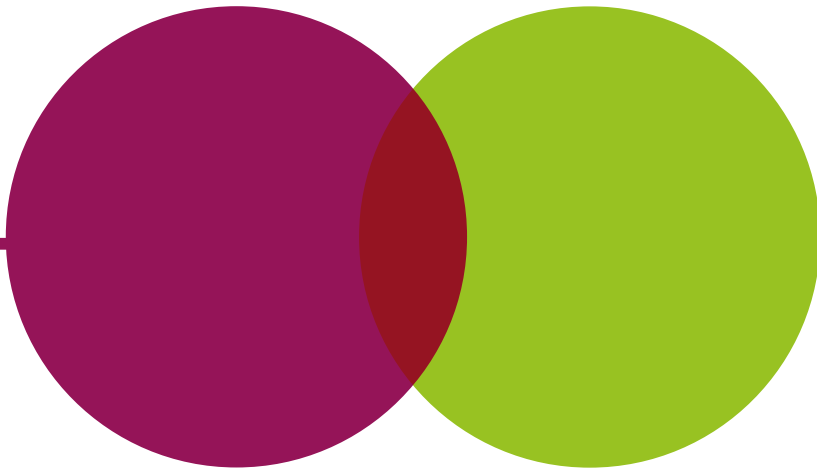




National Audit Office



INSIGHT

# Lessons learned: Cross-government working

Cross-government

---

SESSION 2022-23  
7 JULY 2023  
HC 1659

**We are the UK's independent public spending watchdog.**

**We support Parliament in holding government to account and we help improve public services through our high-quality audits.**

The National Audit Office (NAO) scrutinises public spending for Parliament and is independent of government and the civil service. We help Parliament hold government to account and we use our insights to help people who manage and govern public bodies improve public services.

The Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG), Gareth Davies, is an Officer of the House of Commons and leads the NAO. We audit the financial accounts of departments and other public bodies. We also examine and report on the value for money of how public money has been spent.

In 2022, the NAO's work led to a positive financial impact through reduced costs, improved service delivery, or other benefits to citizens, of £572 million.



National Audit Office

# Lessons learned: Cross-government working

Cross-government

---

## Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General

Ordered by the House of Commons  
to be printed on 5 July 2023

This report has been prepared under Section 6 of the  
National Audit Act 1983 for presentation to the House  
of Commons in accordance with Section 9 of the Act

---

**Gareth Davies**  
**Comptroller and Auditor General**  
**National Audit Office**

**3 July 2023**

## Lessons learned reports

Our lessons learned reports bring together what we know on important recurring issues to make it easier for others to understand and apply the lessons from our work.

The material featured in this document is subject to National Audit Office (NAO) copyright. The material may be copied or reproduced for non-commercial purposes only, namely reproduction for research, private study or for limited internal circulation within an organisation for the purpose of review.

Copying for non-commercial purposes is subject to the material being accompanied by a sufficient acknowledgement, reproduced accurately, and not being used in a misleading context. To reproduce NAO copyright material for any other use, you must contact [copyright@nao.org.uk](mailto:copyright@nao.org.uk). Please tell us who you are, the organisation you represent (if any) and how and why you wish to use our material. Please include your full contact details: name, address, telephone number and email.

Please note that the material featured in this document may not be reproduced for commercial gain without the NAO's express and direct permission and that the NAO reserves its right to pursue copyright infringement proceedings against individuals or companies who reproduce material for commercial gain without our permission.

Links to external websites were valid at the time of publication of this report. The National Audit Office is not responsible for the future validity of the links.



# Contents

## Summary

Introduction 4

## Part One

Setting-up cross-government working 11

## Part Two

Delivering cross-government working 19

## Part Three

Improving cross-government working 22

## Appendix One

Our evidence base 27

This report can be found on the National Audit Office website at [www.nao.org.uk](http://www.nao.org.uk)


If you need a version of this report in an alternative format for accessibility reasons, or any of the figures in a different format, contact the NAO at [enquiries@nao.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@nao.org.uk)


The National Audit Office study team consisted of:


Eleanor Fairbairn,  
Caroline Murray,  
Poppy Sparham and  
Katie Taylor under  
the direction of Siân Jones.

For further information about the National Audit Office please contact:

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

 020 7798 7400

 [www.nao.org.uk](http://www.nao.org.uk)

 @NAOorguk

# Summary

## Introduction

**1** Central government is organised into departments that plan and deliver their own objectives. Some of these objectives can be met perfectly well by individual departments acting alone. But in some instances, important government priorities such as net zero, adult social care, rough sleeping and vulnerable families cut across departments, and require them to work together, through what is known as cross-government working. In this report we draw on insights from our work to set out what effective cross-government working looks like and highlight some of the barriers. We have also produced a guide to support leaders and practitioners engaged in cross-government working.<sup>1</sup>

### **What is cross-government working?**

**2** Citizens do not usually think of their interactions with government in terms of traditional government departments, and not all issues fit neatly into one part of government. Increasingly, government policies need to involve more than one department and departments are required to work together to achieve policy priorities.

**3** Successful cross-government working (which we have defined as delivering through more than one department or arm's-length body) can allow government to deliver outcomes more effectively and better value for money but requires concerted effort. There are many different types of cross-government working, from sharing best practice between departments to delivering complex programmes that cut across different departmental objectives.

### **How does it work?**

**4** Departments are responsible for the planning and delivery of their objectives and for identifying where cross-government working will help to achieve these. They are also responsible for ensuring they have the right supporting departments lined up to deliver shared priorities and agreeing effective monitoring and governance arrangements to ensure everyone understands their role. Departments set out their priority outcomes in Outcome Delivery Plans (ODPs), along with their plan for achieving them.

<sup>1</sup> National Audit Office, *Cross-government working, Good practice guide for leaders and practitioners*, July 2023.

**5** Both HM Treasury and the Cabinet Office have a role in supporting cross-government priorities. HM Treasury is responsible for allocating and controlling public spending, including departmental spending, and for scrutinising and approving any project or programme spending which is outside of departments' delegated limits or is novel and contentious. Its spending teams advise HM Treasury ministers on decisions at spending reviews; review and approve submissions for new spending on projects and programmes; and monitor departments' budgets and spending risks. The Cabinet Office and HM Treasury are responsible for monitoring the delivery of departmental objectives and 20 cross-cutting outcomes established in October 2021. Both departments have responsibility for identifying, supporting and monitoring cross-government working. In December 2022, HM Treasury and Cabinet Office worked with departments to identify the biggest barriers to successful cross-government working, and identified the following areas to better support departments: structures; priorities; spending; data-sharing; culture; and best practice.

