

## Briefing: growth of the civil service 2025

January 2026

### Introduction

The civil service functions as the administrative machinery supporting the government of the day in implementing its policy agenda.<sup>1</sup> Over recent years, its size has expanded substantially, with the most significant increases occurring during and after the coronavirus pandemic. Despite successive government commitments to reduce headcount, the number of civil servants has not returned to pre-pandemic levels, prompting concerns that the civil service has become bloated and inefficient, to the detriment of taxpayers.<sup>2</sup>

The chancellor of the exchequer has expressed confidence that the government can achieve a reduction of 10,000 civil service posts, estimating this would deliver annual savings exceeding £2 billion by the end of the decade.<sup>3</sup> As part of the 2025 spending review, the government committed to an 11 per cent real-terms reduction in departmental administration budgets between 2025-26 and 2028-29, followed by a further 5 per cent cut in 2029-30, as part of wider efforts to reduce the size of the state.<sup>4</sup> However, with the civil service headcount being 131,320 higher than it was in 2016, more decisive action to reduce it is required.

This note, the third iteration in the series, analyses the growth of the civil service, breaking down changes by grade, median salary and profession. The findings show that the civil service continues to expand, underscoring the ongoing challenge of achieving meaningful reform and efficiency within the public sector.

### Key findings

- Between March 2024 and March 2025, civil service employment increased by **6,820**, rising from **542,840** to **549,660**, a **1.3 per cent** increase.
- This marks the **ninth consecutive annual rise** in civil service headcount. The only recorded decrease in the available data occurred as of March 2016.
- The most significant expansion took place in 2021, during the coronavirus pandemic, when employment rose by **6.3 per cent**, an increase of **28,525 employees**.
- All grades experienced an increase in their median salary that was **above the rate of inflation**, with the median salary for all civil servants rising by **almost double** the level of inflation from March 2024 to March 2025.
- The number of civil servants receiving over £100,000 increased by **20 per cent** between March 2024 and March 2025, representing an additional **590 employees**. Salaries within the £150,000-£200,000 range rose more sharply, by **44.2 per cent** in this period.
- While the number of employees in the top three grades increased by 3.9 per cent, administrative officers and assistants, the most junior grade, fell by **4,580**, a **3.4 per cent** reduction from March 2024 to March 2025.
- The total cost of civil service salaries in 2025 is estimated at **£21 billion**, representing a **7.3 per cent** increase from 2024, far outpacing growth of the UK economy during that period.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Civil Service, *About us*, [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/civil-service/about](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/civil-service/about) (accessed 4 November 2025).

<sup>2</sup> Martin, D. & Butcher, B., *How the bloated Civil Service is failing Britain*, *The Telegraph*, 25 March 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Sky News, *Civil service to axe 10,000 jobs, Chancellor Rachel Reeves says - as she eyes cutting £2bn in costs*, 24 March 2025, [www.news.sky.com/story/civil-service-to-axe-10-000-jobs-chancellor-rachel-reeves-says-as-she-eyes-cutting-2bn-in-costs-13334155](http://www.news.sky.com/story/civil-service-to-axe-10-000-jobs-chancellor-rachel-reeves-says-as-she-eyes-cutting-2bn-in-costs-13334155) (accessed 4 November 2025).

<sup>4</sup> Worldidge, J., *Rachel Reeves' spending review aims for a smaller, more efficient civil service*, Institute for Government, 12 June 2025, [www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/comment/spending-review-2025-civil-service](http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/comment/spending-review-2025-civil-service) (accessed 4 November 2025).

<sup>5</sup> Office for Budget Responsibility, *Economic and fiscal outlook*, November 2025, pp.6-7.

