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Breaking silos: cross-government collaboration for fiscal resilience

By: [Dr Olga Siemers](#), [Dr Daniela Serban](#) | 11 Jun 25

The first step towards efficient collaboration in government is creating a shared understanding of the problem at hand, write [Dr Olga Siemers](#) and [Dr Daniela Serban](#).



These days, public finance faces many significant challenges. From economic volatility and demographic shifts to technological advancement and disruption, the traditional siloed approach to policy development is proving increasingly inadequate.

The limitations of departmental isolation are stark. When policies are developed in isolation, they often create unintended consequences, leading to duplication, inefficiency and conflicting priorities. Consider the intertwined nature of housing, healthcare and social care.

A fragmented approach can result in increased costs and diminished outcomes, as each department operates without considering the wider system.

Tackling these multifaceted issues demands a paradigm shift towards robust cross-government collaboration, a strategy vital for ensuring fiscal resilience and effective public service delivery.

While there is a lot of talk about the necessity of collaborating across the UK government, it is easier said than done. In our recent study, focused on the civil service, we spoke with 60 officials to explore their experiences of developing policies across Whitehall to address today's most pressing public issues.

First of all, it is important to understand the key challenge of addressing public issues that cut across different policy domains and levels of jurisdiction. This challenge is in satisfying multiple conflicting priorities, as our findings reveal.

Public health, national security, quality education and international trade have many stakeholders with different perspectives on what is right or wrong. When these issues are addressed within the hierarchical structure of the civil service, each department follows different, sometimes competing, priorities.

To put it simply, it is so hard to solve the most pressing public problems, because stakeholders disagree on major points.

Our study reveals that the first step towards efficient collaboration in government is creating a shared understanding of the problem at hand. This requires sharing diverse and divergent perspectives on the underlying causes of the problem.

Think about poverty. Are people poor because they are lazy or because their opportunities are limited? Depending on your point of view, you may choose a very different approach to addressing poverty.

When policymakers spend enough time discussing the nature of the problem with their counterparts from across Whitehall, they pave the way to successful collaboration. Time reflecting on the nature of the problem is time well spent.

Yet gathering diverse perspectives might turn into an endless process, resulting in information overload. It is important to integrate these different voices and worldviews into a coherent picture to create a shared understanding of the problem. Then, officials can move towards a concrete plan to present an integrated approach in a ministerial submission.

Our results show that while an integrated and clear policy proposal is the desired end result, it is important to avoid rushed solutions. In essence, cross-government collaboration is not merely a desirable goal but a fundamental necessity for navigating the complexities of modern public finance.



Three key messages

We asked our participants to reflect on the challenges of cross-government work and the strategies they adopt to overcome them. As a result, there are three key messages to consider for making cross-government collaboration possible and efficient: breaking down silos; fostering a culture of collaboration; and implementing robust governance structures. In this way, governments can enhance fiscal resilience and deliver more effective and sustainable public services.

This strategic shift will enable public finance to better address the interwoven challenges of our time, ensuring long-term stability and prosperity for all.

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