

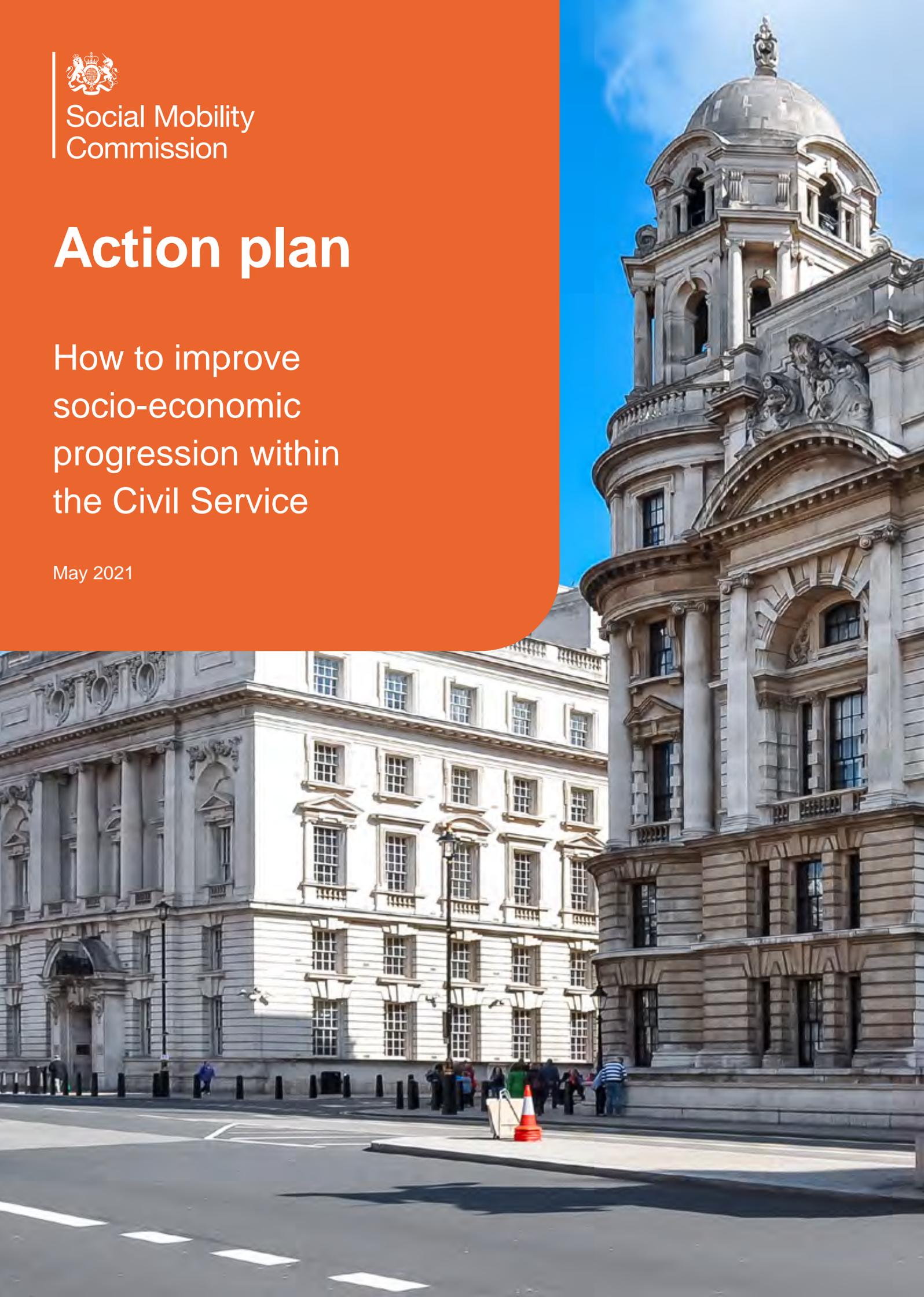


Social Mobility
Commission

Action plan

How to improve
socio-economic
progression within
the Civil Service

May 2021



Introduction



Cabinet Office at Whitehall road, City of Westminster, Central London

This action plan outlines a set of practical recommendations to improve socio-economic diversity and inclusion in the Civil Service, based on the barriers uncovered in the complementary report, *Navigating the labyrinth*.¹

We highlight case studies of good practice in various government departments and show resources all employers – not just Civil Service departments – can use to drive greater socio-economic diversity and inclusion.

In formulating this action plan, we have drawn on our work with employers.² We consulted with dozens of civil servants, working at both cross-government level in Civil Service Human Resources, and within departments designing and delivering local interventions on inclusion, talent, apprenticeships and learning and development. We have also evaluated the huge breadth of work happening across the Civil Service on socio-economic background (SEB).

We believe the action plan that this process has generated, while made for the Civil Service, offers many tangible steps that all employers can apply as they seek to tackle socio-economic barriers to progression. There is no ‘silver bullet’ to solving diversity and inclusion, and that shines through in our multi-step plan. Employers should embrace a layered approach to drive change.

¹ Social Mobility Commission, [Navigating the labyrinth: Socio-economic background and career progression within the Civil Service](#), 2021.

² View www.socialmobilityworks.org.

The Civil Service workforce action plan

ACTION POINT 1

Establish a cross-departmental workforce strategy to improve socio-economic diversity and inclusion within the Civil Service, with delivery at a local level in departments. The Cabinet Office should have responsibility for overseeing and ensuring effective implementation.