### **Insights from the National Audit Office**

**6** Through our regular examination of government projects and programmes we frequently see examples of how weaknesses in cross-government working can undermine value for money. Findings in our reports regularly highlight problems with cross-government working and reiterate the importance of a shared vision and objectives, coordinated programme and risk management, and compatible data and technology. Our *Guide for effective cross-government working* explores these points, and others, in more detail (**Figure 1** overleaf).

### **Scope of this report**

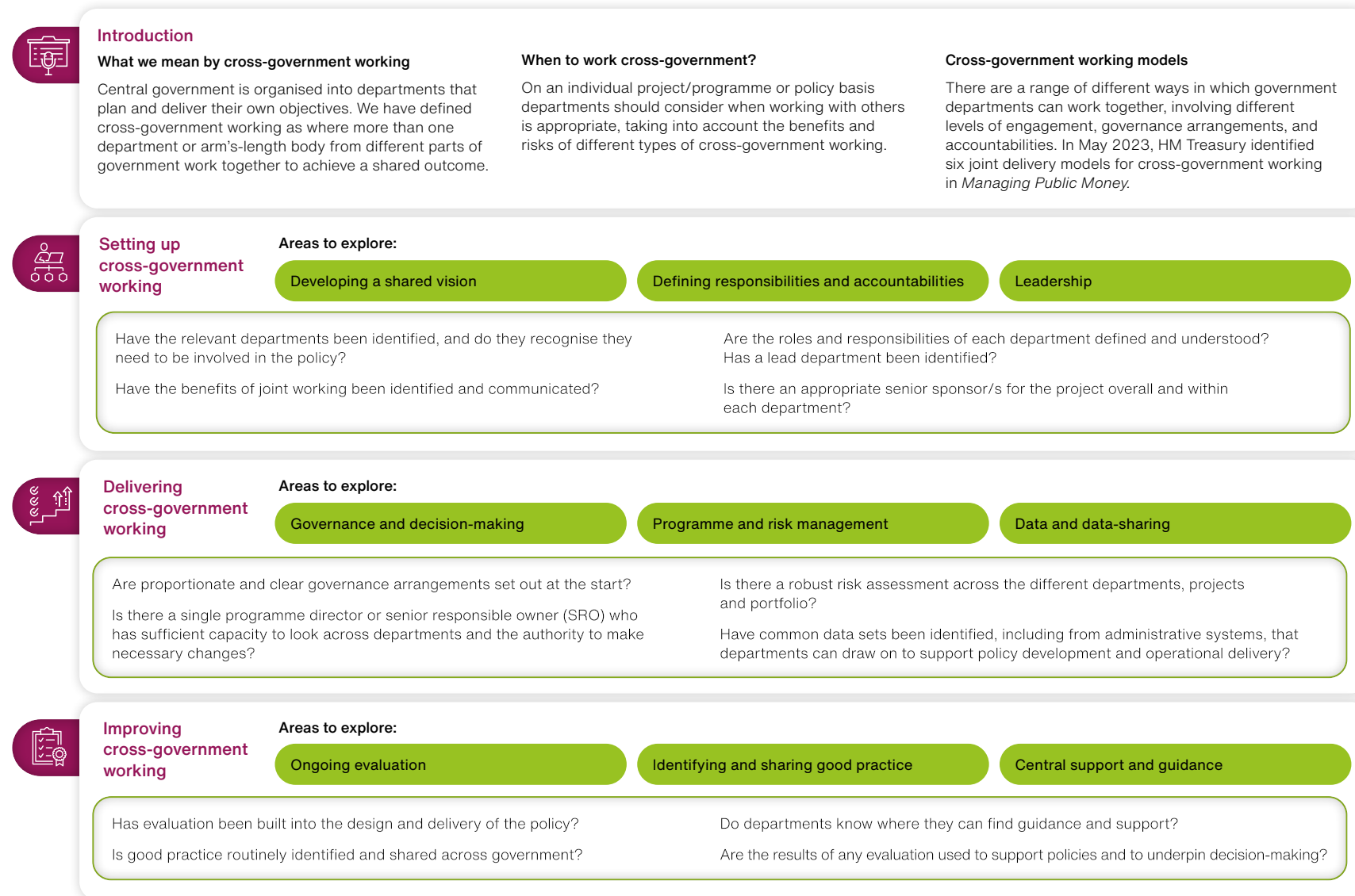
**7** This report draws on insights from our previous work to set out what effective cross-government working looks like and highlights some of the barriers. It covers the roles of Cabinet Office, HM Treasury and government departments in supporting and delivering cross-government work and recent work undertaken by HM Treasury and Cabinet Office to identify barriers to cross-government working. It also considers examples of cross-government working in other countries. The report expands on the main themes of our cross-government working guide and examines:

- setting up cross-government working (Part One);
- delivering cross-government working (Part Two); and
- improving cross-government working (Part Three).

**8** We have defined cross-government working as where more than one department or arm's-length body from different parts of government work together to achieve a shared outcome. The report focuses on the way central government departments and their arm's-length bodies can work together. It does not consider cross-government working with local government, devolved administrations or organisations outside of government.

## Figure 1 Effective cross-government working

Our guide sets out three main areas to consider for effective cross-government working





## Setting up cross-government working

**9 There are many different models of cross-government working.** It can range from two departments working together on a specific policy, such as adult social care, to government priorities delivered by multiple departments, such as net zero. Some departments have overall responsibility for delivering a policy which contributes to other departments' strategic priorities. For example, the Department for Culture, Media & Sport has responsibility for maximising participation in sport, which contributes to strategic priorities across government, such as levelling-up (paragraph 1.4, and Figure 2).

**10 Departments need to carefully consider which policies and programmes will benefit from cross-government working.** Working with more than one department is not always necessary or beneficial, but some policies or programmes cannot be delivered without it. In these circumstances government needs to have a rigorous understanding of its planned outcomes and how they will be delivered when multiple departments are involved (paragraphs 1.4 and 1.15).

**11 It is not always clear which departments are involved in delivering policies which cut across departmental boundaries.** Our work has shown the importance of clearly defined responsibilities and accountability structures, but this does not always happen. Our report on *Support for vulnerable adolescents* found a poor mutual understanding of how different bodies within the health and social care system made decisions. This had hampered joint working. Departments report on their cross-cutting outcomes in ODPs, but we identified one example in the July 2021 ODPs where a shared cross-cutting outcome was not consistently reported by all responsible departments. In addition, some departments used their ODPs to explain where more informal joint working was involved in delivering other outcomes but this was not reflected consistently in the other relevant ODPs (paragraphs 1.7 and 1.9).

