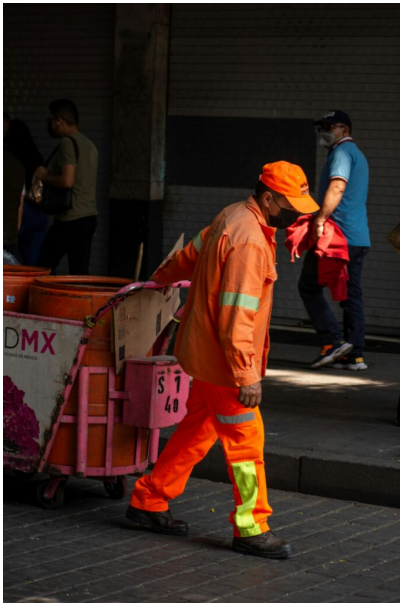


Improving operational capability is crucial to meet rising demand with stretched resources – NAO

7 months ago



With public services under pressure from rising demand and stretched resources, the [National Audit Office \(NAO\)](#) highlights that improving operational delivery is crucial to enhance services and ensure value for taxpayers.

In 2024-25, central government departments were expected to spend over £450 billion on the day-to-day running costs of public services, grants and administration, which is approximately 35% of public spending. Poor service across the public and private sectors costs UK organisations around £7.3 billion every month, due to the amount of employee's time fixing problems, handling complaints, and dealing with things that went wrong.

In its latest report, the NAO outlines the critical importance of smarter operational delivery – where policy meets people – by drawing on a wide range of case studies including the Home Office, DVLA and NHS to understand how departments are innovating, adapting, and improving the way public services are delivered.

The current operating challenges for government organisations include:

- New and changing levels of demand for services, such as responding to seasonal patterns and unforeseen crises
- Improving productivity and reducing costs to meet fiscal challenges
- Changes to the operational capabilities and workforce needed to manage and improve services

- Implementing the government's new 'delivery agenda'¹ to improve outcomes from government's services

Getting operational capability right means better quality services, more output for the same or lower cost, and improved outcomes for the people who rely on them, which is why the NAO has focused on four key capabilities government organisations need to learn for smarter delivery.

The capabilities:

- Taking a whole-system approach: Dealing with complexity and uncertainty by understanding how the different parts of the system work, what service users' needs are, and how processes connect.
- Understand and deal with demand: Designing and running services in a way that provides people with what they want, when they want it, and get it right the first time.
- Use information to improve: Working to understand how services are performing, and use that information to decide what to change, why, and how.
- Have a systematic approach to innovation and improvement: Knowing where problems happen or where there are opportunities to improve.

Government's approach to building operational capability

The Operational Delivery Profession (ODP) is the largest profession in the UK Civil Service, playing a vital role in the day-to-day delivery of public services. Professions focus on developing the capabilities of staff, with profession-specific skills, and providing them with career development opportunities.

It has over 290,000 members, more than half of the entire civil service workforce. ODP's roles span a wide range of services, including processing benefit claims, issuing passports, managing prisons, handling planning applications, and working at the UK border.

Looking to the future, the ODP's new strategy recognises that the skills required by operational delivery professionals are evolving. Operational management knowledge, such as how to resource to meet supply and demand, and how to design and manage services for work to flow smoothly and achieve high throughput, is still required, but people also need to know how to use that expertise in a digital service operating context – for example via using artificial intelligence, and developing user-friendly apps.