

Public Accounts Committee

Oral evidence: Smarter delivery of public services, HC 952

Monday 14 July 2025

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Chair); Mr Clive Betts; Nesil Caliskan; Sarah Green; Lloyd Hatton; Chris Kane; Oliver Ryan; Blake Stephenson.

Gareth Davies, Comptroller and Auditor General, National Audit Office, Kate Caulkin, Director, National Audit Office, Alec Steel, National Audit Office, and David Fairbrother, Treasury Officer of Accounts, HM Treasury, were in attendance.

Questions 1-69

Witnesses

I: Sir Peter Schofield KCB, Permanent Secretary, Department for Work and Pensions, and Head of Operational Delivery Profession; Paul Morrison, Chief Executive, Planning Inspectorate; Tom Greig, Registrar General for England and Wales, and Director for Passports, Citizenship and Civil Registration, Home Office; Julie Taylor, (former) Deputy Director, Operational Delivery Profession.

Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General

Lessons learned: smarter delivery—improving operational capability to provide better public services (HC 952)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Sir Peter Schofield, Paul Morrison, Tom Greig and Julie Taylor.

Chair: Welcome to the Public Accounts Committee on Monday 14 July 2025. In 2024-25, central Government Departments were expected to spend over £450 billion on the day-to-day current running costs of public services, grants and administration. The current fiscal context means that the Government must be smarter in how they deliver these services and find innovative ways of getting the best value for money from this spend. As set out in the NAO Report, operational capability will be key to delivering this value, especially in the face of emerging challenges, and operational expertise is required all the way through the frontline work to support services and business management.

The operational delivery profession, which I am going to refer to as ODP from now on, of which there are 290,000 members, is responsible for building the necessary leadership capability for its members, although there are widespread capability gaps, and capability across Government is varied.

The Public Accounts Committee has reported time and time again on the impacts that poor service delivery has on its citizens and those who use those services, as well as costing the taxpayer billions of pounds. In today's session, we will be examining the role of the ODP, exploring how Government can do more to encourage innovation and share good practice, and exploring current plans to build the capability needed to deliver better public services.

Today, we have a very good team in front of us. We have the Permanent Secretary, Sir Peter Schofield. He is also head of the ODP. He has been Permanent Secretary at DWP since 2018.

Sir Peter Schofield: Yes, since 2018 in that role, and since 2020 as head of the profession.

Chair: I am going to change the way that I do this. I am not going to read this out in future, but get witnesses to introduce themselves, but I have started today, so I will continue. From the Planning Inspectorate, we have Paul Morrison. He is the chief executive of the Planning Inspectorate, and has been since 2022. He is also MHCLG's Department head of profession for ODP, leading the profession's centre of excellence work.

From the Home Office we have Tom Greig, Registrar General for England and Wales. Tom has had this role since 2024 and is also the Home



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Office's Department head of ODP. From the Operational Delivery Profession, we have Julie Taylor, former deputy director. Julie jointly led the ODP team from 2023 to 2025. She has left her role at ODP and is now HR business partner for Government missions. This is your first time, Julie. Is that right?

Julie Taylor: That is right.

Chair: Paul, is it your first time?

Paul Morrison: It is my first time for a while.

Q1 **Chair:** It is also Tom's first time for a while. Anyway, you are all very welcome. Of course, Sir Peter has been here many times before on many subjects.

On that, I am going to ask a question at the top of the session, Sir Peter, which I hope you have been warned about, which is about work coaches. You will recall that we had a hearing on this subject. You wrote to us on 30 June 25, following that hearing. We wrote back to you on 10 July. Could you set out to the Committee why these work coaches' time, particularly for people claiming benefit in UC and jobseeker's allowance, has been cut, initially from 50 minutes to 30 minutes, and then to 20 minutes for their initial session and their subsequent follow-up to just a quarter of an hour?

In that initial interview, if you are trying to assess who the person is, what their criteria are and what their plan to get into work might be, and if it was deemed necessary to have 50 minutes previously, having it cut twice to 20 minutes seems to be against what everybody is trying to achieve, not least the Government and not least your Department, in terms of getting people into work. Surely the best way is to give them the best advice.

Sir Peter Schofield: I am happy to go into that in a bit more detail. We had the conversation in May, and I talked about how we were approaching our jobcentre offer in a different way, trying to make the most use of the resource that we have, given the intention of Ministers to do more to help people who are economically inactive into work, as well as those in the intensive work search group in universal credit.

We have been doing a number of pieces of research and trials to see what we can do to make the most effective use. We found that, for the initial evidence session, or the claimant commitment session, we did not necessarily need the full 50 minutes; we could do that in 30 minutes. As I said in my letter, and as we discussed in May, if there is a situation where a work coach is having that conversation with the claimant, and it becomes apparent that they do need that longer amount of time, then there is flexibility. We would always want to make sure that there is flexibility in diaries to enable that to happen where possible.

This is about how we make the most effective use of the jobcentre resource that we have. By doing so, it means that we can spread our



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resource more widely and see more people, particularly as Ministers are increasingly wanting us to help people who are economically inactive, particularly around health and disability, into work.

In your letter, you asked me to set out in a bit more detail in a subsequent letter the evidence behind that, which I will happily do, and I will send that alongside the Treasury minute, which we will do on the normal timetable.

Q2 Chair: That is very kind. We appreciate that. Just as a further follow-up to what you have just said, it is my understanding that, both in jobseeker's allowance and in universal credit, your research is pretty old on the whole. It goes back to 2015 to 2018, and is based solely on research from your own Department. It is not, for example, based on customer feedback. We are going to spend the whole of this hearing today discussing how Government services affect the public—its customers—and here we are, with quite a major change but with no consultation with the customers.

Sir Peter Schofield: We published some research in February, which set out in a bit more detail some of the research that we have done of both customers and work coaches about what makes an effective work search review process. I will happily go into that in a bit more detail. That is more recent evidence.

Some of the evidence on which we were basing the discussion that we had in May was quite old, going back to 2015 or 2018, but it was high-quality randomised control trial research. We are currently doing some more research over the next 12 months on a further set of randomised control trials, which we will report back to the Committee on as that work completes. There will be further work that we are doing as well as part of our pathfinder engagement in West Yorkshire, to do more work around innovative approaches to using the resource that we have.

At the heart of this, it is about how we make the most effective use of the work coach resource that we have to help us deliver more effectively, get more people into work and particularly address people who are economically inactive because of health conditions.

Q3 Chair: These changes might help the Department, because they are going to have fewer work coaches employed and it will cost less, but is it not a little bit of cutting off your nose to spite your face if you want to encourage people back into work, which is surely what we all want to achieve? It was previously deemed necessary to have 50 minutes but it is now being cut to 20 minutes. I am just not quite following that. I cannot believe that that cutback is not going to have an effect on getting the number of people into work that we want.

Sir Peter Schofield: Our research has shown that those extra 20 minutes did not make a lot of difference. We put 1,000 work coaches into helping people on the universal credit health journey get into work. There



is more that we can do. We can take that resource and use it more effectively. At the moment, we are focusing our resource on the people in the intensive work search group, which is about 1.5 million people, and yet there are many hundreds of thousands more people who are on universal credit, particularly on a health journey, who would want to work if they had the support to do that. This is all about trying to make sure that we can do more. It is about taking the resource and doing more with it, using the evidence that we have to help us prioritise where to put it. As I say, I will happily set out a bit more evidence in the letter that I send.

Chair: Let us leave it there, Sir Peter. We will look at your letter and the Treasury minute carefully. We will then see whether we wish to come back to this, but thank you for that explanation today.

We will now go into the session properly on *Lessons learned: smarter delivery—improving operational capability to provide better public services*.

Q4 **Blake Stephenson:** My initial questions are scene-setting, really, Sir Peter. First of all, could you please explain why operational delivery capability is so important for Government?

Sir Peter Schofield: At the heart of operational delivery, we are where Government meet the citizen. The 290,000 colleagues who we represent here on this desk are the people who often are engaging with citizens through jobcentres, through the Passport Office and through planning applications, in all sorts of different ways. It is so important that we are delivering an outstanding customer service, because that is the experience that your constituents and citizens across the country have of Government each and every day.

There has been a lot of work, not least by our friends in the National Audit Office, around what makes effective operational delivery. The foundation of that, which was particularly set out in the NAO's Report in 2021, is management capability. That is why the heart of our strategy over the last few years has been focusing on management capability, the capability of frontline folk, the capability of senior leaders and capability at every level, because if we can get that right, that is the first stage along the way towards outstanding public services.

Q5 **Blake Stephenson:** Many of us were astonished to learn that there were 290,000 civil servants in this category of public servants. With increasing pressure on resources, how is this capability going to help Departments deliver good services into the future?

Sir Peter Schofield: At its heart, as I say, this is all about delivering the services. We represent the 290,000 folk at the heart of frontline service delivery. Across each Department represented by operational delivery, we are always looking at how we can deliver better services. That is partly about making sure that we have people who are able to think about how to deliver customer service at its best. It is partly about



thinking about how we innovate and how we use technology in different ways. It is partly about making sure that we use our understanding about the delivery of policy to inform policymaking upstream in the process.

It is also partly about how we make sure that we put the customer at the heart of everything that we do. Many customers engage with different parts of Government in different services. We want to be better at joining up more effectively between our Departments, so that we can deliver a better service for the customers, who often don't care whether they are engaging with DWP, the Home Office or MHCLG; they are much more interested in the overall service that they get.

Q6 Blake Stephenson: The NAO Report found that people with more complex needs may struggle to access Government services that are designed with the "average" user in mind. What work is being done to make sure that people with more complex needs can still easily access good Government services?

Sir Peter Schofield: We could probably all share something about that, could we not? I might pass to Tom to say a bit about what we are doing on the Passport Office.

I will give you a couple of examples from DWP. In the case of child maintenance, we have set up an online portal, which means that people can do the most straightforward accessing of information about their claim or their case online. It frees up our people to deal with the more complex situations. When people phone, they get a better service and can talk to someone who can help them through their complex situation, because we have been able to channel the people with the most straightforward cases on to the online journey, which is more convenient for most people because they can access it 24/7. That is one example of using technology to help focus the resource and the people that we have on to the things that people do best, which is engaging with people with complex needs.

Tom, do you want to give an example?

Tom Greig: Just to build on what Peter said, the two main service lines that I am responsible for—passports, and civil registration, births, deaths and marriages—are both services that need to be available to all of the British public, and that everyone in the British public needs to be able to access. In fact, in terms of birth registration, for example, it is a public good that people should be registering the birth of their children.

We are quite early in the process for birth, death and marriage registrations at the moment, but as we start to look at digital options, given that some of the public do want a digital option, we need to make sure that we don't forget that there are digitally disenfranchised, vulnerable members of the public who still require access to and support through that service.



It comes back to something that was mentioned earlier about understanding what customers need and talking to them. In the passport world, we hold customer listening circles. We hold lots of conversations with customers through that, and also through surveys on other matters. One of the things that Government can do is underestimate how challenging it can sometimes be for individuals to access our services. We think that we have designed something simple, but when we put it out into the world it doesn't work.

