



National Audit Office

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## **Report**

by the Comptroller  
and Auditor General

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## **Cabinet Office**

# EU Exit: the Get ready for Brexit campaign

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# EU Exit: the Get ready for Brexit campaign

Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General

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National Audit Act 1983 for presentation to the House of  
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Gareth Davies  
Comptroller and Auditor General  
National Audit Office

24 January 2020

# This report examines the management of the Cabinet Office-led Get ready for Brexit campaign.

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## Key facts

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <b>£100m</b>  | <b>£53m</b>   | <b>£46m</b>  |
| the budget for the Get ready for Brexit communications campaign (August 2019 to March 2020) | planned campaign expenditure to end of October 2019 | actual campaign expenditure to end of October 2019 |

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| <b>1 September 2019</b> | the launch date of the Get ready for Brexit campaign   |
| <b>28 October 2019</b>  | the date the campaign was stopped following agreement to extend UK membership of the EU to 31 January 2020   |
| <b>6 weeks</b>          | the time taken to design and develop the communication campaign, between the appointment of the new Prime Minister and the campaign launch on 1 September  |
| <b>34%</b>              | the percentage of UK citizens, based on a weekly survey, who have looked or have started to look for information, at the time the campaign was stopped, broadly unchanged from the beginning of the campaign |
| <b>73%</b>              | the percentage of people that recalled the campaign when shown an advert, based on a weekly survey   |

# Summary

## Introduction

- 1** Following the result of the EU membership referendum in June 2016 the government asked departments to begin preparing for all eventualities, including a 'no-deal' exit from the EU. The government's objective was to provide stability for citizens, consumers and businesses, to ensure the smooth operation of business, infrastructure and public services and to minimise any disruption to the economy.
- 2** The work undertaken by departments identified, for example, issues that might impact on the flow of people and goods across the border with the EU and the rights of UK citizens within the EU and EU citizens in the UK. While departments made preparations, putting in place legislation and developing new systems and processes, it became clear that delivering a smooth transition would also depend on businesses and citizens being ready for any changes that might take place. Departments identified a range of issues where the public would need information to enable them to prepare.
- 3** On 1 September 2019 the government launched the Get ready for Brexit public information campaign (the campaign). The campaign objective was to ensure that everyone was prepared for leaving the EU on 31 October – regardless of the negotiation outcome. The campaign also took place at a time when the new administration was seeking to renegotiate the terms of the UK's withdrawal agreement with the EU. The campaign was stopped on 28 October when the government and EU agreed an extension to the UK's membership of the EU to 31 January 2020. The UK and EU have since agreed a deal and the UK will leave the EU on 31 January 2020.
- 4** The campaign comprised two main components: termed the 'air' and 'ground' campaigns.

  - **Air campaign** – The air campaign was targeted at all UK residents, UK citizens in the EU, businesses crossing the border, EU citizens living in the UK and recipients of EU funds and was intended to raise awareness of the UK's commitment to leaving the EU on 31 October 2019, and to encourage people to use the information on the GOV.UK website to identify the steps they might need to take to prepare. It included advertising through TV, radio, digital and other outlets.
  - **Ground campaign** – The objective of the ground campaign was to build on the air campaign by providing information to targeted groups to encourage them to take action in 26 priority areas, for example hauliers moving goods between the EU and UK. It included non-digital activity such as roadshows and stakeholder events.

**5** The overall campaign was led by the Cabinet Office. The executive director of government communications, a senior civil servant at the Cabinet Office, was the senior responsible owner. He was supported by the Brexit Communication Centre, a team of civil servants from the Cabinet Office, the Department for Exiting the European Union and other departments. Directors of communications working in other government departments reported to the Cabinet Office on delivery of the elements of the ground campaign led by their departments. The Cabinet Office appointed three agencies – Engine, Wavemaker and Manning Gottlieb OMD – to design the campaign messages and creative assets, such as billboard posters; decide which media to buy to reach the target groups; and buy the media spots. For the air campaign, the Cabinet Office contracted Ebiquity to provide assurance on whether the campaign was cost-effective. The Cabinet Office established an EU Exit Campaign Assurance Panel, chaired by a non-executive director of the Cabinet Office and industry expert, to provide peer review to the campaign.

**6** The overall campaign budget was £100 million, including £57 million for the air campaign, £26 million for the ground campaign and a further £17 million for activity to support both campaigns (which included £3 million for central staffing and £11 million for developing GOV.UK). By the end of October, at the point at which the campaign was stopped, £46 million had been spent against an expected spend of £53 million by that point. The Cabinet Office has informed us that of the £46 million, £2 million had been committed on media space beyond the end of October. The Cabinet Office has informed us that this media space can be used by it or other government departments by the end of 2020.

**7** This report has been prepared following Parliamentary interest in the campaign. It examines the management of the campaign, in particular: the preparation of the campaign, including the approval of the business case and budget, and procurement; governance and oversight; and the evidence available to the Cabinet Office on the effectiveness of the campaign. We did not examine the timeliness, completeness and quality of the messages delivered and whether they were helpful to their target audiences. Further details on the evidence we reviewed and our methodology is covered in Appendix One. We have commented in other reports on the need for government communication with businesses and others to support the UK's preparations for leaving the EU.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Comptroller and Auditor General, *Exiting the EU: supplying the health and social care sectors*, Session 2017–2019, HC 2654, National Audit Office, September 2019.



## Key findings

**8 The Cabinet Office's need to communicate multiple messages to multiple audiences, in the midst of great political uncertainty, made this a complex campaign to deliver.** As well as raising awareness among UK citizens in the UK, the campaign sought to target UK citizens living in the EU, EU nationals living in the UK, businesses in both the UK and EU and organisations in receipt of EU funds. To prepare for EU Exit, departments had identified more than 300 workstreams that needed to be taken forward. The Cabinet Office, working with departments, had identified from these the 26 highest priority actions to be communicated to citizens and businesses, of which 15 were included in plans for the ground campaign. In addition, it had to remain responsive to changing political events, for example reducing expenditure on the campaign on 17 October when it thought the risk of no-deal had subsided following the announcement of a proposed deal by the UK government and EU (paragraphs 1.6 to 1.12, 3.3 and Figures 2, 3 and 8).

**9 The Cabinet Office worked closely with departments' communications teams to create a single cross-government campaign.** The Cabinet Office had identified lessons from the campaign it had run in the period up to 29 March 2019, the initial planned date for the UK to leave the EU. This time, the government decided that all EU Exit communications by departments should take place within an overall coordinated campaign. This required close working across departments, including regular meetings with the Cabinet Office team of representatives from all departments. The Cabinet Office considered this resulted in better, faster decision-making and more integrated messages. The ground campaign, for example, involved elements delivered by teams located in 15 departments. The campaign integrated the messages to the target audiences to reduce the risk that individuals were receiving multiple messages from different departments (paragraphs 1.13, 1.19, 2.6, 2.7 and 2.12 to 2.18).

**10 The Cabinet Office began intensive preparation for the overall campaign in July 2019 following the appointment of a new administration.** The Cabinet Office had reviewed the lessons to be learned from the March campaign in April and May 2019. By July 2019 a number of departments were reporting an urgent need to communicate with target audiences about the action they might need to take ahead of 31 October 2019. Officials prepared options for a campaign during the last week of July, including the option for a campaign on a significantly larger and more intensive scale than that run ahead of 29 March. On 31 July 2019 the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced new funding for no-deal preparations, which included £100 million for a communications campaign. Usually government information campaigns are planned over many months, for example, the Cabinet Office's own guidance expects government TV campaigns to be worked-up five months before launch. The Cabinet Office had to assemble a team quickly, drawing staff from a range of departments, and appoint contractors to help design, develop and deliver the campaign. The air campaign was launched within six weeks of the start of the planning stage (paragraphs 1.6, 2.2, 2.7 to 2.10).

**11 For its chosen option, the Cabinet Office business case did not demonstrate increased impact for the proposed spending on the air campaign compared to lower-cost alternatives.** The business case analysed four options ranging from 'do nothing' to three options of increasing scale up to the preferred option with a budget of up to £100 million. The £100 million option, which included up to £60 million to be spent on an air campaign, had the potential to reach 99.9% of the UK population, on average 65 times. Only the £100 million option included spending on an extensive ground campaign. The majority of the preferred £100 million option was allocated to the Cabinet Office-run air campaign. It identified in the business case that it was the 'on-the-ground activity' that would get people to act. The business case did not attempt to quantify the potential impact of increased spending on the air campaign in prompting public action and therefore did not assess the additional value to be derived (paragraphs 2.17, 2.18 and Figure 9).

**12 The three principal contractors – Engine, Wavemaker and Manning Gottlieb OMD – were drawn from existing government framework agreements.** All three companies had previously competed successfully to be added to the Crown Commercial Service (CCS) framework agreements for government communications contracts. The Cabinet Office appointed two of them – Engine and Wavemaker – off existing call-off contracts. The third, Manning Gottlieb OMD, was appointed, following competition, the sole media buyer for government in May 2018 and as such there was no requirement to run a further competition. For the air campaign, the Cabinet Office contracted Ebiquity to provide independent challenge on both the media strategy (developed by Wavemaker) and the media buying plans (generated by Manning Gottlieb OMD) to provide assurance that the campaign was cost-effective (paragraphs 2.20 to 2.23, 3.15 and Figures 10 and 11).

**13 The Cabinet Office gathered a lot of performance information but lacked a consistent way of measuring impact during the initial period of the campaign, which made it difficult to track the value delivered.** The Cabinet Office reported on a wide variety of performance data in its internal reports to senior officials and ministers but there was little consistency in what was being reported during the first month or so of the campaign, though its choice of measures became more consistent thereafter. The performance measure agreed by the Cabinet Office with the EU Exit Assurance Panel – the proportion of UK citizens who have looked or have started to look for information – was not confirmed until mid-October and a target was not set. The Cabinet Office had a clear target level of action for two out of the 26 priority actions that departments wanted citizens and businesses to take. It gathered performance information about the level of action for some but not all of the 26 areas (paragraphs 2.15, 3.6 to 3.12 and Figure 8).

**14 The Cabinet Office's air campaign, based on survey evidence, achieved widespread public recognition but evidence of impact was mixed.** By the end of October 2019, the Cabinet Office had spent £28 million on the air campaign against a forecast of £36 million for the same period. It estimates that by the end of October 2019, the air campaign had reached 99.8% of the population and that each member of the public had had the opportunity to see the adverts 55 times. Cabinet Office commissioned survey data show that 58% of people could recall the campaign and 73% recalled it when shown an advert. However, the Cabinet Office performance indicator agreed with the EU Exit Assurance Panel, the proportion of UK citizens who reported that they have looked or have started to look for information, did not notably change compared to the beginning of the campaign: it ranged between 32% and 37% and was 34% when the campaign was stopped. The detailed performance data reported by the Cabinet Office did show action being taken on some of the priority areas. For example, the number of passport renewal applications were higher than business-as-usual forecasts and the number of international driving permits issued increased during the period of the campaign though the reporting did not assess this against what was likely to be needed (paragraphs 3.2, 3.4, 3.9, 3.11 and 3.12, Figures 15 and 17).

**15 The Cabinet Office's review of elements of the ground campaign recorded a positive response from target audiences although it was more difficult to determine the impact on preparedness.** By the end of October 2019, departments had spent £14 million on the ground campaign in line with its forecast for the same period. The Cabinet Office told us that it had carried out seven deep-dive reviews on activities run by departments before the campaign was stopped. The five deep-dives we reviewed focused on the activity delivered and stakeholder experience. The reviews recorded a positive response from the target audiences although, in most instances, it was not clear whether this led on to action being taken. Examples of some of the ground activity and audience response were:

- 22,194 visits to GOV.UK by UK nationals in the EU directly from SMS messaging after the Department for Work & Pensions sent SMS messages to recipients of UK state pension in the EU; and
- 120 organisations attended a HM Revenue & Customs conference designed to increase Brexit readiness. All attendees completing a follow-up survey said they would be passing on the information provided to their members and/or customers (paragraphs 3.5 and 3.14, Figures 12 and 14).