Cabinet Office plays a central coordinating role across workforce matters. It should be responsible for establishing and implementing a cross-government workforce strategy on socio-economic diversity and inclusion, with delivery undertaken by each department. There are pockets of best practice and innovative programmes in individual departments but no central strategy or coordination to scale-up activity.

A strong socio-economic diversity and inclusion strategy should ensure clear outcomes and accountability for departments, highlight 'scalable' initiatives, and be ambitious enough to drive change. It should consider how aligned but currently under-utilise initiatives, such as the Civil Service apprenticeship strategy, can be used to reach wider diversity targets. In its delivery, the strategy should ensure coordination across departments, for example by joining up departmental outreach efforts to avoid duplication and targeting

geographic coldspot areas and institutions that are missing out.³ An outcome of the strategy should be the production of case studies to showcase the pockets of best practice throughout the Civil Service, which other departments can replicate.⁴

Importantly, most departments rely on anecdotal views of the impacts of their initiatives. The plan will need effective evaluation. Cabinet Office should analyse – either itself or with external support – the effectiveness of ‘go-to’ diversity and inclusion initiatives on socio-economic background, such as mentorships, sponsorships and Senior Civil Service flow targets, to determine their effectiveness.

Alongside this strategy, Cabinet Office should produce guidance on two topics that departments have regularly asked for more support:

How departments can use positive action to drive change.

Our work surfaced that many departmental leads are hesitant to use positive action, due to misgivings that socio-economic background is not a protected characteristic. This is not based in the law and clear guidance from Cabinet Office can give assurances to departments on what they can – and cannot – do.^{5, 6}

How departments can use exceptions within the Civil Service

Commission Recruitment Principles to improve socio-economic diversity.

For example *Exception 2* allows for fixed term appointments “for individuals whose circumstances and previous life chances make it difficult for them to compete for appointments on merit on the basis of fair and open competition, without further work experience and/or training opportunities”.⁷

³ For a list of social mobility coldspots, see Social Mobility Commission, [State of the nation 2017](#), 2017.

⁴ For example, many feature on our microsite: <https://socialmobilityworks.org/success-stories/>.

⁵ Equality Act 2010, [Section 159, Positive action: recruitment and promotion](#), accessed March 2021.

⁶ Government Equalities Office, [Equality Act 2010: What do I need to know? A quick guide to using positive action in recruitment and promotion](#), 2011.

⁷ Civil Service Commission, [Exceptions](#), accessed March 2021.

ACTION POINT 2

Introduce workforce-wide reporting on socio-economic background

Ultimately, the success of any strategy is underpinned by the quality of data collected and reported.

In undertaking research for this project we identified many problems relating to data collection and reporting which ranged from quality of measurements to low response rates. The Civil Service People Survey (CSPS – used in our report, *Navigating the labyrinth*) was the best data source available to undertake this type of analysis but is not intended as a workforce reporting mechanism.⁸ It is imperative that the Civil Service creates better datasets that are equivalent to what is currently available on other diversity characteristics. To achieve this, each department should collect the four questions on socio-economic background on their HR platforms, enabling Cabinet Office to publish its socio-economic diversity data in full annually in the Annual Civil Service Employment Survey, alongside other diversity characteristics. Departments must put concerted efforts into driving up response rates to these socio-economic diversity questions to facilitate this.

Improve your response rates

The quality and value of the data you collect depends on high response rates



Applicants and employees are more likely to engage with socio-economic background questions if they see them as part of an integrated diversity and inclusion' strategy



Explain why this information is important and how it will drive positive change



Offer support and encouragement to managers, especially where response rates are low



Eventually, make responses to surveys compulsory but always with 'Prefer not to say' as an option on the survey



Issues around data storage, use and confidentiality are critically important. Be clear about this: who will see data, how you will ensure anonymity, and how it will be stored and used



Use senior leaders to act as role models

⁸ Social Mobility Commission, [Navigating the labyrinth](#), 2021.

What to ask

All employers, including Civil Service departments, should ask job applicants, apprentices and their workforce the following four questions to assess socio-economic background:

The key question: What was the occupation of your main household earner when you were about aged 14?*

This question is the best measure to assess someone's socio-economic background. Not only that but it's easy to understand, it gets high response rates in testing, and it's applicable to those from all ages and from all countries. It is the main measure we have used in our report, *Navigating the labyrinth*, and is the question we tell all employers to use.

The full version of this question (used in the Civil Service People Survey) has four follow-up questions that improve its accuracy. In 2020, we released a one step, simplified version. The Civil Service can choose to continue using the slightly more accurate four-part version or the new one-part version, which could help drive up response rates and simplify analysis. Regardless, departments should use the one-part version for supplementary staff surveys, where there isn't enough space for the full version.

Question 2: Which type of school did you attend for the most time between the ages of 11 and 16?*

This measure shows extreme economic and cultural advantage because it looks at how many of your workforce attended fee-paying schools. Our joint research with the Sutton Trust, *Elitist Britain*, shows how private school attendees are over-represented in many of the UK's top jobs, including the Senior Civil Service. Plus, many departments have collected this measure for years and can use it to track longitudinal trends.

Question 3: If you finished school after 1980, were you eligible for free school meals at any point during your school years?*

This is a measure of extreme economic disadvantage. Roughly the poorest 15% of the population receive free school meals. The question is easy to understand and many departments have been tracking it for years, giving longitudinal data.