As Peter said, one of the benefits of delivering an increasingly digitised service is that you give the majority of the public something that they want and can access, but you can also save both money and resource to focus time on more vulnerable people who might want to access the service in a more direct way. That is something that we think about a lot.

Sir Peter Schofield: It is something that we think about across the profession as well, because we are all going through a similar experience. How do we make sure that, as you try to encourage those who can to access the digital channel, there is support for people for whom the digital channel doesn't work, either to help them get into the digital channel or to be there as a different type of approach, whether it be face-to-face or telephony-based? We have had a number of communities of practice events, where we have thought about this across the profession. It is the sort of thing that we can learn from each other as we go forward.

Q7 Chair: That is exactly where I was going to come in—first, to praise you, Tom Greig. During the pandemic, we had hearings with you. At that time, there were huge problems and backlogs of passports. You have come a huge way since then. You hold some of the most sensitive information about people. You are very public-facing. Your service has increased hugely. This Committee spends a lot of its time criticising people when they get things wrong, but congratulations on that.

I was going to come in on the point that Sir Peter was just addressing at the end there. How can you use your example as an example of how you can go across Government and improve your operations by the use of sensible digital technology?

Sir Peter Schofield: Do you want to say a bit about how you are sharing that experience with others?

Tom Greig: I have presented at the senior community of practice that ODP runs. I have spoken to that whole group about digital transformation. I also took a module in the most recent iteration of the OpDel Excel course for senior directors. We are trying to talk a bit about our experience in the Passport Office over the last three or four years.

Thanks very much for your kind words, Chair. We have done some good work over the last few years. We still have some way to go. There are still some things that I would like to make better in our service, but we spoke about that experience and what we have done. My team has also



directly supported some other areas of the Home Office in their thoughts about digital transformation and operational delivery, and we continue to do that through both the ODP and internal Home Office networks. We learn from the people we talk to as well.

Q8 Chair: Paul, you were nodding. Do you want to come in here?

Paul Morrison: Yes, absolutely. One of the beauties of having this operational delivery profession is that I can spend time with peers such as Tom, understanding and learning the lessons. For example, as I am sure Tom can talk about, one of the things that the Passport Office has done really well is thinking about the passports that they provide to people as an end-to-end service, thinking about that not just as something that operational and digital people do separately but as something they do all together.

That service model that Tom has really successfully implemented in the Passport Office is something that we are borrowing with pride in the Planning Inspectorate. We are following that example and thinking about all the lessons they have learned. They are very different operations, and there are things that have worked in the Passport Office but will not work in the Planning Inspectorate, but that is absolutely the spirit of what we are doing.

Sir Peter Schofield: This illustrates exactly what I am trying to achieve with the profession. As the Report sets out, there is a lot of variety about the types of activity that go on under the “operational delivery” heading, with 290,000 folk in a huge number of different roles. There are things that we can learn across the piece, and peer-to-peer learning is absolutely crucial in terms of how we can improve across the whole of operational delivery.

Q9 Chris Kane: Just to help me understand, when you talk about putting a resource towards people who are vulnerable, I would imagine that you have people who are vulnerable, people who are digitally excluded and people who just don’t like technology or change. How are you breaking down the different types of people who are resource-heavy, and ensuring that you are helping them so that they are not always in that category? If they are digitally excluded, you would be passing them to a different Department that can see them—or are you just going to make the resource focused on a smaller group that you think are always going to be needing that additional resource?

Sir Peter Schofield: It is probably a question mainly directed to me, because DWP is there for everyone. We need to make sure that our service is available for everyone, particularly those who have more complex needs. There are a few examples of this. Continuing with the child maintenance example that I talked about earlier, our operators will often talk someone through their inquiry, but they will also say, “Did you know that you could have done this online at a time that might be more convenient for you? Can I just talk you through that?” They will stay on



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the phone for a bit longer, talk them through the digital journey, help them get online, look at the options and work out how to do the same inquiry online. That would be someone who is maybe less confident about digital but can be brought into that situation.

At the other end of the spectrum is an example that I might have shared with this Committee before. For the most vulnerable people who we serve in DWP, we have visiting officers. Some months ago, I went with a visiting officer in south London to the home of someone who was applying for PIP, was bedridden and had a carer three times a day. Together, we filled in the application for PIP there and then, face to face. She had the Permanent Secretary of DWP and I am not sure that I added a lot of value, but the visiting officer certainly did.

That is the spectrum. We are there for people, whatever their situation, whether it is face to face as a visiting officer, in a jobcentre, on the phone or digitally. That sort of approach of thinking about our people and the people who we serve, according to their own particular needs, is absolutely crucial to outstanding service delivery across the whole of Government.

Q10 Chair: Can I just examine how you did that? Did one of you—either you or your visiting officer—have a computer and you were just asking the claimant questions?

Sir Peter Schofield: Yes.

Q11 Chair: So there was no way that that claimant themselves was ever going to be able to fill in that form without help.

Sir Peter Schofield: That is exactly right. She was, as I say, confined to her bed. She had a hospital bed in her front room, and that is where she was. She might have been able to do that with a supporter—maybe a friend or a relative—but, with the visiting officer there, she knew what was required in terms of the questions around PIP, so was able to fill that in and help her get through the process.

Q12 Oliver Ryan: Thank you, Sir Peter. I am trying to work out just how formal or influential the ODP is, and how you balance that work with your role as Permanent Secretary at DWP. How often do you typically spend on the ODP work? Is it something that you can do? DWP is not a quiet Department, particularly at the moment. How do you balance the two?

Sir Peter Schofield: There are a number of levels to that, Mr Ryan. The first is the formal governance process. Figure 3 of the Report sets out the various governance boards that we use to think about driving through the strategy. It is also how we ensure that we are all working effectively together. I chair the strategy board with directors general from across the profession coming together. Below that, you have a number of subgroups that a number of colleagues are part of. That is how we drive the strategy forward.



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In terms of talent management, I have two talent boards—one that looks at the talent coming through at director level, and the other at director general level, with a number of other leaders.

I use those governance fora to help me bring the right people together. It is one of these things where the way we get things done is not by any one individual; it is very much a team working together. For me, it is about getting that team motivated for us all to be driving towards a clear strategy and then to be empowering groups of senior leaders to be taking forward different elements of the strategy and making things happen. For example, the professional skills framework was led by one of the directors general from across the profession on behalf of all of us. That is one element of my role.

A second element is representing the profession in some of the more cross-Government, cross-civil service governance fora. One would be the senior leadership committee, which looks at the development of directors general across the whole of the civil service—and I sit there, partly as the Permanent Secretary at DWP, but also as head of the profession—and also the civil service operations board.

Capability across operational delivery is something that matters for all of the leaders of the big operational Departments. Although my day job is a busy one, I am always thinking about capability across DWP. By its very nature, DWP is a big part of operational delivery as well.

- Q13 **Oliver Ryan:** You mentioned there governance models and the strategy board, and how you try to implement some of the objectives through things such as peer-to-peer learning. From what I have read of this and from the governance that you have in place, it is all persuasion and good will, is it not? There are no powers attached to what you do as the ODP. You just have to get people in a room. Your power is really to get people around a table, because you are not, as far as I understand, a function, and so do not have the authority to develop mandates and standards, or tell people what to do. Is that correct?

Sir Peter Schofield: Yes, although this is the sort of area where you can push and make further progress. You will see that our strategy has us looking more at common frameworks and standards to enable us to think about the measurement of standards across the board. We do a huge variety of roles, but are there some common standards that we can think about applying to service delivery that we can then hold each other to account on.

At the heart of this, it is not about holding people to account with any particular accountability; it is about engaging people who want to work together, because they will know that if we work together most effectively, everyone will be more successful in their own role. You will have seen that in that conversation between Tom and Paul just then. Paul wants to hear from Tom, because Paul wants the Planning Inspectorate to get even better. Likewise, I want to hear from the Passport Office or from



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HMRC, or they want to hear from me, about some of the things that they are doing. We all have things that we can learn.

The crucial thing for me about building the profession is giving this sense of community. We can think about how we can learn from each other. It is not about people turning up to meetings because I am making them turn up to meetings. They want to turn up to meetings. They turn up to the talent meetings because they want the people who they lead to have the best opportunities for development in their own careers. They turn up to communities of practice meetings because they want to learn from each other or share some of the great things that they have done.

We then have some wonderful awards events, where we bring together people from all over the country, and we just celebrate great things that are happening. You will have seen 23 case studies in here, where we see so many great examples of excellent service delivery from different parts of the country and different roles in Government, and we celebrate great things. At the heart of this, it is about serving our communities and citizens.

Q14 **Oliver Ryan:** I do not doubt that you are a very charming man and a good chair of that board. What I am cautious of on the accountability side is that, for people such as Tom and Paul, you may get in a room and think, "We have this strategy. We want to drive this home." Surely it empowers them if there is a bit of accountability on the side to say, "I have the head of profession on my back trying to get me to do this." That then empowers them in their service. Does that not make you want to lean into perhaps a bit more rigid governance?

Sir Peter Schofield: As I say, we are certainly leaning into some of the aspects of function by looking at standards and delivery. That is part of the strategy going forward. Tom is accountable to the Permanent Secretary at the Home Office, who wants to engage with me because she wants to make sure that service delivery in the Home Office is as effective as possible. Antonia and I will work closely together as part of the civil service leadership overall. I represent the heads of all Government Departments working together, and they have all signed up to the strategy themselves. That accountability comes from a collective at the heart of Government, as well as directly from me. Tom, do you want to talk about how it feels for you?

Q15 **Oliver Ryan:** I want to ask Tom and Paul in a second about how it feels and perhaps some examples, so I will give you a couple of seconds to think. Lastly, Sir Peter, why is the ODP not a function in that sense, and why does it not have the kind of authority that comes with functions, as opposed to this loose association?

Sir Peter Schofield: I would push back slightly on this question about the distinction between profession and function. We have two different lists, and you are right that the operational delivery profession is under



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one list rather than the other. As I said earlier, the strategy is pushing us more in the direction of a function.

In terms of why it has been seen in the past as a profession rather than a function, if you think about what Government Departments are all about, frontline service delivery has to be at the heart of it. If DWP is not delivering a good service to our customers, or outcomes through service delivery, then we are not delivering what we are all about and the heart of what we do.

The same is true for policy work. Policy and operational delivery have been professions rather than functions because prime accountability always goes through the leadership of that relevant Government Department. If I am the Permanent Secretary at the Home Office, continuing that analogy, Antonia will feel that she is accountable for the delivery of the Passport Office service, not Peter Schofield as head of the delivery profession, and you would expect that. As the Public Accounts Committee, you will hold her to account rather than me. There is more that we can do to lean into this to help identify where operational delivery could be improved by better learning from other parts of Government.

Julie Taylor: Sir Peter, is it worth me saying something about profession maturity?

Sir Peter Schofield: Yes, do. That is a good point, Julie.