## **Conclusion**

**16** The Cabinet Office had to work at great pace to prepare and launch a large, complex campaign spanning the work of many departments. It established a dedicated team to coordinate and work closely with departments to integrate messages from across government, getting them to work together effectively to coordinate what needed to be communicated to their respective target audiences.

**17** As a result of the campaign the public was more aware of some of the things they might need to take action on. However, the Cabinet Office could not demonstrate that the air campaign resulted in significantly better preparedness. The impact of the campaign is likely to have been reduced by the public's reading of political events in the weeks leading up to 31 October and the likelihood of a no-deal exit. For the future, the Cabinet Office's analysis of campaign options should, from the start, focus much more on what impact is needed and how the behaviour change required by government will be delivered. Its scrutiny of plans should place more emphasis on targeting resources on the combination of activities likely to add the greatest value. A more consistent focus on key performance metrics from an early stage would help maintain attention on objectives.

# Part One

## Introduction

**1.1** This part covers:

- the background to the Get ready for Brexit campaign;
- its governance and oversight; and
- the scope of this report.

### **Background to the campaign**

**1.2** Following the result of the referendum on the UK's membership of the EU in June 2016 the government asked departments to begin preparing for all eventualities, including a no-deal exit from the EU. The National Audit Office (NAO) has published more than 20 reports examining various aspects of government preparations ahead of the UK's exit from the EU including, for example, the arrangements made at the UK/EU border to facilitate the movement of people and goods.<sup>2</sup>

**1.3** The government's preparations identified a range of potential impacts on citizens and businesses should the UK leave the EU without a deal. These included, for example, new rules on living, working, travelling and doing business for UK citizens in the EU and EU citizens in the UK. The government has sought through its communication activities to make citizens and businesses aware of what they might need to do and encourage them to take steps to prepare.

<sup>2</sup> Comptroller and Auditor General, *Briefing on EU-UK finances*, National Audit Office, December 2016; Comptroller and Auditor General, *Exiting the EU: supplying the health and social care sectors*, Session 2017–2019, HC 2654, National Audit Office, September 2019; and Comptroller and Auditor General, *The UK border: preparedness for EU Exit*, Session 2019–20, HC 98, National Audit Office, October 2019.

## Communications in advance of March 2019

**1.4** The government had taken a number of steps to communicate how to prepare for a no-deal departure prior to the launch of the Get ready for Brexit public information campaign (the campaign) in September 2019, including:

- between August and October 2018, it released a series of technical notices outlining the potential impacts of a no-deal scenario, as well as steps citizens and businesses could take to prepare; and
- in advance of 29 March 2019, the initial expected date of departure from the EU, it ran a communications campaign to raise public awareness of potential changes and encourage preparedness. The campaign, which started in December 2018 and ran until April 2019, began with radio and social media and ended with a TV campaign. It explained that the actions people needed to take to prepare for a no-deal exit were different from the actions if there was a deal and provided details on how to prepare for a no-deal departure. By the end of April 2019, the central campaign had cost £15.2 million. Individual government departments were given funding to carry out communications activity as part of their wider preparations for a potential no-deal departure, but this was not centrally coordinated.

**1.5** On 10 April 2019, the government reached agreement with the EU to extend the deadline for the UK to leave the EU until 31 October 2019. The communications campaign that had been running ahead of 29 March was halted. The 31 October leave date became the new focus for EU Exit planning across departments. The key dates in the government's preparations for a no-deal departure are set out at **Figure 1**.

## The Get ready for Brexit campaign

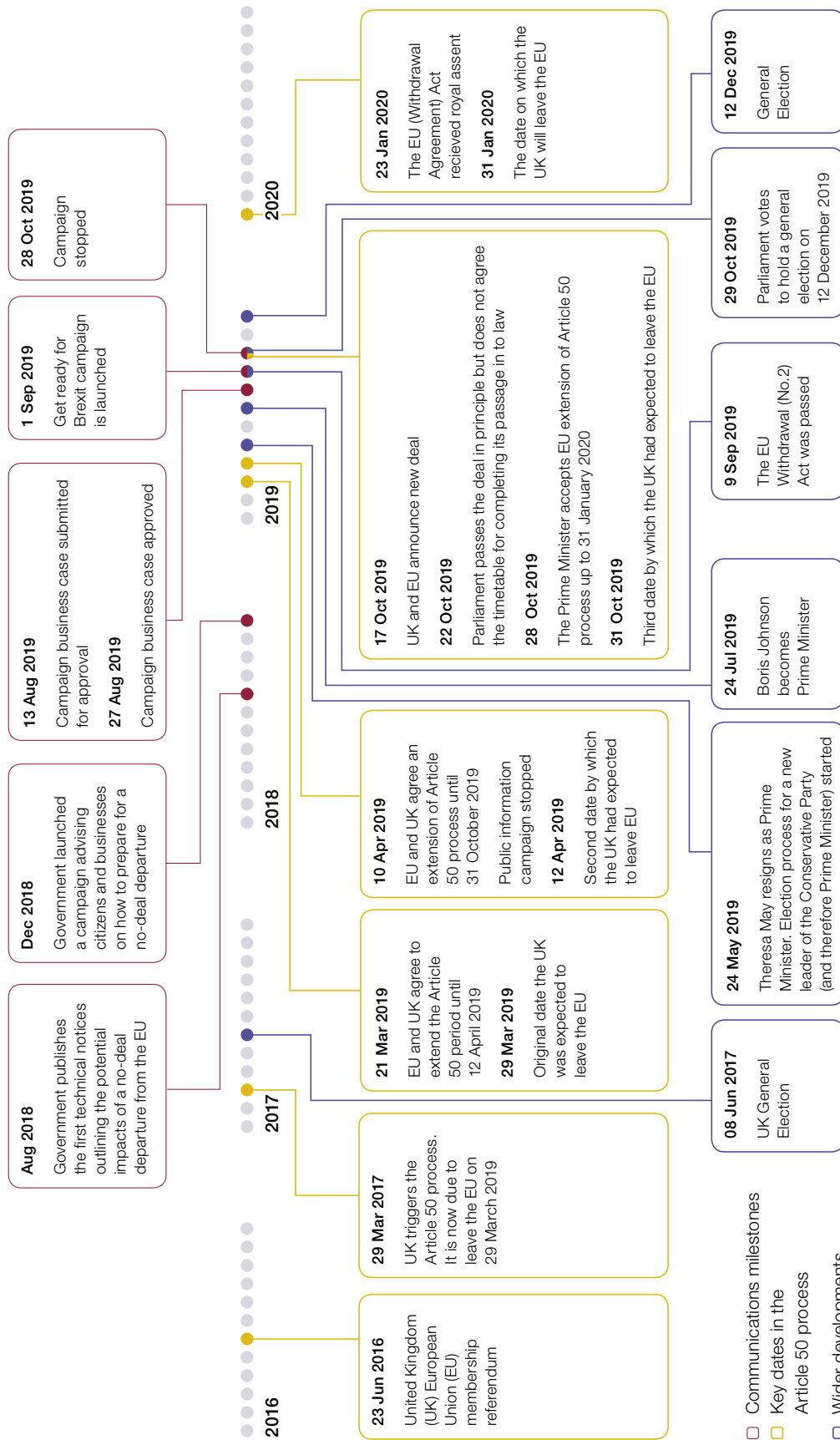
**1.6** On 24 July 2019, a new Prime Minister and Cabinet were appointed. On 1 September 2019 government launched the Get ready for Brexit campaign. Its objective was to ensure that everyone was prepared for leaving the EU on 31 October – regardless of the negotiation outcome. The campaign was to be one of the largest information campaigns to be delivered by government.

**1.7** The Cabinet Office has overall responsibility for government communications and had lead responsibility for the campaign. The campaign had two components (**Figure 2** on page 14):

- **An 'air campaign'**, organised by the Cabinet Office, intended to raise awareness and change behaviour by stating the UK's commitment to leaving the EU on 31 October 2019 and encouraging citizens and businesses to "Get ready for Brexit".
- **A 'ground campaign'**, intended to build on the air campaign, to provide information directly to citizens and business in the UK to encourage them to take specific actions in 26 cross-government priority areas. This consisted of a number of elements each led by a department but working within the overall framework established by the Cabinet Office.

## Figure 1 Government's preparations for EU Exit

Since June 2016 the Cabinet Office and departments took steps to increase preparedness for an EU Exit



**Note**

1 The EU Withdrawal (No.2) Act is informally known as the Benn Act.

**Figure 2**  
Get ready for Brexit campaign structure

The campaign comprised two main components, the air campaign and the ground campaign

|   | Air campaign   | Ground campaign   |
|---|--|---|
| Managing department and accounting responsibility | Centrally managed by Cabinet Office  | Led by the Cabinet Office, delivered by government departments  |
| Delivery mechanisms                               | Paid-for advertising covering TV, radio, outdoor media, video-on-demand, print and social media  | A wide variety of activity including roadshows and stakeholder events   |
| Target audience                                   | UK citizens, businesses crossing the border, UK nationals living in the EU, EU citizens living in the UK and recipients of EU funding  | The different elements of the ground campaign targeted specific groups within the campaign target audience, for example hauliers moving goods between the EU and UK, to encourage them to take particular actions |
| Objectives  | Raise awareness and change behaviour by stating the UK's commitment to leaving the EU on 31 October 2019 and encourage people to visit the GOV.UK website and find out what steps they may need to take to prepare for a no-deal departure | Encourage target audiences to take action against the 26 priority areas identified by government  |

Source: National Audit Office analysis of departmental documents

**1.8** On 28 October 2019 the UK and European Union agreed a further extension to the Article 50 period to 31 January 2020. On the same date the public information campaign was stopped.

Target audiences

**1.9** The air campaign was targeted at UK citizens, UK citizens in the EU, businesses crossing the border, EU citizens in the UK and recipients of EU funding. Its stated aim was to persuade people that the UK would leave the EU on 31 October and encourage them to check what action they needed to take to prepare for this. The campaign directed audiences to the GOV.UK website, which hosted a checker tool to help people identify what they needed to do. The tool consisted of a series of questions (for example, whether they planned to travel to the EU) to identify what action the user might need to take. Once the user had completed the questions, they were provided with links to advice and, if appropriate, links to websites to allow them to take action.



**1.10** The elements of the ground campaign were designed to target specific messages to particular groups. Departments had identified more than 300 workstreams that needed to be taken forward to prepare for EU Exit. The Cabinet Office, working with the Department for Exiting the European Union and other departments, then narrowed these down to 26 priority actions (**Figure 3** on pages 15 and 16).

