complexity and uncertainty, including across team and organisational boundaries, whereas management is more likely to apply known techniques to known problems.⁵ Academics from the Blavatnik School of Government at the University of Oxford argued that management tools and techniques are often regarded as easier to teach in a classroom setting than leadership. When describing how to develop leaders, a key focus for them was on integrity and the moral and ethical dilemmas leaders face. The Leadership College for Government, in its June 2022 prospectus, states "management is doing things right, and leadership is doing the right things."

1.5 Leaders often have a dual role. They must meet the needs of key stakeholders while also ensuring their organisation is managed well. In other sectors key stakeholders include shareholders or the chair of the board, but in the civil service the dual role plays out in a particular way. Leaders need to focus on their minister's priorities, while motivating and organising their colleagues to deliver them. They must also lead in a way that upholds their ethical obligations as expressed in the civil service code⁶ and seven principles of public life.⁷

4 Comptroller and Auditor General, *The challenges in implementing digital change*, Session 2019–2021, HC 575, National Audit Office, July 2021.

5 The Leadership Centre is an external provider for government (see glossary).

6 Cabinet Office, *Statutory Guidance, The Civil Service Code*, March 2016.

7 Cabinet Office, *Guidance, The Seven Principles of Public Life*, May 1995.

1.6 Those civil servants who are accounting officers have particular, extra responsibilities. While their primary responsibility is to serve their minister, permanent secretaries and certain other senior leaders are formally appointed as accounting officers and have specific duties to Parliament to safeguard public money. Civil service leaders must therefore be prepared to speak truth to power, for example if a minister’s proposed approach to delivering policy does not represent value for money to the taxpayer. In 2016, we reported on the challenges accounting officers face balancing these duties at the interface between policy and implementation. They require a high degree of skill and experience, and also the right incentives and support to allow them to perform it effectively.⁸ Our 2022 report highlighted some progress with the use of accounting officer assessments which can provide a clear and transparent framework for accounting officers to use when making these difficult decisions. However, we concluded there was further to go to ensure the assessments are used consistently and transparently.⁹

Effective leadership helps deliver value for money

1.7 Leadership of public sector organisations is a key factor in delivering value for money for the taxpayer. Leaders have the potential to create an environment where people use their talents effectively in achieving the organisation’s objectives, creating the conditions for innovation, and for sharing new ways of thinking. They can also focus minds and activities on the priorities of the organisation, facilitating decision making about how to make best use of limited resources.

1.8 We have observed examples of good leadership in our past work. The COVID-19 vaccination programme, for example, built teams with the right leadership, skills and experience to make clear, timely and reliable decisions in managing the deployment and uptake of vaccines at speed. It recognised uncertainties in delivering the programme at speed, keeping options open and maintaining flexibility in its approach.¹⁰ However, we have specifically identified “building technical and leadership capability” as one of five key areas for government to get right.¹¹ When leadership is not working effectively, there are wide-ranging consequences for value for money. **Figure 1** on pages 10 to 11 sets out some examples from our reports, organised by the Declaration on Government Reform’s three priorities of ‘People, Performance and Partnership’.

8 Comptroller and Auditor General, *Accountability to Parliament for taxpayers’ money*, Session 2015-16, HC 849, National Audit Office, February 2016.

9 Comptroller and Auditor General, *Accounting officer assessments: improving decision making and transparency over government’s major programmes*, Session 2022-23, HC 65, National Audit Office, July 2022.

10 Comptroller and Auditor General, *The rollout of the COVID-19 vaccination programme in England*, Session 2021-22, HC 1106, National Audit Office, February 2022.

11 Comptroller and Auditor General, *Improving Operational Delivery in Government*, National Audit Office, March 2021.

Figure 1

Recent concerns identified by the National Audit Office (NAO) regarding leadership in government

The NAO has identified a range of leadership risks in our reports since 2016. We have categorised these according to the three priorities identified in the Declaration on Government Reform, 2021

Reform category	Leadership risk factor	NAO report examples
People	Leadership environment does not enable staff to contribute to their fullest potential	“In the 2019 staff survey, Immigration Enforcement performed significantly below the civil service benchmark for leadership and managing change.” <i>Immigration enforcement</i> (2020), paragraph 3.28
	Insufficient investment in leadership training	“[Clinical commissioning groups] ... experience significant issues with attracting and retaining high-quality leaders. They cited a range of reasons for this, including: ... lack of access to training and development.” <i>A review of the role and costs of clinical commissioning groups</i> (2018), paragraph 11
	Programme leaders lacking sufficient technical understanding of their projects	“In May 2019, a Department-commissioned review found that programme leadership had failed to understand the technical requirements of the programme.” <i>Digital services at the border</i> (2020), paragraph 16
Performance	High turnover of senior leaders in key roles	“Turnover of senior responsible owners has been high, with only four of the 73 programmes that had been in the [Government Major Projects] Portfolio for four years having had a single senior responsible owner during that time.” <i>Delivering major projects in government: a briefing for the Committee of Public Accounts</i> (2016), paragraph 7
	Challenges in embedding change and realising the benefits of initiatives	“The Department is also implementing ... a best-practice approach to realising greater efficiencies from procurement, which it has previously tried, and failed, to embed. Strong leadership will be needed to manage the risks to realising the benefits of these initiatives.” <i>Improving the performance of major equipment contracts</i> (2021), paragraph 15
	Insufficient time for leaders to undertake their leadership role alongside other responsibilities	“Partnerships outlined a lack of capacity among leaders and stakeholders to implement plans. They said they were unable to free up sufficient time from their day jobs.” <i>Sustainability and transformation in the NHS</i> (2018), Figure 17
Partnership	A lack of clarity on roles, responsibilities and governance arrangements	“Officials ... told us they are not clear about the role of representatives from the Department on the board and other committees or the extent to which they should be observing, advising or intervening ... We identified similar concerns in our overall review of government departments’ oversight of arm’s-length bodies in June 2016.” <i>Investigation into oversight of the Student Loans Company’s governance, and management of its former chief executive</i> (2018), paragraph 6
	Lack of national oversight can leave local bodies without a clear sense of direction, coordination or guidance on complex national issues	“There is no common vision or strategy; no public forum for highlighting gaps in the system, resolving disputes over roles or sharing information; and no clear leader that drives and coordinates change across the system.” <i>Local authority governance</i> (2019), paragraph 3.25
	Lack of capability within teams and organisations to carry out their leadership role	“According to the Infrastructure and Project Authority’s analysis of its assurance reviews of major projects, capability of the team is a frequently high concern ... The recommendations particularly focused on ... leadership capability.” <i>Capability in the civil service</i> (2017), paragraph 1.21