Julie Taylor: One of the things that we are going to be rolling out in October is a profession maturity matrix. This is not about having a league table, but setting some metrics around what is expected of a head of profession—for example, the extent to which heads of profession are engaging with us and with their professionals on the ground, the way in which they are using our products and services, and being able to look year on year as to how that is progressing. It is not about accountabilities in the true sense, but definitely about maturity and helping and supporting them. We have co-created this with them.

We have set up a role profile for a head of profession, also looking at what that looks like for capability leads who support them. We have also put in place a set of documents that set out what good support structures look like. It is about encouraging Departments to put their backing behind operational delivery in the future.

Q16 **Oliver Ryan:** Paul and Tom, as I touched on before, how does the ODP help you address the problems that you deal with? Do you have an example of where this has changed the way that you have worked or approached a problem?

Tom Greig: I will just start by saying that my job is to deliver the best possible service for the public, whether or not ODP existed as a concept. That means not just the public that are my customers, but also the public that expect me to deliver a secure service and make sure that we are



giving documents only to those people who deserve them. ODP supports me and my team in doing that. It does that in a very practical way. We have used SRRT, or the surge team, in the past when we have had spikes in demand. Those are people who we can bring in and who belong to ODP centrally. They came in at really short notice when we had our issues in the Passport Office, and did a great job. They are highly trained, well-motivated civil servants. They come with their own managers. They were brilliant for us.

Alongside that, hundreds of my staff, at AA to SEO grades, so at the more junior grades, have undertaken ODP training courses. Again, they are complementary to the learning that we do. They are not classroom learning and you can do them in your own time, but they teach you some of the basics around operational management, for example, which is something that is really good. That is something that has been really supportive of us.

On a personal level, I did the ODP Excel course, which is the directors' course. I also spent a lot of time with ODP colleagues talking about personcentric design and how we put customers at the heart of the services that we build. I brought that principle and some of the material that I took from the ODP and the ODP learning back into my operation. When we talk about some of the things that the Passport Office has done in the last two or three years, that has all been based around those principles. Those were principles that we were working to, to an extent, without calling it that in the past, but the ODP learning around that really crystallised in my mind how we needed to take on the next phase of our transformation as an organisation.

Paul Morrison: Just to build on that, the Planning Inspectorate is a relatively small arm's length body of 1,000 folk. We have taken advantage of the surge capacity that Tom spoke about recently. That really benefits us.

One of the things that Sir Peter mentioned earlier on was the capability framework that a colleague in the operational delivery profession oversaw the development of. In the Planning Inspectorate, one of the things that I and my senior team have wanted to do is to increase the professional capability in our organisation. We want that for all of the professions in our organisation. Because the ODP has done the work and we have that capability framework, we have been able to bring it into the organisation. Rather than having 1,000 flowers blooming and everyone doing it differently, we have that framework. It is now in place. It is how everyone works out their learning and development programmes. As Tom says, that is filled up with a lot of content that we get from being part of the ODP.

Maybe going back to the question you were posing to Sir Peter about what, in the absence of it being mandated, is in it for us, as accounting officer there is definitely lots in it for me, because I know that I am going



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to get so much more than if I was trying to do this on my own and plough my own furrow in a relatively small organisation.

Oliver Ryan: It is interesting that you both talked about the surge teams as well, which we will probably touch on a bit later.

- Q17 **Chair:** Sir Peter, I hope that I am not being unkind, but the ODP must be about the best kept secret in the civil service. Why are you not shouting about it? I have been on this Committee for 13 years, and I am sure your research team will go away and give me numerous examples now, but I don't think that I have ever heard you or any other Permanent Secretary talking about it. Why do you not tell the public what you are doing? This would, surely, raise respect for the civil service as a whole. This public awards ceremony sounds like a fantastic thing. Why not get a celebrity in and start dishing out prizes and get it on the news?

Sir Peter Schofield: I am the celebrity. I don't want to share the limelight.

Chair: We all are, Sir Peter, but some more than others.

Sir Peter Schofield: In all seriousness, it is lovely of you to say. The reports by the NAO are part of that. We talk a lot about it within Government. We talk a lot about it in terms of how we support our people to gain the skills that they need.

What I really want from this profession is outstanding service, and that, at its heart, is what we are about. If we are doing all of these courses and all of these things and not delivering outstanding service, then we are not doing what we want to do. We want the service to speak for itself.

- Q18 **Chair:** Perhaps I am not getting my point across. You are talking to each other. You are not talking to your customers. If they knew what Tom Greig's organisation had been through to produce the improvements that he has, they would be absolutely thrilled.

Sir Peter Schofield: Yes, and I imagine each Department talks about what it is doing on its own and shares some of that experience as well. I take the point that we should shout more about this. The crucial thing for me is that we are making a difference at the end of the day, and that is at the heart of what this is about.

- Q19 **Sarah Green:** Sir Peter, how can Government get better at dealing with the inevitable peaks and troughs in demand?

Sir Peter Schofield: It is such a good question, and one that is raised in this Report quite heavily. You will see some examples of where that has been done. There are a number of elements to it. One is understanding the nature of demand, as this Report sets out, in terms of whether it is a demand fluctuation that is happening because of something that you can control, or something that you cannot control. With some things you can get upstream of the demand to make a difference before it happens in



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the first place. Can you take some of the pressure out of the demand by introducing more automation that can scale up more quickly than if you are delivering the service entirely by people?

Then you will come on to other ways of managing this, one of which, as Mr Ryan was talking about earlier, is our surge team. Looking back, we found that one of the problems that we had is that each Government Department maybe had a seasonality in their demand. In the case of DWP, one example would be winter fuel payments, which are high-profile at the moment. There is more pressure on the service over the winter, when we have to get the payments out, than the rest of the year, so how do we manage that? We were either having excess numbers of people to cope with that demand peak, or we were going out to outsource suppliers and bringing people in, at great cost, to manage those peaks.

We realised that we could develop our own internal resources, held by HMRC on behalf of the whole profession. As Tom says, they are incredibly well-motivated folk who are willing to be deployed at short notice to new pressures. They come with their own leadership team and are then made available. The receiving Department then pays HMRC for the cost of the people, but they get in return people who are well trained and motivated civil servants who care. They are professional at coming in, making a difference quickly and then being ready to move on. That means that we can deliver better value for money and a better service for customers.

It is a combination of all those different things. How do you eliminate the demand fluctuation in the first place? How do you manage together across the piece? How do you have outstanding flexible people and professionals to make a difference? We could all talk about how we are doing that in different ways, and about how we are using the surge team and how that is making a difference.

Q20 Sarah Green: Can I just ask Julie about the surge team? The NAO Report notes that it was deployed to support 75 times across Government last year. How does that work in practice? Are they based in HMRC? Again, this is a secret team that I would love to know more about.

Julie Taylor: They are employed by HMRC, but it is a full cost recovery service. There is a day rate, which means that, when you take them on, you pay that day rate in order to recover the full cost over the course of the year.

Q21 Sarah Green: How can they best be deployed across Government? What is the best use of them as a rapid response team?

Sir Peter Schofield: This is something that we look at across the whole profession. We have a team of senior leaders who look at the different pressures that come in. Different parts of Government will say, "I could do with access to the surge team." We try to plan a year in advance. As I say, there is often some seasonality where you can predict the pressures



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in different parts of the network. We will then prioritise according to where the greatest need is.

Then you will have something where there may be a sudden need to do something that is really high-profile and really important for Government, and then they will move very quickly. There are some examples in here.

Q22 Sarah Green: Who uses them? Presumably, they do not have repeat customers; it is when there is a specific type of need.

Julie Taylor: Some will be repeat in terms of seasonal demand, but other areas might be something that was just unexpected. There are many examples in housing, and the Home Office and manning the border. We have talked about DWP, HMRC and defence. There are also things that you would remember on more of a global stage, such as mobilising staff to support with Ukrainian visas or with the Afghanistan evacuation, and helping people to move from temporary to permanent accommodation, saving huge amounts of taxpayers' money.

Sir Peter Schofield: If we take another example, when Monarch Airlines collapsed, many people were abroad and needed help. The same happened when Thomas Cook collapsed as well. We sent people out to airports around the world just to be there to help UK holidaymakers who needed to get home, and to support them in that process. That is the sort of thing whereby they are willing to move at short notice. They are very motivated, but they love the variety that comes with the job.

Q23 Sarah Green: If it is a day rate that is being paid, that presumably has an impact on how long a Department can afford them for. I am curious to know about that day rate and how it is set.

Sir Peter Schofield: It is set by HMRC, who look at the cost of employing them and make sure they fully recover the cost. At the end of the day, were there to be a situation where no one needed the surge team, HMRC would employ them and have to find work for them to do. It matters that the cost can be covered. The work would need to be done. The alternative is that we might have to buy in outsourced suppliers from a third party, who probably would not provide the same quality or motivated staff.

Q24 Chair: I was looking at paragraph 2.12, which deals with this surge team, and it was going through my mind as to how they operate. They must need a wide variety of skills. Do they operate, for example, in a particular situation under a specialist? If an airline collapses, it might be a Foreign Office person who would direct them. How does this actually work?

Sir Peter Schofield: Tom might talk about that. Often, you use them to fill in the more straightforward tasks, and the more experienced folk who already work for the organisation might move to the more complex element. Do you want to talk about how you use them?



Tom Greig: As Sir Peter said, in the main, where we have used SRRT in the past, we have put them on to the most simple products, the most simple bits of work or the most simple tasks, and that has allowed us to move our own staff on to more complex work or more complex areas of work. I would say, though, that they are really quick to hit the ground anyway, because a lot of these operational processes are, at least in some ways, similar in their execution. Once you have made a decision based on a set of evidence against criteria, that is a skill in itself. Even if the criteria and the evidence are different, you still have the skill to get on and do that process again somewhere else.

The other thing that I would say about SRRT—and we should not underestimate how challenging this can be when you are bringing new people in—is that they are already security-cleared. They already have IT. They are already on all the Government systems, so they can literally come in, sit down on day one and start working. If you bring in people from outside, we have worked very hard to make that time to competence quicker in our Departments, but it is not as quick as it is when people have all those things as pre-existing conditions when they arrive.

Q25 **Chair:** Would they normally be deployed at the request of the sponsoring Department?

Sir Peter Schofield: Yes. The request always comes in from them.

Q26 **Nesil Caliskan:** I want to ask a question or two on the back of the questions that you have asked. I am trying to understand if Government Departments are asking for this resource in moments of crisis, so to speak, or if it is part of their core planning.

Sir Peter Schofield: It is a combination of the two. Departments will often have seasonality in their systems. I talked about winter fuel in our case, but every Department will see a bit of that; in the case of HMRC, it is around self-assessment deadlines and suchlike. You can do a certain amount of planning around that, but they are also ready for something emergency-wise, or something that you cannot expect, as in some of the examples that we were just talking about. They are ready for both.

