



UK Government Delivery Service Case Study

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UK GDS Case Study

Overview

Today, the UK is an internationally recognised leader in Digital Government. Its Government Service Delivery model has been praised and emulated around the world by digital leaders such as the United States and Australia, and the country continuously ranks at the top of global indices.

The situation could hardly have been more different in 1999 when the government first began to systematically embrace IT. At this time, the UK had an economy which:

- Lagged behind other major economies in embracing the Internet - not least because it was one of the most expensive places in the world for Internet access
- Had a non-existent broadband market - ranking 24 out of 32 amongst OECD countries, with take up at just 0.1%
- Ranked 6th amongst the G7 for business use of IT – with a mere 7% of Board Directors seeing the Internet as a strategic issue for their business
- Had only a third of Government services available online - none of which were transactional

In just five short years, however, the UK:

- Saw a five-fold growth in home Internet access - driven by competition policies which made the country one of the cheapest places in the world to access the internet¹
- Achieved one of the most dynamic broadband markets in the world - with a 15,000% increase in home²
- Achieved pervasive business use of ICT³
- Placed 75% of Government services online – millions of which were transactional

Ten years on from these impressive achievements, the UK now:

- Enjoys a doubling in daily internet access rates to 78% of all adults (39.3 million) in 2015 up

¹ OECD Communications Outlook Sept 2002 Off-peak @ 40 hrs/ month rate

² In 2004, the UK ranked 3rd in the G7 for broadband competitiveness and extensiveness, and was the only country in the world to have a route map to achieve 100% coverage by 2005

³ Employment weighted data from 2002 Office of National Statistics e-Commerce Enquiry

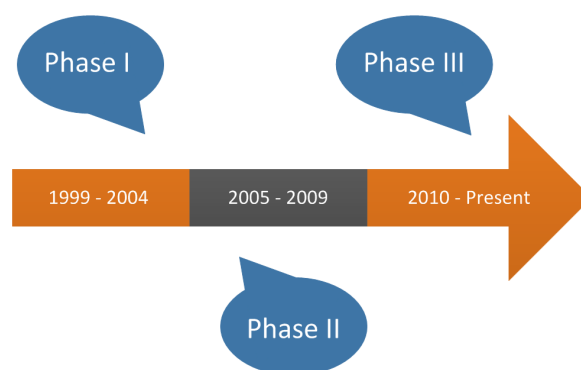
from 35% (16.2 million) in 2006 when directly comparable records began⁴

- Stands amongst the top ten countries globally in the World Economic Forum's Global 2014-2015 Competitive Index, thanks in large measure to broadband and internet services⁵
- Enjoys one of the world's strongest internet economies with the digital economy pervading every sector from dotcoms and biotech start ups to architecture to heavy manufacturing⁶
- Offers all government services online with the stated policy aim of delivering a quality that is *at least* equal to the digital experience delivered by the giants of the web

Social and economic transformation of this kind did not occur through happenstance. Rather it flowed from a long-standing strategic and political commitment by stakeholders at the very highest levels of government – from the Prime Minister's office down - to use IT to jumpstart the economy and transform public service delivery. As the following case study will show, this commitment was supported along the way by robust institutional and technical enablers, which ultimately allowed the UK to learn from trial and error mistakes whilst forging a world-leading model.

Institutional & Technical Context

Looking back upon the development of eGovernment in the UK, one can see 3 clear policy phases:



Phase I, as we will discuss, entailed a bold and visionary period in which the British Government

⁴ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/rdit2/internet-access---households-and-individuals/2015/index.html>

⁵ <http://www.ispreview.co.uk/index.php/2014/09/broadband-helps-uk-rank-9th-global-competitiveness-report.html>

⁶ http://www.niesr.ac.uk/sites/default/files/publications/SI024_GI_NIESR_Google_Report12.pdf

established the framework for inclusive and participatory citizen-centric service delivery that would inform all future efforts and ultimately catapult the country to the forefront of international rankings. Phase II, by contrast, represented a period of consolidation and technical focus in which the foci of work centred on delivering shared services, and the associated cost savings and efficiencies, via technical integration. Finally, Phase III saw a return to a globally pioneering vision through an embrace of openness and innovation, and subsequent creation of a Government Delivery Service (GDS) unit to parallel private sector online service delivery.