**12 Our work shows that departments need strong leadership, a common purpose and shared vision to maximise buy-in and support for cross-government working.** In our 2020 report on *Achieving net zero*, the then Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy told us its latest arrangements were more likely to endure because they had senior political buy-in, including the Prime Minister chairing the Climate Action Strategy Committee. It also established the Climate Change National Strategy Implementation Group, which was made up of senior officials from across departments and helped coordinate activity (paragraph 1.8).

## Delivering cross-government working

**13 Departments need effective governance and decision-making structures for successful cross-government working.** The more bodies that are involved, the more complex it can be to oversee and manage delivery. Our 2022 report into *Government shared services* found that unclear governance arrangements had created risks to delivery and had made it difficult to come to a shared view. Cabinet Office has now begun to streamline its governance arrangements. It is also important that governance arrangements support open discussion and continuous organisational improvement across departmental boundaries (paragraphs 2.2 to 2.4).

**14 Cross-government working can carry more risk, reinforcing the need for effective risk management.** Departments need strong end-to-end risk management arrangements in place that allow government to identify, assess and manage significant risks across government departments. They are supported in this by the Risk Centre of Excellence in HM Treasury and Cabinet Office, which leads on civil contingencies. Our recent report on *The government's preparedness for the COVID-19 pandemic* highlighted several areas for improvement in the way that government assesses risk. We recommended that Cabinet Office should establish who is responsible for leading and managing whole-system risks, and that it should work with government departments to ensure their risk management approaches are comprehensive, integrated, and holistic (paragraph 2.5, and Figure 5).

**15 Departments have a way to go to understand and evaluate the success of cross-government interventions.** Departments must manage common challenges including poor-quality data, lack of consistent data, and impractical data-sharing agreements. In our 2019 report on *Challenges in using data across government* we made it clear that to overcome these barriers, government must take steps towards interoperability by embedding consistent data standards, improving data quality, addressing issues posed by legacy IT systems, and enabling data-sharing across government. This involves departments putting in place data-sharing agreements that address practical considerations including quality, technical limitations, and the cost and effort of making data available. Our recent report on *Digital transformation in government: addressing the barriers to efficiency* found that there had been some recent progress on establishing data standards across government, but that the use of data remains a major undertaking with significant technical and cultural barriers to overcome (paragraphs 2.6 to 2.8).

## Improving cross-government working

**16 Government is taking steps to monitor and evaluate cross-government projects and programmes to understand what works and what does not.** Evaluation allows government to make informed decisions and helps it learn what works. Our 2021 report on *Evaluating government spending* found that 8% of government spend on major projects had robust evaluation plans in place in 2019. It observed that HM Treasury and Cabinet Office have been more proactive on evaluation since 2020. For example, in April 2021, government set up a joint Evaluation Task Force of Cabinet Office and HM Treasury specialists to support evaluation of policies and programmes across government (paragraphs 3.7 and 3.8).

**17 Government could do more to routinely identify and share best practice in cross-government working.** Our *Framework for auditing evaluation* notes the importance of collating evaluation findings and lessons learned so they can be easily accessed and shared. This includes government maintaining a central repository of evaluation evidence, which is kept updated and is accessible to analysts and policy professionals. Our report on *Progress with trade negotiations* recommended that the then Department for International Trade should ensure it learns lessons from the progress it has made on multiple negotiations so far. It should ensure that feedback, learning and sector knowledge from across departments and devolved administrations is recorded and shared, and used to inform an improved approach in future negotiations (paragraphs 3.9 to 3.11).

**18 In December 2022, the centre of government identified where it can do more to support better practice in cross-government working.** Between February 2022 and March 2022, HM Treasury and Cabinet Office carried out an online survey of departmental practitioners to identify the main barriers to cross-government working. They received 229 responses and identified six areas where it was important for departments to work together: structures, priorities, spending, data-sharing, culture and best practice. Some of the surveyed practitioners had found it difficult to locate and apply the relevant guidance on how departments should work together. HM Treasury and Cabinet Office have worked with the cross-government Policy Profession to develop a new joint-working 'hub' to support departments in identifying and establishing cross-cutting accountability structures and clear ways of working, as well as signposting relevant guidance and sources of support (paragraphs 1.14 and 3.2).

**19 Additional funding is often used as an incentive to encourage cross-government working.** As part of the Spending Review 2019, HM Treasury launched the Shared Outcomes Fund to test innovative ways of cross-government working across the public sector, with an emphasis on thorough plans for evaluation. The 2020 and 2021 Spending Reviews allocated an additional £200 million of funding each to the scheme to support both a new round of pilot projects and to scale up or continue existing pilot projects where evaluation has shown they work, bringing the total funding made available through the scheme to £600 million. As at 31 May 2023 the Fund has supported 44 projects. However, there is little incentive for departments to invest in programmes which deliver benefits elsewhere in government. Our work on *Improving outcomes for women in the criminal justice system* highlighted that costs and benefits are often not spread evenly among implementation partners (paragraphs 3.4 to 3.6, and Figure 6).

# Part One

## Setting-up cross-government working

**1.1** Central government is organised into departments that plan and deliver their own objectives. In some instances, important government priorities such as net zero, adult social care, rough sleeping and vulnerable families cut across departments.

**1.2** In this report, and our supporting guide, we have defined cross-government working as where more than one department or arm's-length body from different parts of government work together to achieve a shared outcome.