I have spent some time with some of the surge colleagues in the past. It is the unexpected that many of them really quite enjoy most, because the adrenaline is going, and it is new and fresh, but they are ready for both. We can do quite a lot of planning. You will see from the Report that the surge team has risen from around 200 folk a few years ago to around 800. That is partly because, over time, we have realised that there is more need for this resource, and more seasonality baked into our existing processes than we might have realised. HMRC is willing to take more of a risk, because its balance sheet is behind this, to increase the size of the resource.

Q27 **Nesil Caliskan:** That is why I am asking the question. Moments of crisis,



emergencies, or things that you could not plan for, by their very nature, should not happen often. One might misinterpret the increase in numbers of the core team that you are talking about, as Departments just not planning for what should be predictable events, and not the very few unpredictable events. HMRC, as you have referenced, is a good example of that. Tax returns happen every year. Should not Departments be planning better for peaks and troughs?

Sir Peter Schofield: I can see that Paul wants to come in, so I will hand to him in a second. Yes, they should, but, in terms of planning for peaks and troughs, if we have a peak over here and someone else has a trough at the same time, is it not better to share the resource together across the Departments than to both be preparing for peaks and troughs in different ways? It is about how we share resource most effectively and, in doing so, delivering better value. Paul, do you want to say a bit more?

Paul Morrison: As I mentioned before, we are a relatively small organisation of 1,000 people. It might not be a global event, but it is an increased pressure. For example, we have recently used the surge team because we had to get into some recruitment and needed that capacity. Because we are only 1,000 people to begin with, having the release valve of a bigger organisation, where we can bring people in for the short term, with all the benefits that Tom is describing, means that we do not have to rely on contingent labour. We do not have to take people off business as usual in terms of scheduling planning appeals and so on. It gives us that flexibility by being part of a bigger whole, which is what the surge team gives us. It is not bad planning. What it affords us is more flexibility.

Q28 **Nesil Caliskan:** That is a helpful answer. My only other challenge back would be, in a climate where more agility is required for individual Departments, are you not, in a way, giving them a get-out clause by saying, "Don't worry about making sure that your core teams are agile enough to be able to deal with things? We will always have this backstop with the central team"?

Sir Peter Schofield: That is a good challenge. At the heart of it, it goes back to what I was saying to Ms Green earlier, which is that there are different ways of addressing peaks and troughs in demand. Can we avoid the fluctuation in demand altogether or drive more flexibility in the organisation by having more flexible deployment within your own organisation or, indeed, using automation to make it possible to scale up and scale down when you need to?

This is just a resort at the end of all of that, when Departments have used all the different opportunities, but there is still value. There will always be some peakiness in demand. Sharing some of that resource across the piece is always going to make more sense than trying to do it on your own. We keep the size of the surge team under review year by year, according to what is needed.

Q29 **Nesil Caliskan:** Can I ask you about the four key capabilities that the



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NAO Report specifically identifies? You have spoken about some of them already, including, as we have just discussed, dealing with particular demands, and also the need to take a whole-system approach. I wonder if you might be able to talk about how the four will be able to make a difference in your organisation, for example, but also in the system as a whole.

Paul Morrison: Just to illustrate it, thinking about a system, there is a way of approaching the operational delivery in the Planning Inspectorate, which could be very focused on the narrow things that I am responsible for. I mentioned before that we are going through a process of recruiting additional people, because we are right at the heart of Government priorities around house building and infrastructure.

There is a way that I could approach that that would be quite narrowly focused on my accounting officer responsibilities, which would be to bring people in, train them up and get them making determinations. I know that I sit in a system that is made up of lots of other organisations, and in particular local government. Traditionally, the default approach that I would take to recruitment, if I did nothing else, would probably have the majority of people coming to us from planning departments around the country.

If I take a step back and look at it from a systems level, that is not the best thing for the whole, because the last thing that I want to do is take all of the talent out of the critical bit of the process overall. The way that we are approaching recruitment is to have lots of conversations with local government about how we can do this, thinking around innovative delivery models, and I and my team thinking around wider professions in the built environment than just the planning profession and just that focus on the planning department.

That is just to try to bring it to life—and it is completely correct in the Report to describe taking that whole-of-system approach—and how it is applied in my particular area of the operation.

Sir Peter Schofield: Do you want to give an example of the whole-of-system approach?

Tom Greig: Paul spoke a bit earlier about our service management model. At the Passport Office, for example, there are five different organisations involved in the delivery of a passport. There is us and four commercial partners. We have what is called a service management team that sits across the top of that, and its job is to make sure that the end-to-end process for the customer is as simple as possible. In using that model and always taking that customer-centric view, so the question that we always ask ourselves is, “How will this impact the customer?”, not, “How will we do this specific piece of work?”

As I say, that overarching customer service management team is the primary decision-making team for that service line, which is passports in



this example. We use that customer-centric model to make sure that we are always delivering something that works for the customer rather than something that just solves a problem or does one bit of the process.

Sir Peter Schofield: You can scale this up another level, to use some of the examples in the Report. When you think about releasing prisoners from prison at the end of their sentences, how do you make sure that you do everything that you can to avoid the risk of reoffending? That often requires someone leaving prison to have somewhere to live, to be connected to a job or access to benefits, and to be connected to community and to probation services.

There has been a lot of working together to have a whole-system approach in terms of how we make sure that all the agencies of Government come together around that individual and how we make sure that all of the services are there to avoid that person going back to a life of crime, and giving them the best opportunity of living a life and contributing to society going forward. That is a high-level example, and one that is referenced in the Report as well.

Q30 **Chair:** I wanted to come in on exactly this space. Paul, before I ask you this question, I should draw attention to my declaration of Members' interests, in that I am a chartered surveyor. As such, I have been heavily engaged with the planning system for most of my life, one way or another. I know that local authorities' planning departments vary hugely in their efficiency. Most are pretty inefficient because it is a non-statutory service, and therefore it tends to get second-class treatment. You can be as efficient as you like in your own organisation, but if your main customers, who are the local authorities, are not providing you with a timely service, how do you make your whole operation more effective?

Paul Morrison: Part of it is coming out as a theme in terms of how we design our services in the Planning Inspectorate to be part of that whole. For example, we are investing very heavily in digitalising a lot of our services. In doing that, we are having a lot of conversations with our colleagues in local planning authorities around, "How can we make this system work for everyone? How can we make it easy for you to interact with us? How can we streamline all the processes?" We have talked about demand, but how can we make sure that we are not, for our own convenience, creating demands on other people that, if we did things a bit differently, we could shift?

Through the design of our services—and, in particular, our digital services—we are relentlessly doing that. We are having conversations with local government all the time, because you are right that they are a key part of the end-to-end service that the customers, who are the public, will be experiencing.

Q31 **Chair:** Would you go as far as saying to an individual local authority, "If you could provide us this digitally, in this way, it would speed up the service hugely"?



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Paul Morrison: Not individually, but collectively. For example, we are just rolling out the full digital appeals service, and that is precisely the conversation. We rolled it out in stages. We started piloting it with a small number of local planning authorities, and then expanded it. That is the tenor of the conversation, but it is not a one-to-one transaction. It is about how we can collectively work in a way that allows local planning authorities to interact with us.

Q32 **Chair:** How do you work with local government? It is not part of the ODP, so what is your means of communicating this to local government?

Paul Morrison: Interestingly, we do have colleagues from local government who are part of the learning development and the senior leadership, but day to day, regardless of whether it is inside or outside of the civil service, part of my job as the leader is to have lots of conversations. I speak regularly through representative bodies and the Local Government Association. The Planning Advisory Service is another part of the LGA. Part of my job, and that of my senior team and our organisation, is to have that conversation collectively, in the round, with our colleagues in local government.

Sir Peter Schofield: As Paul mentioned, in the latest cohort of the operational delivery Excel programme, we have two candidates from mayoral combined authorities as part of that. Part of this is about building networks, for exactly the reasons that you have described.

Q33 **Chair:** Presumably, that will go on as we get more mayoral authorities, which seems to be the way that the Government are going in terms of devolving more power to them. Presumably, you will need to strengthen those networks.

Sir Peter Schofield: Yes, definitely. We are doing that within DWP in terms of the devolution of employment support and working with mayoral combined authorities in terms of how you provide support to help people who are far away from the labour market to move towards employment. Maybe it is a health issue or a housing issue. You need a whole-system approach to that, and often that is best done locally. It is partly about how we need to deliver, but we are trying to build capability to do that alongside other organisations as well, so you build networks as well as capability.

Q34 **Nesil Caliskan:** That is a perfect segue, because my final question, perhaps to Julie, was going to be about building capability and how the profession helps organisations build their capability. Specifically, I have the DWP in mind when I ask this question. I represent Barking constituency, in Barking and Dagenham. It is one of the areas where the new jobs scheme is being rolled out, and one where there is consistent long-term unemployment. The nature of the support that DWP will have to provide will be multi-layered. It will have to be consistent. It will be long-term.

I am wondering how the profession can support those who are on the



frontline in the jobcentre in Barking, which I visit regularly, to be able to make what really feels like quite a fundamental shift from just seeing people, whether it is for half an hour or 20 minutes, to a longer-term approach with the skills that they need to be able to perhaps speak to the NHS or to industry, and to talk about the skills that that individual needs. It feels like quite a big leap and task. What role can the profession play in that?

Julie Taylor: It is important to distinguish between the profession and some of the technical domain that is required in a given organisation and operational delivery profession. From a profession-wide perspective, we launched our skills framework in the autumn of 2024—the first that we had ever had. It sets out really clearly the core skills required for each of the job families at whatever level, and the capabilities required for senior civil servants and how that makes its way through. Alongside it is a learning curriculum that helps signpost people to the right things to develop their skills, either to be even better in their current job or to help them to progress to more complex and more senior roles.

We then have our heads of profession, two of whom are here today, who are working to translate that into their organisation and align that with what is needed for more technical and domain activity. Similarly in DWP, we have a head of profession who is looking at how you bring the professional skills up across the board. There are also colleagues who are then looking at what that means on the ground with the changes that you articulate, Ms Caliskan.

Sir Peter Schofield: To bring that to bear in terms of a frontline work coach, there will be two dimensions to that. In terms of the technical learning around how to be a work coach, we are developing our coaching academy as part of our pathfinder for the jobs and careers service. We talked a bit about that when I was here in May. That is about the technical skills of being a work coach.

What the profession is doing is giving broader customer service skills that relate to anyone in a frontline customer service role. The two together really complement and give that person the skills that they need for the really important role that they do.

Q35 **Nesil Caliskan:** Is it fair to say that the profession helps get the day-to-day business functions as efficient as possible? What I mean is people not waiting on the phone, for example, or not having to complete a form several times, and the more complicated, individual-type cases that our constituents might need to face needing to be dealt with by those on the frontline. Rather than the profession, those on the frontline are going to be looking to their Departments to skill up. Is that correct?

Sir Peter Schofield: Yes. The things that are very specific to the role, which are not related to other types of role, will be delivered by the Department, per se. In order to progress as a professional in operational delivery, you want to be progressing in terms of some of these broader



professional skills. For someone in frontline service delivery, a lot of that will be around customer service or issues around leadership as you grow and become a team leader within your area. Maybe you are a work coach team leader, so it will be about giving you those leadership skills, which are more generic. It is a combination of the two.