Question 4: Did either of your parents attend university and gain a degree (for example BA/BSc or equivalent) by the time you were 18?*

Attending university gives a nuanced form of cultural advantage, as organisational cultures tend to favour graduates. Being the 'first in family' to attend university signals a potential lack of support to navigate university and entry into the graduate workforce. This can help you understand the experiences and needs of your graduate hires.

*Find the exact wording of these questions, including response categories, at: <https://socialmobilityworks.org/toolkit/measurement/>

Moving forward the Civil Service should:

- 2.1** Mandate that SEB data is collected consistently at a departmental level on HR platforms so that it can be published in the Annual Civil Service Employment Survey.
- 2.2** Empower departmental HR and internal communications leads to drive up response rates to these SEB questions, using best practice.⁹
- 2.3** Publish annually on gov.uk the SEB data across the workforce, within grade levels, within professions, and within departments, by location, by gender, by ethnicity, by disability and by LGBT.
- 2.4** Use national benchmarks to assess progress, with the aim of creating a proportionately representative Civil Service.
- 2.5** Set five-year targets for improvement and publish an action plan for achieving these.
- 2.6** Examine the socio-economic background of staff at each grade, including within the grades of the Senior Civil Service and the most senior 200 Civil Servants – the ‘top 200’.¹⁰
- 2.7** Examine the socio-economic backgrounds of those leaving the Civil Service at different grades, to better understand the potential link between socio-economic background and attrition rates.
- 2.8** Collect better data on progression within and between departments, to allow for regression and/or sequence analyses on progression to take place, for example by creating a Civil Service-wide staff number that stays with employees for the duration of their Civil Service career.¹¹
- 2.9** Clarify statistical definitions and improve data collection on which professions and functions of the Civil Service employees belong to, to enable more granular analysis of SEB by professions and functions.¹²

9 See our guidance to employers here: <https://socialmobilityworks.org/toolkit/measurement/#buy-in>.

10 Due to how the CSPA is delivered, this report grouped all SCS together; future work should analyse each grade level within the SCS.

11 Currently, there is no way to track career progression when civil servants move departments. Moving departments is a key feature of how civil servants progress their careers and is thus important to study analytically. A Cabinet Office system for assigning an employee number would enable more sophisticated analysis to unpick the effect of socio-economic background on career trajectories.

12 We hypothesise that the effects we have identified in policy and operations will exist in other professions/functions but we lacked the data to test this hypothesis.



HM Revenue & Customs

CASE STUDY

Maximising response rates with HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC)

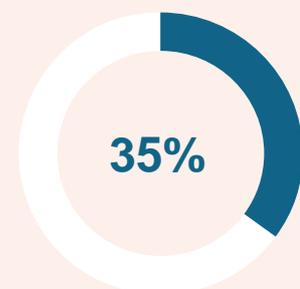
Establishing a robust baseline of employees' socio-economic background was key to HMRC's strategy for creating an inclusive workplace. The department commissioned a survey that aimed for a representative sample of all staff and grades. Given the size and diversity of the workforce, researchers issued the questionnaire to around 12,000 staff and planned for a response rate of 35% within a three-week period.

The department took several important steps to explain to staff why the survey was important and how the results would be used. To maximise publicity, researchers worked closely with businesses leads, unions and senior leaders to gain their agreement and support to issue the survey, issued messages to all managers and added a news article to the intranet. Staff invited to take part received a personalised message from the project's senior sponsor, and were assured that their responses would be completely anonymous. Once collected, survey data was stored in a restricted folder, which could only be accessed by the project analysts.

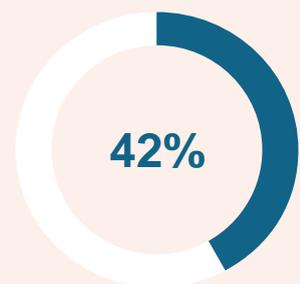
These steps resulted in a response rate of 42%, well above the planned figure. Findings and personal social mobility stories were shared with staff, inspiring a rise in members of networks promoting progress on social mobility and inclusion within HMRC.

12,000 staff

3 weeks



Expected response rate



Actual response rate



Ministry of Justice

CASE STUDY

Data with Ministry of Justice



The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) has over 70,000 staff in locations across the UK. High quality data is key to understanding and improving socio-economic diversity in such a large and varied organisation. All staff are asked questions to establish their socio-economic background, aligned to those recommended by the Social Mobility Commission.¹³ Applicants are asked when they apply; existing staff are asked to update their internal HR profiles; and the questions are asked on the annual staff survey.

Analysis of this data shows progress against three key targets: who gets in, who gets on and how does it feel? The data informs interventions ranging from schools' outreach activities and work experience opportunities in social mobility coldspots, to mentoring for staff from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Data also measures effectiveness: two-thirds of students attending one of almost 600 school events would consider a career in MoJ; and one-third of almost 400 staff entering into a mentoring relationship have since achieved promotion or level transfer. This clear strategy underpinned by quality data has established MoJ in the upper reaches of the Social Mobility Foundation's Social Mobility Employer Index.

