

REPORT

Data's role in propelling the UK public sector forward

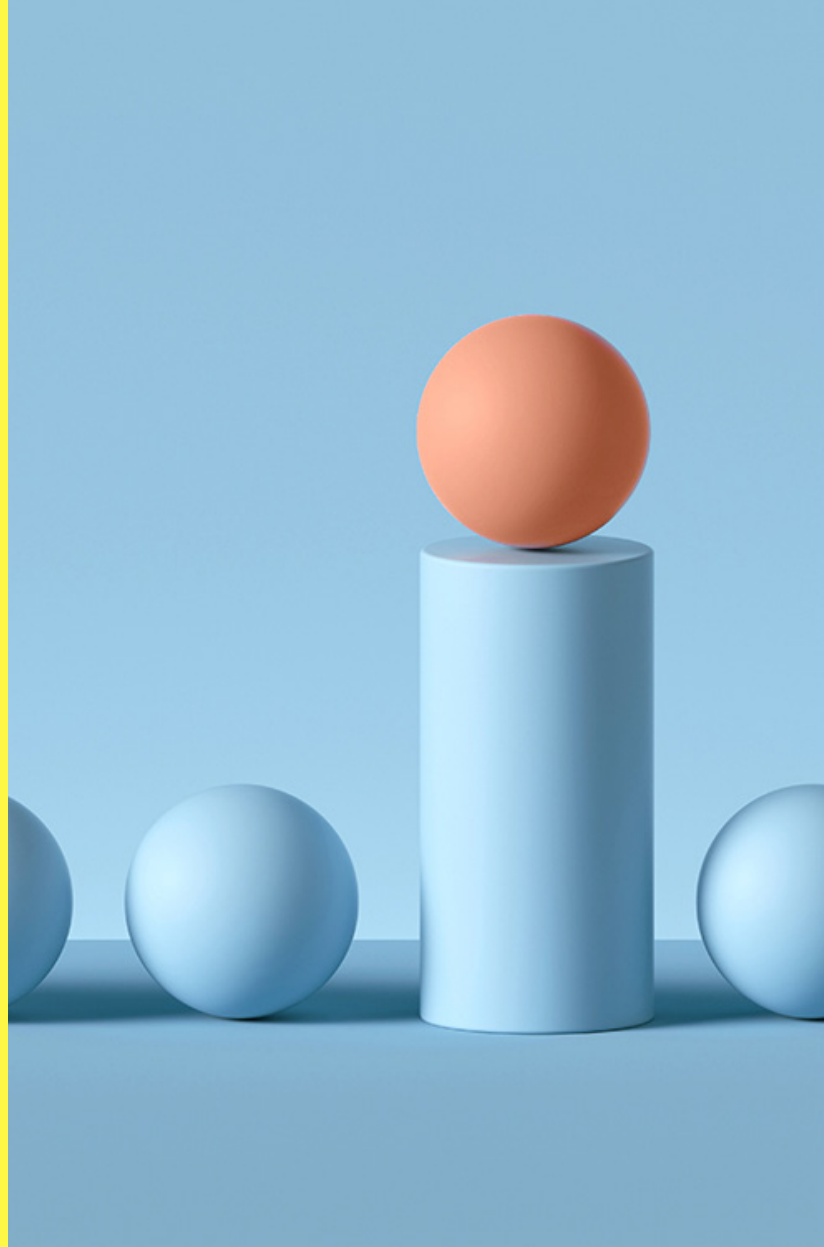


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Data is undoubtedly one of the buzzwords of the 21st century – for good reason. It’s now the driving force of the world’s modern economies, fuelling innovation in businesses large and small. Since the onset of the COVID pandemic, data has even helped to save lives and livelihoods, enabling governments, businesses, and public sector organisations to share vital information, efficiently and ethically.

On the road to economic recovery, we have an opportunity to make the most of the valuable lessons learned, to keep using data to innovate, experiment, and drive a new era of growth in the UK. Herein lies the purpose of the National Data Strategy (NDS), which is designed to harness the power of data to boost productivity, create new jobs, improve public services, and position the UK as a pioneer in the next wave of innovation.