Figure 1 *continued*

Recent concerns identified by the National Audit Office (NAO) regarding leadership in government

Notes

- 1 The themes of People, Performance, and Partnership, are the priorities for reform identified by the Cabinet Office in the Declaration on Government Reform, June 2021.
- 2 Extracts taken from the following Comptroller and Auditor General reports: *Immigration enforcement*, Session 2019–2021, HC 110, National Audit Office, June 2020; *A review of the role and costs of clinical commissioning groups*, Session 2017–2019, HC 1783, National Audit Office, December 2018; *Digital services at the border*, Session 2019–2021, HC 1069, National Audit Office, December 2020; *Delivering major projects in government: a briefing for the Committee of Public Accounts*, Session 2015–16, HC 713, National Audit Office, January 2016; *Improving the performance of major equipment contracts*, Session 2021–22, HC 298, National Audit Office, June 2021; *Sustainability and transformation in the NHS*, Session 2017–2019, HC 719, National Audit Office, January 2018; *Investigation into oversight of the Student Loans Company’s governance, and management of its former chief executive*, Session 2017–2019, HC 948, National Audit Office, May 2018; *Local authority governance*, Session 2017–2019, HC 1865, January 2019; and *Capability in the civil service*, Session 2016–17, HC 919, National Audit Office, March 2017.

Source: National Audit Office review of findings in our reports published between 2016 and 2022

Civil servants’ perceptions of leadership in their organisations

1.9 Civil servants have mixed views about the leadership of their departments. For example, according to the Civil Service People Survey, only around half of respondents from HM Revenue & Customs, the Home Office, the Department for Work & Pensions and the Ministry of Defence had confidence in the decisions made by senior leaders in their organisation, as shown in **Figure 2** overleaf.

Civil service approach to leadership and development

Expectations of leaders

1.10 In recent years, the Cabinet Office has set out several different articulations of the expectations of leaders. The 2015 civil service leadership statement describes what the civil service expects of effective leaders under three characteristics: inspiring, confident and empowering. More recently, *Leadership in Action*,¹² launched in 2020, describes eight attributes of leaders, and the Leadership College for Government in July 2022 described seven core areas of leadership and management in its first prospectus.¹³ These are set out in **Figure 3** on page 13. There are others too – for example, in 2018 the civil service published ‘success profiles’, for use by government organisations in making recruitment decisions, which have a different description of leadership behaviours again. See paragraph 2.20 for a description of how a sample of departments we spoke to set expectations for leaders.

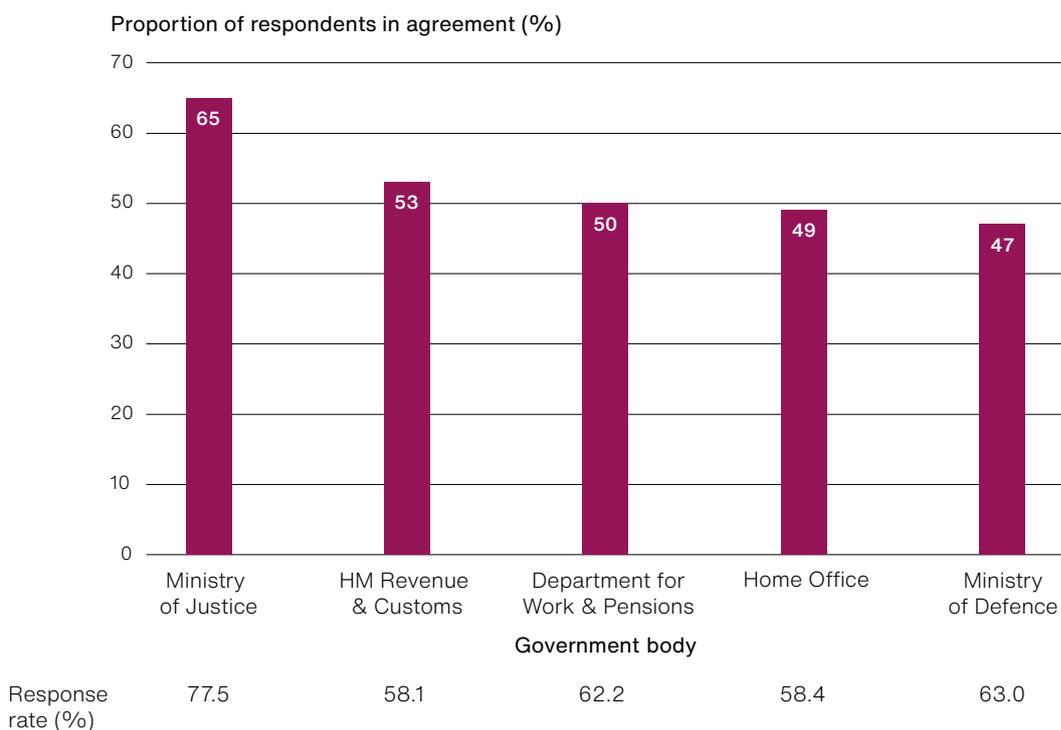
¹² Cabinet Office, *Leadership in Action*, April 2020.

¹³ Cabinet Office, *Leadership College for Government Prospectus*, July 2022.

Figure 2

Proportion of Civil Service People Survey respondents who have confidence in the decisions made by their organisation’s senior managers in the five largest government departments, 2021

Only around half of employees in four of the five largest government departments have confidence in the decisions made by their leaders



Notes

- 1 The figure shows the proportion of survey respondents who answered “strongly agree” or “agree” with the statement “Overall, I have confidence in the decisions made by [my organisation’s senior managers]”.
- 2 The departments included in the figure are the five largest by civil service departmental headcount as at 31 March 2021, representing 68% of all civil servants across government, sourced from Cabinet Office, *Statistical bulletin – Civil Service Statistics: 2021*, page 3.
- 3 The Civil Service People Survey is carried out annually, with an overall response rate of 62% to the 2021 survey.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of 2021 Civil Service People Survey

Figure 3

Two recent examples of different ways the civil service describes what is expected from leaders

The latest articulation of what is important for leaders places importance on technical and management areas needed to deliver their objectives

a) Eight attributes of leadership highlighted by *Leadership in Action*, 2020

Every day we see the best Civil Service leaders...



b) Seven core areas of leadership and management in *Leading to Deliver, a Leadership and Management Prospectus*, 2022



Notes

- 1 Leadership in Action was developed by the Leadership and Talent Board and the Civil Service Talent team and launched in April 2020 to guide leaders and those supporting their development.
- 2 The seven core areas were developed by the Leadership College for Government and were published in *Leading to Deliver, a Leadership and Management Prospectus* in June 2022.