70,000

staff in locations across the UK

3 key targets

who gets in
who gets on
how does it feel

2/3



of students attending one of almost 600 school events would consider a career in MoJ

1/3 of 400 staff



entering into a mentoring relationship have since achieved promotion or level transfer

ACTION POINT 3

Use training and 'learning and development' to drive positive change

Our work on adult education and training shows persistent and clear trends: those from higher socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to receive training than their less privileged peers.¹⁴ 'Learning and development' and training courses are all widely used within the Civil Service and can help enable career progression – but only if they are fairly distributed.¹⁵ The Civil Service has many leading practices in this space. Generally, it supports staff to use paid days to conduct training; regular performance meetings with managers keep progression conversations at the forefront; training courses and travel to get to training is paid for, and more.

In our work with employers, we have developed an Organisational Practice Model to help guide employers who want to target more training to overlooked groups.¹⁶ Based on this work, we recommend the Civil Service should:

- 3.1** Analyse whether learning and development training is disproportionately given to those from higher SEBs.
- 3.2** Set targets for participation in learning and development training by department by socio-economic background.
- 3.3** Gain buy-in from senior leaders in each department to address any disparities found and use department-wide calls to reinforce a culture of training.
- 3.4** Regularly communicate to the workforce why learning and development is important.
- 3.5** Consider how organisational structures may prohibit some from participating – for example, our work has found that employees who spend most of their day working without a computer often face barriers when training is communicated and accessed only via emails or online platforms.

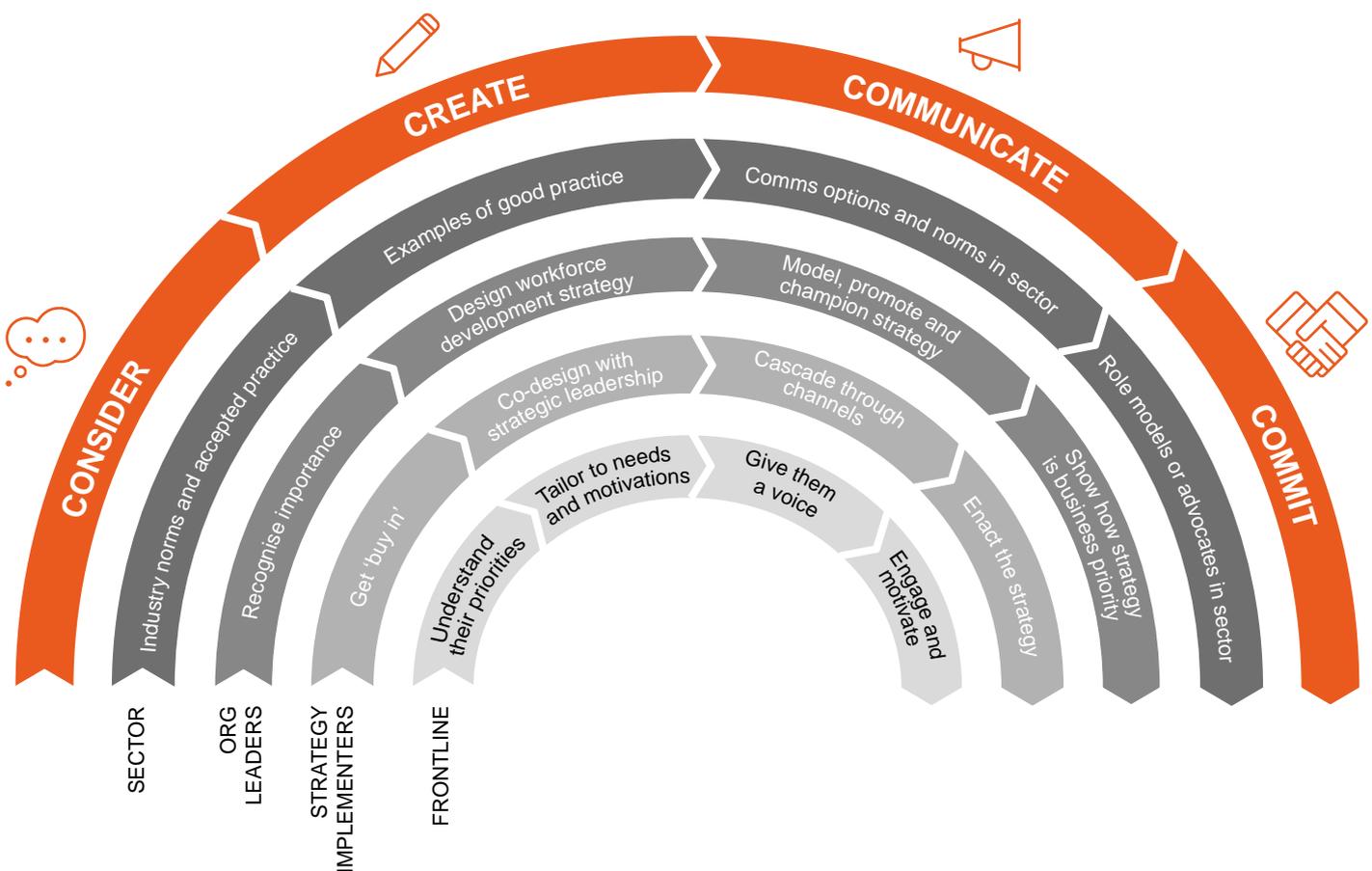
¹⁴ Social Mobility Commission, [Learning ladders: increasing in-work progression](#), 2020.

¹⁵ Due to limitations in the dataset, our research could not evaluate whether these measures were helping those from low socio-economic backgrounds to access and benefit from training opportunities at the same rates as others.