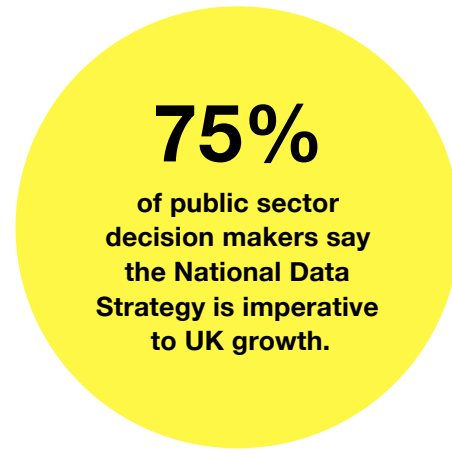
However, to move forward with the NDS, fiscal and physical investment is required to equip organisations, especially those in the public sector, with the necessary skills and infrastructure to use data effectively.

To explore the current state of data usage and effectiveness across the public sector, NetApp gathered insights from 200 public sector decision makers in the UK. This research report collates the findings of that survey. The NetApp® report examines the relationship between national policy and individual government departments, and the steps needed to help the public sector become truly data driven.

Do public sector leaders believe in the doctrine and direction of the National Data Strategy?

In its National Data Strategy manifesto, the UK government states its belief that unlocking the value of data is key to driving growth, both within the digital sector and across the wider economy. Most public sector leaders agree, with three-quarters (75%) saying that the NDS is imperative to the UK’s future economic growth, while 73% believe that it will help the UK cement its position as a global digital leader.

Furthermore, organisations across the public sector are using the NDS as a guide for their own data policies, with the majority (79%) of respondents saying that their organisation’s policy for how they use data is aligned to the NDS. Similarly, 71% are



also in favour of the UK having a central strategy to improve how data is used across the public sector.

Despite these responses, continued investment in infrastructure is required to improve processes around data sharing and delivery of digital services. Over half (56%) of respondents do not believe that their organisation’s data is currently stored on infrastructure that is fit-for-purpose, while just under half (47%) say that they require further investment to provide a platform to deliver digital services in the future.

Part and parcel of this challenge is the public sector’s longstanding dependence on legacy systems, which can make data difficult to collect, maintain, organise, and share, creating many barriers in the process. Removing data barriers requires upgraded infrastructure, to transform systems and make data more accessible. Only then can users begin to wield data to inform decisions and increase productivity.

Greater cloud adoption is the key to unlocking efficient data sharing and hybrid working

On the journey to becoming data driven, the need to harness the power of cloud and analytics to accelerate digital transformation will continue to be even more critical. The survey findings support this notion, with the majority (79%) of public sector organisations storing at least some of their data in the cloud. Key benefits cited are reducing costs (35%), enabling data sharing (35%), and supporting workers in hybrid environments (34%).



Given the mounting need for public sector organisations to expand their capacity for data sharing and the delivery of digital services to citizens, it's also likely that the investment in cloud will continue to grow in the next 12 months. NetApp's research is a clear indication of this, with a vast majority (87%) of respondents saying that they will maintain or grow their cloud expenditure, while more than half (53%) expect to increase their use of cloud services in the next 12 months.



However, although there is evidence that public sector strategies are maturing when it comes to investing in cloud services, this hasn't advanced at the expected rate. Since 2013 the UK government's flagship Cloud First policy has been at the forefront of enabling departments to shed their legacy IT

architecture to embrace digital transformation. But with only 30% of public sector leaders consciously adopting a cloud-first approach, cloud-appropriate is perhaps a more financially and operationally prudent way to describe the delivery of digitised public services.