The profession cannot provide the technical stuff that is related only to that role; that would be inappropriate, but we can do more by spreading that professional work across the piece. That then gives people a chance of building their knowledge base in a way that is recognised all across the profession. Someone can develop through the skills framework and then apply for a role in another part of the profession. There are 290,000 roles all across the country. You can grow and develop your profession. You don't just have to stay within your own Government Department. That is another part of this whole offer that we have to people.

- Q36 **Nesil Caliskan:** Can I just give a final shout-out to a place-based approach? I understand that everything that you have said is really important for a system to work, but some of our public services are in need of transformation because, over a number of years, we have lost that place-based approach. If I was to be very cynical, everything that you have described that is important for a system could, on a bad day, ignore how a specialised understanding of an area is really important too. It is not really a question, so I apologise, but just to say that locality should also be at the heart of everything that you do.

Sir Peter Schofield: I am really glad that you said that, because this is not in any way cutting across that. It complements that. The need to be connected to place and to community matters as much in east London as anywhere else. Our east London district is fabulous at being connected to local agencies, housing associations, GP surgeries and employers. I have been part of a number of their programmes of engagement and seen that happening in an amazing way. That happens all across the country. We want to complement that by doing things across the profession that add value, but in no way cut across the need for place-based approaches and connection to community, which is what you have just described.

Julie Taylor: If I could just add, the way in which we have created the skills framework and helping people to navigate their careers also helps them to see what other opportunities there are within their local vicinity for their career progression. When you are stuck in a large organisation, you often cannot see what is elsewhere. This has enabled us to corral groups of what might initially appear to be very different jobs, but into really clear job families where people can see other organisations that might be just along the road, where they could step next, because they have built the skills to be able to manoeuvre themselves as a professional.

- Q37 **Chris Kane:** Before I go to my main question, can I just close off something that was mentioned when we were talking about local authorities? My experience of local authorities is as a council leader in



Scotland, which I recognise is a different kettle of fish. If English and Scottish local authorities share anything in common, I suspect that it is a lack of resources, money, and ability to do anything other than firefight at the moment.

How are you going to ensure that, if you get this right, which requires a bit of resource but will deliver great things if you get it right, you do not get out of kilter with local authorities? When it comes to, for example, employing someone in planning, with the difference between going straight to the civil service versus going to the local council, whereby there is such a pull to go to the place where it is recognised, how are you going to ensure that local authorities, which are another one of your key delivery partners, come on this journey with you?

Sir Peter Schofield: It is a good point. Paul may have things to add. At the heart of that is the answer to Ms Caliskan's question about how we connect with place and community, and put the customer or the citizen at the heart of how the service operates.

As I say, one of the examples we have is, as we think about working with local mayoral combined authorities, particularly in England and Wales, how we do that in a way that enables us to put the customer at the heart and build capability where we need to in the mayoral combined authority. It needs to be there, rather than held in the Department. There are things we can do around that.

When it comes to building capability of people, it is step by step. At the moment, we have been focusing on the 290,000 folk within the civil service operational delivery profession. There have been some steps in that direction, as I say, with OpDel Excel programme, bringing in some representatives from mayoral combined authorities.

Any learning that we develop I am sure we would be happy to share with the Local Government Association and use whatever learning we have to build capability across the piece, working with the LGA and others to build capability in local government, as well as central Government.

Q38 Chris Kane: I absolutely agree with Nesil in the sense of place, but my observations were that, within the sense of place, there is a resource imbalance between local and central Government. Central Government want to put in more resource if they can. You are putting more resource into the development of this standard, the development of this recognition, which is good to see, but I would imagine—I am just bringing it back to planning—that there are planning officers who are a little bit worried about this.

In my local authority, it was always the case that the bigger local authorities could pay more money for planning officers than I could in Stirling. That was always the concern. If you have a central Government that are paying more money, offering more recognition, offering more development, making it more of a professional pool, they will say, "I am going to go there. I don't want to go there".



It is about making sure, on a resource level within that place-based approach, you are approaching it with awareness of each other's limitations and possibilities.

Sir Peter Schofield: Paul, do you want to talk about the planning example and the planning profession centrally and locally?

Paul Morrison: There are two things there. The resource that we are putting in here, in terms of increasing the capability of operational delivery professionals, is almost agnostic of which organisation they are in and which sector. As we have described, we are definitely trying to bring more of a connection between local and central Government in with my colleagues who are on the course that I am on at the moment.

Specifically on the planning point that you are making, that is exactly what we are trying to work with local government on. It is precisely that question of how we can collaborate to make sure that the system as a whole is functioning, rather than the whole idea of robbing Peter to pay Paul, with one bit of the public sector having a negative impact on the other.

The first thing is to take that view, to take that place-based approach, not to sit in central Government in isolation from our partners in local government. That is what we are actively collaborating on now. We are having the conversation. How do we make that work? How do we think about this as a public sector planning profession that we each have a vested interest in? You have to have those conversations.

That is exactly what we are doing at the moment, because I recognise the risk that you are describing, if you don't actively do something about it.

Q39 Nesil Caliskan: I will be brief. For the record, I used to be a council leader and I am vice-president of the Local Government Association, having sat on the board. I absolutely recognise everything that you have said, Paul, about the live conversations. There is a tension, is there not? Central Government has grown in size, including the number of staff and civil servants. Numbers in local government have shrunk and yet there is this agenda of devolution in the most basic of terms, but also a commitment to place-based solutions.

How do you wrestle with that? How are you making progress in being able to design services that are around the individual and the place when organisations and systems that you have spoken about today sit in central Government and not in local communities?

Sir Peter Schofield: It is a really good challenge. Let me give you an example of what we are doing in DWP and the challenge of making sure that our young people are in employment, training or education. We have an increasing problem with the proportion of our young people who are not in education, employment or training. How do we tackle that? That is something we are working with local areas to do as part of trailblazers.



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We have a number of trailblazers in different urban parts of the country, particularly mayoral combined authorities. We have said to local areas, "Can you help us? Can we work together to develop a solution that works in your area, whatever the local situation is?" Part of that is about building capability locally, so that we can join it up.

We know it is not just about what we do through the jobcentre. It is not just about what we do through the adult skills system, which is often devolved. It is not just about local and central Government, but about employers working together. It is around how the health system works, particularly for young people with mental health conditions. How does that all join up?

At the heart of that is a local plan that brings everyone together. As we assess the local plans that come forward, a key part is about building capability and capacity to make it deliverable. In DWP, we think, "How can we support the deliverability of that by supporting the creation of that capacity?"

Q40 Nesil Caliskan: That capacity has to come from somewhere. It is not an endless pot, nor is there a blank cheque. There is a fundamental question as to where that capacity comes from. Local government is not short of ideas, nor is it short of innovation. Some might argue there is more innovation going on locally than there is centrally. That is a debate.

If it is not going to be a direct transfer, where is that capacity coming from? You do recognise, I am sure, that that capacity currently does not exist locally.

Sir Peter Schofield: Yes, but that is what we are developing the plans to deliver. The plan is not just about what we do, but about how we do it and what the capacity is. There is funding available to support those plans. We are working this through in all different parts of the country, both in terms of youth and also in terms of economic inactivity. That is something we will be reporting back over a period of time and we can report back to you in terms of the capacity and how we build that, as well as having a plan that we can make work.

Q41 Mr Betts: There is a key point about place and local authorities' key role in that, in trying to co-ordinate the various elements of delivering holistic services. What Nesil Caliskan has just said is that the willingness is there in local government, some skills are there but, over the last few years, local authorities have had to reduce their workforce. Often the biggest cuts have come at the centre of councils, because they are the people in the back room who are not seen up front. They are disposable. Of course they are not, when you start to look at pulling these things together and people are really leaning on it. What can you do to help individual councils perform that pulling together, that leadership role?

Sir Peter Schofield: Mr Betts, from DWP, our approach has been to work with a number of mayoral combined authorities, where they have been bringing together that capacity and that capability, by combining



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the capability that is in local areas and local authorities with what we have from central Government around a plan.

I was in Greater Manchester not that long ago and we talked about the plan that they have from an employment perspective. In West Yorkshire, we are coming together in terms of employment, bringing together the work that we do from central Government with the work that is being done locally, pooling capacity and working together around a joint plan. That, for me, is the future, particularly when we can demonstrate that that delivers a return in terms of getting people into work, helping to reduce the pressure on public services as a result and helping to promote economic growth locally.

I could not agree more that this is about how we work together and how we see a lot of the innovation and the planning coming from local areas, because what matters locally will be different in different parts of the country.

Q42 Chris Kane: I am very much enjoying this because, from a Scottish perspective, it is intriguing to see that a lot of the problems are the same with local government. Perhaps I would add to that by saying it often feels like it is local government standing outside the window looking in, pressed up against the window, in a sort of Dickensian approach to getting some resources from inside, where the heating is on and everything else.

You have 290,000 people engaged in this in central Government. If you were to expand that figure to, say, central Government and local government, what number of people would you have? You have a huge number of people.

While you are trying to find the synergy between disparate professions within central Government, if you expand that out to local government I bet, in this instance, there is not a huge difference between the 290,000 you have working internally and the other 290,000-plus that are in local government. They have the same challenges you have in central Government without the same resources or the same economies of scale to address the challenge.

Sir Peter Schofield: It is a brilliant point. What you are saying is that the profession is bigger than the 290,000. I have a slight intake of breath when I think about the need to do even more, but you are right that we do. Is there more that we can do? Partly, that is about capability. A lot of the conversation we have just been having has been about capacity. I know there are questions about resourcing and my colleagues in MHCLG will have more to say in terms of local authority resourcing, so I should leave that to them.

When it comes to capability, you could not be more right, Mr Kane. The job families that we have described, which apply to people in central Government, will also apply to people in local government. What is the



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potential for us to open up our opportunities, our professional skills framework, to local authority colleagues?

As I say, we have already dipped our toe in the water in terms of senior leadership, with the OpDel Excel programme for senior leaders, but I am taking this challenge, quite rightly, from the Committee. Where can we go further with this profession to build capability more broadly across central Government into local government too?

Tom Greig: As I said, one of my jobs is Registrar General for England and Wales. Registration services are delivered by local authorities, by local authority registrars. As we are starting to think about how we transform that service, there is that inherent tension between what works digitally, which is simple, repeatable processes, and different circumstances in different places.

You go to one local authority and they will have aligned their registration services with their bereavement services. For another, they are aligned with their children's services. The way that it works best for them is to put those services in the same place. In some places, they put them together with the general enquiries that they are providing to their customers.

We think about how we can deliver a system that will work in the future and that will work digitally, but is also adaptable enough to be put in where it works locally, within the individual local authorities. They all have very different operating models and they are operating in very different environments with very different customer sets. It is a real challenge and it is something we have to keep at the top of our minds.

