**Table 1: Key events and reforms across Conservative and Labour governments**

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| **Year** | **Programme or reform** | **Details** |
| 1979 | The Efficiency Unit | Under the Chief Executive of Marks and Spencer, Derek Rayner, the Efficiency Unit scrutinized government departments for efficiencies, including streamlining procedures and cutting staff numbers. |
| 1982 | Financial Management Initiative | This Treasury-led initiative was intended to bolster and decentralize managerial accountability, delegate budgeting responsibility downwards and incentivize the improvement of financial management practices through performance measurement. |
| 1984 – 1994 | Privatization | Privatization came in waves. The first was the nationalised industries and public utilities, most notably British Telecom in 1984 and British Gas in 1986. The second, privatizing public services, followed in the early to mid-1990s, as market testing and outsourcing entered the lexicon of public sector reform. |
| 1988 | Next Steps Programme | The *Next Steps* report was published in 1987, arguing that the civil service required reform to contend with the disparate tasks of modern government. Next Steps Agencies were intended to reduce the gap between management and delivery, improve managerial autonomy and financial planning and further enhance arm’s-length oversight from the centre. |
| 1991 – 2000 | Citizen’s Charter | The Citizen’s Charter expanded the range of performance indicators in the name of increased transparency and oversight. The attention turned to public service outcomes rather than inputs. More broadly, public service users were reframed as customers. |
| 1991 | Market testing | In-house public service providers were forced to ‘compete’ with external providers on the basis of costs. |
| 1994 | Private Finance Initiative | Public sector investment was increasingly turned over to the private sector for major infrastructure projects, such as prison, school or hospital building. In some cases, private sector providers operated and maintained the service after build on lengthy 25-year contracts. |
| 1994 | *Civil Service: Continuity and Change,* White Paper | Introduced the Senior Civil Service, consisting of the then 3,500 officials at grade 5 or above and chief executives of Next Steps Agencies. Detailed central oversight was reduced as departments and agencies had to prepare their own annual ‘efficiency plans’ although they were expected to continue using competition as a tool through market testing, privatization and contracting out. |
| 1998 | The first Comprehensive Spending Review and Public Service Agreement targets | Introduced multi-year budgeting and sought to link performance monitoring to departmental budget allocations. Public Service Agreements focused on measuring output/outcomes. Between 1998 and 2007 the targets were refined considerably and reduced in numbers from 600 to 60. |
| 1999 | *Modernising Government,* White Paper | Pushed the notion of ‘joined up’ and ‘integrated’ government amid a programme of modernization. It sought to transcend ‘big’ versus ‘small’ government debates and embraced the view that not ‘everything government does has to be delivered by the public sector’. |
| 2001 – 2010 | Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit | The PMDU focused on five distinct areas of public service delivery through bespoke targeting and monitoring from the centre. It initially focused on education, health, crime and transport and was headed by Sir Michael Barber. |
| 2004 | Lyons Review | The Lyons Review was established to assess the appropriateness of civil service staffing, in particular the concentration of officials in London. It identified 27,000 jobs that could be taken out of London and the South East, recommended the slimming down of Whitehall headquarters and advocated the dispersal of civil servants to other regions. |
| 2004 | Gershon Review | The Gershon Review targeted efficiencies across the public sector to enable a release of resources to front line services. It identified efficiency gains of over £20 billion in 2007-08. Its express intention was to deliver savings without impacting on public service delivery. |
| 2006 – 2012 | Capability Reviews | Capability Reviews were intended to be rigorous reviews of organizational capability across Whitehall through departmental scrutiny to improve quality. The programme was gradually eroded and finally became a self-assessment task before being eventually abandoned in 2012. |
| 2010 | The Big Society | Presented by then Prime Minister David Cameron as his vision for a reformed state, the Big Society was contrasted with the so-called era of ‘big government’ under New Labour. It advocated decentralising power downwards to civil society, communities and citizens. Voluntary and private sector actors were expected to fill the void created by the withdrawal of public sector providers. The Big Society sat uncomfortably alongside fiscal consolidation and ultimately proved to be little more than a rhetorical exercise. |
| 2011 – 2015 | Public Bodies Act 2011 | The so-called ‘bonfire of the quangos’ embodied in the Public Bodies Act 2011 formed a major rhetorical arm of the Coalition government’s fiscal consolidation programme. Like the Big Society, it was intended to address the perception that the public sector had become bloated, unnecessarily expensive and a drag on efficiency. A broad range of public bodies were abolished. Ultimately, though, the process facilitated a wave of centralisation and the reclassification of public bodies instead of a meaningful reform. |
| 2012 | *Civil Service Reform Plan* | The *Civil Service Reform Plan* dramatically reduced the size of the civil service, instigated a pay freeze and purported to increase transparency surrounding senior civil servant appointments and remuneration. Its architects intended to strengthen core skills, improve performance and effectiveness and bolster policymaking processes generally. Ministers were granted greater control over senior appointments who, in turn, would be subject to more rigorous, targeted oversight of performance. The governing principles of the civil service remained intact. |
| 2015 – present | Functional Model of government | The Functional Model of government introduced cross-departmental corporate functions to address the lack of specialist skills within departments in areas including finance, HR, digital platforms, commercial knowledge etc. The principle is a simple one – resources, knowledge and expertise pooled at a strong corporate centre could be ‘leveraged at scale’ by departments. The programme has received praise, although remains a work in progress despite being introduced in 2015. |
| 2019 – present | Public Value Framework | The Public Value Framework (PVF) has grown out of a report by Sir Michael Barber, published in 2017 (HM Treasury, 2017). Intended to enhance departmental understanding of funding and delivery in relation to policy outcomes, the PVF was introduced proper at the 2019 Spending Review following a series of successful pilots across government. |
| 2021 – present | Outcome Delivery Plans | Recently introduced to replace the often-criticised Single Departmental Plan, Outcome Delivery Plans are intended to operate alongside the PVF to further enhance departmental understanding of the relationship between inputs, outputs and policy outcomes. Department must outline strategies to deliver priority outcomes, provide high-quality evaluation plans and submit to central oversight. |
| 2021 | Declaration on Government Reform | Published in June 2021, this programme of reform was devised in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, although in truth it continues a long series of incremental reforms. Its focus is on diversifying the civil service and opening it up to external appointments, losing its London-centric image, strengthening skills in digital, data science and commercial delivery and improving policy delivery generally. It reiterates the need to improve the outcomes of public spending. Central oversight of senior civil servants is to be further enhanced. The programme enjoys political backing but has been criticised for offering few novel solutions to long-standing problems in government and public administration. |