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### Figure 3

#### The 26 priority actions for the ground campaign

**Working with officials across government, Cabinet Office identified 26 priority actions for the ground campaign**

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Four</b></p> <p>priority actions for UK residents</p>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● UK nationals travelling to the European Union (EU) should buy health insurance when travelling to the EU.</li> <li>● UK nationals who want to drive in the EU need to register for an International Driving Permit to ensure recognition of driving licences.</li> <li>● UK citizens need to check their passport has at least six months until expiration for all travel in the EU. If not, you will need to renew.</li> <li>● To make sure your pet is able to travel from the UK to the EU after Brexit, you should contact your vet a least four months before travelling to get the latest advice.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Three</b></p> <p>priority actions for UK residents in the EU</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● All you need to do to drive in the EU is to get a green card from your insurance provider – this is easy and straightforward to do.</li> <li>● Check with your health insurance provider that your policy still covers you. All it takes is one point of contact to guarantee you are still covered by your policy.</li> <li>● If you choose to return to the UK, and you want to receive money from the UK government when you do so you need to check you know the steps you need to take.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Four</b></p> <p>priority actions for EU citizens</p>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● EU, EEA or Swiss citizens need to register for the EU settlement scheme, which will continue to run regardless of whether a deal is reached. To continue living in the UK after June 2021, EU, EEA or Swiss citizens must register with the EU Settlement Scheme.</li> <li>● In a no-deal scenario, EU citizens who arrive in the UK after the UK has left the EU and who are planning to stay in the UK for more than three months need to apply for European Temporary Leave to Remain.</li> <li>● EU citizens arriving in the UK after exit day will have benefits aligned to arrivals from the rest of the world.</li> <li>● Border fluidity for Passengers: EU citizens will be entitled to enter the UK as now. This means at the borders they will be able to access e-gates, not require their passports to be stamped or receive questioning.</li> </ul> |

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**Figure 3** *continued*

The 26 priority actions for the ground campaign

12

priority actions for business

- In the event that the UK leaves the EU without a deal, anyone exporting live animals, animal products, composite products, live fish or shellfish to the EU will need to apply for an export health certificate (EHC) in advance of the export.
- Those who export to the EU must register for an economic operators registration and identification (EORI) number. If exporters to the EU do not register and receive an EORI number by 31 October, they will not be able to move goods in and out of the EU and may face additional costs and delays.
- If businesses want to continue to receive data from the EU, they need to remain compliant with the guidance that is set by the Information Commissioner’s Office.
- Architects in the UK with qualifications from EU institutions should be assured that we will continue to recognise qualifications. Architects must register to ensure their qualifications are recognised by member states.
- Hauliers should apply for short-term and long-term ECMT (European Conference of Ministers of Transport) permits for trailers. If hauliers do not obtain an ECMT permit, they will not be able to transport goods through EU and EEA countries to non-EU and EEA countries who are ECMT members.
- Businesses trading at the border should register to use simplified transitional procedures for goods being brought into the UK from the EU. This will ensure a consistent flow at the border and reduce interruptions.
- Medical supplies traders should reassess supply routes and stockpile where applicable.
- Traders should check their supply routes and not stockpile. Taking these actions will mean businesses are playing their part to reduce interruptions at the border.
- Protections are in place which will allow goods to flow and reduce interruptions at the border. Republic and Northern Ireland businesses need to be informed goods will not be subject to customs duty or declarations. Exceptions are those liable to excise duty.
- Importers and exporters need to be made aware that Low Value Consignment Relief (LVCR) will be extended to parcels sent from the EU to protect businesses. Communications will provide reassurance that this is a continuation of current arrangements.
- Businesses trading with countries in the Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) must continue to comply with these requirements. This prioritises developing countries in trade agreements, and the UK will retain this approach post-Brexit.
- Businesses need to be informed that no-deal tariffs coming into play on 31 October will ensure smooth trade and reduce the impact to organisations.

Three

priority actions for recipients of EU funds

- UK Shared Prosperity Fund beneficiaries will continue to receive funding. This will come from the UK government.
- European Territorial Cooperation Programmes beneficiaries will continue to receive funding. This will come from the UK government.
- Horizon 2020 recipients should be registered on the UKRI Portal, hosted on GOV.UK to continue to receive money which will come from the UK government.

**Note**

1 Messages used to persuade audiences to take these actions evolved over the course of the campaign.

Source: National Audit Office summary of Cabinet Office documents

**1.11** To help deliver a coherent but tailored message the Cabinet Office divided up the overall target audience into six major groups:

- UK citizens in the EU;
- UK citizens in the UK;
- EU citizens in the UK;
- businesses;
- people passing through the border (this group would also have been covered by the four groups above); and
- EU funding recipients.

**1.12** The ground campaign was delivered using a variety of different methods depending on the target audience. For example, the Department for Transport wanted to reach hauliers to alert them to the paperwork that would be requested of them at the EU border in the event of a no-deal departure. Its communications campaign included pop-up stands at motorway service stations and on ferries. HM Revenue & Customs, the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy and other departments sought to reach small businesses to support their Brexit preparations. The Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy led roadshows around the UK involving 10 departments to provide integrated advice to small businesses.

## Budget and spending

**1.13** The campaign had an overall budget of up to £100 million. In total it allocated £56.7 million to the air campaign and a further £17.1 million for activity to support both campaigns (which included £3 million for central staffing and £11 million for developing GOV.UK) (**Figure 4** overleaf). It allocated £26.2 million to the ground campaign, which included 14 government departments. It then revised these figures over the course of the campaign.

**1.14** The campaign was substantially larger and more complex than other recent government communications campaigns. Government campaigns of a similar duration have typically had much smaller budgets and fewer messages. For example the Stoptober campaign which aims to encourage people to give up smoking and runs for around six weeks every year had a total media budget of £1.2 million in 2018. The GREAT Britain campaign, which promotes the UK, had a budget of £113.5 million over three years.

**Figure 4**

## Get ready for Brexit public information campaign budget allocations

The Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, Department for Transport and HM Revenue & Customs received the largest ground campaign budget allocations

| Campaign element                                      | Budget at the start of the campaign (£000) |
|---|--|
| <b>Air campaign</b>                                   | <b>56,700</b>                              |
| Ground campaign components:                           |  |
| Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy | 6,000                                      |
| Department for Transport                              | 6,000                                      |
| HM Revenue & Customs                                  | 4,000                                      |
| Department of Health & Social Care                    | 3,000                                      |
| Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport        | 1,870                                      |
| Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs      | 1,600                                      |
| Home Office   | 1,260                                      |
| Foreign & Commonwealth Office                         | 1,000                                      |
| Department for International Trade                    | 300  |
| Department for International Development              | 300  |
| Ministry of Justice                                   | 60   |
| Department for Education                              | 40   |
| Department for Work & Pensions                        | 30   |
| Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government   | 10   |
| Ground campaign – not yet allocated                   | 730  |
| <b>Ground campaign total</b>                          | <b>26,200</b>                              |
| Local authorities                                     | 1,500                                      |
| Devolved Nations                                      | 600  |
| Prime Minister's Office                               | 1,000                                      |
| Government Digital Service                            | 11,000                                     |
| Brexit Communication Centre resourcing                | 3,000                                      |
| <b>Support to both campaigns total</b>                | <b>17,100</b>                              |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>100,000</b>                             |

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Cabinet Office budget documents

## **Governance and oversight**

### The Government Communications Service

**1.15** Government departments deliver communications activity within a framework set out by the Government Communications Service (GCS), which is led by the executive director for government communications based in the Cabinet Office. The GCS sets the standards for communication activity in a number of areas including professional development, good practice in communications delivery (through the OASIS framework, which is discussed in more detail in Part Two) and the evaluation of government communications.

**1.16** The GCS also has a role in applying government spending controls to communications activity. Any communications activity that is likely to cost more than £100,000 requires approval in advance from the Cabinet Office, by submitting a professional assurance (PASS) form. This is then reviewed by the GCS team who advise ministers on whether or not to approve the spend. The GCS also provides advice on propriety in government communications.

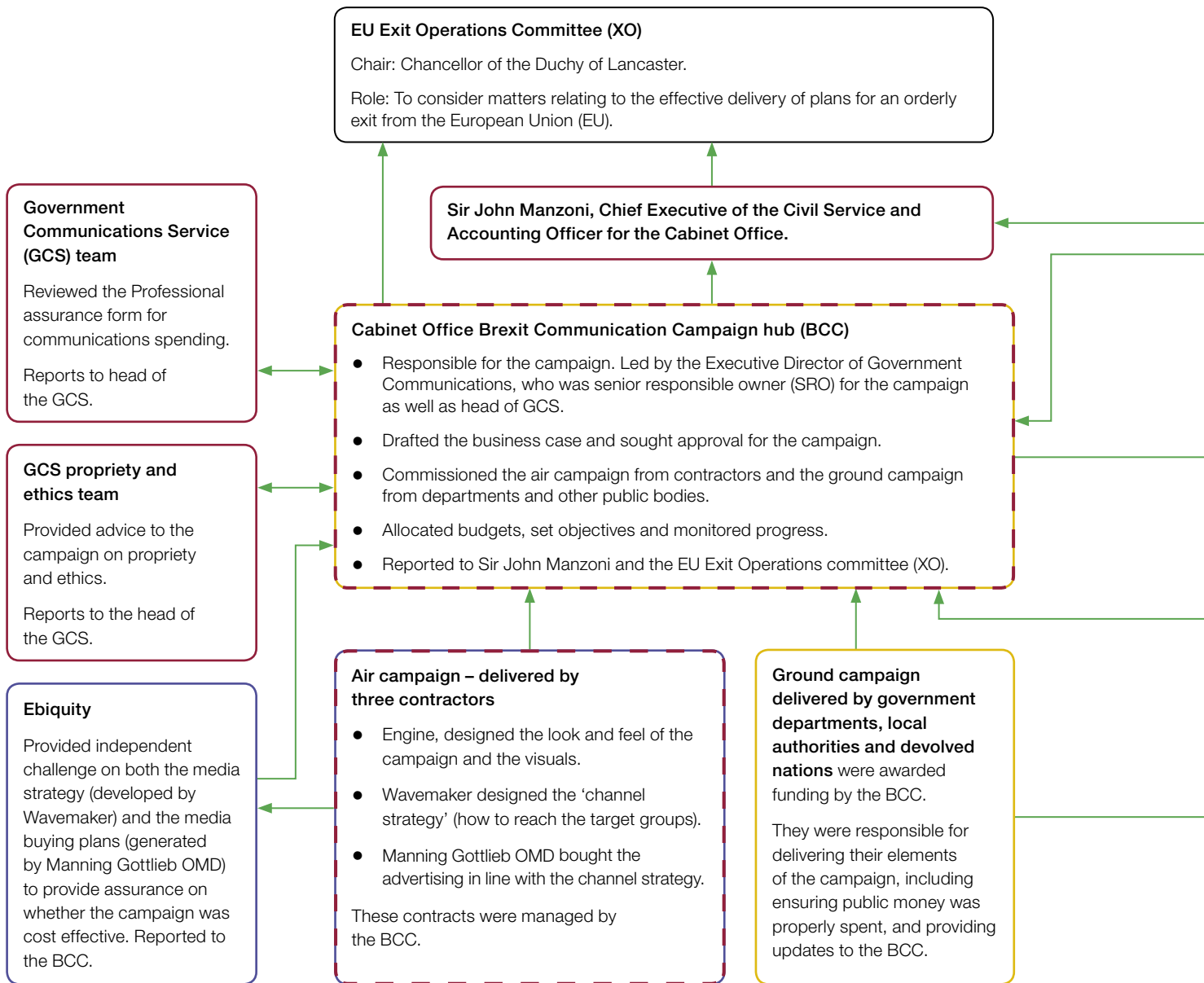
### Delivering the campaign

**1.17** The Cabinet Office had overall responsibility for the Get ready for Brexit campaign and the executive director for government communications was senior responsible owner. The Cabinet Office then allocated money to individual departments and other public bodies to deliver each element of the ground campaign (Figure 4).

**1.18** The Cabinet Office set up the Brexit Communication Centre, a team of civil servants from Cabinet Office, the Department for Exiting the European Union and other departments involved in the ground campaign, to deliver the core campaign. This team managed the contractors working on the air campaign. The team also included behavioural insights, evaluation and project management specialists. The Cabinet Office's Government Digital Service ran the GOV.UK website. Its responsibilities include managing the website itself, ensuring the most popular pages are up to date, setting design standards for content and helping departments meet these standards. Individual departments provide content for other pages and are responsible for running transactional services, for example passport renewal (**Figure 5** on pages 20 and 21).

**Figure 5**  
Get ready for Brexit campaign governance arrangements

The campaign had complex assurance arrangements



- Ministers
- Cabinet Office
- Communications specialists from other government departments
- External to government
- ➔ Arrows indicate direction of accountability (who answers to whom)
- Dashed lines represent dual responsibility between the two respective colours

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Cabinet Office papers

**Government Digital Service** (part of Cabinet Office)

- Runs GOV.UK website, which provided advice on guidance to citizens and businesses on how to prepare.
- Worked with other government departments to agree content for the website.