Paul Morrison: There are multiple different things that we need to do to address this. As Peter says, my colleagues in MHCLG can talk about the wider capacity in local government. One of the things that is specific to this profession, though, because we are talking about demand, is that all of us who are in this who interact need to ask ourselves questions around failure demand—where could we be more efficient, where could we change the way that we do things and our processes, to make sure that we are not creating pressures on local government whereas, if we ran our processes more seamlessly, it would be effective? There are other programmes, such as Test, Learn and Grow, which the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is sponsoring, around how central and local government interact. That is going to teach us a lot of lessons.

The other thing is the leadership networks that we are establishing. We are talking today about the operational delivery network, but there is a wider network of public sector leaders and chief executive officers who, through the wider civil service leadership college, are engaged in joint training. We completely recognise in the civil service that this is not just us; it is everyone else. There is a fair amount of work going on to build those networks, but the onus is on us centrally, in our delivery



profession, to think about how we are as efficient as possible in our interactions with all parts of the public sector.

- Q43 **Chair:** Chris sets you a very fair challenge. Unlike most requests, this is not a question of resources, because these people are already employed in local government. Would it not benefit you to have at least one member of your profession in every single local authority, at least to provide a forum so that these sorts of issues could be discussed?

Paul Morrison: You mean embedding the wider operational delivery profession.

Chair: Yes.

Paul Morrison: One of the brilliant things around the Places for Growth agenda, about pushing civil servants away from Whitehall and out and about, is that it is precisely designed to have that impact. A number of my colleagues, who are based around the country, do exactly that and engage with local government and local services in those places. Certainly, that is the intent behind it.

- Q44 **Chris Kane:** If I can move us on, I am looking at page 8 of the Report and the 20 lessons and insights to improve operational delivery. I am looking at the last one, which is, "Creating a working environment that encourages openness and innovation and challenges current thinking. You need leaders who ask what barriers and problems people need help with, that are clear spending time on improving is a priority and see failure when innovating as an opportunity to learn rather than an exercise in sharing out blame".

Can we spend a little bit of time looking at that? I am wondering what the barriers are to Departments innovating more in how they provide services. I wonder what you all think about that.

Sir Peter Schofield: Seeing failure as an opportunity to learn, rather than an exercise in sharing out blame, is such a good point. That is a challenge in the wider public debate that we often have. This Committee has a role to play just as much as leaders across the whole civil service. It is something the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster was talking about, as Paul was saying earlier. As we innovate, are we willing to try things and willing to let them fail, because we have tried something new? You have to make them fail fast, so you don't waste money and time on doing the wrong thing.

At the heart of this is creating a culture of empowerment and leadership across the civil service as a whole and within our Departments. In DWP, during the really difficult time we had during the pandemic in 2020, there was a huge amount of innovation and creativity. That was because of the pressures that we were all under. There was a very clear focus for the whole organisation on how we made sure we were there for people who need universal credit because, due to what was happening in wider society, their jobs were coming to an end.



We had hundreds of thousands of people come to DWP for support. The amount of creativity and innovation that was going on at every level in DWP to find ways of changing processes, improving processes, bringing in automation, to have that objective was quite phenomenal. It did not require me or the leadership of DWP coming up with the ideas. These ideas were happening all across the organisation.

There were three reasons they did. First, we were very clear about the priority: paying people their benefits. We needed to do that. Secondly, there was, at that time, the opportunity to spend money on technology and to bring in new ways of working. Thirdly, there was no culture of blame. There was a willingness to take risks, because the risk of not paying was much greater than the risk of paying the wrong person. These three elements are so important for all of us as leaders across the organisation.

We all play a part, as I say, including Parliament in forgiving us when we do the wrong thing because we are trying something new. We need to create that sense of empowerment and creativity across all of the civil service. It is a culture thing and it is something that I feel very strongly about as a leader of a big organisation such as DWP.

Q45 Chris Kane: I appreciate that what was done in the pandemic was unique. I hope we never ever have to have that unique approach again, where there is an external factor of that magnitude that makes us more innovative. Do you think that we have returned to the previous habits, prior to the pandemic, where there were barriers to innovation? Have we learned and embedded the lessons from that? Are you saying that there are fewer barriers to innovation post pandemic and that we have embedded these lessons, or did we go back to our pre-pandemic habits?

Sir Peter Schofield: It is a bit of both, to be honest, Mr Kane. One thing that has changed back is that, instead of us having very clear single objectives, we are back to having a range of objectives, because we are all complex organisations. There are always a variety of different things we need to do. The second thing is that our risk appetite has reverted as well, because the risk of getting things wrong is less offset by the risk of non-action.

There is still a lot that we are holding on to. One thing is the ability to work together across barriers. That is one of the things we try to do across the profession. How do we avoid this silo mentality coming back in terms of different organisations focusing on their own thing, rather than looking at everything from the point of view of the customer? We have retained some of that. The opportunity to use technology in new ways is absolutely there and driving things forward. Artificial intelligence adds to the tools in the armoury to make a difference there.

The third thing is the ability to step back and look at the process end-to-end. How do we reduce complexity? How do we innovate to drive new ways of delivering services without having to follow slavishly the



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processes we have had in the past? There is a lot there that we can learn from but, as I say, the things we have to avoid are the risk of going back to being confused by the range of objectives that we have got, and having too low a risk tolerance. That is something that is always there.

Q46 Chris Kane: It is worth seeking a little bit of further clarity. We mentioned the pandemic. There are wonderful things that we did to adapt to the pandemic, but I am never sure today, in 2025, how much we are capturing where we are today rather than thinking back to those days five years ago where innovation was kicking in.

Do you have confidence that you have a handle on where we are today, how we are approaching innovation and how you can embed the things that did work that may be slipping away just through time?

Sir Peter Schofield: We are all looking forward, rather than looking back. Every organisation would have a different answer to that, as well as the things we do together in the profession. Within DWP, we have a 2030 strategy that is all about changing the nature of how we deliver our service, using technology to help customers use our services more effectively and to help to deliver using our people in the way that makes the most difference for people with complex needs. That is all about trying to take cost out of the organisation but deliver a better service at the same time.

We will make that happen through a combination of different things. It will be some of the big change programmes that you can only do from the top, on which I will be held to account by this Committee, such as the health transformation programme. A lot of it will also be done by continuous improvement or small-scale innovation in different places, which you can then grow and spread, trying it somewhere and expanding elsewhere.

I see more of those examples going on. As leaders, we need to encourage that innovation. Tom, you might have some examples you want to give about how you do that.

Chair: I am keen to get to a break.

Sir Peter Schofield: My point would be that it is about leadership and creating the culture. In the profession, we can learn from each other about how we, as leaders, are creating that culture of innovation, but how it plays out in different places will depend on the individual strategy in those Departments. They will all have their own strategies in the way that DWP does, with our 2030 strategy.

Q47 Chris Kane: I want to ask a quick question on AI. Paul, you mentioned that we are still digitising services. We are still, in effect, catching up with, in effect, the 21st century when it has moved on rapidly in the last 12 months. We are still digitising services from an analog world. This new thing called artificial intelligence is here and it is creating another step change.



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What scope is there for Government to use artificial intelligence to improve services? Are you factoring it into the digital revolution? We thought we understood the terms of reference, but it has now blown up a little bit. Can you talk about how you are working with the Government Digital Service to realise all of these benefits?

Sir Peter Schofield: AI is one of the tools. It is not the only tool. You start by having to look end to end at the process. You don't want to automate an inefficient process. You want to make the process more efficient and then automate beyond that. We are all using AI in different ways but learning from each other. The great thing about the Government Digital Service is that it is holding a learning tool together and holding together the best examples and developing some of the things that we can all apply across the piece.

One would be a tool they have for summarising responses to consultations, such as Green Papers. How can you do that in a way that summarises those responses quickly and enables us to provide a Government response and support that Government response? There is an AI tool that can help augment the work of Departments on that.

We have some in our own Department. One great example that I just came across quite recently on one of my visits, going back to another child maintenance example, was in Newcastle. I was visiting the team there and they developed a tool that enables them to identify those circumstances where you have a payment arrangement between two parents that might be at risk of breaking down. They have analysed thousands of cases where the payment has broken down and they have identified characteristics that might be leading indicators that identify that something is going to go wrong.

They use an AI tool to interrogate all the hundreds and thousands of cases that they have, picking those ones where those characteristics are present. That then enables our people to get involved proactively and often prevent a payment breaking down before it ever happens. That is another great example of using AI.

There are lots of those use cases around. The great thing about the Government Digital Service is it helps us identify where we can learn across the piece. Operational delivery leaders are the people who think about the end-to-end service, how you can streamline that and make it more efficient, and then our colleagues in digital can help us with the tools, whether it is AI or anything else, to promote automation and to improve the whole end-to-end process as a result.

Chair: We are going to take a break now. The clock stands at 5.01. If we could be back here promptly at 5.10, that would be fantastic.

Sitting suspended.

On resuming—



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Chair: Welcome back to the Committee's proceedings.

Q48 **Mr Betts:** Sir Peter, it is great to have strategies, aims and objectives. How will you know if you have been successful?

Sir Peter Schofield: It is a really good point. In terms of our focus on capability, we start by measuring the effectiveness of the interventions that we provide. It is about getting feedback from the participants on the learning courses that we run. It is about getting feedback from the success of the surge teams that gets presented to the host Department. You get feedback from the participants or the people who are receiving the interventions that we are providing.

At the heart of this is whether we are making a difference to the overall outcomes that we are seeking to achieve, in particular the services to customers and citizens. We start from the assertion, which the NAO itself has backed up, that investing in capability is the foundation of delivering excellent service.

As part of the next stage of the strategy, we are looking at how we can develop better metrics for progression in terms of the professions in each Department, in terms of the services that are being delivered by our different parts of the profession and, ultimately, whether we can make the connection between the interventions that we make and service outcomes. We are some way off being able to provide that to the degree of assurance that is behind your question.

Q49 **Mr Betts:** Is that not a real challenge? Even if you can show that where you have been working in certain areas there have been improvements, is it your work that has caused the improvement?

Sir Peter Schofield: As I say, we and the NAO share the view that growing capability is a crucial part of this. If we know that we are growing capability in all the different interventions we are doing and we can see we are making a difference in terms of capability, you have to believe that that is the right thing to do to drive better service outcomes.

It is not the only thing. Alongside that, part of this is how we engage with other professions to deliver service outcomes and how we deliver alongside other parts of the public service in terms of local authorities. We have talked about that already. The actual outcomes that we deliver are only partly in the hands of the profession anyway, but focusing on capability is a really good place to start.

Q50 **Mr Betts:** Do you have a way of collecting all that information about what effect you are having on capability in different places?

Julie Taylor: We have brought data expertise into the team where we did not have any. We have corralled an initial set of information together in a baseline report, which is updated on a regular basis. That gives us a good overview of where our people are, how a number of our products are landing and the usage of things like our website. We have actively



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developed some dashboards for our heads of profession to be able to tell them about what is happening with particular programmes, such as our AA to SEO programme.

We need to corral that even more so in order to be able to then demonstrate the progress that we are making on our strategy. I mentioned earlier the professions maturity matrix that we are developing to roll out in autumn. That is also about how we work with our heads of profession to look at how they are progressing with the way in which they are reaching into their organisation, using our products and services and progressing the profession out into the business.