## Senior civil servants

- The growth of the civil service between 2024 and 2025 was disproportionately concentrated among higher grades. Employees in the top three grades increased by **9,635**, representing a **3.9 per cent** rise, while employment across all other grades declined by **2,805** over the same period.
- In 2025, there were **7,775** senior civil servants. This group increased by **240** from the previous year and accounted for **1.4 per cent** of the total civil service workforce.
- Senior civil servants experienced the largest average salary increase in cash terms, with median salaries rising by **£3,570** or **4 per cent** from 2024 to 2025. Meanwhile, administrative officers and assistants recorded the largest percentage increase, with median pay rising by **8.8 per cent** or **£2,160**. Across the entire civil service, the average increase in median pay was **5 per cent** or **£1,700**.
- The Competition and Markets Authority had the highest proportion of senior civil servants in 2025, with **12.3 per cent** or 140 of 1,140 employees being in this grade, compared with a civil service-wide average of **1.4 per cent**.
- Among major departments, the Cabinet Office recorded the highest departmental concentration of senior civil servants, at **6.7 per cent** or 770 of 11,510 employees. This represented an increase of **50** senior civil servants compared with 2024.

## Communications

- In 2025, there were **5,355** communications staff employed across the civil service, representing **1 per cent** of total headcount. This was an increase of **505 employees** or **10.4 per cent**, compared with the previous year.
- The **Ministry of Defence** recorded the largest rise in communications staff, with numbers increasing by **31.2 per cent**, equivalent to an additional **215 employees**.
- The **Office of the Secretary of State for Wales** had the highest proportion of communications staff of any civil service organisation, with **10 out of 45** or **22 per cent** of employees, working in communications roles.

## Policy

- Between 2024 and 2025, the number of policy staff across the civil service increased by **2,060**, reaching a total of **36,925** employees and accounting for **5.9 per cent** of the overall civil service workforce.
- The **Department for Business and Trade** experienced the largest growth in policy staff, with numbers rising by **1,690**, a **90.4 per cent** increase, from **1,870 to 3,560 employees**. This represented the greatest percentage increase in policy staffing of any civil service organisation during the period.
- The **Office of the Secretary of State for Wales** had the highest concentration of policy staff in 2025, with **35 of its 45** employees, **77.8 per cent**, working in policy roles.

## Data

**Table 1: year on year change in civil service headcount, as at 31 March 2015 to 31 March 2025**

Year	Headcount full-time role	Headcount part-time role	Total	Change	Increase (%)
2015	322,990	110,820	433,810		
2016	316,790	101,550	418,340	-15,470	-3.6

Year	Headcount full-time role	Headcount part-time role	Total	Change	Increase (%)
2017	321,165	98,235	419,400	1,060	0.3
2018	331,390	98,685	430,075	10,675	2.5
2019	343,960	101,520	445,480	15,405	3.6
2020	351,775	104,580	456,355	10,875	2.4
2021	382,945	101,935	484,880	28,525	6.3
2022	408,115	101,965	510,080	25,200	5.2
2023	417,680	102,100	519,780	9,700	1.9
2024	438,965	103,875	542,840	23,060	4.4
2025	442,770	106,890	549,660	6,820	1.3

**Table 2: change in civil service headcount by grade, as at 31 March 2024 to 31 March 2025**

Civil service grade	2024	2025	Change	Increase (%)
Senior civil service level	7,535	7,775	240	3.2
Grades 6 and 7	80,805	85,110	4,305	5.3
Senior and higher executive officers	157,605	162,695	5,090	3.2
Executive officers	136,425	138,405	1,980	1.5
Administrative officers and assistants	135,645	131,065	-4,580	-3.4
Not reported	24,820	24,615	-205	-0.8
<b>Overall civil service</b>	<b>542,840</b>	<b>549,660</b>	<b>6,820</b>	<b>1.3</b>

**Table 3: change in median salary by grade, as at 31 March 2024 to 31 March 2025**

Civil service grade	2024 (£)	2025 (£)	Change (£)	Percentage
Senior civil service level	88,970	92,540	3,570	4
Grades 6 and 7	60,670	63,630	2,960	4.9
Senior and higher executive officers	39,940	42,060	2,120	5.3
Executive officers	29,500	30,980	1,480	5
Administrative officers and assistants	24,480	26,640	2,160	8.8
Not reported	30,210	31,650	1,440	4.8
<b>All civil servants</b>	<b>33,980</b>	<b>35,680</b>	<b>1,700</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Inflation 2024 to 2025</b>				<b>2.6</b>