Civil service leadership initiatives

1.11 The civil service's approach to developing leaders has evolved over time, with a large number of leadership initiatives introduced in recent years, primarily led by the Cabinet Office. Some approaches have come in and out of favour, such as having a central establishment for learning and development. In this report we describe the Cabinet Office's launch of the new Government Campus for civil service learning, including a Leadership College for Government. The previous National School of Government was launched in 2005 and disbanded in 2012 as part of the Coalition Government's public bodies reform programme – see **Figure 4**.

1.12 In recent years we have periodically reviewed the overall approach to developing civil service leadership, which is led by the Cabinet Office. A common theme has been a profusion of initiatives, many of which address recognised needs, but which often lack coordination or mature roots in organisational structures. Here are some examples of our findings:

- In 2011, we found a lack of coordination in the provision of training, with more than 250 different leadership courses in use across central government, and poor management of training costs and attendance rates.¹⁴
- In 2013, we reported that, despite repeated recommendations on the need to improve civil service leadership capability, efforts to improve it had been piecemeal, inconsistent, and often not sustained.¹⁵
- In 2015 we reported on initiatives to increase the diversity of civil service leadership, finding that while improvements were being made these needed to be institutionally embedded so that they were not dependent on the personal priorities of senior sponsors.¹⁶
- In 2017 we noted the provision of initiatives by government professions aimed at improving the recruitment and development of highly capable staff, but cautioned it would be a matter of years before they improved leadership at senior levels.¹⁷
- In 2020 we found that, with one exception, government professions were not collecting data on the impact and benefits of their training to inform the procurement of their future leadership programmes.¹⁸

14 Comptroller and Auditor General, *Identifying and meeting central government's skills requirements*, Session 2010–2012, HC 1276, National Audit Office, July 2011, paragraph 10.

15 Comptroller and Auditor General, *Building capability in the Senior Civil Service to meet today's challenges*, Session 2013–14, HC 129, National Audit Office, June 2013, paragraph 10.

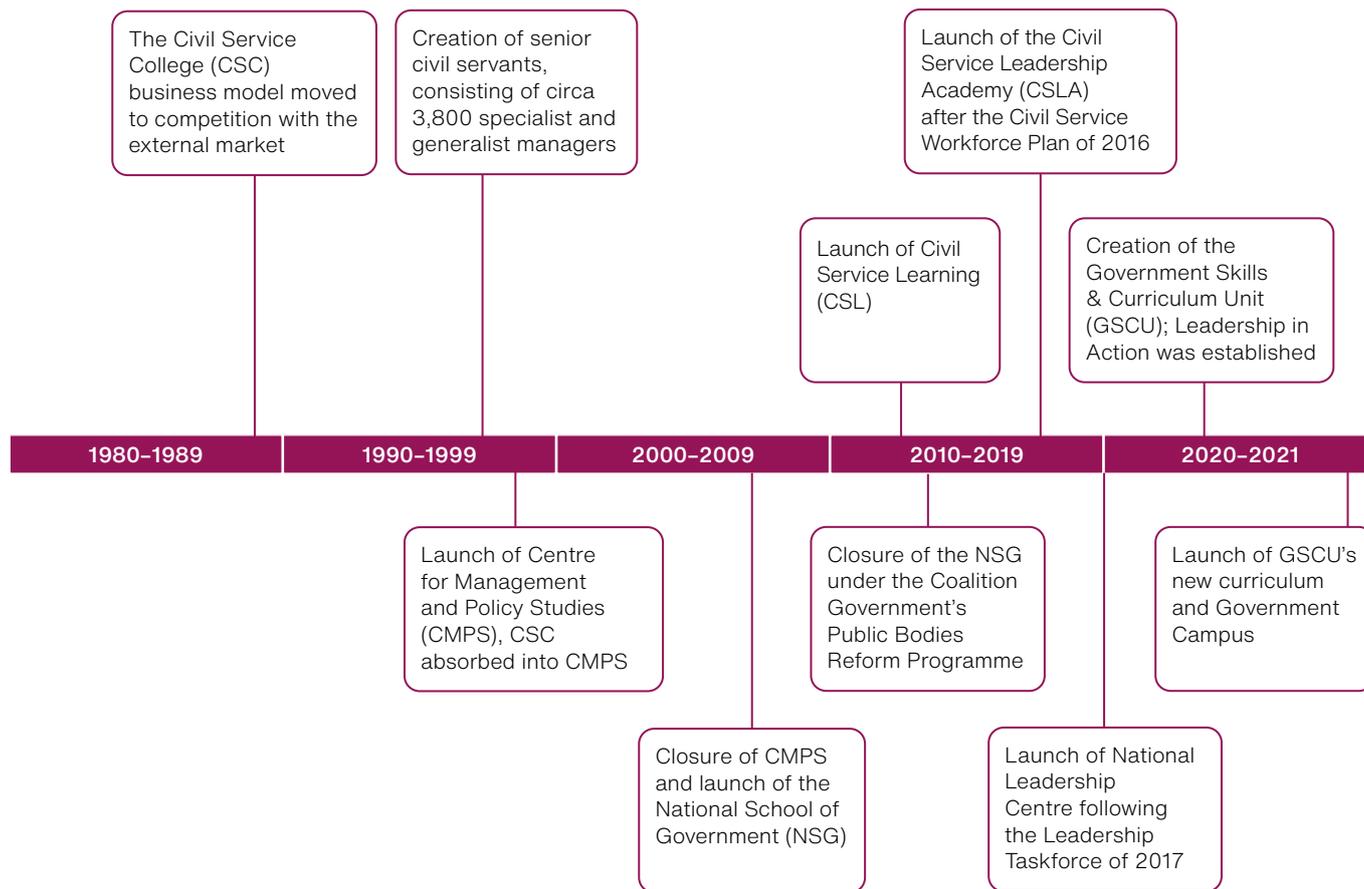
16 Comptroller and Auditor General, *Equality, diversity and inclusion in the civil service*, Session 2015–16, HC 88, National Audit Office, June 2015, paragraph 13.