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|  | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | (Dec) 2020 |
| Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy1 | 11,040 | 17,790 | 18,100 | 14,790 | 16,640 | 15,650 | 14,460 | 9,820 | 10,850 | 11,690 | 12,710 |
| Cabinet Office2 | 1,490 | 1,680 | 1,750 | 1,930 | 2,060 | 2,040 | 2,530 | 5,160 | 6,130 | 7,300 | 9,230 |
| Defence | 71,930 | 63,000 | 58,050 | 56,530 | 56,340 | 53,100 | 53,780 | 53,750 | 54,940 | 56,500 | 57,240 |
| Digital, Culture, Media and Sport3 | 550 | 580 | 500 | 490 | 570 | 1,210 | 620 | 850 | 1,130 | 1,240 | 1,560 |
| Education | 2,650 | 2,780 | 3,820 | 3,430 | 3,280 | 3,460 | 5,250 | 5,880 | 6,650 | 7,150 | 7,620 |
| Environment, Food and Rural Affairs | 9,310 | 8,970 | 8,550 | 8,060 | 7,960 | 6,840 | 6,700 | 7,680 | 9,410 | 10,050 | 10,360 |
| Exiting the European Union | — | — | — | — | — | — | 210 | 550 | 610 | 600 | — |
| Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office4 | 5,720 | 5,910 | 5,760 | 5,610 | 5,510 | 5,490 | 5,390 | 5,530 | 6,130 | 6,470 | 8,630 |
| Health and Social Care5 | 3,620 | 3,220 | 3,080 | 8,130 | 8,450 | 8,120 | 7,490 | 7,950 | 8,000 | 8,020 | 9,460 |
| HM Treasury | 1,180 | 1,220 | 1,130 | 1,090 | 1,120 | 1,270 | 1,240 | 1,960 | 2,080 | 2,210 | 2,620 |
| Home Office | 27,240 | 26,180 | 26,140 | 26,570 | 27,980 | 27,280 | 27,180 | 28,140 | 31,680 | 33,140 | 34,150 |
| Housing, Communities and Local Government6 | 4,160 | 2,760 | 2,480 | 2,480 | 2,430 | 2,500 | 2,160 | 2,390 | 2,690 | 3,130 | 3,210 |
| International Development | 1,560 | 1,680 | 1,800 | 1,800 | 1,930 | 1,960 | 2,110 | 2,370 | 2,760 | 2,620 |  |
| International Trade | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1,060 | 1,430 | 1,670 | 2,160 | 2,640 |
| Justice | 77,190 | 71,200 | 66,320 | 62,320 | 70,270 | 68,050 | 67,090 | 70,670 | 74,360 | 74,970 | 76,280 |
| Transport | 17,420 | 17,670 | 17,660 | 16,900 | 17,230 | 13,910 | 13,890 | 14,180 | 14,650 | 14,940 | 15,330 |
| Work and Pensions | 109,080 | 111,580 | 107,210 | 98,970 | 91,760 | 86,890 | 86,020 | 85,210 | 84,490 | 80,400 | 81,990 |
| **Central Government Departments Total** | **437,560** | **434,980** | **422,190** | **412,940** | **410,570** | **397,160** | **392,960** | **401,290** | **416,550** | **422,740** | **434,410** |

**Table 2: Civil service headcount across core departments in first quarter, 2011 - 2020**

Source: ONS Public Sector Employment Dataset

1 The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills merged with the Department of Energy and Climate Change in July 2016

2 On 31 January 2020, the Department for Exiting the European Union was closed and in February 2020, the remaining staff were moved to the Cabinet Office (580) before moving to parent departments or re-posting elsewhere

3 The Department for Culture, Media and Sport was renamed the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on 3 July 2017.

4 The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Trade merged on 2 September 2020

5 The Department of Heath became the Department of Health and Social Care in January 2018

6 The Department for Communities and Local Government became the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on 8 January 2018