Phase I - 1999-2004: Coordination and Participation

Institutional Context

The initial decision to modernise the UK's economy and public services vis-à-vis ICT came from the very top of government. It was a key theme of the Labour Party's 1997 Manifesto, and was subsequently placed centre stage by Prime Minister Tony Blair and his closest advisor, Peter Mandelson, with the 1998/9 publication of the Knowledge Economy White Paper that placed strong emphasis on the importance of information technology and telecommunications in building a vibrant economy.⁷

This policy paper was subsequently institutionalised through the creation of an Office of the e-Envoy (OEE) which was seated in the Cabinet Office, but reported directly to the Prime Minister.

One of the first government departments of its kind, the OEE was uniquely tasked with bringing the UK into the Internet Age through a combination of back office departmental coordination and high profile citizen engagement. Prime Minister Blair gave the OEE 3 very public challenges at its 1999 inception:

- Establish the UK as the best environment in the world for e-commerce by 2002
- Provide Internet access for all who want it by 2005
- Make all Government services available online by 2005

The second of the Prime Minister's challenges – make all government services available online by 2005 – attracted the widest attention at the time, not least for the pioneering scale and scope of the ambition at

this time. In so doing, however, it tended to focus attention on the narrow eGovernment side of the OEE's remit rather than the wider and far more radical remit to make the UK a world leading center for online business and ubiquitous Internet access.

Taking its cue from the Knowledge Economy White Paper, the OEE assumed that to deliver on the Prime Minister's overall vision, it was not enough to merely 'put government services online.' The services, after all, could only really deliver value if people used them. *Instead, it was literally necessary to put the whole society online.* Thus, in contrast to most other eGovernment initiatives around the world, the OEE's fundamental strategy relied less on IT infrastructure per se than on a highly integrated agenda, which aimed first and foremost to grow the overall UK market for ICT.

In this sense, the e-Envoy programme represented much more of a far-reaching eInclusion initiative to get UK civic society online than a run of the mill e-Government programme. Central to this effort was the UK Online initiative which combined delivery of a central government portal – DirectGov – to make online services more accessible, convenient and easy to use with an integrated marketing communications programme to raise awareness about the Internet as well the launch of over 6,000 UKOnline Centers to provide safe, secure access to the Internet and hands on technical support and training.

In reviewing the scale and scope of the UK's Phase One Initiatives it is clear that the UK adopted a unique approach to equipping the country for the Internet Age. Whereas most other countries simply focused on eGovernment – or putting government services online – UK Online focused on take up or eInclusion. In so doing, the UK was able to successfully use eGovernment as an opportunity to create a genuinely knowledge-based economy programme in which the Internet, education, IT skills came together to drive economic growth.

Technical Context

The UK Government made significant changes in the use of technology throughout the OEE's tenure – changes which would ultimately help to transform the way government operates:

- Services *and* citizens were put online
- A central infrastructure and standards were put in place, and
- Government departments were slowly but surely encouraged to work more closely together.

⁷ "Our competitive future: Building the knowledge-driven economy" (Cm 4176), December 1998. 84. See also: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0267364999800259>

The Government focused on 3 core components to achieve the above results:

- **DirectGov** – A citizen-focused front facing portal that was designed to provide a single, preferred point of entry into Government services and information. At the time, DirectGov broke the conventional ‘government mould’ by organizing content in terms of ‘life episodes’ such as ‘Having a Baby’ and ‘Moving Home’ rather than departments. Despite its pioneering attempt to centralize citizen services into a single, user-friendly portal, DirectGov still co-existed alongside hundreds of other agency and departmental websites.
- **Government Gateway** – A central portal was designed to insulate eGovernment access channels from the complexity of the Government Back Office by acting as a central gateway. The Government Gateway provided the UK with an advanced e-Government infrastructure to begin to coherently link different government departments and services and offer basic transactional services such as renewing motor vehicle registration and obtaining driving licenses.⁸ It provided a centralised registration service for all e-Government services in the United Kingdom and was supported by the creation of a cross-departmental e-government delivery programme board to promote leveraging partnership building across government departments. Key elements of the Gateway included:
 - Authentication and authorisation services – to ensure that users are who they claim to be and that they have the right to access a specific service
 - Single credentials – so that users can have one user ID and password, or a digital certificate, for use with all public services
 - A messaging infrastructure – to guarantee the reliable delivery of documents and messages between businesses, citizens and government organisations

Open standards – in the form of published APIs (for programmatic access) and XML (for data interchange) – provided the bedrock upon which Government Gateway services were base.