17 Comptroller and Auditor General, *Capability in the civil service*, Session 2016–17, HC 919, National Audit Office, March 2017, paragraph 3.6.

18 Comptroller and Auditor General, *Specialist skills in the civil service*, Session 2019–20, HC 575, National Audit Office, July 2020, paragraph 2.4.

Figure 4
Civil Service Reforms to 2021

The civil service’s approach to developing leaders has changed many times since the 1980s



Source: National Audit Office analysis of civil service reforms

Reforms to leadership development

1.13 Further changes to the landscape of leadership development are currently underway, as part of wider civil service reforms. In Part Two we set out the background to these reforms and what the new leadership development landscape is expected to look like.

Part Two

The future leadership development landscape

Introduction

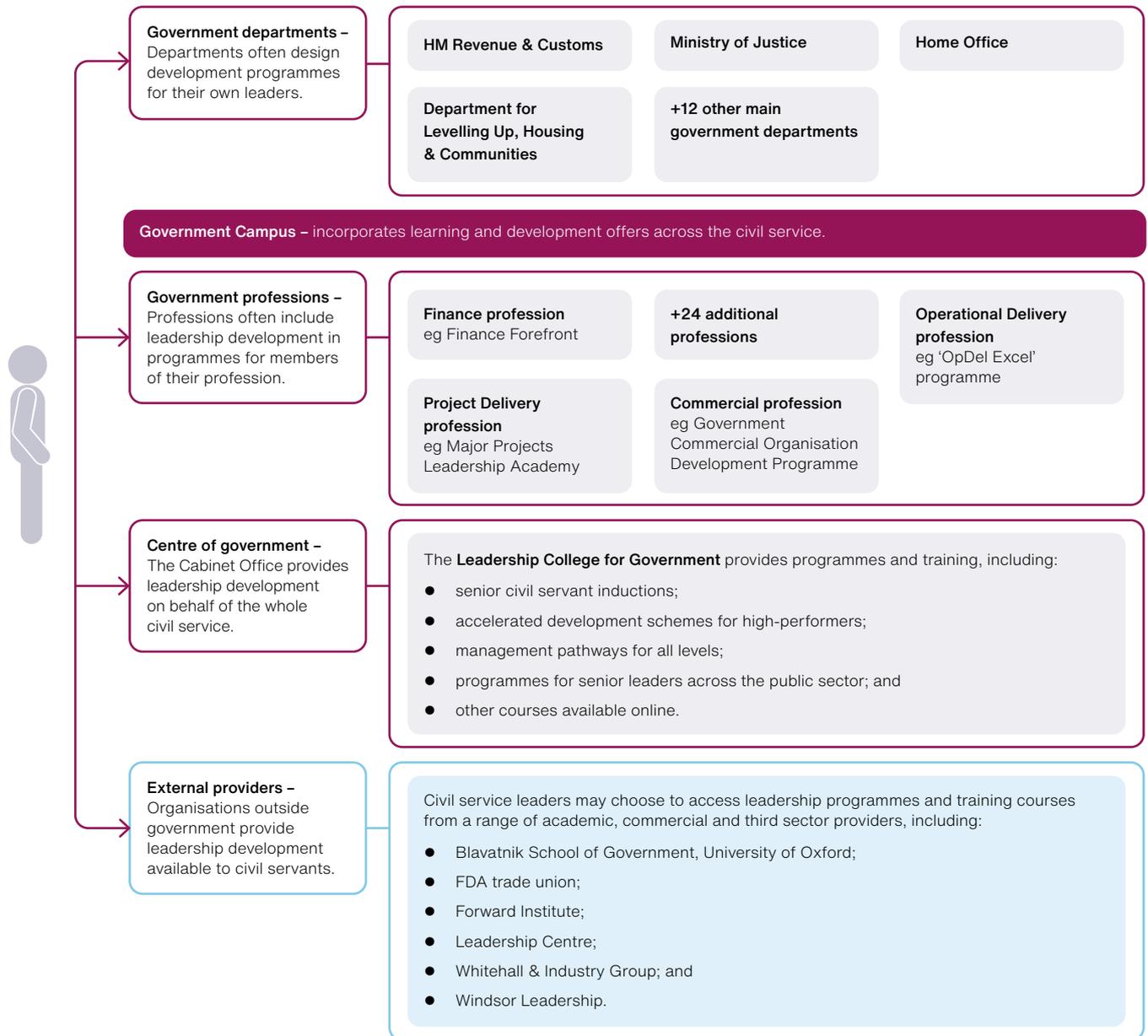
2.1 The landscape of leadership development in the civil service involves many different organisations, programmes and interventions. A summary of how the leadership development landscape is expected to work under new reforms is illustrated in **Figure 5**, including:

- **central offer** – The Cabinet Office is responsible for developing a central offer, including courses available to civil service leaders of all levels. Flagship programmes include inductions for senior civil servants, selective schemes for high-potential leaders and events to convene senior leaders from across the wider public sector;
- **government professions** – Government professions develop the capability of groups of people with specialist professional skills, knowledge or expertise. Some of their programmes include leadership development;
- **government departments** – Government departments and other public bodies are responsible for ensuring they have the right leadership capability in place. They develop their leaders by drawing on what is offered by the Cabinet Office, by government professions and external bodies, and supplementing that with their own leadership development offer; and
- **external providers** – Civil servants can access leadership development from organisations outside government. We heard examples of civil servants using courses run by the Leadership Centre to build systems leadership capability; by the Forward Institute focused on organisation and systems change; and the Whitehall & Industry Group, offering programmes to enhance organisational performance.

2.2 In the remainder of Part Two we describe current civil service reforms and what we expect the landscape of leadership development to look like. We outline the proposed central offer and how Cabinet Office has gone about designing its reforms, before describing what is offered by government professions and government departments.