**EU Exit Campaign Assurance Panel** (convened August 2019)

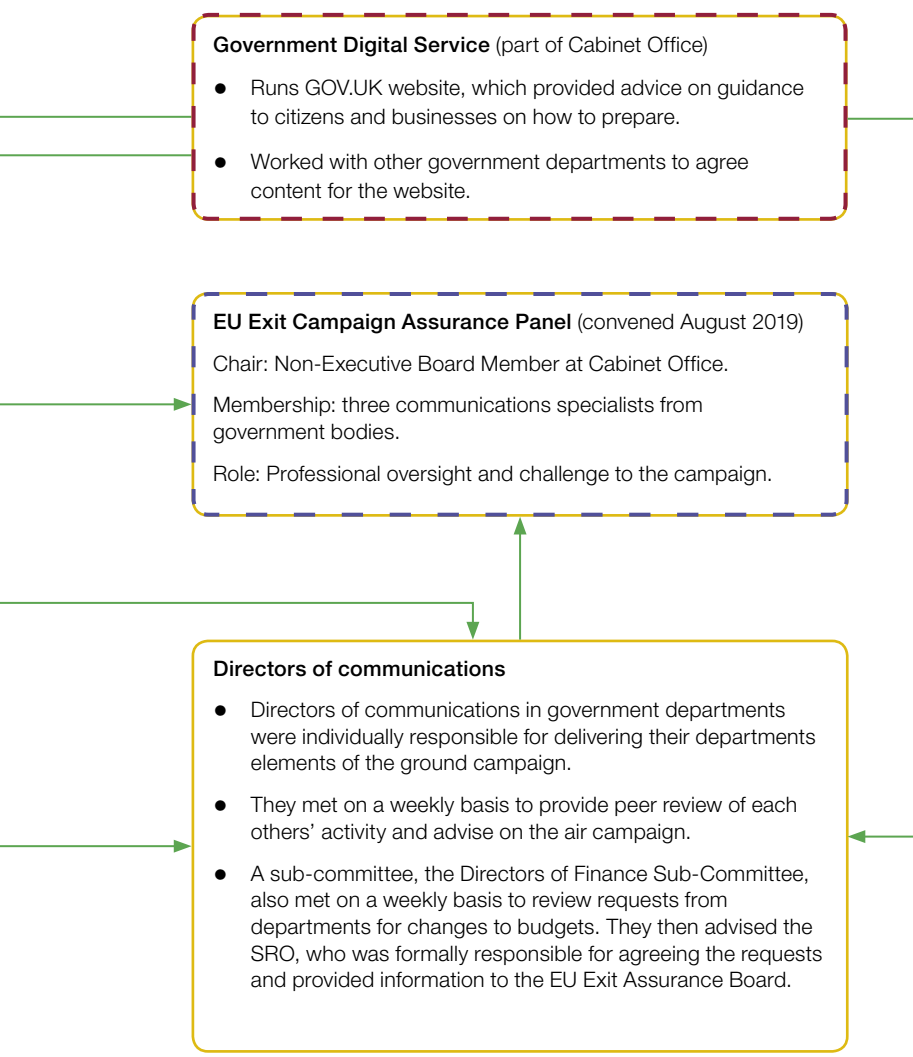
Chair: Non-Executive Board Member at Cabinet Office.

Membership: three communications specialists from government bodies.

Role: Professional oversight and challenge to the campaign.

**Directors of communications**

- Directors of communications in government departments were individually responsible for delivering their departments elements of the ground campaign.
- They met on a weekly basis to provide peer review of each others' activity and advise on the air campaign.
- A sub-committee, the Directors of Finance Sub-Committee, also met on a weekly basis to review requests from departments for changes to budgets. They then advised the SRO, who was formally responsible for agreeing the requests and provided information to the EU Exit Assurance Board.



**1.19** The Cabinet Office established three committees, mainly drawn from the communications profession from across government, to provide peer review to the campaign (Figure 5). These were:

- **the EU Exit Campaign Assurance Panel**, which was chaired by a non-executive director of the Cabinet Office and industry expert. There were three other panel members – one director of communications and two deputy directors from other government bodies;
- **the directors of communications weekly meeting**, which was chaired by the executive director for government communications. This was made up of directors of communications from across government; and
- **Directors of Communications Finance Sub-Committee** – this was a smaller group of directors of communications, who scrutinised additional budget requests and reviewed programme expenditure.

### **Scope of this report**

**1.20** This report examines the progress made by the Cabinet Office, working with departments, in implementing the campaign. It examines:

- its preparation, including approval of the business case and budget, and procurement (Part Two); and
- the evidence available to the Cabinet Office on the effectiveness of the campaign (Part Three).



# Part Two

## Preparation and procurement

**2.1** This part of the report examines:

- the lessons drawn from the March campaign;
- the development of the Get ready for Brexit campaign (the campaign) and preparation of the business case; and
- the procurement of contractors to support delivery of the campaign.

### **Lessons drawn from the March campaign**

**2.2** In April and May 2019, the Cabinet Office communications team conducted a review of lessons learned from the public information campaign that had been delivered in the lead-up to 29 March 2019, the original expected date for the UK to leave the EU.

**2.3** The overall campaign conducted ahead of March 2019, and organised by the Cabinet Office, had sought to inform, engage and reassure the public about how the UK's departure would affect them and the practical steps they needed to take to prepare. It directed people to the GOV.UK website to check the actions they would need to take to prepare for a deal or no-deal outcome. It had been launched in December 2018 with communications activity increasing towards the expected departure date of 29 March. Messages had been communicated via social media platforms, radio and television (**Figure 6** overleaf).

**2.4** The Cabinet Office estimates that it had spent £15.2 million on the campaign, including money spent between 29 March and 10 April when a short extension to the Article 50 period was agreed pending the further extension to 31 October 2019. Alongside the overall campaign, departments had launched and delivered their own information campaigns directed at their target audiences. The Cabinet Office informed us that no aggregate figure was available on the amounts spent by departments.

**2.5** The Cabinet Office tracked the impact of the campaign to mid-April. Its performance data indicated that the March campaign reached 99.7% of all UK adults between 15 and 20 times. It also showed that 26% of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) were planning for Brexit. Despite increased awareness of the campaign, assessments by departments of readiness for a no-deal exit by the end of March had indicated continuing concerns about some sectors of the economy, particularly the degree of preparedness among small and medium-sized enterprises.

## Figure 6

### March 2019 EU Exit advertising campaign

The Cabinet Office used different campaign materials for the March 2019 campaign to the campaign materials used for the October campaign



#### Note

1 Example of March campaign materials.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of departmental documents

**2.6** The Cabinet Office communication team's review of the campaign ahead of 29 March 2019 identified a number of lessons including:

- the need to bring together the messages from the different parts of government targeted at the same target group;
- future campaign messages needed to be more action-driven; and
- the need for a single ringfenced budget for campaign communications where other government departments gave funds to the Cabinet Office to run a centralised campaign.

## Developing the Get ready for Brexit campaign

**2.7** We have commented in other reports on the need for government communication with business and others to support the UK's preparations for leaving the EU.<sup>3</sup> By July 2019, a number of departments were reporting to the Department for Exiting the European Union and the Cabinet Office of a pressing need to start communications with their target audiences.

**2.8** The Cabinet Office began work on a significantly larger campaign in mid-July. Officials prepared options during the last week of July following the appointment of a new Cabinet, including an option for a campaign on a significantly larger and more intensive scale than that delivered ahead of 29 March. On 31 July 2019 the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced new funding for no-deal preparations, which included £100 million for a communications campaign.

**2.9** The Cabinet Office was under significant time pressure to prepare proposals for the campaign. Under normal circumstances government information campaigns are usually planned over a period of many months. The Cabinet Office's own guidance for approving already worked-up campaign proposals, for example, advises departments to allow at least three months for approval ahead of launch date; five months where TV may be involved.

**2.10** The Cabinet Office had to assemble a team quickly, drawing staff from a range of departments, and appoint contractors to help design, develop and deliver the campaign. The Cabinet Office informed us that the in-house campaign team grew from 14 people in April to 70 in September including embedded leads from departments. The Cabinet Office considered that close working across departments resulted in better, faster decision-making and more integrated messages. It employed three contractors to support development of the campaign: Engine to design the campaign, Wavemaker to plan what media to buy to reach the target groups and Manning Gottlieb OMD to buy the media spots. We examine the procurement of the contractors further at paragraphs 2.20 to 2.23.

### Design and approval of the campaign

**2.11** From late July 2019, the Cabinet Office worked to design and set up the campaign including briefing the agencies and initiating focus group research in the four nations. It developed, with its contractors, a strategy to reach its target audiences, design the overall campaign branding and develop its messages. During August it ran 10 focus groups to test the campaign messages and design – three were conducted with SMEs and seven with members of the public, and were held across the country – Belfast, Birmingham, two in Cardiff, Londonderry (Derry), Edinburgh, three in London and Nottingham.

<sup>3</sup> Comptroller and Auditor General, *Exiting the EU: supplying the health and social care sectors*, Session 2017–2019, HC 2654, National Audit Office, October 2019.

**2.12** In parallel, departments were invited to bid for resources from the Cabinet Office and prepare the elements of the ground campaign. Departments were under significant pressure to get ready. The departments we contacted reported drawing upon their experiences of their campaigns to the end of March and on better information on their target audience to assist them in preparing their bids.

**2.13** A significant lesson drawn from the March campaign was the need to bring together the messages from the different parts of government targeted at the same target group (paragraph 2.6). This was integral to the design of the Get ready for Brexit campaign and was intended to reduce the risk of different parts of government communicating separately with the same target audiences. The Department for Transport, for example, informed us that the vast majority of the message content it delivered to hauliers during the autumn campaign was delivered on behalf of other parts of government. In a similar way, the Home Office's messages to the travelling public were partially delivered via a ground campaign delivered through the Foreign & Commonwealth Office.

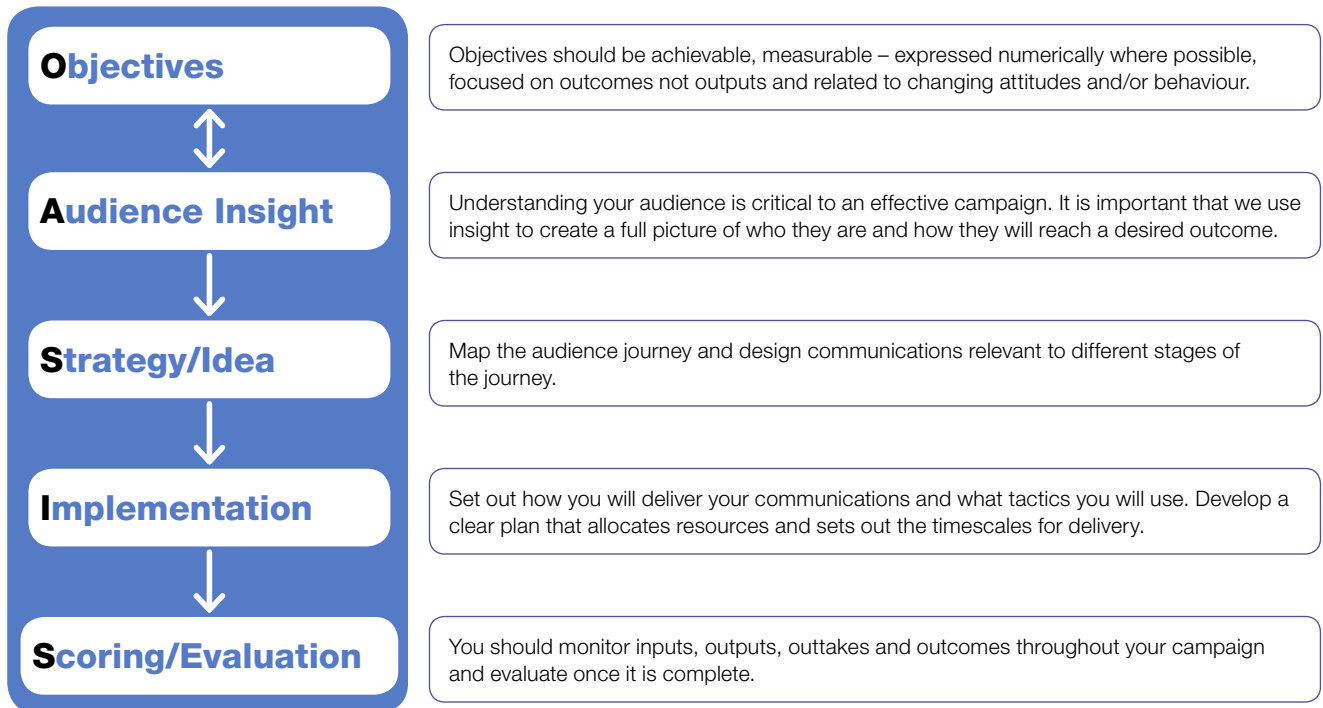
**2.14** The Cabinet Office used its own cross-government campaign planning guide, known as OASIS, to help develop the campaign. The guidance comprises the five steps set out in **Figure 7**. The Cabinet Office developed OASIS bids for ground campaign funding and proposed activities for each of the five audience groups. The bids were prepared within three weeks of the decision to prepare the communication campaign. The Cabinet Office informed us that OASIS plans continued to evolve during August and into early September. The bid for the sixth group, recipients of EU funding, was drafted later, in mid-October.