⁸ For a complete history of the Government Gateway, including technical standards and architecture, see: Jerry Fishenden’s excellent blog piece: <https://ntouk.wordpress.com/2015/05/07/a-brief-history-of-uk-government-moves-towards-a-platform-based-architecture/>

- **e-Government Interoperability Framework (eGif)** – Technical policies and specifications governing information flows across government and the public sector, including interconnectivity, data integration, e-services access and content management. The framework was ultimately designed to drive joined up service delivery by helping public and private sector organisations ensure that their systems are e-GIF compliant, and that their people have the necessary knowledge and skills to enable systems to work together.

Despite establishing a strong foundation for future eGovernment development, the OEE’s tenure was marked by a number of high profile failures involving traditional proprietary deals with major IT powerhouses:

Gateway.Gov.UK: The initial contract for the flagship project with the IT supplier Compaq to place all government services online was terminated in 2000 after 4 months. Compaq was meant to receive £6.7 million to provide consultancy services and IT asset purchases, under an Instruction to Proceed notice that would have led to a multi year contract. Despite only working a matter of months, the direct cost of termination was £5.6 million for assets relating to work completed.

Microsoft completed development of the Gateway portal in just 15 weeks, proclaiming it had "brought Tony Blair’s ambitious e-government vision to reality."⁹ The project was ultimately roundly criticized, however, because the digital certificate system, a key component of the centralized registration service for all eGovernment services, locked out all other browsers except Microsoft’s own Internet Explorer.

Data & Hosting: The second IT failure was with the data centre and hosting management service which was to be provided by ITNET. ITNET was the only supplier left at the end of the bidding process following withdrawal by Fujitsu Services and SchlumbergerSema, but its contract was terminated in 2004 for failing to provide enough flexibility in rolling out the data centre and implementing the IT. The original contract value was £84 million. Prior to termination, ITNET spent £15.2m on the fixed assets of the datacentre for which it only received a pre-payment of £5m.

⁹ "Microsoft Helps Turn Britain's E-Government Vision Into Reality" (Press release). Microsoft. 27 March 2001. Retrieved 2006-11-23.

Though the termination of the of the ITNET deal was not as costly to the government as the Compaq deal, through time all 3 of the above contracts, particularly the 'closed' one with Microsoft, became a poster child for bad public-private sector practice amongst the ranks of Open Source within UK eGovernment circles.

Phase II 2004-2009: Consolidation and Integration

Institutional Context

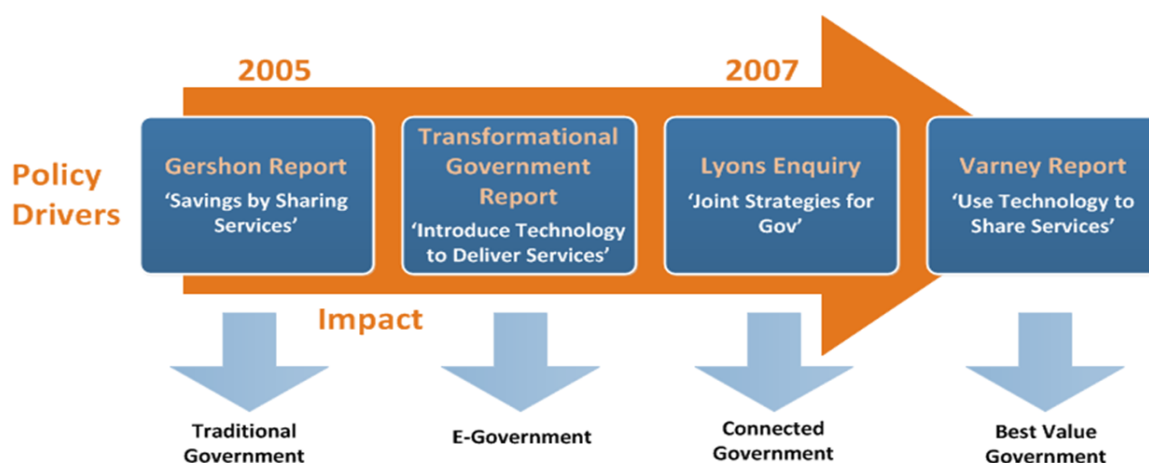
If the first phase of eGovernment in the UK was characterised by forward thinking and vision, the second phase was more clearly marked by an internally-driven policy focus on consolidation and efficiency as evidenced by the release of a consistently themed series of reports and enquiries:

In this new phase, the outward looking and often evangelising Office of the eEnvoy was replaced with a newly formed e-Government Unit, which saw a career IT consultant recruited to act as the UK's first ever central UK government chief information officer (CIO). Building upon the work initiated by OEE to introduce common interfaces, designs, utilities, and infrastructure across different government departments, the new CIO set forth to transform government operation by rationalizing offerings within and across organisations. Whilst he and his team continued to talk about transforming government to meet citizen needs and improve the user experience,¹⁰ the dominant focus throughout his

Following the appointment of a Central Government CIO, chief information officers were appointed in every UK Ministry in 2004 and their efforts coordinated through a government CIOs' forum. This initiative was followed in 2005 with the announcement of a new unified IT strategy to integrate IT-related activities that were common across many departments, such as human resources and finance, into more streamlined shared services operations with an emphasis on account core transaction systems, including those that support the collection of taxes and the payments of tens of billions of pounds in welfare benefits.

From a policy perspective, this new CIO-focused approach was very much driven by Sir Peter Gershon's highly influential 2004 Efficiency Review which incentivised major transactional departments to integrate back office functions and embrace radical IT-enabled change to drive efficiency gains. The Review came at the behest of both Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown and Prime Minister Tony Blair, who appointed Sir Peter, at that time the head of the Office of Government Commerce and a former GE Director, to review operations across all public services and make recommendations regarding expenditure and efficiency. Sir Peter's final report recommended introducing dramatic IT-driven changes to the organisation of each government department, including automating work and sharing support services, in order to generate upwards of £20bn savings on administrative expenditure in

FY20
07/0
8.



tenure (which lasted until 2006) and indeed the whole of Phase II was upon breaking traditional government silos to cut costs and improve efficiency.

¹⁰ Transformational Government: Enabled by Technology 2005, <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130128101412/http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/141734/transgov-strategy.pdf>

Gershon's emphasis on performance and efficiency was subsequently taken up in another highly influential policy document - the 2006 Varney Report *Service Transformation: A Better Service for Citizens, a Better Deal for Taxpayers*. The Varney Report not only implemented many of the staff cuts advocated by Gershon, it also outlined the key actions needed to introduce 'transformational government:' 1) focus on citizen needs 2) shared services and 3) professionalism. Varney estimated that sharing support services alongside standardizing and simplifying processes would save 20% of government support costs for human resources and finances. The Cabinet Office agreed and in 2006 adopted Varney's proposed internal provider model, requesting central government departments to adopt a shared service concept.¹¹

In many ways, the Varney Report epitomized the strong emphasis on performance and efficiency that had come to dominate virtually every discussion surrounding public sector reform in the UK. Often overlooked at the time, however, the Varney Report also began to anticipate the newly emerging era of social media, openness and Digital by Default by drawing an explicit linkage between:

Engaging citizens and businesses more fully in the design and delivery of public services, establishing principles that underpin a coordinated multi-channel approach to government delivery and ... making e-services the primary channel for information and transactional services.

Technical Context

Throughout Phase II, the UK Government largely focused on expanding and embedding the technology changes introduced during the OEE's tenure – with a central focus on consolidation and integration.