The third area, which Sir Peter has alluded to, is that, in this strategy, we will step into more functional territory. We will be looking at service standards for the profession. Our first energy around that will be this year and we will co-create a number of common methodologies with our heads of profession to help us look at how we consistently monitor performance in certain areas across all of our organisations.

Q51 Mr Betts: Do you expect to be able to demonstrate any benefit to private sector partners as well?

Sir Peter Schofield: Yes. We should do, shouldn't we? If we are working more effectively, then we should be making a difference. That will operate in different ways in different parts of the operational delivery profession, because we all engage in different ways with the private sector. I imagine we will.

Q52 Mr Betts: If you came back to us in two years' time, what would you want to tell us that you had achieved in terms of evaluation?

Sir Peter Schofield: There are a number of elements here. I would love all 290,000 folks we have talked about here to feel a real identity with the profession, and feel that the profession is somewhere they are going to regularly to upgrade their skills and to see where they are in terms of their career progression and career opportunities. That would be the starting point.

I would love to see a much larger number of senior leaders across the civil service who have been through the operational delivery profession OpDel Excel programme and feel empowered to be leaders going forward at the most senior levels in Government. I would love to see a situation in which we have built capacity at every level of people who are delivering excellent customer service.

Primarily, I would love to see customer satisfaction indexes all across every element of customer service across the civil service at record levels, because we will have created that capability and it will be playing out in terms of the customer experience of users of public services.

Q53 Mr Betts: If all the customers are happy in two years' time, you will have succeeded.



Sir Peter Schofield: As I said, at the end of the day, there are a variety of factors that come into play, are there not? Customer service is a really good way of measuring the overall performance. That should be one of the things that we focus on.

Q54 **Chair:** Can I stick with the private sector at the moment? The private sector is very good at innovating. You have the senior community of practice for SCS staff. These are thought leadership events held three times a year, drawing on both public and private sector insight about challenges of leading, designing and delivering large-scale operational services. What is the synergy and how is it promoted between the public and private sector with your profession?

Sir Peter Schofield: With our senior community of practice, we want to not only bring together leaders within the public sector, but also draw in expertise from the best parts of the private sector, so we can learn from that. Some of the communities of practice events that we have had up until now have involved bringing private sector thought leaders in as well to challenge us. That is one element of that.

A second is about how we can use private sector innovation in the delivery of customer services. How can we work to bring suppliers not just to provide the people or deliver a service that we have shaped, but to come in, innovate and take a risk and the opportunity to deliver the service in a different way? We need to learn from each other about where that can be done most effectively. We have things to learn in DWP about how we can do that.

The third would be about where we can innovate and create opportunities that the private sector can exploit further, creating jobs and economic growth elsewhere. Innovation in the public sector can also lead to innovation in the private sector. Look at the innovation in something like the Ordnance Survey over the years and how that has promoted data and geographic-driven services all across the private sector. Those would be the three areas that I would bring out.

Q55 **Chair:** Tom and Paul, not to repeat what Sir Peter has said, but both your organisations have been on this journey. Are there any comments you want to add about how you have learned from the private sector and how they have learned from you?

Tom Greig: On the private sector, we have four delivery partners. We use four different private sector organisations to deliver for us. We always make sure that we talk to them not just about the day-to-day work, but also about how they see the future of the industry they are in. Many of these partners are also working for a number of other international Governments, so they will understand what other Governments are doing in certain areas of work.

They can then help to talk to us as we are developing our future strategy. We can shape where we are going on the basis of that. As I say, we often



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use our existing partners for day-to-day business to help us think a bit about our future strategy.

Paul Morrison: I would echo the point about the private sector input into a lot of the development. For example, the last residential I went on, the OpDel Excel had a lot of content that came from learning from that sector.

The private sector is a critical part of my day-to-day job and the interaction with the Planning Inspectorate. For a lot of the services we are designing, very often the people who use Planning Inspectorate systems will be developers. In the same way as Tom was describing about our commercial partners, we have to understand them. I have to do exactly that and have conversations.

In the digitalisation of the programmes we are doing, for example, on major infrastructure, there are conversations we need to have with developers around how we can build systems that allow them to engage, provide information and do the right thing at the right time. This is a key part of missions, which are all parts of society and how we can collectively work together. I think about that all the time in my day job.

Q56 **Chair:** Very briefly, because I don't want this session to go on too long, how do all four of you encourage people within your profession to communicate new ideas on how they can improve their organisations? We were talking about the local government sector. They are very good at innovating with relatively few people. Innovation from within an organisation can cause a transformation, can it not, Tom?

Tom Greig: I certainly agree with that. If you talk to the people who were there at the very start of the passport transformation programme, which was around 10 or 12 years ago, they ascribe a lot of the success of that programme to going through a programme with their team called operational excellence. You take people off-site and you talk to them about how you want the organisation to be in the future. You really try to embed that culture of innovation and of people talking to each other about how to improve the service. It really built a culture of customer-centricity in the Passport Office that was ahead of its time. We have to continue to do that as our organisation changes.

We have done a range of other things. We have a continuous improvement team, which picks up ideas from colleagues within the business, as well as things we have seen online or complaints from customers. They follow those customer journeys through and work out how they can address pain points that have been identified by both those groups.

We have also recently started to roll out what we call our quality framework. We have done this with representatives from the British Quality Foundation. That is a similar process. We have trained over 1,000 people in it so far. It is a way of encouraging people to identify issues



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that they see in their day-to-day job and there being a framework for them to reflect that into channels and for us to practically do something about that.

We are working very hard to do that. We have some good examples of where it has worked. It is not working as well as I would like yet. There are still people in my organisation who, if you said to them, "Have you had the opportunity to raise an issue?", would say it has been hard to do. We have to carry on working but, as I say, it is about building those structures and that culture. Taking people out of their day job and giving them time to talk about that, showing your commitment to it, is the way we are seeking to drive that innovation, both currently and going forwards.

Q57 Chair: Julie, as head of the organisation for a number of years, you must have had a lot of conversations along these lines. It is very easy to talk to the heads of the various organisations, but it is also about getting into the lower levels, to people who have little ideas, little innovations, which could make a huge difference.

Julie Taylor: Our skills framework really brings this out and creates the environment as a leader where people can take the opportunities to improve things within the flow of work as an individual. Last autumn, we also had across Government—and we promoted this very heavily as ODP—One Big Thing, which was all about innovation and helping everybody on the ground not to make some massive change, but to take one small step and identify one small thing. It was about encouraging leaders to bring those things together and share those with wider teams to bring that to life. That will have happened across all of the organisation; certainly in DWP it very much happened for operational delivery.

Sir Peter Schofield: Tom's point is a really good one. It is about the culture and the leadership. We can support the leadership through the interventions that Julie has described. The culture is something that takes time to work through. In part, that is about showing what you value as a senior leader and what really matters. In part, it is about giving people time, but it is also about the environment in which you want people to come forward with new ideas that make a difference to customers, putting the customer at the heart of what we do.

I see that everywhere I go around DWP. Often, I will go to a jobcentre where they have some new way of doing something. I say, "Have you shared this with the rest of the jobcentre network?" They say, "We haven't done that yet." Some of it is about the structures, as Tom says, that take the learning and the ideas and spread them across the big organisations we lead, far and wide, where they work.

Paul Morrison: I will just add two things. One is that I started my career as a caseworker right at the frontline and I remember not being asked my view about anything. The senior leadership that I manifest, which I



talk about a lot, is about people being empowered to make sure that they are doing things right; they are not just making the wrong thing more right and beavering away at the problem. The communication of the culture is really important.

On a very practical level, you mentioned, Chair, at the beginning that I am the sponsor of the centre of excellence, which is one of the innovations. The idea behind that is it is a web presence, but is also an opportunity for people right across the profession to come together to share. We just launched it in March. People having that innovation and the ability to share it, not just within their organisations but across the whole of the profession, is a really key bit of the infrastructure.

Q58 Sarah Green: May I direct my question at Julie? It is about the strategy. Given how diverse your membership is, how are you ensuring that it is relevant to all 290,000 members that you have?

Julie Taylor: The engagement that helped us get to the point of developing the strategy included heads of profession across all the different organisations, whether that was looking at arm's length body requirements or larger operational organisations. Of course, as Paul and Tom have alluded to, they are very different in terms of their requirements.

We also did a number of focus groups with frontline colleagues and spoke to our colleagues in the National Audit Office, as well as a variety of other senior colleagues. We were picking up people's knowledge from different ways of engaging with the organisation, as well as leading it and being in it.

There are some themes that have come through. It is probably easier to point you to figure 6 on page 61 in the Report. What came through most strongly—and, in some respects, this comes back, Chair, to your point earlier about shouting louder—is the fact that we have done a lot to strengthen professional identity, but we need to do more. Often, we find that operational colleagues have more connection with the specific work that they do, with the organisation they are in. Trying to help them to understand that they are part of something bigger is still a really important piece for us to do.

Part of doing that is about helping people who are coming into the profession and thinking about what that means for them at a very early stage, really engaging with them as they become part of our community. It is also about strengthening the identity more broadly. We have talked a lot about end-to-end systems leadership. It is not just about operational delivery professionals understanding what we do and why it is important. It is also about all other professionals across Government and elsewhere understanding.

It is about creating the resources to help people to do that. The centre of excellence is just embarking on a piece of work with policy and



operations working together to say, "How do we tell the story of what good looks like when you work really well across the system in that respect?"

Our heads of profession were particularly keen for us to continue to work on the activity we have done on skills, embedding our professional skills framework and the review that we are doing of the learning curriculum to ensure that it fully aligns and that we are addressing any gaps. In that, I will be really honest that we have done a lot of work at the bottom end. At the top end, there is a real gap in grades 6 and 7, which we aim to fill this year by putting together a package that signposts the right things.

That also includes encouraging people to get more engaged in the centre of excellence that Paul has just talked about. I have touched on developing common methodologies. We recognise that it is really helpful to have the ability to consistently assess performance across the piece. This is new territory, but we have agreed with our strategy board that there is a way to do that, which will enable us.

We cannot all measure everything the same, because we are so diverse, but we can corral around similar things that we do. That might be around the way in which we roll out our digital services. It could be around some of our telephony elements, casework, etc.

The third part is the question of our role in strategic workforce planning. The consensus is that is just extra work, potentially additional bureaucracy, layers and things that we don't really need. Can we help the profession think ahead about some of the emerging workforce challenges? Where are there cross-profession requirements?

Q59 Sarah Green: If I am a prison warden in Wales, would I in that role feel that what you just said is relevant to me?

Julie Taylor: In terms of learning and building your career, if you want to stay in the prisons, it probably is not. We talked earlier about technical expertise, building yourself up within that type of organisation. You might not engage but, if you want to progress your career and step out of MoJ, moving into another organisation—particularly if you are in a locality where the prison is quite a fundamental employer, but you don't know what else is out there—this might be the way for you to engage.