**1.3** In this part we cover:

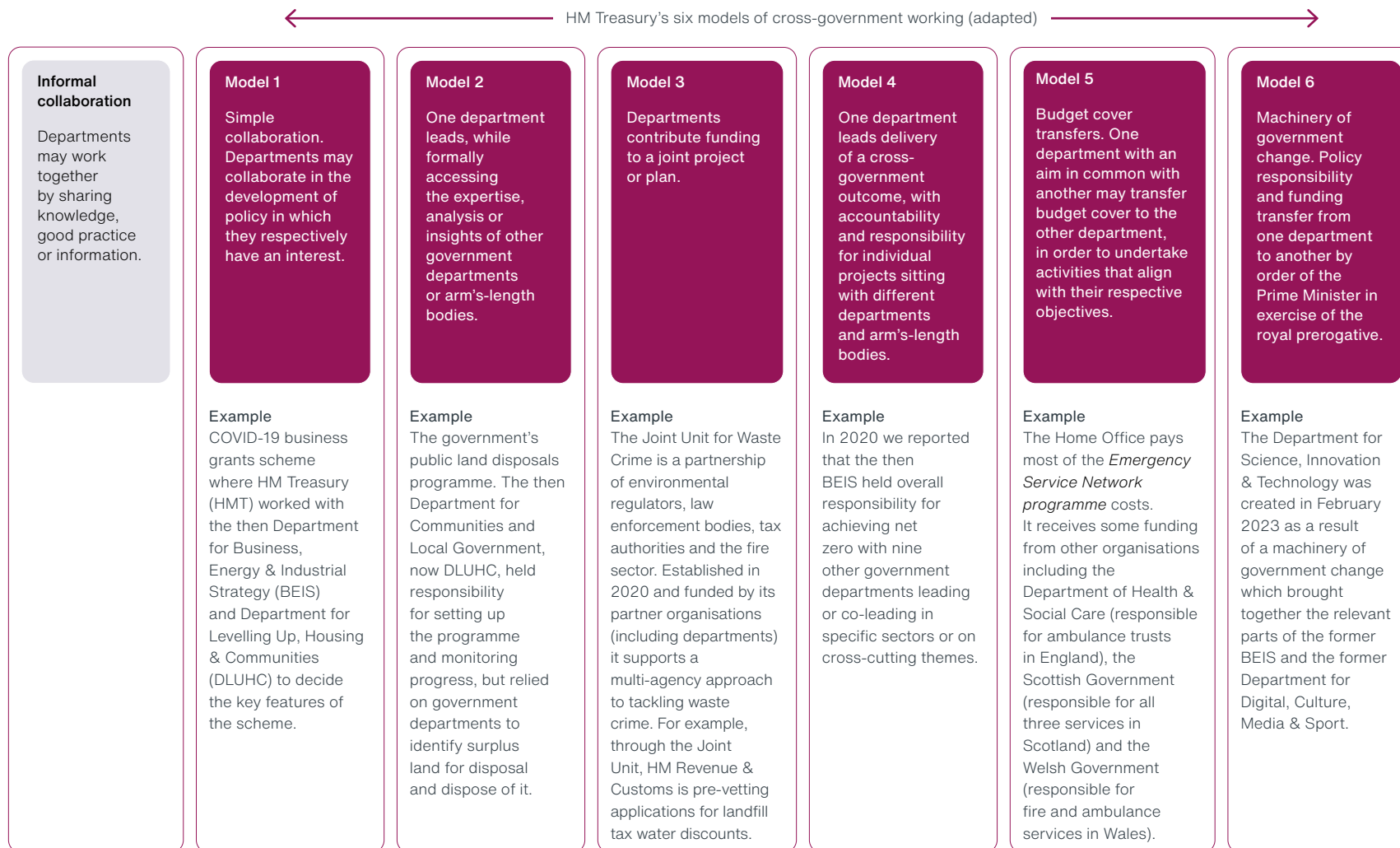
- cross-government working models;
- roles and responsibilities;
- functions; and
- barriers to cross-government working.

### **Cross-government working models**

**1.4** There are a range of different ways that departments can work together. Cross-government working can cover everything from informal collaboration on areas of shared interest, through to multiple departments contributing funding to a joint project or programme. Some departments have overall responsibility for delivering a policy which contributes to other departments' strategic priorities. For example, the Department for Culture, Media & Sport has responsibility for maximising participation in sport, which contributes to strategic priorities across government, such as levelling-up. In May 2023, HM Treasury set out six joint delivery models for cross-government working in *Managing Public Money*, including details on responsibilities and accountabilities for each model. It is important to identify which model of joint working is most appropriate in different circumstances, and whether it is necessary or beneficial to deliver in a cross-departmental way (**Figure 2** overleaf).

**Figure 2**  
Effective cross-government working

HM Treasury has identified six models of cross-government working



**Note**

1 In May 2023 HM Treasury identified six joint delivery models for cross-government working in *Managing Public Money*, May 2023. In addition to these models the National Audit Office identified more informal ways departments can work together. For example, informal collaboration to share good practice.

## Roles and responsibilities

**1.5** HM Treasury is responsible for allocating and controlling public spending. This includes delegating budgets to departments, and scrutinising and approving both novel and contentious proposals, and project and programme spending outside of departments' delegated limits. Its spending teams advise HM Treasury ministers on decisions at spending reviews; review and approve submissions for new spending on projects and programmes; and monitor departments' budgets and spending risks. It also sets rules for government financial management. The Government Finance Function (GFF) sits within HM Treasury and its objectives and priorities include:

- incentivising cross-government collaboration and innovative ways of working;
- establishing cross-government data standards and process designs that enable government to be more efficient and responsive; and
- supporting its governance and cross-government communities and networks to enable collaboration and knowledge-sharing.

**1.6** Cabinet Office and HM Treasury are responsible for monitoring the delivery of departmental objectives and government policy priorities. They also have responsibility for identifying, supporting and monitoring cross-government working. This includes identifying areas for integration through policy coordination work and monitoring back-office integration savings. They oversee and assure policy areas with integrated service or programme delivery through the Infrastructure and Projects Authority, which provides central assurance for project implementation, including for major integration projects. Cabinet Office and HM Treasury also set the overall performance framework that requires departments to set out priority outcomes and how they plan to achieve these. This includes outlining any crucial 'enabling' activities, strategy and planning information, and the level of support required from other departments. Cabinet Office also publishes efficiency savings delivered through government functions.

**1.7** Departments are responsible for the planning and delivery of their objectives and for identifying where cross-government working will help to achieve these. They are also responsible for ensuring they have the right supporting departments lined up to deliver shared priorities and agreeing effective monitoring and governance arrangements to ensure everyone understands their delivery role. Our work has shown the importance of clearly defined responsibilities and accountability structures, but this does not always happen. For example, our report on *Support for vulnerable adolescents* found a poor mutual understanding of how different bodies within the health and social care system made decisions.

**1.8** A common purpose and shared vision across all departments is crucial to successful cross-government working. A shared vision helps to maximise buy-in from departments. This is especially crucial where there is uneven distribution of costs and benefits. In our 2020 report on *Achieving net zero*, the then Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy told us its latest arrangements were more likely to endure because they had senior political buy-in, including the Prime Minister chairing the Climate Action Strategy Committee. It also established the Climate Change National Strategy Implementation Group (NSIG), which was made up of senior officials from across departments and helped coordinate activity.