**2.15** The bids did not consistently apply the OASIS principles. Of the 26 priority actions that departments wanted citizens and businesses to act upon, 11 were not mentioned in the OASIS bids, and of the remaining 15 only two set out objectives they wanted to achieve (Principle 1) and a plan for scoring and evaluating whether they were achieved (Principle 5) (**Figure 7** and **Figure 8** on page 28).

### The business case

**2.16** Before committing resources, Cabinet Office spending controls require departments to seek ministerial approval for any proposal involving advertising, marketing and communications expenditure of £100,000 or more. The Cabinet Office's Investment and Portfolio Committee (a sub-committee of the Executive Committee) is responsible for reviewing and approving investment cases for programmes, projects and other contracts of more than £1 million. HM Treasury also requires departments to prepare a full business case and to seek its approval for all programmes and projects above £5 million. The business case prepared by the Cabinet Office to cover the campaign was approved by the Cabinet Office's Investment and Portfolio Committee on 13 August; ministerial approval was given on 23 August; and by HM Treasury on 27 August 2019.

**Figure 7**  
OASIS principles for government communications



**Note**

1 Text summarised by National Audit Office.

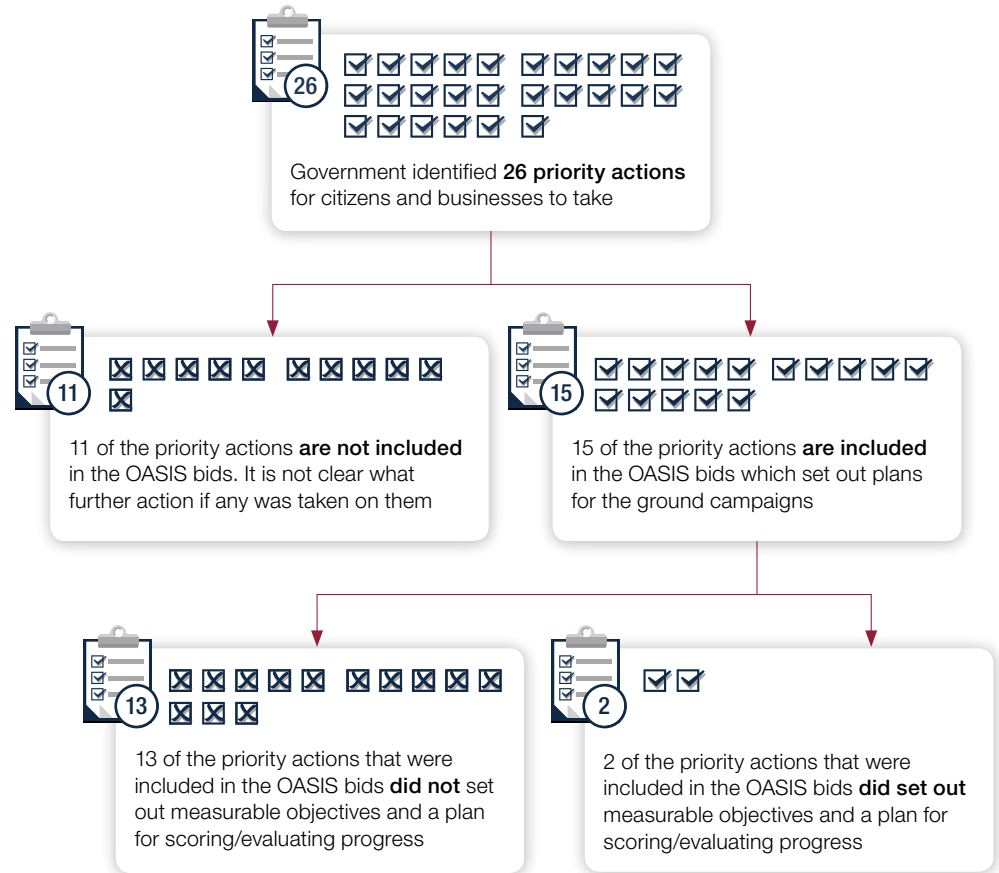
Source: Government Communications Service, *Guide to Campaign Planning*, accessed November 2019. Available at: <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/campaigns/guide-to-campaign-planning-2/>

**2.17** The business case presented four options ranging from ‘do nothing’ to three options of increasing scale up to the preferred option with a budget up to £100 million (**Figure 9** on page 29). The £100 million option was the only option to propose extensive targeted on-the-ground activity (the ground campaign), such as roadshows and events. Each option was assessed against its potential reach – the proportion of the population that would see the message – and the frequency with which they would see the message. The Cabinet Office analysis suggested that for the £15 million option more than 99.2% of the population would see the campaign messages on average 17 times. Increasing the expenditure increased the frequency at which the population would see the messages.

**Figure 8**

Assessment of Get ready for Brexit campaign priority actions against Cabinet Office’s own OASIS principles

Of the 26 priority actions, only two had plans that met Cabinet Office’s own good-practice requirements



**Notes**

- 1 OASIS is the Cabinet Office’s cross-government campaign planning guide (Figure 7). Available at: <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/campaigns/guide-to-campaign-planning-2/>.
- 2 Two of the OASIS principles relate to setting objectives and a plan for scoring/evaluating progress towards the objectives. We reviewed the OASIS bids and found that only two of the 26 priority actions were included in the OASIS bids and had both a measurable objective and a plan for scoring/evaluating progress.
- 3 Some other actions covered in the OASIS bids were later added to the campaign dashboards. This is covered in more detail at Part Three (paragraph 3.12).

Source: National Audit Office analysis of departmental data

**Figure 9**

## Campaign scale options considered in the Get ready for Brexit October 2019 campaign business case

The Cabinet Office selected the largest in scale and budget of the options considered in the business case

| Option   | Campaign description  | Proportion of UK population who could be reached by campaign (%) | Potential frequency that UK citizens see campaign advertising (times) |
|--|---|--|---|
| Do nothing <sup>1</sup>                                  | –   | –  | –   |
| £15 million campaign                                     | Similar approach to the pre-March 2019 campaign using radio, TV, press and outdoor advertising with updated messages on preparedness for EU Exit.   | 99.2   | 17.3  |
| Up to £60 million campaign                               | More extensive marketing, sponsorships and prominent advertising to raise mass awareness among the UK public that they need to prepare for EU Exit including regional and local messages.   | 99.9   | 45  |
| Up to £100 million campaign: <b>the preferred option</b> | Domestic and international communications targeting foreign governments, businesses and citizens about preparedness for EU Exit, increased communications for UK nationals abroad and extensive targeted on-the-ground non-digital activity such as roadshows and stakeholder events. | 99.9   | More than 65  |

**Note**

<sup>1</sup> The 'do-nothing' option was judged not feasible because of evidence of lack of preparedness among the public and businesses.

Source: Cabinet Office

**2.18** A lesson identified by the Cabinet Office from the campaign to March 2019 had been that future campaign messages needed to be more action-driven. The business case analysis did not attempt to assess the potential success of each option in prompting action by businesses and the public and therefore did not assess the additional value to be derived from spending additional sums. The business case noted that the £100 million budget had already been agreed by the Cabinet.

**2.19** Scrutiny by HM Treasury focused on ensuring that there were appropriate governance arrangements in place. HM Treasury approved the business case subject to the Cabinet Office providing detailed cost forecasts, regular updates and including some contingency within the £100 million.

## Appointing the contractors

**2.20** All three contractors used by the Cabinet Office (**Figure 10**) were pre-approved suppliers who had won places on Crown Commercial Service (CCS) framework agreements (**Figure 11**).<sup>4,5</sup> The framework agreements enable departments to commission further competitions for contracts over shorter timescales.

**2.21** Where there is an existing framework agreement contract the CCS expects departments to run further competitions between companies on the framework to appoint a supplier. Following further competitions, the Cabinet Office, in December 2017, awarded Engine a call-off contract for creative design services and in October 2018 awarded Wavemaker a call-off contract for media planning services. The Cabinet Office used these existing contract arrangements for the campaign. To accommodate the work on the existing contract with Engine the Cabinet Office agreed a contract variation increasing the spending limit from £5 million to £7.5 million. The overall approach and the contract variation were agreed with the CCS, although the latter noted that there could be some legal risk should the contract variation be challenged by other companies on the framework.

**2.22** Manning Gottlieb OMD was appointed, following competition, the sole media buyer for government in May 2018 and as such there was no requirement to run a further competition. The Cabinet Office also engaged Ebiquity, an independent marketing and media consultancy, who hold the cross-government contract to independently audit and provide challenge to the work performed by the contractor under the media buying contract.

## Agreeing the scope of the work

**2.23** In July 2019, the Cabinet Office briefed the three agencies so that they were aligned on target audiences, media channels and timescales. The creative agency (Engine) was briefed on the campaign direction, tone and aim. To meet the brief, the agencies worked at a faster pace and greater level of complexity than is normal for government campaigns. The agencies worked together on the Cabinet Office briefs and produced proposals for specifications of works, which were subject to challenge by Ebiquity. Once satisfied, the Cabinet Office approved the proposed works.

4 The CCS is an executive agency of the Cabinet Office which buys and manages a range of common goods and services on behalf of departments. Common goods and services include utilities, office supplies and marketing and communications, and are typically bought from pre-approved suppliers who have won places on CCS framework contracts.

5 Framework agreements are arrangements with a provider, or a list of providers, for a certain goods or services. They define what will be purchased (such as maximum price and quality of services) and are valid for a certain number of years.



**Figure 10**

## Overview of Cabinet Office contracts with the three agencies working on the Get ready for Brexit October 2019 campaign

**The agencies were contracted to provide creative design, media planning and buying services**

| Contracted agency   | Engine   | Wavemaker  | Manning Gottlieb OMD                            |
|---------------------|--|--|---|
| Contract value (£m) | 5 increased to 7.5   | 10   | 183.8 including 160 for EU exit                 |
| Contract type       | Call-off contract with Cabinet Office  | Call-off contract with Cabinet Office  | Call-off contract with Cabinet Office           |
| Contracted service  | Deliver innovative, best-practice communications to achieve government's goals | Manage and coordinate cross-government EU Exit communications as well as plan individual EU Exit campaigns | Government's single-supplier for media planning |
| Campaign brief      | Design campaign messages and the creative assets (for example posters etc)     | Develop the channel strategy (which media to buy to reach the target groups)                               | Buy the media spots                             |

**Notes**

- 1 Call-off contracts are individual contracts which come under a framework agreement.
- 2 The contract values are for the whole of government, not just the Cabinet Office.
- 3 The contract values are estimates and are subject to change over the duration of the contract.
- 4 The Cabinet Office also used Ebiquity, an independent marketing and media consultancy, who hold the cross-government contract, won competitively in December 2015, to independently audit and provide challenge to the government's media buying.