¹⁶ Social Mobility Commission, [Increasing in-work training and progression opportunities for low-skilled workers](#), 2020.

- 3.6** Ensure line managers are conducting regular performance reviews and are considering how learning and development opportunities can be directed to under-developed staff.
- 3.7** Ensure training offers are relevant, engaging and useful – while this is useful for all training, our work on progression for those in lower skilled jobs has found it particularly important for those who had negative experiences in educational settings and who may find the idea of ‘training’ undesirable.

Figure 1 Organisational Practice Model to help employers develop behavioural insights guided strategies to tackle progression¹⁷



¹⁷ Social Mobility Commission, [Increasing in-work training and progression for frontline workers](#), 2020.

ACTION POINT 4

Use apprenticeships to drive your strategy

The Civil Service apprenticeship strategy – and the wider public sector strategy – does not currently address socio-economic diversity sufficiently. We know that apprenticeships do not automatically boost socio-economic diversity unless there is an explicit commitment to targeting offers and support to the working class.¹⁸ And yet, through our work to help diversify apprenticeships within the Civil Service, we found departmental apprenticeship leads often lacked an understanding of the SEB makeup of their apprenticeship starts, or where they did, they lacked understanding on how to benchmark this with their own departmental workforce or interpret it in meaningful ways to drive change. Within apprenticeship data, held by Cabinet Office and communicated to departments, declaration rates of apprenticeship starts were too small to be analysed by important factors (such as level, completion or professions) and were not published. Cabinet Office officials were unsure when and how apprentices were asked to disclose their SEB, or how to target support to drive up declaration rates.

The Civil Service Apprenticeship Strategy is due soon and solving these data issues are critical to create a data-driven approach that works for social mobility. Without addressing this, the strategy is unlikely to deliver for social mobility.

Cabinet Office should:

- 4.1** Ensure that each department's HR platform captures which of the workforce are apprentices, to reduce how often apprentices are asked to disclose their background and to help unify and expand the available reporting and analysis on apprenticeships. This is already happening in some departments but is inconsistent.
- 4.2** Publish annually (on gov.uk) the SEB makeup of apprenticeships starts, level of apprenticeship, completion, profession/function breakdown and progression post-apprenticeship.¹⁹

¹⁸ Social Mobility Commission, [Apprenticeships and social mobility: Fulfilling potential?](#), 2020.

¹⁹ See our guidance to employers on measuring and reporting on apprenticeships here: <https://socialmobilityworks.org/toolkit/measurement/#apprenticeships>.

- 4.3** When providing apprenticeship data to departments in its quarterly ‘apprenticeship starts’ pack, Cabinet Office should benchmark each department’s apprenticeship SEB, gender and ethnicity rates to its workforce rates and the national benchmark to enable departmental leads to see results in context.²⁰
- 4.4** Cabinet Office should set targets in the upcoming apprenticeship strategy on SEB participation and completion rates.²¹

We will be releasing an apprenticeship toolkit for employers in 2021, which we anticipate will further help employers like the Civil Service drive social mobility through their apprenticeship offers.

ACTION POINT 5

Increase representation of senior civil servants (SCS) from low SEBs

Our work found those from lower SEBs are under-represented in senior leadership roles (the Senior Civil Service). To solve this:

- 5.1** Cabinet Office and individual departments should establish five-year ‘flow targets’ to increase numbers of SCS from low SEBs across the workforce.
- 5.2** Talent schemes (such as the Future Leaders Scheme / Senior Leaders Scheme / High Potential Development Scheme and others) should set targets for increasing representation of staff from low SEBs and consider ringfencing a certain percentage of slots for merit-based applicants from low SEBs, recognising this could overlap with other diversity characteristics including race and gender.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ In the interim, employers can view our webinars on how to improve apprenticeship outcomes at www.socialmobilityworks.org.



Department
for Work &
Pensions

CASE STUDY

Using apprenticeships to advance social mobility



DWP offers 18 month fixed-term apprenticeship opportunities to young unemployed individuals, with little or no work history or qualifications. The programme aims to identify people who would not otherwise be successful in securing employment (operating through *Exception 2* of the Civil Service Commission Recruitment Principles). The purpose is to train and educate them; and give them experience of a working environment.

There are no minimum level entry requirements to apply for the programme. DWP work coaches recruit at Jobcentres. Apprentices are at the administrative AO level and executive EO level and work towards a Level 2/3 apprenticeship (depending on their current knowledge and skills) in business administration or customer service practitioner and functional skills. Placements are run nationwide with apprentices working alongside existing employees, acting as 'buddies' for the new apprentices.

Apprentices receive training in work-related skills, including eight mandatory workshops that focus on CV writing, behaviours, body language, interviewing techniques and job searches. Both the training provider and line managers provide intensive support during the final months of the apprenticeship to help the apprentices secure permanent employment and they are allowed specific time to dedicate to their job search and time off for interviews.



18 month

fixed-term apprenticeship
opportunities to young
unemployed individuals

2,000

apprentices in 10 years
through DWP's programme

No minimum

level entry requirements to apply for
the programme

8 mandatory

workshops training
in work-related skills



Department for Education

CASE STUDY

Care Leaver Covenant – a Department for Education led, cross- government initiative



Young people leaving care are over three times more likely than their peers not to be in education, employment or training. They often don't have the same support networks of family and friends that other young people have, so are at risk of being left behind.