**Table 4: change in number of civil servants in higher salary bands, as at 31 March 2024 to 31 March 2025**

Civil servants in higher salary bands	2024	2025	Change	Percentage
£100,000 to £150,000	2,625	3,095	470	17.9
£150,000 to £200,000	260	375	115	44.2
Greater than £200,000	30	35	5	16.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,915</b>	<b>3,505</b>	<b>590</b>	<b>20.2</b>

**Table 5: government departments by percentage of senior civil servants, as at 31 March 2025**

Department	Senior civil servants	Total staff	Percentage
Cabinet Office	770	11,510	6.7
Department for Business and Trade	345	10,720	3.2
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	70	1,060	6.6

Department	Senior civil servants	Total staff	Percentage
Department for Education	275	8,185	3.4
Department for Energy Security and Net Zero	235	4,780	4.9
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	240	13,950	1.7
Department for Science, Innovation and Technology	185	7,135	2.6
Department for Transport	295	16,535	1.8
Department for Work and Pensions	360	96,890	0.4
Department of Health and Social Care	700	11,115	6.3
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office	575	9,435	6.1
HM Treasury	180	2,720	6.6
Home Office	370	50,655	0.7
Ministry of Defence	560	57,500	1
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government	190	4,945	3.8
Ministry of Justice	320	96,210	0.3
Northern Ireland Office	15	175	8.6
Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland	15	135	11.1
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales	5	45	11.1
<b>Overall civil service</b>	<b>7,775</b>	<b>549,660</b>	<b>1.4</b>

**Table 6: 10 civil service organisations with the highest percentage of senior civil servants, as at 31 March 2025**

Civil service organisation	Senior civil servants	Total staff	Percentage
Competition and Markets Authority	140	1,140	12.3
Government Commercial Organisation	185	1,535	12.1
Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland	15	135	11
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales	5	45	11
Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency	145	1,480	9.8
Attorney General's Office	5	55	9.1
Northern Ireland Office	15	175	8.6
UK Export Finance	50	585	8.5
Cabinet Office (excluding agencies)	530	6,890	7.7
Government Property Agency	30	390	7.7
<b>Overall civil service</b>	<b>7,775</b>	<b>549,660</b>	<b>1.4</b>

**Table 7: 10 civil service organisations with the highest percentage increase in senior civil servants, as at 31 March 2024 to 31 March 2025**

Civil service organisation	2024	2025	Increase	Percentage
Social Security Scotland	5	10	5	100
The National Archives	5	10	5	100
Transport Scotland	5	10	5	100
Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland	10	15	5	50
Office of Gas and Electricity Markets	75	95	20	26.7
HM Land Registry	25	30	5	20

Civil service organisation	2024	2025	Increase	Percentage
Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills	30	35	5	16.7
Submarine Delivery Agency	35	40	5	14.3
Department for Transport (excl. agencies)	235	265	30	12.8
Scottish government	320	360	40	12.5
<b>Overall civil service</b>	<b>7,535</b>	<b>7,775</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>3.2</b>

**Table 8: 15 civil service professions with the highest percentage increase in headcount, as at 31 March 2024 to 31 March 2025**

Civil service profession	2024	2025	Increase	Percentage
Corporate finance	80	215	135	168.8
Planning	240	460	220	91.7
Veterinarian	430	620	190	44.2
Social research	1,705	2,175	470	27.6
Economics	2,400	2,910	510	21.3
Statistics	3,505	4,175	670	19.1
Knowledge and information management	2,430	2,780	350	14.4
Project delivery	18,555	21,030	2,475	13.3
Communications	4,850	5,355	505	10.4
Geography	520	570	50	9.6
Science and engineering	14,340	15,605	1,265	8.8
Internal audit	665	710	45	6.8
Intelligence analysis	3,585	3,810	225	6.3
Human resources	11,860	12,565	705	5.9
Policy	34,865	36,925	2,060	5.9
<b>Overall civil service</b>	<b>542,840</b>	<b>549,660</b>	<b>6,820</b>	<b>1.3</b>