Figure 5
The leadership development landscape

Civil servants can access a wide range of leadership development provided by departments, professions, the centre of government and external providers



Notes

- 1 There are 28 government professions. We have included here a sample of professions that we spoke to and the development programmes they offer. See paragraphs 2.16, 2.17 and Figure 8.
- 2 The UK government has 16 main government departments, as at October 2022. We have included a sample of departments that we spoke to. See paragraphs 2.18 to 2.24 and Figure 9.
- 3 Government professions are hosted in departments across government. Of the sample of professions described here, HM Treasury hosts the Finance profession, HM Revenue & Customs hosts the Operational Delivery profession, and the Cabinet Office hosts the Commercial and Project Delivery professions.

Background to current civil service reforms

2.3 The then Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, in June 2020, introduced a vision for a “properly-resourced campus for training those in government” as part of his Ditchley speech about government reforms.¹⁹ This wider agenda to reform the civil service was further developed in the 2021 Declaration on Government Reform, under the three categories of People, Partnerships and Performance.²⁰ This also included ambitions for capability-based pay for the senior civil service and encouraging civil service leaders to spend time in the private and third sectors.

2.4 The Cabinet Office established the Government Skills and Curriculum Unit (GSCU) in September 2020, following the Ditchley speech, to design and deliver better training, knowledge and networks across the civil service, offered through a new Government Campus. The Government Campus is both online and physical, making use of existing government and partner sites across the UK. It has a single curriculum with five strands, which are:

- strand 1 – foundations of public administration;
- strand 2 – working in government;
- strand 3 – leading and managing;
- strand 4 – specialist skills; and
- strand 5 – domain knowledge (related to a specific area of government).

2.5 The Cabinet Office delivers much of its learning and development through central contracts with KPMG and EY. KPMG is the delivery partner for developing and delivering campus programmes. EY is the delivery partner for providing coaching and facilitators. The Cabinet Office estimates that, in 2021/22, central government booked leadership and management courses to the value of £27.6 million through the central contracts with KPMG and EY.²¹

2.6 The Leadership College for Government, which has responsibility for the central offer to leaders and managers, is located within GSCU in the Cabinet Office. The high-level Cabinet Office structures are set out in **Figure 6**.

¹⁹ Cabinet Office, *The Ditchley Annual Lecture on “The privilege of public service”*, July 2020.

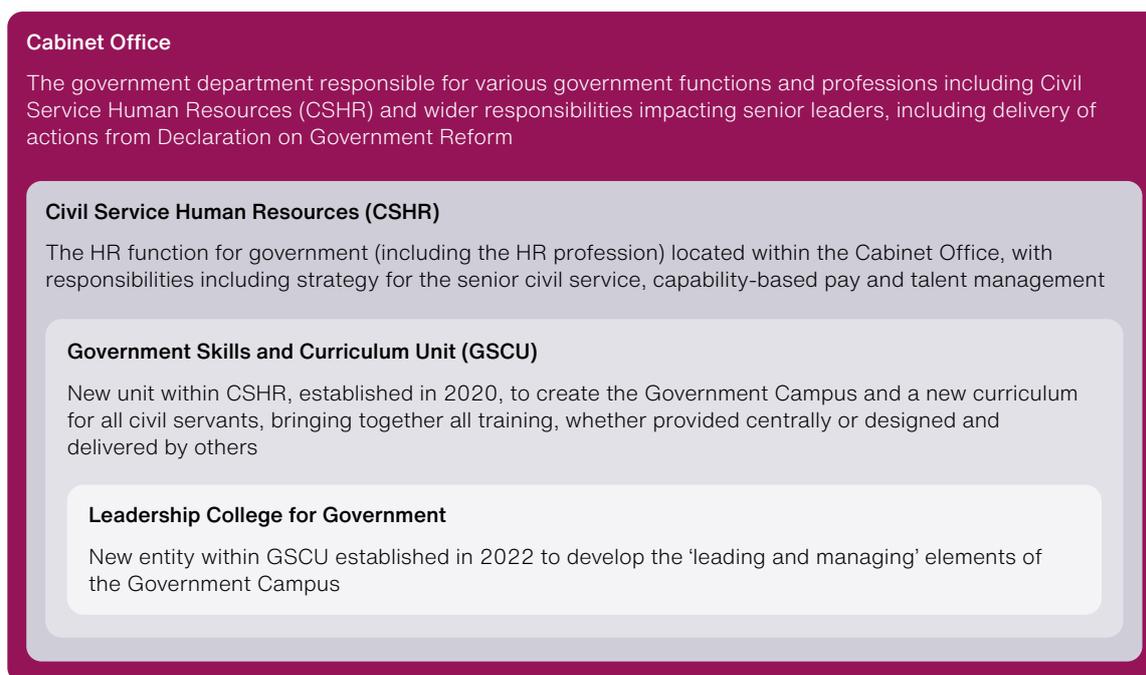
²⁰ Cabinet Office, *The Declaration on Government Reform*, June 2021.

²¹ The way that individual departments across government record, reconcile and report learning and development expenditure means that data on actual spend was not available at the time of publication.

Figure 6

Cabinet Office management structures to oversee leadership development

The Cabinet Office has established a new Leadership College for Government, sitting within its Government Skills and Curriculum Unit



Source: National Audit Office analysis of structures and roles within the Cabinet Office, 2022

The Cabinet Office approach to designing its reforms

Understanding problems with existing programmes

2.7 Soon after it was established, GSCU took steps to understand the problems with the previous approach to leadership development. It commissioned social researchers to gather evidence on the strengths and weaknesses of its existing leadership programmes. They examined information from a range of sources, including data from suppliers and the Civil Service People Survey. They found weaknesses and inconsistencies in the reporting of spend on leadership development by departments. Other problems included leaders being unconnected to other leaders, and a mismatch of supply and demand; some major development programmes were over-subscribed, yet other courses had not been used in years. These findings led in turn to the case for change for the Leadership College for Government, set out in **Figure 7** overleaf.