Source: Cabinet Office and Crown Commercial Service documents

**Figure 11**

## Overview of government framework agreements used to procure services for the Get ready for Brexit October 2019 campaign

**The three principal contractors were drawn from three existing government framework agreements**

| Framework name          | Framework services  | Number of framework suppliers                              | Date it was set up |
|-------------------------|---|--|--------------------|
| Campaign solutions      | All the services needed to run marketing campaigns from start to finish. It is a single lot agreement.  | 27   | 16 December 2016   |
| Media buying            | Buying media channels (for example, advertising space, partnerships, events and sponsorship) regionally, nationally and internationally across offline and online channels. | 1  | 22 May 2018        |
| Communications services | Niche or specialised marketing communications support. The framework is split into 11 lots.   | 62 of which 8 are in the channel strategy and planning lot | 16 January 2017    |

**Note**

- 1 Frameworks can be divided into lots by product or service type.

Source: Cabinet Office

# Part Three

## Measuring the effectiveness of the campaign

**3.1** This part of the report outlines:

- the Cabinet Office's approach to monitoring and measuring the effectiveness of the Get ready for Brexit campaign (the campaign); and
- the extent to which the campaign delivered its objectives.

### Measuring effectiveness

#### Volume of activity purchased

**3.2** The Get ready for Brexit public information campaign was launched on 1 September 2019 and ran until 28 October 2019 when a further extension to the Article 50 process was agreed with the EU. By the end of October 2019, the Cabinet Office had spent £46.1 million on the campaign overall, compared with the £53.4 million budgeted spend by that date. It had spent £28.4 million on the air campaign compared to the expected spend of £36 million up to that point and the overall air campaign budget of £56.7 million (**Figure 12**). The Cabinet Office informed us that of the £46.1 million, £2.0 million had been committed for on buying media space beyond the end of October 2019. It informed us that this media space can be used by it or other government departments by the end of 2020.

**3.3** The Cabinet Office had reduced expenditure on the campaign in mid-October when it thought the risk of no-deal had diminished. On 17 October, when the EU and UK government announced a proposed new deal, the Cabinet Office decided to reduce expenditure on some elements of the campaign. However, four days later, when Parliament had given the deal preliminary agreement but had not agreed a timetable to sign it off, the Cabinet Office judged that the risk of a no-deal had once more increased. It therefore decided to increase its expenditure. The campaign was stopped on 28 October after the UK and EU had agreed an extension to 31 January. Expenditure on the air campaign was £7.6 million lower at the end of October than the Cabinet Office had forecast at the end of September.

**Figure 12**

Spending on the Get ready for Brexit public information campaign by the end of October 2019 was within the expected spend by that date

| Campaign element                                      | Budget at start of the campaign (£000) | Expected spend by end of October 2019 (£000) | Actual spend to end of October 2019 (£000) |
|---|--|--|--|
| <b>Air campaign</b>                                   | <b>56,700</b>                          | <b>35,969</b>                                | <b>28,399</b>                              |
| <b>Ground campaign components:</b>                    |  |  |  |
| Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy | 6,000                                  |  | 2,742                                      |
| Department for Transport                              | 6,000                                  |  | 6,000                                      |
| HM Revenue & Customs                                  | 4,000                                  |  | 1,416                                      |
| Department of Health & Social Care                    | 3,000                                  |  | 690  |
| Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport        | 1,870                                  |  | 562  |
| Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs      | 1,600                                  |  | 1,329                                      |
| Home Office   | 1,260                                  |  | 660  |
| Foreign & Commonwealth Office                         | 1,000                                  |  | 343  |
| Department for International Trade                    | 300                                    |  | 142  |
| Department for International Development              | 300                                    |  | 3  |
| Ministry of Justice                                   | 60                                     |  | 4  |
| Department for Education                              | 40                                     |  | 0  |
| Department for Work & Pensions                        | 30                                     |  | 231  |
| Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government   | 10                                     |  | 5  |
| Ground campaign – not yet allocated                   | 730                                    |  | 0  |
| <b>Ground campaign total</b>                          | <b>26,200</b>                          | <b>14,100</b>                                | <b>14,127</b>                              |
| Local authorities                                     | 1,500                                  | 0  | 1  |
| Devolved Nations                                      | 600                                    | 0  | 0  |
| Prime Minister's Office                               | 1,000                                  | 0  | 359  |
| Government Digital Service                            | 11,000                                 | 2,265  | 1,768                                      |
| Brexit Communication Centre resourcing                | 3,000                                  | 1,062  | 1,323                                      |
| <b>Support to both campaigns total</b>                | <b>17,100</b>                          | <b>3,327</b>                                 | <b>3,530</b>                               |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>100,000</b>                         | <b>53,396</b>                                | <b>46,055</b>                              |

**Notes**

- 1 The total budget at the start of campaign covered spending to the end of the financial year (to March 2020).
- 2 There are no expected spend figures by individual departments because the Cabinet Office did not profile spending to that level of detail
- 3 The actual spend figures are as reported to us by the Cabinet Office. They will be finalised as part of the Supplementary Estimates process in Spring 2020 and are therefore subject to change. We have not audited these figures.
- 4 Cabinet Office reviewed and amended departments' ground campaign budgets over the course of the campaign. No departments exceeded their revised budgets.
- 5 The individual figures may not add up to the total exactly due to rounding.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of departmental data

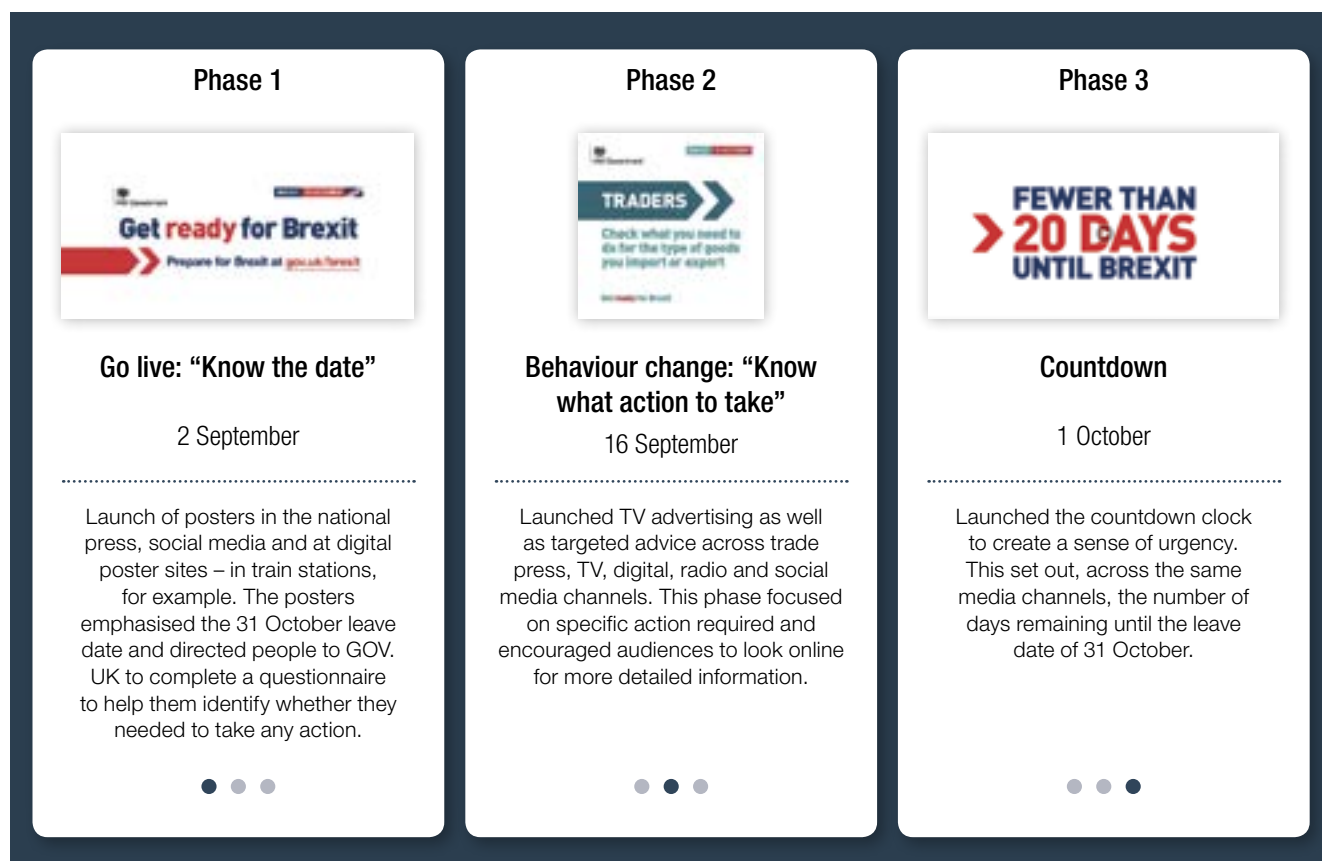
## The air campaign

**3.4** The air campaign had three phases (**Figure 13**). By the end of October 2019, the campaign had delivered a total of 122,241 adverts run across press, radio and TV media. The Cabinet Office estimates that the campaign reached 99.8% of the population and that each member of the public had the opportunity to see adverts 55 times against a planned reach of 65+ times (Figure 9). These statistics were submitted to the Cabinet Office by Manning Gottlieb OMD – the contractor responsible for buying the media slots.<sup>6</sup> Cabinet Office commissioned survey data showed that 58% of people could recall the campaign and 73% recalled it when shown an advert.

**Figure 13**

Advertising material used for the October 2019 Campaign

The air campaign comprised three phases: go live, behaviour change and countdown



**Note**

1 This is a sample of campaign materials.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of departmental documents

6 The Cabinet Office did not hold the supporting data and it has not been audited.

## The ground campaign

**3.5** By the end of October 2019, departments had spent £14.1 million on the ground campaign in line with the expected spend to that date and the overall budget of £26.2 million (Figure 12). In addition, it is likely that departments may also have spent some of their own departmental budgets on ground campaign activities, for example where they had been operating communications activities ahead of the campaign. Examples of some of the activities and what was delivered are shown in **Figure 14** on pages 36 and 37.

## Measurement of impact

**3.6** The overall campaign objective was to ensure that everyone was prepared for leaving the EU on 31 October – regardless of the negotiation outcome. The Cabinet Office planned to use the Government Communication Service’s evaluation framework to assess the campaign. This framework emphasises the importance of using consistent metrics for awareness and behaviour change campaigns.

**3.7** The Cabinet Office developed a performance dashboard to report performance internally. This included measures to track overall preparedness as well as information relating to each of its priority audiences. We found that a wide variety of data was reported on the dashboards used to inform senior officials and ministers. The dashboards included measures on a range of areas such as small businesses taking, or planning to take, action; passport renewal applications; and visits to GOV.UK Brexit pages. However, what was being reported in the performance dashboards over the course of the campaign varied, particularly in the first month. While the format and content of the dashboards became more stable in October, some measures did continue to change. Over the course of the campaign, around one-third of metrics were reported consistently.

**3.8** The EU Exit Campaign Assurance Panel (the Panel) had stressed the importance of having a “super KPI” (key performance indicator) to measure the overall effectiveness of the campaign. The Panel had challenged the Cabinet Office team in late August and again in September on this and in the 17 October meeting the Cabinet Office confirmed its “super KPI” would be “the proportion of UK citizens who have looked or have started to look for information”. This indicator was measured using data from a weekly survey of adults carried out by Kantar, a subcontractor of the Wavemaker contract.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The number of UK adults that Kantar surveyed each week varied. For questions aimed at all UK adults, around 1,000 were surveyed each week. For specific questions relating to business impact or GOV.UK, the survey samples were smaller: between 134–224 people and 143–584 people, respectively. The survey data shows the responses received over the previous two weekly surveys.