**Table 9: government departments by percentage of communications staff, as at 31 March 2025**

Department	Communications staff	Total staff	Percentage
Cabinet Office	340	11,510	3
Department for Business and Trade	200	10,720	1.9
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	50	1,060	4.7
Department for Education	230	8,185	2.8
Department for Energy Security and Net Zero	85	4,780	1.8
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	375	13,950	2.7
Department for Science, Innovation and Technology	215	7,135	3
Department for Transport	235	16,535	1.4
Department for Work and Pensions	185	96,890	0.2
Department of Health and Social Care	245	11,115	2.2
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office	180	9,435	1.9
HM Treasury	60	2,720	2.2
Home Office	180	50,655	0.4
Ministry of Defence	905	57,500	1.6

Department	Communications staff	Total staff	Percentage
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government	120	4,945	2.4
Ministry of Justice	310	96,210	0.3
Northern Ireland Office	10	175	5.7
Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland	5	135	3.7
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales	10	45	22.2
<b>Overall civil service</b>	<b>5,355</b>	<b>549,660</b>	<b>1</b>

**Table 10: 10 government departments with the highest percentage increase in communications staff, as at 31 March 2024 to 31 March 2025**

Civil service organisation	2024	2025	Increase	Percentage
Northern Ireland Office	5	10	5	100
Cabinet Office	200	340	140	70
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	255	375	120	47.1
Department of Health and Social Care	170	245	75	44.1
Ministry of Defence	690	905	215	31.2
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government	95	120	25	26.3
HM Treasury	50	60	10	20
Department for Transport	210	235	25	11.9
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	45	50	5	11.1
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office	165	180	15	9.1
<b>Overall civil service</b>	<b>4,850</b>	<b>5,355</b>	<b>505</b>	<b>10.4</b>

**Table 11: government departments by percentage of policy staff, as at 31 March 2025**

Department	Policy staff	Total staff	Percentage
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales	35	45	77.8
Department for Energy Security and Net Zero	2,900	4,780	60.7
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	585	1,060	55.2
HM Treasury	1,455	2,720	53.5
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government	2,045	4,945	41.4
Department for Business and Trade	3,560	10,720	33.2
Northern Ireland Office	55	175	31.4
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office	2,460	9,435	26.1
Department for Education	1,925	8,185	23.5
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	2,795	13,950	20
Department for Science, Innovation and Technology	1,240	7,135	17.4
Department for Transport	1,510	16,535	9.1
Department of Health and Social Care	690	11,115	6.2
Home Office	2,660	50,655	5.3
Cabinet Office	585	11,510	5.1
Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland	5	135	3.7
Ministry of Defence	1,595	57,500	2.8
Ministry of Justice	1,340	96,210	1.4

Department	Policy staff	Total staff	Percentage
Department for Work and Pensions	1,235	96,890	1.3
<b>Overall civil service</b>	<b>36,925</b>	<b>549,660</b>	<b>6.7</b>

**Table 12: 10 civil service organisations with the highest increase in policy staff, as at 31 March 2024 to 31 March 2025**

Civil service organisation	2024	2025	Increase	Percentage
Department for Business and Trade	1,870	3,560	1,690	90.4
Cabinet Office	410	585	175	42.7
Department of Health and Social Care	535	690	155	29
Department for Work and Pensions	1,130	1,235	105	9.3
Ministry of Defence	1,475	1,595	120	8.1
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	565	585	20	3.5
HM Treasury	1,410	1,455	45	3.2
Department for Transport	1,470	1,510	40	2.7
Home Office	2,610	2,660	50	1.9
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government	2,030	2,045	15	0.7
<b>Overall civil service</b>	<b>34,865</b>	<b>36,925</b>	<b>2,060</b>	<b>5.9</b>

## Methodology

This analysis uses annual civil service statistics released by the Cabinet Office.<sup>6</sup> To estimate the total civil service salary bill, the number of full-time employees was subtracted from the total number of full-time equivalent (FTE) employees to calculate the number of FTE part-time staff. This remainder was multiplied by the mean part-time salary, while the full-time headcount was multiplied by the mean full-time salary. The two figures were then combined to produce the total estimated salary bill.

<sup>6</sup> Cabinet Office, *Civil Service statistics: 2025*, 30 July 2025, [www.gov.uk/government/statistics/civil-service-statistics-2025](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/civil-service-statistics-2025) (accessed 30 October 2025).