- The number of transactional services available to citizens and businesses was increased
- The whole-of-government infrastructure (including interoperability standards)¹² was further developed

This era included both front office and back office work:

- **Business Links** – In 2004 the Government introduced a front facing national portal for its ongoing Business Links initiative - which until this point in time provided face-to-face and telephone advice to small businesses. Information on the site came in the form of *guides* (pages of text information), *interactive tools* (in which businesses could get personalised information) and *transactions* (in which businesses could for example, calculate their VAT). In many ways, Business Links was seen as a business equivalent to DirectGov. The site was built and operated by the private vendor Serco at an annual cost of £35 million per year.
- **Government Gateway:** Work on the Gateway continued to focus on developing the underlying identify management service (which issued government authenticated digital certificates that anonymously mapped a user's identify to individual government services)¹³ and the middleware XML messaging hub (which provided a single, reliable, secure and consistent route for secure, authenticated messages into and out of customer backend systems.)¹⁴

In 2003, the UK government added payments to its existing set of cross-government components. Plans were then put in place to add additional components such as notifications, rules, forms server & store, circumstances & personalisation, address database and appointments. Although initial prototype work was undertaken, internal divisions over funding and stakeholder cooperation hindered further progress. These divisions eventually became caught up in what was to become an ongoing point of contention throughout Phase III, namely the extent to which government should build in-house vs. purchase from outsiders.

¹¹ Value for Money in Government Public Administration After 'New Public Management,' OECD, 2010, p. 64.

¹² See, for example, the e-Government Interoperability Framework Version 6.1 <http://www.unapcict.org/ecohub/resources/united-kingdom-e-government-interoperability-framework-version-6.1/?searchterm=None>

¹³ Proceedings of the 5th European Conference on eGovernment (ECEG 2005), Jerry Fishenden, https://books.google.com/books?id=OTIP-Cad4u0C&pg=PA536&lpg=PA536&dq=2005+UK+Government+Gateway&source=bl&ots=zphJeQ0y2G&sig=qG3HJnsM4qvic5OQ8MBIna_tlQY&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewi7wuSlp8DJAhUClh4KHbLRAVQQ6AEILzAD#v=onepage&q=2005%20UK%20Government%20Gateway&f=false

¹⁴ 2008, for instance, saw the release of a V3.1 of a new Document Submission Protocol (DSP) for routing business transactions (e.g. Self assessment tax forms) submitted from either a Department Portal (e.g. the HMRC Online service Web site) or directly from an ISV application, through the Gateway, to the appropriate Department (back-end) system and retrieving the corresponding response. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/366466/GatewayDocumentSubmissionProtocol_V3.1.pdf

Phase III -2010 – Present: Openness & Innovation

Institutional Context

The election of David Cameron as Prime Minister in 2009 saw the introduction of the third and, arguably most notable, phase in the evolution of eGovernment in the UK – a phase which is perhaps best captured by the title of Martha Lane Fox's highly influential 2010 Report: *DirectGov 2010 and Beyond: Revolution not Evolution*.¹⁵

A celebrity internet entrepreneur, Cameron appointed Fox to assume the newly created role of UK Digital Champion in 2010 as part of a new government drive to increase transparency and accountability.¹⁶ Tasking Fox with responsibility for advising and challenging the government to make faster progress in getting more citizens and services online, Cameron's appointment of such a high profile Digital Champion not only signalled an end to the back office focus of Phase II, it also unleashed a new era of openness and innovation which was ultimately to result in the creation of a path-breaking new global model for eGovernment.

In *Revolution not Evolution*, Fox wrote an open letter to Cabinet Office Minister Francis Maude in which she presciently argued:

There has been a reinvention of the Internet and the behaviour of users in the last few years. Digital services are now more agile, open and cheaper. To take advantage of these changes, government needs to move to a 'service culture', putting the needs of citizens ahead of those of departments. This increase in focus on end users should include opening up government transactions so they can be easily delivered by commercial organisations and charities, and putting information wherever people are on the web by syndicating content.

In making this assertion, Fox effectively introduced the necessary preconditions for Tim O-Reilly's 2010 concept of Government as a Platform for the co-creation of agile new services, going so far as to recommend that DirectGov be transformed into a 'wholesaler as well as creating a retail shop front for government services & content by mandating the development and opening up of Application Programme Interfaces (APIs) to third parties.'