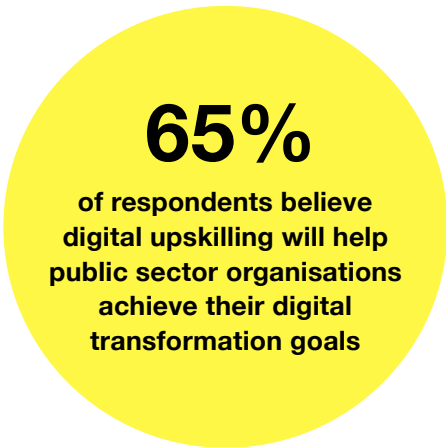
If the National Data Strategy is to truly position the UK as a pioneer in the next wave of innovation, more support is needed to bridge old and new worlds to drive the transition from complex legacy IT platforms to digital-first architectures.

To this end, hybrid cloud could well be the answer to the UK public sector's infrastructure challenges. By creating a hybrid cloud data fabric as opposed to separate disconnected storage silos, with support from NetApp, public sector organisations can improve data mobility and sharing, meet data compliance obligations, and optimise for both performance and cost.

Investment in technology must be underpinned by digital and data upskilling

Public sector organisations can elevate employee and citizen experiences by using data effectively in today's digital-driven economy. However, doing so requires data-literate individuals. Currently, there's a desperate need for digital skills that simply aren't there.

With one in eight job opportunities residing in the digital sector, the UK government's [data skills gap report](#) claims that as many as 234,000 data-related roles are presently unfilled.



In keeping with the government's report, NetApp's findings reveal that a majority of public sector leaders (69%) believe that their organisation must also change their culture to embrace new technology. Similarly, 63% also believe that a lack of employee training is a barrier to digital transformation, while the same number say that they need more support from senior management to meet digital objectives in 2022.

Ultimately, the looming shortage of technical skills is a challenge that organisations must overcome to expand their data sharing and digital capabilities, to truly benefit from investment in digital infrastructure and cloud services. In response, all roads seem to lead to training as the solution to close the gap, with 65% of public sector leaders agreeing that digital upskilling is required to help their organisation achieve its digital transformation goals.

Public sector organisations need to manage the vast amounts of data they have at their disposal, which is a complex undertaking with significant rewards. As well as implementing training and initiatives to increase IT proficiency and digital literacy among existing employees, the technology and higher education sectors must work together to produce data-savvy graduates across all disciplines. This effort will help organisations across all industries, beyond the public sector, respond to the challenge posed by the technical skills shortage and the increasing requirement for decision making at every level to be more data driven.



Conclusion

Following the onset of the pandemic, the kind of shifts that were expected to take place over a decade swept across the UK – and indeed, the world – seemingly overnight. But few sectors, if any, were as impacted as the public sector, as organisations scrambled to continue serving and protecting the public.

In the face of adversity, data emerged as a lifeline, informing decisions and guiding strategies that saved countless lives and kept the economy running during a period of intense disruption. In 2022, as the world continues to reopen and recover, the emphasis is now on learning and building on these valuable lessons to revolutionise the public sector, remove complexity, and elevate the lives of citizens.

Data can be the answer to realising these benefits. But to unlock it, we need the key, in the shape of modernised infrastructure, continued cloud migration, and employees equipped with digital and data skills.

The UK government's National Data Strategy is an essential piece of this puzzle, providing direction and the foundation for a truly data-driven society. But although it's a huge stride in the right direction, the NDS alone isn't enough to realise this ambition. More financial, time, and resource investment is crucial to maintain momentum and give public sector organisations the support they need.

This is where partners like NetApp can be a powerful ally to the public sector, with a proven track record of empowering public sector organisations to lead with data, while helping to unify digital, data, and technology functions.

Ultimately, the UK has changed, and that journey is far from over. But by unleashing the power of data to become truly data driven, the public sector can thrive in the age of accelerated digital transformation to improve the lives of millions, while being ready for whatever comes next.

Methodology

NetApp commissioned this report to gain a greater understanding of how public sector organisations in the UK are implementing the National Data Strategy, and to identify the challenges and opportunities of using data more strategically in national and regional governance. To inform the report, NetApp partnered with Opinium, an independent research consultant, to conduct a survey of 200 public sector leaders across central and local government, health and social care, emergency services, education, and defence organisations in the UK.

For more information about modernising your hybrid cloud data services strategy, visit www.netapp.com and search for hybrid cloud data services.