The strategy is not a document that is out there for an audience of everybody. It is for senior leaders and it is to enable senior leaders to bring that to life in their organisations in a way that means something to their people.

Q60 Chris Kane: Can I talk about impact, please? What impact will this strategy achieve for organisations? What will it achieve for staff and what will it achieve for users of services?

Sir Peter Schofield: For individuals, it is all about raising identity and increasing awareness of the profession, and then the opportunities to



grow skills and grow your career. To build on something that Julie was saying earlier, I have been around the country. We are in the season of something called Civil Service Live at the moment. Senior leaders amongst the civil service go around to different venues around the country and local civil servants come together for big events, learning from leaders in terms of what is going on and what the future looks like for the civil service as a whole.

I am often asked, not by people from DWP necessarily, but by people from the wider civil service, about their opportunities to develop: "I cannot leave the area that I am in." Maybe they live in the north-east. "I work here. I want to look at opportunities, but I work in a Department that does not have many operational delivery opportunities. What is my opportunity to grow and develop?" We can connect people to career opportunities within the profession, but in other Departments, that are locally based.

We can talk to them about the professional skills framework and how it can demonstrate the skills that they need to move to the next level in the civil service. For them, it is the opportunity to grow their skills, grow their career, and reach their potential without necessarily having to move from where you currently live. You can pursue a career all around the country. That is one thing for individuals.

For leaders, it is the opportunity to learn from each other in the way we have described already, to learn about innovative opportunities, to learn how to do more for less and deliver the outcomes more effectively. There are a number of different ways that we do that through, for example, the centre of excellence, as we build that out.

For customers, it goes back to what we were saying before. As Mr Betts was challenging earlier, I cannot necessarily demonstrate precisely the causal link between what we do and the service outcomes, but I would assert that, if we are working effectively and every member of the profession is working to their potential, that will play out in terms of better services to the customer.

Q61 Chris Kane: There is something about moving between organisations. Why is that not happening at the moment? If I am living in Edinburgh or Stirling and there are multiple different organisations, there is nothing to stop me moving between them at the moment. Therefore, I would surmise that either I am not recognising that my skills are transferable or the people who are interviewing me or putting up the job adverts are not recognising that the skills are cross-transferable. What is going wrong at the moment that this is going to fix?

Sir Peter Schofield: It is those two things. It is awareness about career opportunities. We have something called Lister, which is a digital tool Julie might want to say more about. It identifies career opportunities across the profession. There is something about raising awareness beyond your existing employer, because we are all different employers



within the civil service. Where are there opportunities in your local area in a different Department?

The second thing is recognising the skills that we have and the skills that you might need to develop. That is where the professional skills framework comes in. You can look at your job family. Although we have a wide variety of roles, we have grouped them together into job families so you can see, "This is my sort of role." It might be primarily in a customer-facing, customer service role. "What are the skills I would need to grow to the next level, the next grade up in civil service terms? Where can I go for the development opportunities?"

Maybe it is a training course. Maybe it is another type of development course. It is all there in the professional skills framework portal. "Where can I go to develop my skills to enable me to compete for that role at a more senior level in a different Government Department?"

- Q62 **Chris Kane:** What is your instinct about what is happening at the moment? I am curious about this. If you are in Edinburgh, Newcastle or wherever, is it your instinct that you have a lot of people who are incredibly frustrated in their jobs, because they cannot get on and they are stuck there? Would you surmise that those who have fewer ties to their local place, who can move around more, are benefiting from that ability to not have quite as strong roots in a particular area?

Sir Peter Schofield: It is the value of the profession, looking across the piece. Traditionally, all of our structures and processes tended to be from Whitehall down the hierarchy of the particular Government Department out to the place. You would be confined in terms of your opportunity. You are not confined in terms of formally being unable to compete for those roles, but you just would not know about a job in another Government Department.

- Q63 **Chris Kane:** Are you losing them out of the profession? Do you think they are going sideways to—

Sir Peter Schofield: They might stay where they are and think, "I don't have the opportunity to progress." Showing where there are other opportunities in your local area in the profession, but outside of your Government Department, is the first thing that we have done that is new.

The second thing that is new, as Julie said, is to come together across the profession with a common skills framework. Although you are working in a jobcentre or in a DWP service centre, your skills are analogous to those in a customer service role in HMRC, for example. You can understand that you are part of the same job family and then you can understand what you need in terms of skills to progress within that job family.

We are providing the resource, the frameworks and the information that enables people to make the right choice for them. Some people want to stay where they are and are very happy with where they are. Many people want to progress. Maybe it is not easy for them to move to



another location where their Department has a base, but they can move within their current locality to another Government Department where there is a new role for them to take on.

- Q64 **Chris Kane:** When we talk about military recruiting, the military are aware that they have to figure out a way to let people leave and come back. Do you think, as the civil service, that you are doing that well anyway? Will this strategy help you keep people for longer? Will you also have that ability to let them leave and come back, fostering that interaction with the private sector?

Sir Peter Schofield: That is a very big subject to get into. The narrow point, which is analogous to what we were just talking about, is that I have no doubt that if people feel they have the opportunity to progress and grow within the civil service, they will stay and we will get the most out of them. If they feel there are no opportunities in the civil service, they may well leave and we might lose talent that we would want to hold on to. In that respect, this can really help.

The broader question is about how we encourage people to grow their skills within the civil service and beyond, to come back and to have those T-shaped careers, where you are learning in one organisation and taking it somewhere else, both within and without the public sector, learning about innovative opportunities and different types of culture. There is so much to be gained.

I did a secondment early on in my career where I went into the private sector and I came back. I learned a lot about different cultures and ways of working, which I brought back into the civil service. We probably don't do enough of that, for a variety of reasons that I will not bore you with. There is more potential for that interplay to happen at every level across the civil service, not just in operational delivery.

- Q65 **Chair:** We would all agree with that in terms of more placements and secondments into the private sector and vice versa. Both would benefit hugely.

We are getting towards the end, you will be glad to know. All of you said how important the skills framework is. If it is so important, why are only nine organisations using it, and will you get to your goal of the majority of members using it by September?

Julie Taylor: At the point of the Report being written, nine organisations had actively promoted this within their organisations, but a lot more people have interacted with it on our website. We are not mandating this. As we have said, people may use it. They may want to stay in their own organisations.

Some heads of profession have held back slightly because there are things happening in their own organisations and they need to align the communication, the messaging and how they want to bring the profession to life. There are a number of people who held back from



doing this immediately, but we are working with each of our heads of profession on a one-to-one basis to work out what the best plan is for them and how we can support them in doing that.

We are doing a huge amount of promotion through the Civil Service Live events Sir Peter has mentioned this afternoon. We have had a stand at each of those events, talking about the professional skills framework and all the other products and services that we offer as a profession.

We are not monitoring in terms of having all 290,000 people using it, but we are absolutely monitoring that increase over time. This is a culture change piece. It takes time for these things to reach people. We are doing everything that we can as a team to work through our stakeholder network to promote it more.

- Q66 **Chair:** These are the final set of questions from me. We love success in this Committee, but we like to be able to measure it. The concluding remarks in paragraph 2.24 say that you have a baseline survey, which provides insight into the community, but it is also acknowledged that further work is needed to strengthen its understanding. It goes on in that same paragraph to say that the performance measurement approach is still being developed. You cannot really measure performance unless you have a baseline to measure it from. Julie, I see you are nodding. Do you want to address that?

Julie Taylor: As I said earlier today, we have brought in data expertise to help us to do this, to be able to corral the data together, to be able to tell a much stronger story and to start to think about how we put clearer measures in place for years two and three of the strategy.

We built in an annual review of our strategy to make sure, not only that we were able to do that, but also that we are able to think about the changing context around us. If there are other things that we need to build into our strategy, we have the opportunity to do that in years two and three.

- Q67 **Chair:** If I am right with my remarks at the beginning that this is one of the best-kept secrets within the civil service, how are you going to go about encouraging the brightest and the best from our colleges and universities to want to join the civil service and the ODP?

Julie Taylor: We recently launched the brand-new operational delivery profession fast stream programme. Previously, there was a generalist fast stream and that brought operational and policy together. We now have two separate ones. The operational delivery profession one has, this last year, seen 20,000 applications. We do not have 20,000 opportunities to offer, but that suggests to us that this is something that is really interesting to people who are out there.

We put together the fast stream by creating immediate access to frontline experiences, leading small operational teams from the outset and then ever-increasing operational opportunities, alongside being able



to do a Chartered Management Institute level 6 qualification in leadership and management. It is about really understanding that policy into delivery piece through additional learning and a further leadership qualification in their final year.

- Q68 **Chair:** Talking about the fast stream, I did come across one paragraph that slightly caused me puzzlement. This is paragraph 2.15. "The first cohort of the operational delivery fast stream started in autumn 2024. The goal is for participants to be ready for grade 7 operational delivery on completion". That does sound very ambitious. Is it really achievable?

Julie Taylor: It is ambitious and is achievable through the combination of the experiences from the outset, leading through teams and the access to the learning that we have put together. Previous fast streams were all about getting to grade 7 by the end of the three years, so we are aligning what we are doing with the other professions that are in play with this.

- Q69 **Chair:** Finally, on my theme of shouting about what you are doing, it seems from the Report that you are talking to yourselves. Admittedly, there are rather a lot of selves—290,000. For example, paragraph 2.2 references "enhancing visibility across the civil service, including other professions, and leadership across Government". I have put, "And outside?"

What are you doing? Your 2025 to 2028 strategy does not really have much of what I call a PR, communications-type strategy to communicate. As I say, not only would the customers of the civil service be delighted to know of your successes, but we need to encourage youngsters to come into it. There are a host of reasons why you would want to publicise this and there does not seem to be much in the plan.

For example, why not produce an annual report and accounts? Then it is out there and we can see. Why not produce a simple document outlining what the ODP's strategy is? There seem to me lots of communications tricks that you could do, but you are not doing any of it that I can see in the three-year plan, the 2025 to 2028 plan.

Sir Peter Schofield: We take the challenge. There is a lot of communication that goes on, as you say, primarily to the 290,000, but it is a quality of communication that could be easily adapted to be put out more widely. You are right to say that we should be out there talking about how we can offer wonderful careers to people through the profession's fast stream and everything we have just been talking about.

We also need to do more collectively to engage with citizens across the country. We are all engaging as individual Departments with our customer base, but we will only improve our services if we are talking to our customers and hearing their views on a regular basis. We can do more of that across the piece.

It is a fair challenge. We are taking steps. This has been an evolution. You will have appreciated some of the evolution that is described in the



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Report, but we have great ambitions for where we want to take the profession. We know that if we are successful, then we make a difference to our country and our communities. That is what this is all about.

Chair: That is what we are all about, Permanent Secretary: improving people's lives and improving the standards and qualities of our communities. It has been a fascinating session today and I am grateful to all four of you for your participation.

We will be producing an uncorrected transcript in the coming days, but also a Report in due course with recommendations, which we will look forward to your observations on. Thank you very much indeed for today. We have learned a lot and we have covered a lot of ground.