

State of the State 2025

Mission-driven government

Our State of the State 2025 research finds the UK public sector at a critical moment. With the government finalising a series of long-term plans initiated in its first months, this is the year that defines the future.

The report explores what matters most to the public now and in the years ahead, and how public sector leaders see their institutions in ten years' time.

On missions, it finds:

- The missions are front of mind for many public service leaders, and strongly correlate to the public's top priorities.
- Early strides have been made in cross-government working but this needs to go further, faster.
- While the government has started to make some tough choices, successful delivery of the missions and the Plan for Change will require greater prioritisation.



What public sector leaders told us:

“The NHS mission has a lot of potential but it hasn't changed anything yet...What needs to change is for civil servants to stop pursuing the objectives of their ministers alone.

NHS trust chief executive

“I thought...someone would be putting us under pressure to deliver [the missions] but we're not really seeing that. Whitehall isn't really reorientating, and it needs to, and that feels quite pressing.”

Senior civil servant

“Missions are not prioritising enough. We need to decide where to put the laser-like focus that will make a tangible difference in five years.”

Senior civil servant



Securing successful mission-driven government

Soon after the launch of the missions, we shared our perspective on mission-driven government identifying [five critical success factors](#). Six months on, our State of the State research emphasises three points in how these factors are applied.



Critical success factors

1.



First, construct genuinely multidisciplinary mission teams with the right accountabilities and incentives – reflect the mission intent and not existing departmental remits

2.



In parallel, activate stakeholders across the delivery pathway – ensure the mission team has the right levers to engage widely

3.



Next, make sure the mission has a truly cross-cutting, long-term, flexible funding settlement – avoid traditional funding paradigms

4.



Create and sustain a culture of psychological safety and collective ownership in the mission team and across the delivery system – the ability to “speak truth to power” is vital

5.



Finally, use data and insight to understand performance – agree the smallest basket of outcome metrics possible.

The public and public leaders emphasise...

A. Animate the entire public service system through collective leadership

While good progress has been made defining each mission and establishing ways of working and reporting (mission boards, stock takes, use of secondments, etc), this has largely taken place within the confines of Whitehall.

Mission teams need to find ways to inspire and engage the capabilities and expertise of the wider public sector, private and third sectors. This requires government to embrace collective leadership and move from a language and approach of “pulling central levers” to one that sets the tone for how leaders behave and cooperate across complex systems.

B. Space and permission to “fail” is welcome - the next challenge is scaling up

Departments and their partners need the space and freedom to take risks, fail fast and learn rapid lessons about what works. There are encouraging signs that political and public service leaders recognise this.

We support the vision behind the ‘test and learn’ pilots but a further challenge will come with scaling up successful learnings. Rolling out transformation at scale often demands a different set of skills and capabilities. Mission leaders need to act now to prepare the ground and bring in the skills needed to drive change at scale and pace in due course.

C. Prioritise in a way that is simple and focused but balanced

Prioritisation is key. Successful delivery requires a focused delivery plan that makes sometimes ruthless choices about what to target and that stakeholders are bought into.

But it's important to strike a balance between meeting the single milestones set out in the Plan for Change and addressing the longer-term ambitions that underpin mission-driven government. A small and carefully chosen basket of outcome metrics should provide a rounded picture of performance and help drive the right behaviours.

The government's mission dashboards are a positive step to align departments around a common set of measures. We encourage making a version of these dashboards public to generate public accountability and help other parts of the system understand how they can contribute.

Get in touch



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