**1.9** Departments report on their priority outcomes in Outcome Delivery Plans (ODPs). ODPs replaced the previous Single Departmental Plans (SDPs) in a move to make sure that departments have a greater focus on linking spending to outcomes, evaluation and joint working. Departments published their first ODPs in July 2021. In October 2021, as part of Spending Review 2021, the government published a list of 76 priority outcomes, 20 of which are cross-cutting outcomes. These cover major policy areas including net zero, health and social care, and levelling-up (**Figure 3**). Some cross-cutting outcomes involve only two departments working together but others include more. For example, there are nine departments working on the cross-cutting outcome to 'reduce crime'. Shared outcomes are not always reported consistently by departments. We identified one example in the July 2021 ODPs where a shared cross-cutting outcome was not consistently reported by all responsible departments. In addition, some departments used their ODPs to explain where more informal joint working was involved in delivering other outcomes but this was not reflected consistently in the relevant ODPs.

**1.10** Other governments have similar mechanisms for overseeing joint priorities. The United States Congress enacted the GPRA Modernization Act in 2010 to create a more integrated, cross-cutting approach to federal performance management. As part of this, the Office of Management and Budget and all federal agencies are required to establish four-year Cross-Agency Priority (CAP) goals. These goals cover areas such as improving customer experiences with federal services. In September 2021, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) identified key considerations to help facilitate the implementation of goals, such as reporting on cross-agency results at the end of the four-year goal period.



**Figure 3**

Examples of policy areas identified from cross-cutting outcomes published in the Spending Review, October 2021

Cross-cutting outcomes cover a range of major policy areas including net zero, health and social care, and levelling up

**Productivity and economic growth (levelling up)**

Increase economic growth and productivity through improved digital connectivity.

Secure world class free trade agreements and reduce market access barriers, ensuring that consumers and businesses can benefit from both.

Raise productivity and empower places so that everyone across the country can benefit from levelling up.

**Net zero**

Reduce UK greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050, while supporting green jobs and mobilising investment to deliver a green industrial revolution across the UK.

Improve the environment through cleaner air and water, minimise waste, and thriving plants and terrestrial and marine wildlife.

**Education, skills and jobs**

Drive economic growth through improving the skills pipeline, levelling up productivity and supporting people to work.

Support the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people through high-quality education and local services so that no-one is left behind.

Support families and provide the best start in life for all, through improved family services and high-quality early education and childcare to raise standards and help parents into work.

Maximise employment across the country to aid economic recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Address poverty through enabling progression in the workforce and increasing financial resilience.

**Crime and justice**

Reduce crime.

Reduce the risk of terrorism to the UK and UK overseas interests.

Deliver swift access to justice.

Secure a safe, prosperous and resilient UK by coordinating national security and crisis response, realising strategic advantage through science and technology, and the implementation of the integrated review.

**Health and social care**

Improve, protect and level up the nation's health, including reducing health disparities.

Improve social care outcomes through an affordable, high-quality and sustainable adult social care system.

End rough sleeping through more effective prevention and crisis intervention services, and reduce homelessness by enabling local authorities to fully meet their statutory duties.

**Strengthening borders and union**

Seize the opportunities of Brexit, through creating the world's most effective border to increase UK prosperity and enhance security.

Maintain the Union, and ensure that its strength and benefits are clear, visible and recognised by all citizens.

Tackle illegal migration, remove those with no right to be here and protect the vulnerable.

**Notes**

- 1 We analysed the list of 20 cross-cutting outcomes published in October 2021 and split them into broad policy areas.
- 2 The cross-cutting outcomes were taken directly from the Spending Review, October 2021.
- 3 Cross-cutting outcomes are delivered by two or more departments working together.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of cross cutting outcomes published in October 2021

## Functions

**1.11** In 2015, the government set up cross-departmental corporate functions. These functions aimed to improve decision-making, increase organisational capacity and capability, and normalise cross-government working. The functions cover core areas of business such as human resources, legal, commercial and digital. In 2022, government reaffirmed its ambition that the functions will form a framework for back-office collaboration within organisations and across organisational boundaries, to support efficient and effective delivery of policy, outcomes and services.

**1.12** Functions have set up a range of initiatives with the aim of making cross-government working easier. For example, the digital function has worked with Microsoft to set up the Microsoft 365 Collaboration Blueprint for UK Government, which explicitly aims to improve collaboration between different departments. The HR function is also looking to converge processes across the civil service for the onboarding and transfer of staff, making it easier to manage staff moves between departments.

## Barriers to cross-government working

**1.13** In our guide, we highlight three themes to consider for effective cross-government working. Drawing on our reports, we have highlighted a range of common challenges departments face when setting-up cross-government working, delivering joint policies and programmes, and learning and improving working arrangements when there is more than one department involved.

**1.14** HM Treasury and Cabinet Office have also identified a range of barriers to effective cross-government working. Between February 2022 and March 2022, they carried out an online survey of departmental practitioners and received 229 responses. Some of the most commonly identified barriers were structures and bureaucracy hindering planning and delivery; ministerial priorities not being well understood; inconsistent join-up in spending decisions and allocations; a lack of routine data-sharing between departments; and poor arrangements for sharing best practice and learning (**Figure 4**). To combat these issues HM Treasury and Cabinet Office identified areas where they could do more to better support cross-government working. These were: structures; priorities; spending; data-sharing; culture; and best practice. They found that there was further to go in ensuring an open and collaborative culture that rewards and recognises its people.

**Figure 4**

Common challenges to effective cross-government working identified by survey practitioners

HM Treasury and Cabinet Office identified a range of barriers to successful cross-government working



**Notes**

- 1 HM Treasury and Cabinet Office online survey of departmental practitioners between February 2022 and March 2022. Results based on 229 responses from 15 different departments and three other bodies involved in cross-government working. Responses were to 18 questions aimed at understanding the extent to which different barriers impact on cross-government working. Figure based on top five responses.
- 2 This figure does not present all the identified barriers to joint working.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of HM Treasury and Cabinet Office survey data

**1.15** The way that government is structured can present a barrier to effective cross-government working. Different departments work in different ways, which can lead to siloed working across government. These silos make it difficult to converge processes and deliver joint initiatives effectively. Our report on *Improving government's planning and spending framework* found that departments creating planning and spending review submissions in silos can undermine overall value for money and negatively affect local services. We noted to deliver value for money over the medium to longer term, government needs an integrated planning and spending framework which includes robust realistic plans, with clear priorities and long-term clarity on funding that supports organisations to work together across government and protect value for money.