Figure 7

The leadership development needs identified by the Cabinet Office

The Cabinet Office developed a “case for change” by identifying problems with the existing provision of leadership development

- 1 ...to streamline the multiple routes and interventions available that are difficult to navigate and not clearly linked to supply and demand
- 2 ...a clear and common purpose across different leadership and management interventions. And a better balance between individual development needs, as well as organisational capability requirements and standards
- 3 ...to fill the gaps in the current offer, including people management at the executive level, and ensure that products are consistently high quality
- 4 ... more training opportunities to develop new and emerging skills like big data analysis, physical sciences, hybrid working, and the future of work
- 5 ...to build a better connected leadership community that takes a systems approach to solving complex policy and delivery problems, encouraging movement, learning and skills transfer across the public and private sectors and civil society
- 6 ... to foster a genuine commitment to continuous learning and development, using real life experiences and evidence-based design
- 7 ...better information about how taxpayers' money is spent on training and development, and better evaluation of its impact on organisational objectives and personal development
- 8 ...better functional expertise in the top tiers of leadership
- 9 ...more mainstreamed content on diversity, inclusion, and wellbeing to ensure inclusive behaviours are at the heart of leadership and management in organisations rather than a “nice-to-have” add-on
- 10 ...to work with departments to establish a shared view of what to expect from people, build professional capabilities and transfer learning from different fields

Source: Adapted from *Leading to Deliver, a Leadership and Management Prospectus*, 2022

Consulting on the approach and decision-making bodies

2.8 GSCU has consulted with departments, professions and others to establish the aims of the central offer, the design of the Government Campus, and the design of the Leadership College for Government and its programmes. Consultation and decision making happens in various ways, including through:

- **the Government Campus Design Authority (the Design Authority)** which provides assurance that the training and development programmes across the civil service meet the needs of departments and professions. It includes around 20 high-level representatives from both the civil service and third-party suppliers;
- **the Strand 3 (Leading and Managing) Senior User Group**, a sub-group of the Design Authority, created to determine good practice in the delivery and implementation of the Curriculum and Campus Strand 3 (Leading and Managing) programme; and
- **the GSCU Leadership Advisory Board**, which provides guidance and productive challenge to support GSCU in accelerating development of the knowledge, skills, and professional practice of civil servants across the public sector. Membership consists of around 15 senior leaders from outside the civil service across private, public, and third sectors.

The central offer

The Leadership College for Government

2.9 Within the Government Campus, the Cabinet Office has established a new Leadership College for Government to unite all central leadership development and management training, delivering Strand 3 of the Campus and Curriculum. The Leadership College for Government replaces existing entities including the National Leadership Centre and the Civil Service Leadership Academy, and aims to prepare leaders and managers with the skills, knowledge and networks needed to deliver public services. It aims to do this through sharing educational standards across the civil service, providing universal and selective interventions for all grades, and reforming and better integrating talent and management programmes, including for public sector leaders.

2.10 The Leadership College for Government has designed new induction programmes for leaders recently promoted to deputy director, director or director general roles in the senior civil service. These replace the previous Civil Service Leadership Academy programmes. Accelerated development schemes, selective programmes for those with high potential to progress to more senior leadership positions, are also being redesigned. Reform starts with the Directors Leadership Programme (DLP), a new programme for directors to replace the existing High Potential Development Scheme (HPDS). Another example is the Future Leaders Scheme (FLS), aimed at civil servants recognised as having the potential to progress to the senior civil service. The most senior development programme, the Individual Development Programme (IDP), for directors general who aspire to become permanent secretaries, sits outside the Leadership College for Government.

2.11 One of the aims of accelerated development schemes is to build a robust and diverse pipeline to senior roles. As part of the existing FLS, Cabinet Office offer a Minority Ethnic Talent Association (META) programme to successful candidates from ethnic minorities and Disability Empowers Leadership Talent Association (DELTA) programme to successful candidates with disabilities. This year there are 77 META and 63 DELTA participants. The Leadership College for Government is currently reviewing its approach to META and DELTA.

2.12 The Leadership College for Government has a renewed focus on opportunities for secondments and exchanges, to share expertise, build confidence and stimulate curiosity to tackle complex problems in new ways. It also aims to set expectations that civil servants and their public sector counterparts be ready and equipped to 'pay it forward', building the capability of their colleagues and the next generation.

2.13 The Leadership College for Government has also replaced the National Leadership Centre (NLC). The NLC was established in 2018 in response to a report by the Public Sector Leadership Task Force to improve leadership and productivity. Its programmes aimed to support the most senior leaders in the public sector, such as chief executives of local authorities, together with senior civil servants, to work together in tackling the toughest challenges facing the country. In 2019-20 its Public Leaders Programme had 100 participants and the NLC facilitated a network of more than 1000 public sector leaders across the public sector. The Leadership College for Government intends to continue to run programmes and activities that bring civil service and wider public sector leaders together.

Management skills for senior leaders

2.14 The Leadership College for Government, in bringing leadership and management together, aims to ensure the qualities of good leaders and good managers have equal status. It has identified a deficiency in people management skills, including amongst senior leaders. Therefore, it is introducing new management pathways to improve people management skills, and to replace the ad hoc programmes that existed before. Eligibility for the different levels is based on role, rather than grade, recognising that the scale and nature of people responsibilities do not always correspond to grade. For example, Grade 6 and Grade 7 civil servants in operational departments, such as the Department for Work & Pensions, may have more significant people responsibilities than those of more senior grades in policy roles. Management pathways will be a universal offer, aiming to reach 15,000 civil servants.

Planning evaluation of the new approach

2.15 The Cabinet Office has developed a systematic and proportionate approach to evaluating the impact of its reforms, which can be applied to both the individual interventions, and to programmes containing multiple projects, including the overall Campus and Curriculum model. The evaluation approach is the result of system-wide engagement over many months, led by a social research professional, and will evaluate GSCU against the outcomes described in its educational standards. The evaluation model is also being applied to Leadership College for Government programmes, starting with the new accelerated development scheme for directors. The Design Authority will formally oversee the evaluation process.

Leadership development in government professions

2.16 Government professions develop the capability of a group of people with particular skills, knowledge or expertise. They work across government on behalf of departments and other public bodies. There are 28 government professions, covering areas of expertise from policy to project delivery, and from communications to commercial. Operational Delivery is the largest profession. Most professions have career frameworks and provide professional development, including aspects of leadership. For example, the Project Delivery profession's Major Projects Leadership Academy was established in 2012. GSCU, in its guide to specialist training, outlines the professional training offered by 12 professions.²²

2.17 We spoke to representatives of five government professions to understand the role they play in developing leaders. **Figure 8** overleaf gives some examples of the leadership development they offer. The Project Delivery and Commercial professions are members of the Design Authority, which is part of the governance structure for making decisions on the design of leadership interventions (see paragraph 2.8). The professions were generally positive about how they had been consulted on reforms and valued being seen as faculties of a wider campus.