Since 2016, the Department for Education (DfE) in partnership with other Whitehall departments, and under *Exception 2* of the Civil Service's recruitment practices, has been implementing the cross-Government strategy [Keep on Caring](#) to support young people in care to make a successful transition to independence.

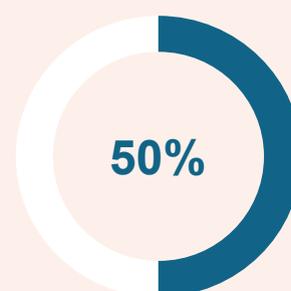
As part of that strategy, the DfE launched the [Care Leaver Covenant](#). The aim is to help young people aged 16 to 25 leaving care by encouraging public, private and voluntary sector organisations across society to make a commitment to offer them practical support, including better access to education, training and job opportunities and a roadmap to their very own social mobility journey.

All government departments have signed the Covenant. Their core offer is to provide paid 12-month internships for care leavers. Over 500 care leavers have taken up opportunities at administrative or executive officer level to work in one of 26 departments in the Civil Service to date; and over 250 were successful at interview in the 2020 intake.

The scheme, which is co-ordinated by DfE, helps interns develop the skills and competences they need to progress

3x

Young people leaving care are **over three times** more likely than their peers not to be in education, employment or training.



50%

Over **500**
care leavers have taken
up opportunities at
administrative or executive
officer level

Over **250**
were successful at interview
in the 2020 intake

into long-term jobs. Training days and support materials are available for the line managers, so they can hear directly about the challenges of moving from care to independence and develop the empathy and understanding needed to support the interns. The recent establishment of a care leaver intern peer network also helps interns to support each other through learning and development opportunities and by sharing experiences.

Danielle June joined the scheme in 2019 and reflects:

“ I joined the scheme in the beginning of 2019 and thanks to the opportunities and the stability this has offered me, I have achieved so much in such a short space of time. With the support from the department, I graduated [from] university with a first class degree, I travelled to London for the first time in my life, I've met Ministers, I've collaborated with external companies, delivered speeches and met some amazing individuals. I bought a house at 24, which is a huge achievement for any care leaver, but I managed to do it so young because of this scheme.

“ In the last year, I was promoted and I'm now a permanent member of the Civil Service. I've also just started my master's [degree] in the hope of progressing to do a PhD... I can see a future for my life when before there wasn't one. As a care leaver, I have unique skills and attributes and the scheme has helped me harness and develop these. But more importantly, this scheme has given me confidence again, not just in what I can do, but who I am as a person. I used to hate the label 'care leaver', but the internship has helped me to be proud of who I am and what I've overcome. It gave me a chance to reach my potential and for that I'll be forever grateful.”

A majority of the interns have had their contracts extended or been made permanent and some have subsequently been promoted, including one former intern who has secured three promotions and is now a Grade 7 at HMRC. With commitment and the right support from employers, care leavers can thrive and bring unique experience and drive to the organisations that open doors for them.

ACTION POINT 6

Equalise access to accelerator roles

This report highlights how certain roles act to accelerate careers by exposing staff to senior leaders or giving access to high profile work. If the Civil Service believes these roles do provide the kind of experience necessary to move into senior roles it must:

- 6.1** Be more transparent about the existence of accelerator roles.
- 6.2** Make sure access to this information is available to all civil servants, for example by highlighting vacancies through blogs or it being raised on 'all staff calls'.
- 6.3** Set limits for how many of these roles can be reserved by schemes such as the Fast Stream.
- 6.4** Target information about these jobs to departmental social mobility networks and to those in the Minority Ethnic Talent Association and Disability Empowers Leadership Talent (supplementary support programmes for those from protected characteristics who have already achieved a place on the Future Leaders Scheme on merit).
- 6.5** Set up a specific mentoring system for low SEB staff that mimics the role of 'organisational guides' in imparting information about the hidden rules of the Civil Service.



HM Revenue & Customs

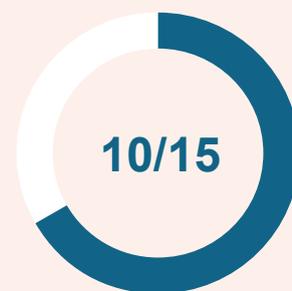
CASE STUDY

Driving sector-wide change by sharing initiatives and resources

HMRC is committed to supporting other departments to develop effective mentoring schemes, having itself benefited from support from the Ministry of Justice in setting up its own scheme.

HMRC organised a workshop for 15 other government departments to introduce its Stride mentoring scheme for employees from lower socio-economic backgrounds, sharing details about the programme, materials and resources, and the results it achieved.

Following the workshop, HMRC followed up with each department with further support for their mentorship schemes, and is now, together with the Ministry of Justice, piloting a new cross-government scheme with 10 of these in which staff are mentored or sponsored by senior leaders in other government departments.



Departments volunteered
to pilot the new
mentorship schemes



A prompt for a cross-government
mentorship scheme

ACTION POINT 7

Formalise the informal

At present there is considerable ambiguity about what the Civil Service considers 'good practice' when it comes to a series of 'grey area' promotion practices. Threats to leave and embellished job applications are two examples of how those from higher SEBs often gain promotion opportunities. These often occur outside of formal promotion opportunities which follow best practice, including blind applications, a focus on behaviours and strengths over 'fit' and more. To further strengthen promotion processes and bring 'grey moments' into better compliance with fair recruitment, the Civil Service should:

- 7.1** Provide specific guidelines on good practice in each of the 'interpretative moments' described in this report.
- 7.2** Regularly analyse whether Temporary Promotions (TP) and Expression of Interests (EOI) are disproportionately from high SEBs.
- 7.3** Bring TPs and EOIs closer to formal interview processes, without overburdening their need to be responsive, such as by requiring line managers to give formal feedback to EOI and TP candidates who are unsuccessful.
- 7.4** Consider how SEB diversity is represented on recruitment/promotion panels, in a similar way to how it is generally done currently for gender and ethnic minority diversity.