**1.16** Other governments also face similar barriers when trying to work across government. The Office of the Auditor General of Canada (OAG) told us that the Government of Canada has introduced a new digital platform called GCXchange to further enable cross-departmental communication. This tool allows federal employees to collaborate and chat with other federal public servants; to co-author documents with other departments; to join one of more than 150 existing cross-departmental communities or to create a new one; and to view departmental and government-wide communications.

**1.17** The Office of the Auditor-General New Zealand also acknowledged that its country's budgets had historically been approached in a siloed way with very little sharing of information between agencies. The New Zealand Government is trialling initiatives to help overcome these silos. Setting up the 'Justice Sector Cluster Budget Pilot' as part of its 2022 budget is one of two such initiatives. This pilot aimed to make the budgeting process in the justice sector a more collaborative activity, with agencies and ministers in that sector working together to develop multi-year funding proposals and to agree priority areas.

## Part Two

### Delivering cross-government working

**2.1** In this part of the report we cover:

- governance and decision-making;
- programme and risk management; and
- data and data-sharing.

#### **Governance and decision-making**

**2.2** Departments need effective governance and decision-making structures for successful cross-government working. Good governance helps an organisation meet its intended outcomes, effectively manage risks and performance, and adds transparency which in turn facilitates effective accountability. As we set out in our 2019 report on *Local authority governance*, poor governance can make the difference between local authorities coping and not coping with financial and service pressure.

**2.3** Cross-government initiatives can often be more difficult to implement due to the large number of bodies involved in delivery and their existing individual governance and accountability structures. This challenging context means that it is even more important that governance arrangements are robust enough to work effectively. This includes ensuring that governance arrangements are carefully designed, streamlined, consistent and well-understood by all involved. This helps to reduce the risk of duplicated effort across departmental teams, allowing government to achieve efficiencies and avoid fragmentation.

**2.4** Our 2020 report on *The government's approach to test and trace in England* noted that the unusual dual reporting lines initially put in place brought risks of unclear governance arrangements and confused decision-making. Our 2022 report on *Government shared services* found that multiple layers of reporting had resulted in fragmented and cumbersome governance arrangements that had created risks to delivery and made it difficult to come to a shared view on what mattered. Since our report was published, Cabinet Office has begun to streamline its governance arrangements.

## Programme and risk management

**2.5** Departments need a strong risk management framework that supports them to deliver their priorities. The Risk Centre of Excellence in HM Treasury publishes guidance on risk in the Orange Book, setting out a principles-based approach to risk management (**Figure 5**). The Cabinet Office also supports departments through its role as lead on civil contingencies. Our recent report on *The government’s preparedness for the COVID-19 pandemic* highlighted the importance of strong end-to-end risk management arrangements in addressing significant risks, including interdependent and systemic risks. This includes a cross-government view of risks to understand the knock-on effects on other parts of the system and to stop risks falling through the ‘cracks’ between departments. We highlighted several areas for improvement, including the need to clarify risk appetite and make it clear who leads and manages whole-system risks. We recommended that the Cabinet Office should work with government departments to ensure that their risk management, business continuity and emergency planning are more comprehensive, holistic and integrated.

**Figure 5**  
*The Orange Book’s Risk Management Framework*

HM Treasury’s *Orange Book* sets out a principle-based approach to risk management



**Note**

1 The purpose of the Risk Management Framework is to help identify and support opportunities and risks within desired levels across an organisation.

Source: HM Treasury, *The Orange Book – Management of Risk – Principles and Concepts*, 2020

## Data and data-sharing

**2.6** Our guide for senior leaders on *Improving government data* highlighted the common challenges to getting the right data in the right place at the right time. These included poor-quality data, lack of consistent data, and impractical data-sharing agreements. To overcome these barriers, government must take steps towards interoperability by embedding data standards, improving data quality, addressing issues posed by legacy IT systems, and enabling data-sharing across government. This involves putting in place data-sharing agreements that address practical considerations including quality, technical limitations, and the cost and effort of making data available. Our recent report on *Digital transformation in government: addressing the barriers to efficiency* found that, while there had been some recent progress on establishing data standards across government, this remains a major undertaking with significant technical and cultural barriers to overcome.

**2.7** Departments also need the right data to understand and evaluate the success of cross-government interventions. In our 2019 report on *Challenges in using data across government* we noted that getting the right data in the right place at the right time was vital to delivering value for money. Our report highlighted that having the right data helps make services work for people, improves government's systems and processes, and supports better decisions. The importance of data was demonstrated in our report on *Improving resettlement support for prison leavers to reduce reoffending*, which found that slow progress in collecting and sharing the right data had limited the government's ability to provide appropriate support to prison leavers.

**2.8** Our recent report on *Digital transformation in government* highlighted how performance data can be used to inform decision-making. The Central Digital and Data Office (CDDO) collects departmental data to track key performance and maturity indicators, including progress against efficiency savings. CDDO and HM Treasury collect and review a range of financial and narrative metrics on a quarterly basis in order to agree performance targets and assess overall progress in delivering the commitments set out in the *2022–2025 roadmap for digital and data*. Progress is also reported to the Digital and Data Board every six months.

## Part Three

### Improving cross-government working

**3.1** In this part we cover:

- central support and mechanisms to facilitate cross-government working;
- evaluation of projects and programmes; and
- identifying good practice.

#### **Central support and guidance**

**3.2** HM Treasury is working to improve central support and guidance. Between February 2022 and March 2022, HM Treasury and Cabinet Office carried out an online survey of departmental practitioners and received 229 responses. This survey data indicated that some practitioners find it difficult to locate and apply the relevant guidance on how departments should work together.<sup>2</sup> HM Treasury has worked with the cross-government Policy Profession to develop a new joint-working 'hub' to support departments in identifying and establishing cross-cutting accountability structures and clear ways of working, as well as signposting relevant guidance and sources of support. It is in the process of developing a 'joint-working crib sheet', which will support departments to identify and establish cross-cutting accountability structures and clear ways of working.

<sup>2</sup> Of 229 responses, 64 respondents agreed that difficulty in finding relevant guidance had impacted the delivery of their work. 32 respondents agreed that the delivery of their work had been impacted by difficulties in applying the guidance. See Appendix One for further details on HM Treasury and Cabinet Office survey data.



