

Making government work better by...

Taking a COORDINATED approach

The UK Government operates some of the world's largest computer systems; more and more services are being delivered online and people increasingly expect to access information in a way that suits them. In this environment, the Transformational Government strategy is more important than ever.

On 10 January 2007, for the first time in 30 years, the Government reported openly on its technology portfolio in the Transformational Government Annual Report.

John Suffolk, Government Chief Information Officer, emphasised the scale of the issues that face government IT, 'We operate in over 140 countries, spend some £12 billion a year across the whole public sector and run many of the world's largest computer systems. The Department for Work and Pensions makes 13 million benefits payments electronically every week – it's a complex operation.'

Transformational Government sets out three key transformations:

- Services enabled by IT must be designed around the citizen or business, and provided through modern, coordinated delivery channels.
- Government must move to a shared services culture – in the front office, in the back office, in information and in infrastructure.
- There must be a broadening and deepening of government professionalism in terms of planning, delivery, management, skills and the governance of IT-enabled change.



Vision for the future

The *Information Sharing Vision Statement*, published in September 2006, sets out the first steps towards developing the Government's strategy for data sharing across the public sector – one of the pre-requisites for delivering transformed services. The Government's vision is to ensure that information will be shared in order to expand opportunities for the most disadvantaged, fight crime and provide better public services for citizens and business, and in other instances where it is in the public interest.

And this vision is at the head of the changes that are happening to IT services.

Transformation in practice

More than 8,000 people have joined the Government IT Profession since it was launched in July 2005. In August 2006, the Technology in Business Fast Stream was launched, which will provide an entry route for talented

graduates who have the potential to become future chief information officers or leaders of large-scale, IT-enabled business change. In the 2006–07 pilot year over 350 people applied for five places.

What does a transformed service look like?

A notable example can be seen at the Department for Work and Pensions where State Pension and Pension Credit claims can now be made over the telephone in one short call. In some cases, several months of form filling have been reduced to one 20-minute phone call, and the information provided can also be used to assess eligibility for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. In transport, a trip to the post office with a pile of documents to renew your car tax has been transformed into a five-minute online transaction. This service has been used by over 9 million customers between April 2004 and September 2006.

HM Revenue and Customs' National Insurance Recording System is one of Europe's largest IT systems and provides information relating to 70 million records to over 66,000 users in private industry and government, processing 1 billion offline and 300 million online transactions each year.

Online services for the public

Transformational Government also called for a radical improvement in the way that online services are designed for the public, by rationalising the number of websites across government and focusing on the needs of citizens and businesses. In January 2007, the Cabinet Office published the results of the first round of reviews of central government websites, announcing that 551 websites were to close. But this is just the beginning of an exercise that will see a dramatic reduction in the number of websites owned by government.

The objective is to take a simple but effective approach to online delivery of services and information, by focusing on core audiences and bringing services together. Students, for instance, don't just think about applying for a student loan, they will be concerned more broadly with getting through university. So this could mean they want to access information about part-time employment, finances, higher education options, housing, health and a whole range of things. And they probably want to find it all in one place. The job of supporting government web managers in delivering the website rationalisation project falls to the Cabinet Office Delivery and Transformation Group.