**Figure 14**

A sample of activities delivered by the Get ready for Brexit ground campaign reviewed in Cabinet Office deep-dives

The Cabinet Office reviewed department-led ground campaign activities through deep-dives

| <b>Hauliers Handbook</b><br><br>Department for Transport<br><br>Aim: To ensure hauliers and haulier managers planning to operate in the EU were aware of, and prepared for, the actions they need to take in the event of a no-deal exit. | <b>SMS messaging to recipients of UK state pension in the EU</b><br><br>Department for Work & Pensions (DWP)<br><br>Aim: Proactively reassure and inform claimants about their ongoing access to welfare and pensions and minimise unnecessary contact via DWP phone lines. | <b>Businesses Readiness Roadshow events</b><br><br>Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy<br><br>Aim: Not listed in deep dive.   | <b>Cross-government stakeholder conference</b><br><br>HM Revenue & Customs<br><br>Aim: To encourage organisations to drive Brexit readiness among their members. |
|---|---|---|--|
| <b>Input (what was put in, planning and content creation)</b>   |   |   |  |
| A Hauliers Handbook and pocket guides were developed, to be used by drivers and their line managers, to provide clear, comprehensive materials in hauliers' native language, outlining the steps they needed to take.                     | DWP sent SMS messages to recipients of the UK pension in the EU. Of the 500,000 customers, 98,000 were identified as having provided a mobile number to the department.   | 40 business readiness roadshow events delivered across 22 locations.  | A cross-government stakeholder conference was held on 12 September 2019 with a delegate pack issued after the event.   |
| <b>Target</b>   |   |   |  |
| Not included.   | Not included.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 2,200 roadshow event attendees.</li> <li>● 3,000 registrations for online webinar version of the roadshow event.</li> <li>● Outcome targets not included.</li> </ul> | Not included.  |
| <b>Baseline</b>   |   |   |  |
| Not included.   | The departmental estimate was that 20% of SMS messages would generate a call (circa 16,000 calls).  | Not included.   | Not included.  |

**Figure 14** *continued*

A sample of activities delivered by the Get ready for Brexit ground campaign reviewed in Cabinet Office deep-dives

| Hauliers Handbook   | SMS messaging to recipients of UK state pension in the EU   | Businesses Readiness Roadshow events   | Cross-government stakeholder conference   |
|---|---|--|---|
| Department for Transport  | Department for Work & Pensions (DWP)  | Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy  | HM Revenue & Customs  |
| <b>Monitoring and evaluation</b>  |   |  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More than 700,000 printed items distributed to stands written in 12 different languages.</li> <li>• 12,300 copies of the Haulier Handbook were downloaded electronically.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The SMS messages had a successful delivery rate of 81.4% and a click-through rate of 17.8%.</li> <li>• 22,194 visits to gov.uk were initiated directly from SMS messaging by UK nationals in the EU.</li> <li>• 21 calls to the helpline were generated as a result, all of which were to check if the message was genuine.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2,184 people attended roadshow events (Target: 2,200).</li> <li>• 3,700 people registered for the online webinar version of the roadshow events (Target: 3,000).</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 120 business organisations attended the conference.</li> <li>• All stakeholders who completed a follow-up survey said they would share the information and content with their members and/or customers.</li> </ul> |

**Notes**

- 1 This is a sample of activities that are indicative of department-led ground campaign activities across the deep-dives we have seen.
- 2 This figure is intended to show what Cabinet Office knew about ground campaign activities from its deep dives. Departments have advised that they hold more data relating to these ground campaign activities than was included in the deep dives. This additional departmental data has not been included in this figure.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Cabinet Office documents

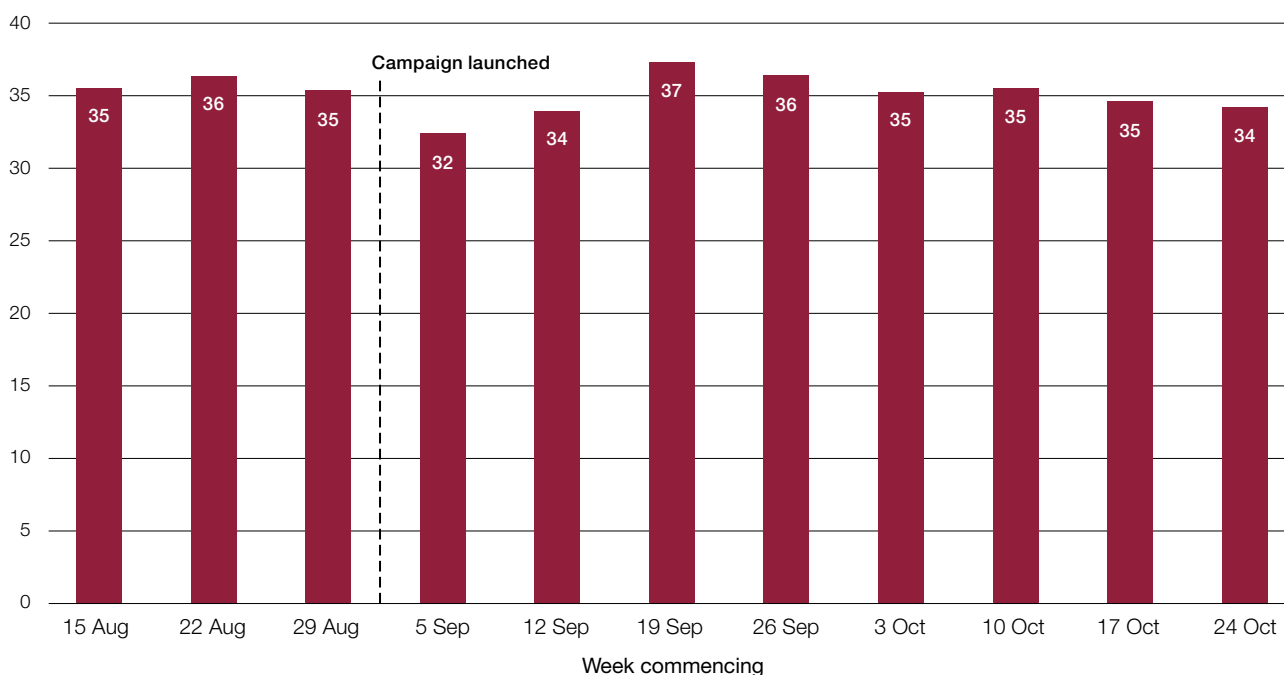
**3.9** Cabinet Office commissioned survey data suggest that there was widespread public recognition of the campaign but that there was broadly no change in the overall percentage of UK citizens who said they had started to take action, including looking for information, to prepare – this figure stood at 34% at the point the campaign was stopped (paragraph 3.8, **Figure 15**). No target was set at the start of the campaign and no estimate was made of the proportion of the population that might have to take some form of action. Hence no assessment could be made of the gap between reported intentions and where the figure needed to be.

### Figure 15

The performance measure agreed with the EU Exit Assurance Panel reported by the Cabinet Office in weekly performance dashboards, week commencing 15 August to 24 October 2019

The Cabinet Office reported the performance measure agreed with the EU Exit Assurance Panel – “the proportion of UK citizens who have looked or have started to look for information” – using Kantar survey data in weekly dashboards. The figures remained broadly unchanged during the campaign

Percentage of respondents (%)



#### Notes

- 1 Respondents are all UK based and over the age of 18 years old.
- 2 Respondents were asked “Which of the following best describes your current attitude towards preparing for Brexit?” with the following response options: “I’ve looked into how it might affect me and have done what I need to do”; “I’ve looked into how it might affect me but I haven’t taken any actions yet”; “I’m starting to look into how it might affect me”; “I’d like to find out how it might affect me but I’m not sure how to go about it”; “I’m not going to look into what I might need to do until a Brexit Deal or No-deal outcome has been finalised”; “I’m not going to be affected by EU Exit and don’t need to look into it”; and “Don’t know”.
- 3 The Cabinet Office reported the data in weekly dashboards though mislabelled what the data represented in its internal reports by including a date of 31 October which the survey questions did not include. It also reported the performance as “those who say they have/will take action” when the data also included those that had looked for information but had not committed to taking action.
- 4 The number of UK adults that Kantar surveyed each week varied. For questions aimed at all UK adults, around 1,000 were surveyed each week.
- 5 The survey data shows the responses received over the previous two weekly surveys.
- 6 The Kantar survey methodology and data have not been validated or audited by the National Audit Office.
- 7 The data presented are for the period in which this question was asked by Kantar.
- 8 Column labels have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

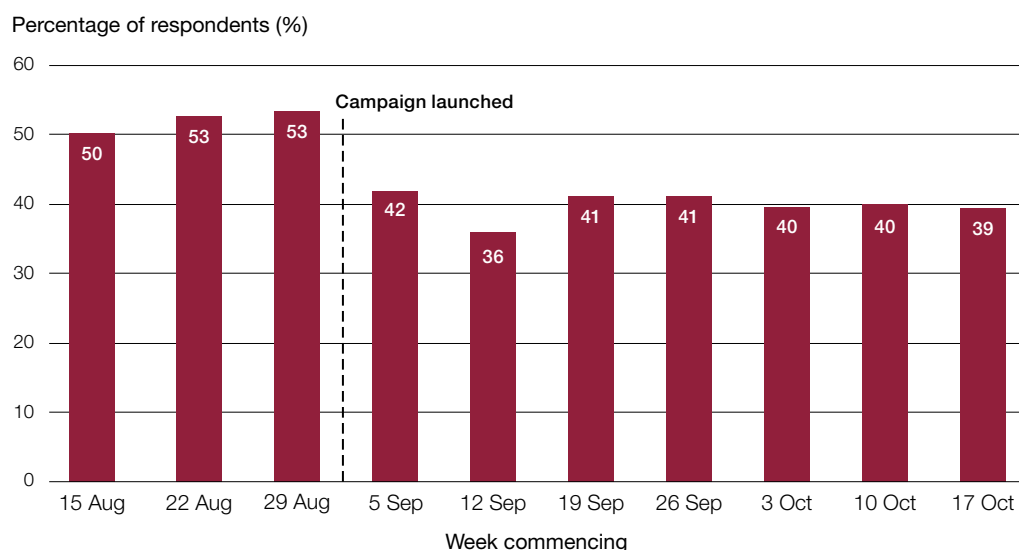


**3.10** The Cabinet Office informed us that it believes that the public's inclination to take action would have been influenced by their belief in whether the UK would leave the EU on 31 October 2019 and with EU negotiations ongoing audiences were unlikely to take any action until there was more certainty and that this would not have become clear until the final days (**Figure 16**). During clearance of the report, the Cabinet Office told us that, in retrospect, it considered that there was no one overall measure available that would be appropriate to use to judge the overall effectiveness of the campaign.

### Figure 16

Belief that the UK would leave the EU on 31 October 2019 reported by the Cabinet Office in weekly performance dashboards, week commencing 15 August to 17 October 2019

The proportion of UK citizens that thought the UK was very likely or quite likely to leave the EU on 31 October did not show a clear change



#### Notes

- 1 Respondents are all UK based and over the age of 18 years old.
- 2 Respondents were asked "The UK is due to leave the EU on 31 October 2019. How likely do you think it is that this will happen, that the UK will leave the EU on this date?" with the following response options: "Very likely"; "Quite likely"; "Neither likely nor unlikely"; "Not very likely"; "Not at all likely"; and "Don't know".
- 3 The number of UK adults that Kantar surveyed each week varied. For questions aimed at all UK adults around 1,000 were surveyed each week.
- 4 The survey data shows the responses received over the previous two weekly surveys.
- 5 The Kantar survey methodology and data have not been validated or audited by the National Audit Office.
- 6 The data presented are for the period in which this question was asked by Kantar.