**3.3** The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 requires specific public bodies in Wales to carry out sustainable development and work towards achieving seven well-being goals. Public bodies must do that by acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle and take account of five ways of working, which include collaboration and integration. The Welsh Government has issued statutory guidance on the sustainable development principle which covers how to take an integrated and collaborative approach in achieving an organisation's objectives. The independent Future Generations Commissioner for Wales has developed a maturity matrix that supports organisations implementing the Act. The maturity matrix is designed to allow organisations to identify where their current practice sits in relation to each of the five ways of working and the next steps the organisation can take to embed the ways of working further. The maturity matrix includes advice on a range of key elements such as how best to identify and understand interdependencies, how to find opportunities to collaborate and share best practice, and how to avoid duplication of time and effort across multiple bodies.

**3.4** In England, additional funding is an incentive used to encourage cross-government working, with the Shared Outcomes Fund (the Fund) being the most recent initiative. It was set up by HM Treasury in 2019 with an initial allocation of up to £200 million to fund pilot projects that test innovative ways of working across the public sector, with an emphasis on thorough plans for evaluation. Spending Reviews 2020 and 2021 announced a further £200 million of funding each to the scheme to allow the government to keep supporting pilot projects and to scale up those where evaluation has shown they work, bringing the total funding made available through the scheme to £600 million. As at 31 May 2023, 44 projects have received support.

**3.5** One such project is the Department for Education's Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce (APST), which received a total of £15.6 million from the Fund to deliver a two-year pilot. This is being used to support young people in alternative provision schools who are most at risk of serious violence or gang exploitation by giving targeted specialist support to keep them engaged in education and attending school (**Figure 6** overleaf). The Department for Education reports monitoring information to HM Treasury quarterly. An independent evaluation of the pilot was commissioned by the Youth Endowment Fund, and this is due to be published in June 2025.

---

## Figure 6

### Shared Outcomes Fund pilot project: Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce (APST), 2021

**The APST programme received £15.6 million of funding through the Shared Outcomes Fund for a two-year pilot scheme**

---

#### Aim of the pilot project

The pilot project aims to provide intensive, co-located on-site multi-agency support to vulnerable pupils in alternative provision schools to get them back on track with their studies and prevent them from being drawn into gang activity or becoming involved with serious violence.

---

#### Bodies involved in delivering pilot project

Lead department: Department for Education

Supporting bodies: Department for Culture, Media & Sport; Department of Health & Social Care; Home Office; Ministry of Justice; Department for Work & Pensions; and the Youth Justice Board.

---

#### Cross-government approach

This project is testing the impact of embedding multi-disciplinary teams of specialists from across education, health care, justice, and youth services in a sample of alternative provision schools that are in serious violence hotspots. This includes mental health workers, youth workers, speech and language therapists, family support workers, youth justice workers, and post-16 transition workers. This blended team of specialists from across different areas allows for the provision of wraparound support and early needs assessment.

---

#### Reported impact to date

Between November 2021 and March 2023, over 3,200 children have been supported by an APST pilot team. Feedback to the Department for Education from APST pilot teams is demonstrating the value of building trusted relationships and offering timely and accessible support. Co-locating the core group of specialists has improved staff training and enabled a holistic understanding of, and response to, a child's needs.

---

#### Future evaluation

The Youth Endowment Fund are funding an independent evaluation of the APST pilot project. This will include assessing the impact of the APST on a range of outcomes such as pupil well-being, post-16 outcomes, attendance, attainment, and involvement with serious crime. It will also assess the cost of delivering APST for the schools involved and the implementation experience of those involved in delivering the pilot.

---

#### Sharing best practice

All pilot teams who have received funding through the Shared Outcomes Fund have been invited to join a cross-government network where project teams are invited to share their learning and experiences. Within the APST programme, the Department for Education also supports collaboration between the schools involved in the pilot. The sharing of best practice is facilitated via an online collaboration hub; via face-to-face events; and via regular virtual communities of practice between specialists from different areas.

---

Source: National Audit Office analysis of published document *Targeted support for vulnerable young people in serious violence hotspots*, published by the Department for Education

---

**3.6** Our work on *Improving outcomes for women in the criminal justice system* highlighted that costs and benefits are often not spread evenly among implementation partners. The centre of government can use its position to incentivise bodies to take the best course of action for the whole system, including incentivising staff to work across organisational boundaries to deliver on joint outcomes. We have previously identified this as an area of good practice in our report on *EU Exit preparations*, where we found staff effectively working cross-government in response to capacity constraints. In this case government had set up a central system to make it easier to move staff between departments, matching need and operating at speed. We found that this had enabled government to respond more quickly as and when issues arose.

## Evaluation

**3.7** We regularly report on the importance of ongoing monitoring and evaluation of projects and programmes. Given that many cross-department initiatives are in priority policy areas where there is still limited evidence of what works, such as net zero and levelling-up, it is particularly important that effective evaluation arrangements are in place. Our *Framework for auditing evaluations* noted that evaluation allows government to make informed decisions and helps it learn what works. Using this information in future projects will improve design and implementation and lead to a greater likelihood of objectives being achieved. HM Treasury's Green Book guidance states that "monitoring and evaluation of all proposals should be [...] an integral part of all proposed interventions". Our report *Evaluating government spending* found that 8% of government spend on major projects had robust evaluation plans in place in 2019. Since 2013, individual departments have undertaken initiatives to improve evaluation. However, we identified in our report that the use of evaluation continues to be variable and inconsistent, and the government has been slow to address problems.

**3.8** In April 2021, government set up a joint Evaluation Task Force of Cabinet Office and HM Treasury specialists to support evaluation of policies and programmes across government. The Evaluation Task Force aims to drive continuous improvements in the way that government projects and programmes are evaluated to inform decisions on whether they should be stopped, continued, expanded or modified. Our 2021 report noted that there has been a change in momentum, with HM Treasury and Cabinet Office being more proactive on evaluation since 2020. For example, HM Treasury made greater use of its powers, requiring departments to include plans for evaluations in order for it to approve funding at the 2020 Spending Review.

## Identifying good practice

**3.9** Government sometimes finds it challenging to share best practice and lessons learned. Our report on *Progress with trade negotiations* recommended that the then Department for International Trade should ensure it learns lessons from the progress it has made on multiple negotiations so far. It should ensure that feedback, learning and sector knowledge from across departments and devolved administrations is recorded and shared, and used to inform an improved approach in future negotiations.