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/directgov-2010-and-beyond-revolution-not-evolution-a-report-by-martha-lane-fox>

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/martha-lane-fox-appointed-as-uk-digital-champion>

Although radical at the time, Fox's call for the government to effectively open up its data and services to outside developers dovetailed with a growing Open Data movement in the UK that began with the Guardian Newspaper's 2006 'Free our Data' campaign and saw tangible policy fruition with the Government's 2010 creation of an Open Government License (which enabled government departments to publish material under a free to use perpetual license with no restrictions other than attribution) and subsequent launch of the now world leading Data.Gov website which specifically aimed to unleash innovation by kick starting 'a new wave of services that find novel ways to make use of the information.'¹⁷

In addition to championing and paving the way for Open Government, Fox also recommended a number of concrete operational actions, namely that 1) DirectGov be given a strong mandate to 'force departments' to use it as a front office to provide improved transactional service delivery, 2) a central team in the Cabinet Office be given 'absolute control of the overall user experience across all digital channels' and 3) a new CEO for Digital (to work within the infrastructure parameters set by the CIO, but independently) be appointed and given 'absolute authority over the user experience across all government online services (websites and APIs) and the power to direct all government online spending.'¹⁸

As one can see from her deliberate use of words like 'force' and 'absolute,' Fox believed that the UK government needed to put a quick end to the deeply entrenched tradition in which each government department was able to act as its own fiefdom, choosing if, when and how to integrate services into DirectGov. To make the type of quantum leap needed to enable government to 'use the internet to communicate and interact better with citizens,' she insisted that the hitherto 'carrot' approach of persuading government departments to buy into DirectGov and the Government Gateway be replaced with a much more powerful 'stick' in which they had no choice but to cooperate with an empowered central authority.

Fox's call to arms led to the creation of a new Government Delivery Service (GDS) as a unit of the Cabinet Office. The GDS was established in the spring 2011 under the leadership of a new Executive

¹⁷ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/8470797.stm>

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/directgov-2010-and-beyond-revolution-not-evolution-a-report-by-martha-lane-fox>

Director for Digital, Mike Bracken. In his new post, Bracken assumed work of the Chief Executive of DirectGov, the lead of cross-Government digital reform work and part of the work of the Director for Digital Engagement and Transparency, remaining in the job until the surprise announcement of his resignation in August 2015.

Reporting directly to Ian Watmore, the Government's Chief Operating Officer, Bracken oversaw an initial team of 100 (which has since grown to 500 in 2015) and set forth on a clear mission to replace the type of traditional large scale government IT contracts (and accompanying vendor lock in) with a leaner and more agile approach to software development and implementation, one that relied more on SMEs than traditional suppliers. The hallmark of the Bracken era was the complete revamp of DirectGov which entailed the consolidation of Business Link and hundreds of other 'sprawling, inefficient and often irrelevant' agency and department websites into a sleek new website Gov.UK.

From the outset, the GDS team set itself the core ambition of 'ensuring government offers digital products and services at least equal to the digital experience delivered by the giants of the web.'¹⁹ Their showcase product - Gov.UK - provides an object lesson in how in-depth design engagement with diverse user requirements, complex data sets and state-of-the-art interaction can create a simple, streamlined service machine that answers the needs of both users and government. Adopting modern design principles, the new Gov.UK site looks much simpler than most other government websites around the world, only using images only when necessary. Its user-centric, open government principles are being emulated by governments around the world, including Australia, New Zealand and the US, as is its vision of offering 'simpler, clearer and faster digital services.'²⁰

Technical Context

In a clear break with the past, Bracken and his team at GDS intentionally set forth to prove that multi-million pound websites and lengthy development cycles were a thing of the past, publicly vowing to tackle head on what Cabinet Officer Francis Maude referred to as 'powerful oligopolies.'²¹

Turning the outsourcing model that marked the OEE's tenure on its head, GDS assembled an initial in-house team of just 12 developers to tackle 2 primary objectives:

1. To test, in public, a prototype of a new, single UK Government website.
2. To design & build a UK Government website using open, agile, multi-disciplinary product development techniques and technologies, shaped by an obsession with meeting user needs.²²

Armed with new agile and open development methodologies – which usually entailed working in one week development sprints – GDS developed the prototype for Gov.UK in just 12 weeks for just £261k, famously bemoaning that it launched one day late.²³ Rather than wait for a final product, as was past custom, GDS launched the prototype – Alpha.gov.uk - in March 2010 and openly invited users to provide feedback. By May 2010, the team had received over 1,000 pieces of structured feedback and 3,000 comments via Twitter which it then combined with more traditional, demographically balanced user testing to improve the site. This effort represented the start of what was to become a perpetual beta style of working in which user feedback is continuously taken on board and implemented to rationalise the information architecture and enable users to get a complete picture of government services and policy via one location. Significantly, all code for the site was made available via open source.