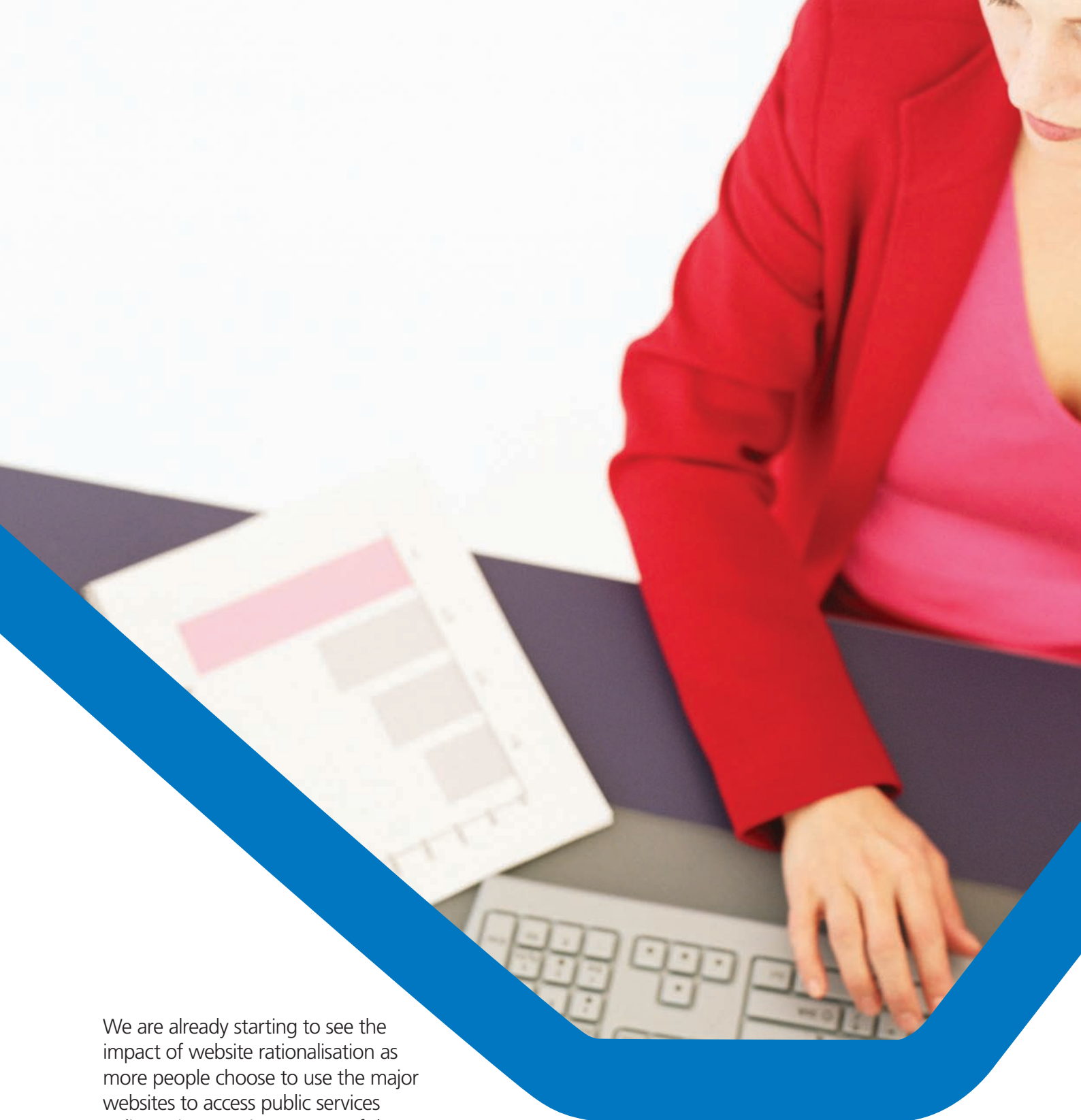
A rational approach

The rationale for reducing and amalgamating government websites is a clear one. People increasingly expect to find all the information they need in fewer, high-quality websites, such as the BBC site or Directgov, and duplication of the same type of content across websites is not only risky and potentially confusing for citizens, but is also wasteful and costly.

The website rationalisation project has focused on strengthening the availability and accessibility of information and services through a smaller number of high-quality websites, such as Direct.gov.uk and Businesslink.gov.uk, which are focused around audiences' needs.

Making an impact

Establishing strong relationships with government departments was key to enabling this process. Alex Butler, who is leading the project, worked closely with web teams in Communications Directorates to help them through the rationalisation process, and many departments took advantage of the new guidance to revisit their entire e-communications strategy.



We are already starting to see the impact of website rationalisation as more people choose to use the major websites to access public services online. Directgov is now one of the UK's 50 most visited sites.

Momentum has continued to build around the website reviews as departments work with executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies to deliver new structures for government on the web, and we can expect to see a very different landscape by 2011.

One million primary school children now use e-learning in class each day and there is a threefold improvement in the computer-to-pupil ratio.