**3.10** Our *Framework for auditing evaluations* notes the importance of collating evaluation findings and lessons learned so they can be easily accessed and shared. This includes government maintaining a central repository of evaluation evidence on different policy areas, which is kept updated and is accessible to analysts and policy professionals. Working groups have traditionally been used to support the identification and dissemination of best practice. While they can be a valuable tool, they often need central support to operate effectively. Our 2021 report on *Central oversight of arm's-length bodies* recommended that Cabinet Office should support departments in developing and strengthening such groups to facilitate better sharing of good practice. The sharing of good practice and learning is essential to the effective management of an intervention and can be valuable in pre-empting factors that are likely to impact on future projects.

**3.11** Cross-government forums can be a useful way of supporting effective working relationships and communication between departments. In 2019, the government set up the EU Exit Operations cabinet committee to help with 'no-deal' preparations. This forum helped bring ministers and officials together more regularly to forge a common understanding of the task ahead, and such regular cross-government communication can also help to facilitate learning and knowledge-sharing between departments. Government must make sure that the level of integration and coordination required between departments supports establishing such structures, but where it does they can be a useful tool in fostering effective relationships.

# Appendix One

## Our evidence base

**1** We analysed evidence between October 2022 and May 2023 in order to understand the challenges to cross-government working, key learning from our back catalogue on cross-government working including common pitfalls and good practice, and government's current initiatives in relation to cross-government working.

### **Departmental interviews**

**2** We held interviews with Cabinet Office and HM Treasury to discuss:

- HM Treasury and Cabinet Office's work to identify the barriers to cross-government working and their ambitions to improve departmental support and to facilitate joined-up working;
- how Outcome Delivery Plans (ODPs) are designed to support the identification and delivery of cross-cutting outcomes; and
- how the Shared Outcomes Fund is being used to incentivise cross-government working, with a particular focus on evaluation.

### **Review of Outcome Delivery Plans (ODPs)**

**3** We reviewed the ODPs for 19 departments, published in July 2021. We also reviewed the 20 agreed cross-cutting outcomes published in October 2021. We identified the lead departments responsible for delivering each of the joint priority outcomes and their supporting departments. We were able to highlight those departments that, according to their ODPs, are more likely to work across government to deliver cross-cutting outcomes.

## **Review of HM Treasury and Cabinet Office survey data**

**4** HM Treasury and Cabinet Office carried out an online survey of departmental practitioners between February 2022 and March 2022. Their results were based on 229 responses from 15 different departments and 3 other bodies involved in cross-government working. Responses were internal and based on 18 questions aimed at understanding the extent to which different barriers impact on cross-government working. We reviewed this data and have used it to support Figure 4 in our report. It should be noted that this is not a statistically representative sample of the views of all practitioners and instead is an indication of some of the barriers faced to joint working. It may over- or under-estimate the actual prevalence of such barriers.

## **Published National Audit Office reports and document review**

**5** This report and our accompanying guide draw on our experience of auditing programmes that require cross-government working to achieve the desired outcomes. We provide case examples to illustrate good practice in cross-government working, as well as the challenges and common pitfalls departments often encounter. The summaries provided in this report and guide reflect our findings at the time of the original report. We have not included details of follow-up action departments may have taken to respond to our findings.

**6** Our previous reports on cross-government working can be found on our website. We have used the following National Audit Office reports to inform our findings:

- Comptroller and Auditor General, *Tackling fraud and corruption against government*, Session 2022-23, HC 1199, National Audit Office, March 2023.
- Comptroller and Auditor General, *Government shared services*, Session 2022-23, HC 921, National Audit Office, November 2022.
- Comptroller and Auditor General, *Progress combatting fraud*, Session 2022-23, HC 654, National Audit Office, November 2022.
- Comptroller and Auditor General, *Improving outcomes for women in the criminal justice system*, Session 2021-22, HC 1012, National Audit Office, January 2022.
- Comptroller and Auditor General, *Progress with trade negotiations*, Session 2021-22, HC 862, National Audit Office, December 2021.
- Comptroller and Auditor General, *The government's preparedness for the COVID-19 pandemic: lessons for government on risk management*, Session 2021-22, HC 735, National Audit Office, November 2021.

- Comptroller and Auditor General, *Central oversight of arm's-length bodies*, Session 2021-22, HC 297, National Audit Office, June 2021.
  - Comptroller and Auditor General, *The government's approach to test and trace in England – interim report*, Session 2019–2021, HC 1070, National Audit Office, December 2020.
  - Comptroller and Auditor General, *Achieving net zero*, Session 2019–2021, HC 1035, National Audit Office, December 2020.
  - Comptroller and Auditor General, *Challenges in using data across government*, Session 2017–2019, HC 2220, National Audit Office, June 2019.
  - Comptroller and Auditor General, *Local authority governance*, Session 2017–2019, HC 1865, National Audit Office, January 2019.
  - Comptroller and Auditor General, *Improving government's planning and spending framework*, Session 2017–2019, HC 1679, National Audit Office, November 2018.
  - Comptroller and Auditor General, *Integration across government*, Session 2012-13, HC 1041, National Audit Office, March 2013.
- 7** We also used the following National Audit Office frameworks:
- National Audit Office, *Improving government data: A guide for senior leaders*, July 2022.
  - National Audit Office, *Evaluating government spending: an audit framework*, April 2022.

## **Consultation with departments**

**8** We held four discussions with representatives from Cabinet Office and HM Treasury on our guide to cross-government working. These were to assess whether we had identified the most important issues government needs to tackle, and to seek views on how government can become more effective in these areas. Relevant feedback from these meetings was incorporated into the guide.

## **International examples**

**9** We contacted 11 international Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) to understand whether their government regularly delivers cross-departmental initiatives, what mechanisms they have in place to capture cross-cutting priorities, the main barriers to effective cross-departmental working, any initiatives or incentives to make cross-departmental working easier, and any examples of good practice that they were aware of. From the 11 requests we received eight responses, allowing us to consider international comparisons as we developed our outputs.









This report has been printed on Pro Digital Silk and contains material sourced from responsibly managed and sustainable forests certified in accordance with the FSC (Forest Stewardship Council).

The wood pulp is totally recyclable and acid-free. Our printers also have full ISO 14001 environmental accreditation, which ensures that they have effective procedures in place to manage waste and practices that may affect the environment.



National Audit Office

Design and Production by NAO Communications Team  
DP Ref: 012220-001

£10.00

ISBN 978-1-78604-502-7



9 781786 045027