Ministry of Justice

CASE STUDY

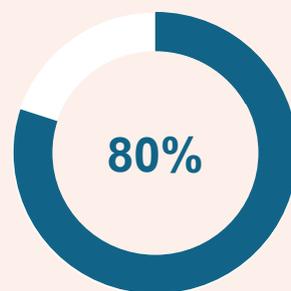
Facilitating progression via mentoring



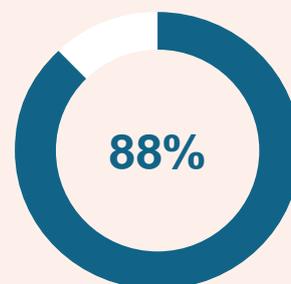
The Ministry of Justice had done a lot to reach out to and hire more socio-economically diverse talent, but it realised it had not paid as much attention to those already in the organisation.

Therefore, it developed Catapult, a mentoring scheme exclusive to employees from lower socio-economic backgrounds and the first of its kind in central government. Employees are paired with a senior leader (Grade 7 and above) within their profession or in another profession to be mentored for 6–12 months. It is designed to build confidence, promote job shadowing, develop skills and provide an internal network to inspire and help employees progress within the organisation.

The scheme has been commended by both mentors and mentees: around 80% claimed it had met their expectations; 88% found the sessions interesting; and within a year a third of mentees have been able to move either laterally to a different role or received promotion.



Satisfied with mentorship programme



Found the session interesting

1/3



Of mentees **have progressed or moved** within a year

Provide **exclusive mentoring schemes** for employees from lower socio-economic backgrounds for greater impact.

Encourage upward and lateral progression – pair mentees with leaders in the same profession or in another.

Measure the scheme's efficiency – collect data from mentors and mentees as well as progression rates.

ACTION POINT 8

Think beyond Whitehall

Access to senior officials and ministers, through working in London, can act as an important career advantage – but not one that everyone can benefit from. The ‘Places for Growth’ initiative aims to move 22,000 civil servants out of London.²² But without careful planning, this programme might inadvertently create other problems that reduce advancement opportunities for lower SEB staff in London. It is not enough to simply export lower-level roles to the regions and leave high profile, senior positions in London. Job freezes in London should also be monitored carefully, as they could disproportionately impact on certain groups more than others. For Places for Growth to deliver meaningful change for socio-economic diversity and inclusion, it must do the following:

- 8.1** Create a meaningful, transparent and long-term strategy that considers how grade mix, professions and other factors come together in regional hubs to enable true profession opportunities, with a goal that individuals in the regions are just as likely to be able to progress from EO to Director as they are if they move to London:
- Target expansion in areas SMC has identified as social mobility ‘coldspots’, ensuring there is greater transparency around publishing plans for target locations and the rationale in choosing each.²³
 - Set targets for the number of SCS, private office and policy roles that are moved outside of London.
 - Seek to move two to three permanent secretaries out of London, the south-east and the home counties by 2025.
 - Consider how departments can share facilities, to enable staff to travel to the nearest department, regardless of whether it is that person’s ‘home’ department, and to enable individuals in the regions to move departments more regularly.

²² HM Treasury, [Budget speech 2021](#), 2021.

²³ Social Mobility Commission, [State of the nation 2017](#), 2017.

8.2 Use data to inform the strategy:

- Conduct analysis of how many civil servants by socio-economic background move to London to take up roles, to better understand how class and internal migration affect access to civil service jobs.
- Monitor diversity data throughout Places for Growth's rollout to ensure unintended consequences – concentration of those from higher SEBs in London – do not occur.
- Ensure that working-class staff who originate from London and major cities still have pathways for progression.

8.3 Establish cultures to support revised ways of working:

- Normalise 'hiring from anywhere,' enabling and promoting greater flexible working and the ability to work from home, with minimal travel requirements to London.
- Normalise support mechanisms put in place under COVID-19, such as funding for employees who do considerable homeworking to purchase equipment (bigger monitors, keyboards, desk chair and so on).
- Ensure IT equipment in departments is appropriately set up to enable blended meetings – where some colleagues are in person and others on video – to run smoothly.

8.4 Where accelerator roles cannot be moved or during a transition period:

- Provide financial support for those moving from outside London to take up such roles, for example through schemes in place in some but not all departments such as rental deposits, advances of salaries or relocation packages.
- Enable short-term 'postings', inspired by Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ways of working, to allow for short rotations or cycles in London for those who live in the regions to do 6 or 12 month postings in accelerator roles.

ACTION POINT 9

Demystify the policy profession

Our analysis shows that those from low SEBs often self-select out of policy work, even though it is frequently the key to progression prospects because the skills needed to progress are often vague and the dominant culture that one needs to succeed favour those from higher socio-economic backgrounds.