A little over one year after its official launch, Francis Maude announced in a written letter to Parliament that Gov.UK, including its alpha and beta sites, cost five times less than Direct.Gov – £4.6 multi vs. £21.4 billion.²⁴ For all the talk of success and external praise, however, critics maintain that all was never as rosy at it seemed at GDS. Whilst transactional services like paying car tax were rolled out to huge praise, the big engines of state – as one former high ranking civil service official put it - like Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) never bought into the new development approach – aptly refusing to entrust mission critical services like tax collection to Bracken and his young team.²⁵

HMRC's skepticism appears to have been validated

¹⁹

<http://www.seeplatform.eu/images/SEE%20Case%20Study%20-%20Government%20Digital%20Service.pdf>

²⁰ <https://gds.blog.gov.uk/2015/07/02/simpler-clearer-shetler/>

²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_Digital_Service

²² <https://gds.blog.gov.uk/2011/07/29/alpha-gov-uk-wrap-up/>

²³ <https://gds.blog.gov.uk/2011/07/29/alpha-gov-uk-wrap-up/>

²⁴ <http://www.computerworlduk.com/news/it-management/govuk-costs-nearly-5-times-less-than-directgov-3370913/>

²⁵ Off the record interview

when a new online service to provide payments to farmers needed to resort to paper due to the failure of a geospatial supplier.

Francis Maude, the government's staunchest supporter of GDS, retired following the May 2015 election. In August 2015, Mike Bracken shocked the UK IT world by announcing his resignation – a move that was immediately followed by the resignation of most of his senior leadership team.²⁶ Insiders speculate that Bracken, aware that the new CEO of the Civil Service, John Manzoni had deep reservations about the centralization that occurred during what he referred to as the 'Maude Era,' left before the going got really tough. GDS had proved that it could effectively centralise and deliver relatively simple transactional services, but had yet to crack the deeper and more challenging task of integrating large multi-faceted legacy systems whilst simultaneously delivering complex organizational change.

Conclusion: Lessons Learned

Reflecting back upon 15 years of transformational change in UK public service delivery, one can identify a number of key lessons from the country's successes, failures and work left undone in the eGovernment arena:

1. Dare to be Different: From aggressively marketing digital services during Phase I through to championing Transformational Government and Shared Services in Phase II and forging Open Government in Phase III, the UK has always anticipated emerging eGovernment trends and lead from the front.

2. Embrace Change: Rather than continue to consolidate and rest on its laurels, the UK undertook a path-breaking change of direction during Phase III – one that not only dramatically improved basic transactional service delivery by emulating best practice from industry, but also helped to kick start a new global conception of government as an innovation partner.

3. Embed Openness: In tandem with the US, the UK was one of the first countries in the world to recognise the pervasive power of openness – from open APIs and internet protocols through to open source and data. Whereas many countries treated these notions as a nice to have add on or window dressing, the UK recognised and championed them as

powerful change agents for improving services and stimulating innovation, whilst also cutting costs.

4. Balance Carrots & Sticks: Throughout the past 15 years, the UK has veered between advancing cross government service integration via persuasion and forcing it via a central mandate. Neither approach has been entirely successful in its own right, suggesting the value of strategically encouraging ministries and agencies to embrace new ways of working through a more balanced blend of incentives and deterrents.

5. Avoid Extremes: Much as with its use of the carrot & stick approach, the UK has tended to veer between the extreme of out-sourcing, on the one hand, and in-sourcing, on the other. Whilst the former resulted in a number of high profile IT fiascos, the latter has tended to throw the baby out with the bath water, disregarding the value of established business practices and insights in favour of anything that appears trendy and new.

If the UK stays true to form, we are currently standing at the dawn of a new and fourth Phase in eGovernment – one which is almost certain to be marked by a return to a period of reflection and consolidation. Whilst it is too early to confidently predict what will follow on from Phase 4 (particularly given the unprecedented pace of technological change) an openness to transformation and innovation is almost certain to be in the mix, yielding fresh new insights for eGovernment practitioners everywhere.

²⁶ <http://www.theguardian.com/public-leaders-network/2015/aug/12/government-digital-service-staff-resignations>