Figure 8

Examples of leadership development in a sample of government professions

The five professions we spoke to offer leadership development to differing degrees

Profession	Full-time equivalent members 2022	Development opportunities	Target participants
Operational Delivery	233,400	'OpDel Excel'	Open competition for high-performing senior leaders across the civil service
		Multi-level accredited qualifications	For leaders across the civil service
		Free third-party resources	
Project Delivery	15,270	Orchestrating Major Projects	Directors general and permanent secretaries
		Major Project Leadership Academy	Senior civil service (SCS) level 1 and above
		Project Leadership Programme	Grade 6 and SCS1
Finance	11,850	Government Finance Academy	Grade 6/7, expanding to high-performing senior executive officers
Commercial	5,970	The Government Commercial Organisation Development Programme	Senior commercial professionals
International Trade	1,620	Undertaken by individual departments based on a learning prospectus	Delegated grades through to senior leaders

Note

1 There are 28 government professions, offering aspects of leadership development across government.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Office for National Statistics data at 31 March 2022 and interviews with government professions, 2022

Leadership development in government departments

2.18 Government departments determine what development offer is right for their leaders. To differing degrees, they use programmes provided by the Cabinet Office, by professions, and by other external bodies alongside interventions they have commissioned or created themselves. We spoke to a sample of departments – the Home Office, HM Revenue & Customs, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, and the Ministry of Justice. We wanted to understand how they develop their leaders and to hear their perspective on how effectively the whole ecosystem of leadership development works. See **Figure 9** for an overview of their approach to leadership development.

Figure 9

Leadership development in a sample of government departments

The four departments we spoke to take different approaches to the use of central programmes and developing their own leadership development interventions

Department	Full-time equivalent (FTE) employees	FTE Senior civil servants	Use of central programmes	Additional interventions
Ministry of Justice	81,480	320	Heavily relies on central programmes and embeds the central approach where possible	Offers coaching and contracts with universities and the Chartered Management Institute
HM Revenue & Customs	66,330	500	Relies on central programmes where appropriate, but the scale does not satisfy all their needs	Uses existing programmes from providers, such as Forward Institute, The Whitehall & Industry Group, and develops bespoke programmes with partners
Home Office	34,230	300	Relies on central programmes where appropriate, but feels there are gaps in technical and specific corporate knowledge	Little use of external programmes outside of the Cabinet Office's framework via EY and KPMG
Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities	4,000	180	Supports its leaders to access central leadership programmes and professional leadership learning via a central budget	Tracks use of central and external programmes

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Office for National Statistics data at 31 March 2022 and interviews with government departments, 2022

Examples of departments' approaches to leadership development

2.19 Departments that described working closely with the Cabinet Office spoke of having a good understanding of the central offer and having a positive experience of being consulted on reforms. A barrier to effective engagement with the Cabinet Office can occur when updates on reforms are communicated to the senior HR community but do not reach those responsible for developing leadership interventions.

Departments had different approaches to setting the expectations of leaders

2.20 Departments we spoke to had adopted different approaches to setting out the expectations of their leaders. Examples of the approaches taken included:

- use of the 2020 Leadership in Action model;²³
- use of leadership behaviours in ‘success profiles’, the civil service’s recruitment framework; and
- developing their own leadership expectations, specific to their size, sector, departmental objectives and number of arm’s-length bodies.

Departments had different approaches to assessing leadership capability

2.21 We would expect departments to be clear on their expectations of leaders and any specific capability requirements. This would be the basis for assessing the capability of leaders, identifying gaps in leadership capability and then designing interventions to close those gaps. While departments did not follow this exact process, they did identify leadership development needs in other ways, including through 360-degree feedback, reference to the Civil Service People Survey, learning needs analysis and use of a departmental capability plan.

Departments develop their own leadership offer and also use external organisations.

2.22 Some departments have developed their own leadership offers to complement the offer from the centre. Some focused exclusively on senior leaders, while others made the offer more widely available. In one example the approach to leadership development involved action learning sets on live issues facing the department. In addition to leadership, there were examples of departments identifying gaps in management capability and providing training to upskill managers. As we set out earlier in this report, leadership and management are difficult to separate.

2.23 The departments we spoke to used external organisations to support their leadership development. Some called on external support for design and some for delivery of programmes; some worked in partnership with external organisations and others contracted out. There are also examples of departments sending leaders on established external courses.

Sharing knowledge between departments

2.24 As described above, departments take different approaches to defining expectations of leaders and to their development. This could create challenges for civil servants who experience different expectations and training approaches when they move between departments. From our conversations there appears to be some duplication of effort, where different departments are seeking to deliver similar interventions. In doing so, they often have little knowledge of what other government organisations are doing and may be missing opportunities to learn from each other.

Appendix One

Our approach

Scope

1 This report gives an overview of the government's approach to leadership development, including initiatives led by central government, across departments and the professions, and the proposed reforms led by Government Skills and Curriculum Unit (GSCU) and its new Leadership College for Government. The report covers the following questions:

- What has the National Audit Office (NAO) learnt about leadership issues across government and the impact on value for money? (Part One)
- What are the expectations of leaders? (Part One)
- How does the civil service develop leaders? (Part One)
- What are the plans for reforming leadership development and what is the central offer? (Part Two)
- What leadership development is done in departments, and in professions? How does that vary and how does that fit with what is done at the centre? (Part Two)

2 Although this report describes the leadership development programmes for under-represented groups it does not assess progress on increasing the diversity of senior civil servants. We will return to these and related areas in more depth in our future programme.

3 The focus for this report is leadership development. Many other factors can impact leadership including recruitment, performance management, pay and reward and leadership development. This report does not cover these areas.

Methods

4 In addressing the questions above we drew on a variety of evidence sources, as described below. During our fieldwork we identified a number of issues that we have not explored in depth, but expect to return to in future evaluative work, including on understanding of leadership capability, evaluation of learning and development, diversity and inclusion, taking a system-wide approach and equipping leaders able to address emerging and future challenges.

5 Our report on leadership development in the civil service was informed by our analysis of evidence collected primarily between May and August 2022, as follows:

Document review

6 We reviewed departmental documents in order to understand the steps taken by government to develop leadership reforms. This included some published material.