To combat this, the Civil Service should:

- 9.1** Provide opportunities for lower grade (AO-HO) staff to get policy experience in departments and directorates that are heavily tilted towards operational roles.
- 9.2** Increase visibility of low SEB SCS who have progressed through both the policy and operational tracks.
- 9.3** The cross-government policy profession should set low-SEB targets at Civil Service and SCS level.
- 9.4** The policy profession should commit to greater outreach in social mobility coldspots to engage school leavers on what working in government policy entails.
- 9.5** The policy profession should strive to onboard more apprentices of all ages from low SEBs.
- 9.6** Make clear the skills and behaviours needed in the policy profession and use internal communications campaigns to highlight those from low SEBs who are progressing in policy roles.
- 9.7** Review whether the 'Success Profiles' framework, introduced in 2018 has achieved its intended effect of increasing value on skills and experience for recruitment.²⁴
- 9.8** Conduct an audit across job adverts for policy roles to assess whether they have emphasised the importance of skills and experience without requiring qualifications, which we know reduces the socio-economic diversity of applicants.
- 9.9** At outreach and hiring stages, and within bulk HR recruitment campaigns, consider how those who might self-select into operational roles might consider policy tracks.

²⁴ Cabinet Office, [Success Profiles](#), 2018.

ACTION POINT 10

Break the taboo around social class

Our analysis shows that many people from low SEBs, particularly women, do not feel comfortable talking about their backgrounds at work. This has important knock-on effects on mental health, wellbeing, and a sense of inclusion and belonging in the workplace. Similarly, we find many from high SEBs misrecognise their backgrounds as socially mobile.

The Civil Service must tackle this by:

- 10.1** Running an information campaign aimed at socialising the meaning of socio-economic background, how it's measured, but also tackling class stigma and the unintended impacts on people's perceptions of themselves.
- 10.2** Create or support existing staff-led forums and opportunities for those from lower SEBs, ethnic minorities and women, so that they can discuss their experiences in the workplace.



ACTION POINT 11

Start a conversation about talent

Among the barriers our analysis identified for low SEB civil servants, the key is how talent and merit is 'misidentified' according to whether people assimilate to dominant behavioural codes. To address this, the Civil Service should:

- 11.1** Pilot cultural sharing initiatives aimed at normalising and revaluing culture (taste, recreations and so on) associated with low SEB staff.
- 11.2** Conduct an audit of Future Leaders Scheme and other accelerated development schemes to see their socio-economic makeup and if they are inadvertently reproducing dominant behavioural codes that tilt in favour of those from high SEBs.

ACTION POINT 12

Focus on cumulative barriers to progression for low SEB women and ethnic minorities

Our work found that those from ethnic minority backgrounds tended to be more privileged than their White counterparts on average, suggesting a higher class 'bar' for entry, but that this privilege does not always then help them progress. It found that women from low socio-economic backgrounds hide their class at work and that more women from higher socio-economic backgrounds have made it to the SCS than working class women.

To combat this:

- 12.1** The Civil Service should conduct specific follow-up research examining the barriers faced by specific ethnic minorities from low SEBs, particularly in terms of access.
- 12.2** Cross-government networks (such as cross-government social mobility network, the women's network, the disability network, and the Civil Service race network) should hold biannual forums of their overlapping groups to give forums for those who face cumulative barriers.

Policy action

ACTION POINT 13

Create legal protection



Social mobility efforts in the Civil Service tend to be thwarted by the fact that legal protection for socio-economic background is not enshrined in the Equality Act. Advances in measurement and a clear evidence-base, including from this report, show that socio-economic background shapes access and progression in Britain's workplaces.

It underlines that the UK government should:

- 13.1** Make SEB a protected characteristic.
- 13.2** Enact the 'socio-economic duty', as Scotland has done and Wales plans to do.

21st century Parliament

ACTION POINT 14

Parliament should consider permanently adopting virtual working trialled during COVID-19, to enable MPs and Ministers to be based for more of the time in their constituencies or elsewhere in the UK.



Whilst not in the gift of the Civil Service or Government, we call on the relevant parliamentary authorities to embrace virtual participation, which has proved a useful evolution during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Past research on gender characteristics has highlighted the negative ways physically attending Parliament impacts on female MPs and on the overall diversity of MPs.^{25, 26} It has challenged the idea of physical presenteeism – that MPs must be physically present in Parliament in order to contribute. We recognise whilst the dynamics are somewhat different for working class participation as opposed to gender, that these changes could yield benefits.

²⁵ Childs, Sarah, [Written evidence submitted by Professor Sarah Childs \(CVR 26\)](#), 2020.

²⁶ Childs, Sarah, [The good Parliament](#), 2016.

Specifically, we see Parliament's physical requirements as impacting not only on under-represented MPs but on the Civil Service workforce. Ministers are bound to be where Parliament is. As long as that is in London, their private offices and senior civil servants will have strong arguments for remaining in the capital.

A permanent, flexible 21st century Parliament would give MPs and ministers more time in their home constituencies, may reduce the need for travel bursaries but most pertinent for this report, would enable regional Civil Service 'hubs' to house private offices and would significantly normalise with Ministers a common practice across the Civil Service – that teams are geographically dispersed.

Acknowledgement



We want to recognise and thank all those at Cabinet Office and across the Civil Service who contributed to this action plan. The Civil Service's transparency and openness on this agenda should be applauded. Now, we hope that transparency is met with action and that the steps outlined in this action plan are adopted into practice.



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