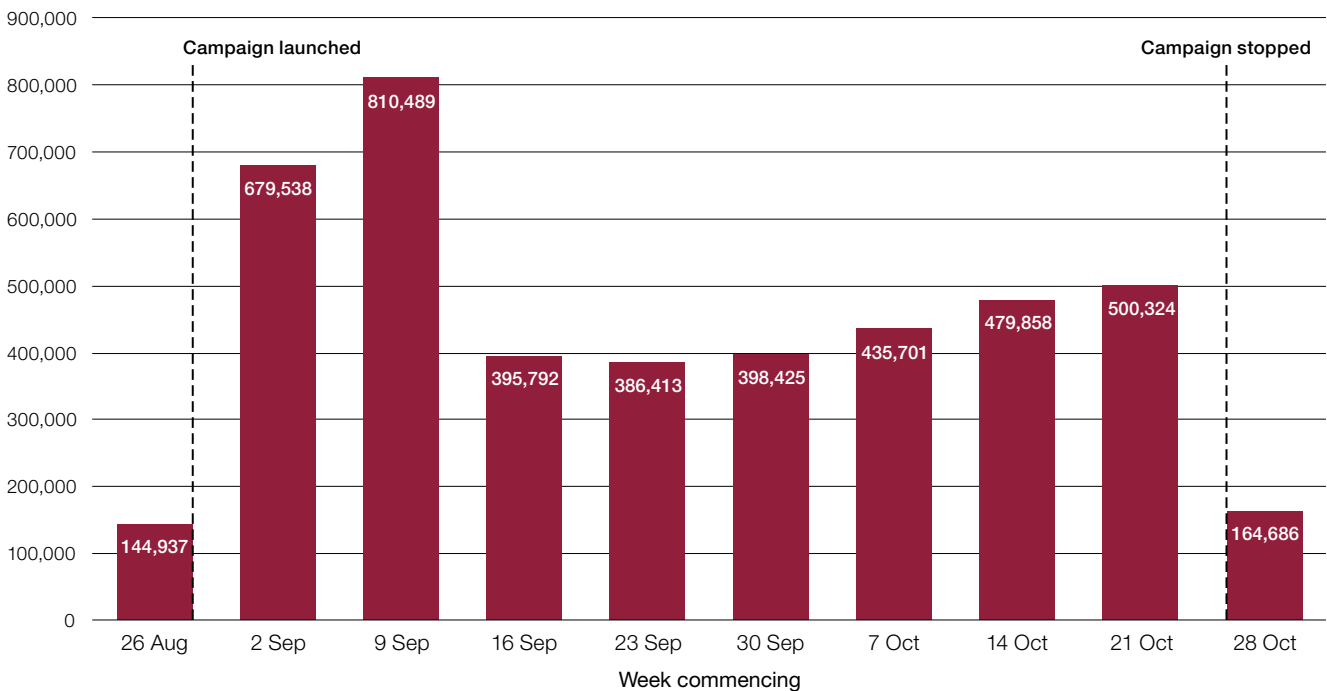
Source: National Audit Office analysis of departmental documents

**3.11** The Cabinet Office used traffic to the GOV.UK webpages as well as the results from the checker tool (paragraph 1.9) to assess the numbers accessing information on what they might need to do. Over the course of the campaign, Brexit-related pages on GOV.UK received 42.9 million unique visits.<sup>8</sup> This figure includes each page visited by each person each time they visited it. Of the 4.3 million unique visits to the GOV.UK Brexit main page (GOV.UK/Brexit) (**Figure 17**), 2.6 million started to use the checker tool and 1.7 million (66%) completed it (**Figure 18**).

**Figure 17**  
Traffic to the GOV.UK/Brexit webpage, 26 August to 3 November 2019

Between the launch of the campaign on 1 September and 31 October 2019 there were 4.3 million unique visits to the GOV.UK/Brexit webpage at least once

Number of electronic devices that have accessed the page for the first time



**Note**

1 It is not possible to identify individual, just individuals machines. For example, if someone visited the website once from their home computer, once from their work computer and once from their phone or tablet, they would be counted three times in these figures.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of departmental data

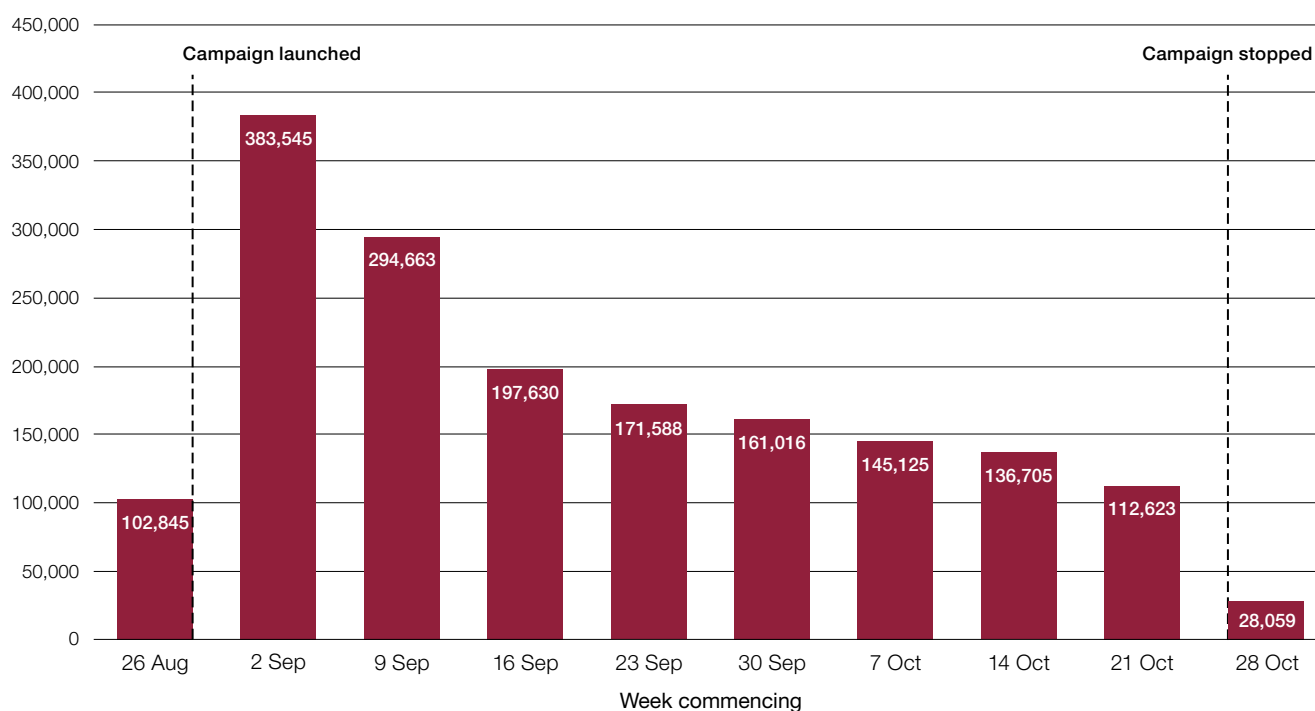
8 A unique visit is a unique page view, which represents the number of sessions during which that page was viewed one or more times.

**Figure 18**

Completion of the GOV.UK checker tool since the launch of the Get ready for Brexit public information campaign, 26 August to 3 November 2019

Between the launch of the campaign on 1 September and 31 October 2019, 1.7 million people have completed the GOV.UK/Brexit checker tool

Number of devices that completed the checker tool for the first time

**Note**

1 It is not possible to identify individuals, just individual machines. For example, if someone visited the website once from their home computer, once from their work computer and once from their phone or tablet, they would be counted three times in these figures.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of departmental data

**3.12** The performance dashboard included performance measures for the five audience groups and these covered some of the 26 priority actions initially identified for the ground campaign (paragraphs 1.10 and 2.15).<sup>9</sup> The performance data included passport renewal applications during the campaign which showed that these were around a quarter higher than business-as-usual forecasts. Similarly, the number of international driving permits issued each week peaked at 15,658 in the week ending 20 October compared to 8,451 in the week ending 15 September. The Cabinet Office reporting did not set out what increases were likely to be needed.

9 It did not track recipients of EU funds, as the campaign bid for this was not developed until mid-October 2019.

**3.13** At its August meeting the EU Exit Campaign Assurance Panel had pressed the Cabinet Office to measure campaign effectiveness in meeting the needs of vulnerable groups. There were no performance measures that looked specifically at vulnerable groups and subsequent evaluation that we have seen does not consider this.

**3.14** For the ground campaign, the Cabinet Office informed us it had carried out seven deep-dives on activities run by departments before the campaign was stopped. We reviewed the five deep-dives for the Department for Transport, the Department for Work & Pensions, the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, the Home Office and HM Revenue & Customs. As shown in Figure 14, the deep-dives covered the volume and nature of activity delivered and stakeholder experience but there was less detailed coverage of the outcomes achieved, such as whether businesses or citizens had taken action to prepare for a no-deal exit. These deep-dives did not explicitly refer to the 26 priority actions identified at the start of the campaign. Some departments have carried out their own evaluation of ground campaign activities.

## **Evaluation**

**3.15** For the air campaign, the Cabinet Office contracted Ebiquity to provide independent challenge on both the media strategy (developed by Wavemaker) and the media buying plans (generated by Manning Gottlieb OMD) to provide assurance on whether the campaign was cost-effective (paragraphs 2.22 and 2.23). Ebiquity provided feedback on a sample of 12 media strategy and buying plans shared with them by Wavemaker and Manning Gottlieb OMD, respectively, between 30 August and 23 September 2019. These covered elements of the air campaign such as healthcare, travel and business readiness and Ebiquity's feedback focused on the price, purpose and target audience. In some cases, action was taken as a result, such as not running full- and part-page adverts in the same newspaper issue. In others, decisions were taken to continue as planned. For example, on business readiness, Ebiquity highlighted the high spend on print advertising in newspapers but Manning Gottlieb OMD advised, and the Cabinet Office agreed, that it was important to continue to use this media to "maintain stature" as the 31 October deadline approached. Ebiquity highlighted that a longer timeframe for the campaign would have allowed more discussion and debate around the plans and may have meant there was less resistance to making changes to plans based on its feedback.

**3.16** The Cabinet Office carried out a deep-dive of the air campaign in early November 2019. This considered the activity delivered, outcomes and impact. It focused mainly on reach, awareness and visits to EU pages on GOV.UK. The Cabinet Office estimated around £1.7 million was saved by coordinating the campaign centrally compared with eight departments running separate campaigns. The Cabinet Office has not yet assessed the return on investment for the campaign.

# Appendix One

## Our approach and evidence base

### Scope

1 This report examines the management of the Cabinet Office-led Get ready for Brexit campaign (the campaign). In particular, we reviewed:

- the preparation of the campaign;
- the governance and oversight arrangements;
- the approval of the business case and budget;
- the procurement of contractors; and
- the evidence available to the Cabinet Office on the effectiveness of the campaign.

### Our methods and evidence base

2 We have produced this report after reviewing evidence collected between October 2019 and January 2020. We:

- interviewed officials in the Cabinet Office involved in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of the campaign to understand the timeline and background to the campaign; the procurement process; governance and oversight arrangements; and the approach to monitoring performance and outcomes;
- reviewed key documentation held by the Cabinet Office. This included: the business case for the campaign; documentary evidence of the procurement process; budgets and spend profiles; meeting minutes; performance dashboards showing key metrics and underlying data; and evaluation;
- interviewed officials in the Department for Transport, Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, HM Revenue & Customs, and the Home Office; and
- interviewed representatives from the three agencies, involved in the air campaign as well as the Crown Commercial Service.

3 We compared the Cabinet Office's approach to developing the campaign with its own cross-government campaign planning guide, known as OASIS (Figure 7). The guide sets out five principles for government communications.

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