7 The documents provided by the Cabinet Office covered the most recent developments in civil service leadership reforms from 2020 to 2022, internally and externally commissioned reports relevant to leadership development, published government reports and press releases.

8 We reviewed previous value-for-money work by the NAO to draw out themes previously reported on the importance of leadership in government. The reports dated from 2016 to 2022. In total we reviewed 70 reports and summarised all extracts from 52 reports into themes/categories as follows:

- What issues/problems/consequences affected by leadership are mentioned?
- Is there a recommendation relating to leaders or leadership?

9 We carried out a document review of academic literature, including a review of the work commissioned by the National Leadership Centre.²⁴ We reviewed the documents for broader leadership insight and expertise in this field.

²⁴ Cabinet Office, *National Leadership Centre. Public Service Leadership Literature Reviews*, December 2020.

Cabinet Office interviews

10 To understand the steps taken by the Cabinet Office to support leadership development across the civil service we met with representatives of different teams in the Cabinet Office. We used these meetings to discuss the reforms to leadership development, the renewed focus on people management skills at all levels, including for senior leaders, and the setting of educational standards for the whole system. We discussed GSCU's approach to evaluating the success of its reforms.

11 These meetings included:

- the overall strategy, approach and policy context for leadership development across the civil service;
- the curriculum and campus for the newly formed Leadership College for Government;
- the most significant leadership initiatives focused on the senior civil service (SCS) and 'high potential leaders';
- joining up its work with the wider system, for example on capability-based pay;
- ongoing work regarding diversity and inclusion; and
- using internal and external secondments to develop new skills.

Interviews with other departments and with government professions

12 We met with officials with responsibilities for leadership development in four other government departments. We also met with representatives of five government professions, which offer their own programmes including elements of leadership development. Departments develop their own offer and also draw on central programmes. We used these interviews to:

- understand how these professions and departments engaged with the Cabinet Office regarding the central offer and developed their own leadership development offer based on their specific requirements; and
- gain an understanding of the development and implementation of central reforms, and consider their impact across the other parts of central government and the challenges facing the organisations involved in the system.

13 Interviews were conducted online. We selected a mix of different types of department and profession, based on size and function, and the choice was informed by our preliminary discussions and background research of published material.

Our sample of government departments was:

- Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities;
- HM Revenue & Customs;
- Home Office; and
- Ministry of Justice.

Our sample of government professions was:

- Commercial profession;
- Finance profession;
- Operational Delivery profession;
- Project Delivery profession; and
- International Trade profession.

14 Departments and professions shared data and documents with us to support our interviews and provide further detail. The interviews and related data and documents were collated and analysed by themes to allow us to synthesise data across the different sources. This helped us compare the approaches taken by our sample of professions and departments. It does not provide evidence on the approaches taken by other government professions or departments and will inform our future evaluative work.

Stakeholder interviews

15 We met with other stakeholders interested in leadership matters or with responsibilities for leadership development in government. We used these interviews to:

- capture a range of views on leadership development in government;
- understand how these stakeholders engaged with the Cabinet Office or other parts of government; and
- gain an understanding of their specific roles and responsibilities within the leadership landscape, and consider the challenges facing their own organisation involved within the system.

16 Interviews were conducted online. We selected a mix of stakeholders informed by our preliminary discussions and background research of published material. One interview was held with each organisation that agreed to an interview. The stakeholders included:

- Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford;
- Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD);
- Committee on Standards in Public Life;
- FDA trade union;
- Forward Institute;
- Institute for Government;
- Institute of Leadership and Management;
- Leadership Centre; and
- Dame Fiona Reynolds (in her capacity as chair of the Bennett Institute Management Board).

Glossary

Term	Definition
Accelerated Development Schemes	<p>Selective programmes to develop high-potential individuals within the civil service. Current schemes include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Future Leaders Scheme (FLS) – for grade 6 and 7 civil servants with the potential to progress to the senior civil service (SCS). ● Disability Empowers Leadership Talent scheme (DELTA) – sub-programme of FLS for successful candidates with disabilities. ● Minority Ethnic Talent Association (META) – sub-programme of FLS for successful candidates from ethnic minorities. ● Senior Leaders Scheme (SLS) – for deputy directors with the potential to progress to more senior roles. ● Directors Leadership Programme (DLP) – for directors with the potential to progress to director general roles, replacing the High Potential Development Scheme (HPDS). ● Individual Development Programme (IDP) – scheme to accelerate the development of directors general.
Civil Service Leadership Academy	Launched in 2017 to provide leadership development for all senior civil servants, now replaced by the Leadership College for Government.
Civil Service Leadership Statement	Developed in 2015 to set out the behaviours expected from leaders within the civil service.
Civil Service Learning	Online platform launched in 2011 to provide training and development for all civil servants across government.
Government Campus	Created by GSCU in 2021 to bring together learning and development through GSCU's five strands, linking to all related curriculum for employee development across the civil service.
Government Campus Design Authority	Provides assurance that the training and development programmes across the civil service meet the needs of departments and professions.
Government Skills and Curriculum Unit (GSCU)	Created in 2020, within Civil Service HR in the Cabinet Office to design and deliver the Campus and Curriculum.
GSCU Leadership Advisory Board	Provides guidance and productive challenge to support GSCU.
GSCU Leadership Research, Evidence & Impact Panel	Panel of senior leaders within the civil service and high-level representatives from universities, tasked to evaluate, plan and design existing and new curriculum through GSCU.
Leadership Centre	An external provider that supports leadership development as the means of improving outcomes for people and places, looking to build leadership capacity across public services and connectivity in solving complex problems.
Leadership College for Government	Provides the central offer of training and development for leaders and managers in the civil service, replacing the Civil Service Leadership Academy and National leadership Centre in April 2022.
Leadership in Action	Developed by the Leadership and Talent Board and Civil Service Talent team in 2020 setting out eight attributes which describe the key characteristics, skills and behaviours expected of leaders.
National Leadership Centre	Created in 2019 to provide cross-government support for senior civil servants through networking and development programmes, now replaced by the Leadership College for Government.
National School of Government	Former part of the Cabinet Office previously known as the Civil Service College and the Centre for Management and Policy Studies (CMPS), the National School of Government ran development and training courses for civil servants from 2005 until its closure in 2012.
Success profiles	Recruitment framework used since 2018 in the assessment of new employees to the civil service.

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