INLINE

**National Data Strategy**

# Understanding the UK Government's National Data Strategy

SEPTEMBER 2020

# UK National Data Strategy and consultation

## BACKGROUND

In June 2018, the then Secretary of State for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) announced that the UK would develop a National Data Strategy to unlock the power of data across the government and the wider economy. A year later, DCMS undertook a period of consultation, consisting of a written call for evidence (of which there were 105 responses) along with 20 roundtables and workshops. A summary of this process is available here.
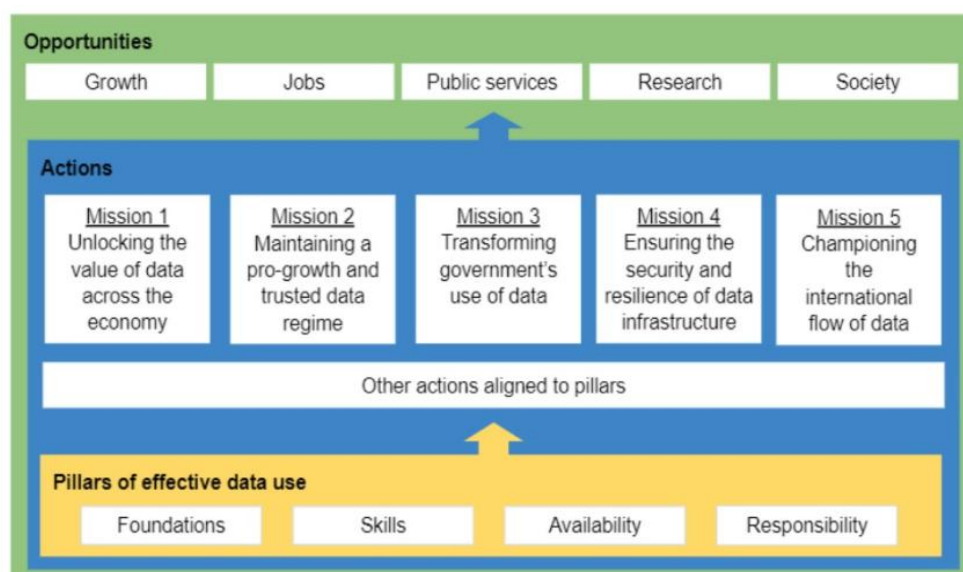
A draft strategy was expected in 2019, but was delayed by the UK Government election, and thus the policy paper has only been published today (9 September 2020). The Government has also opened a consultation for stakeholders to respond to the policy proposals, which launched today and will close on 2 December 2020.

Notably, in accompanying comments to the publication, Digital Secretary Oliver Dowden said that the Strategy had been shaped by experiences over recent months with COVID-19. The National Data Strategy "seeks to maintain the high watermark of data use set during the pandemic, and to free up businesses and organisations to keep using data to innovate, experiment and drive a new era of growth".

## KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE STRATEGY

The National Data Strategy as it currently stands is **based on a framework of pillars for effective data use**, which seek to work towards 1) standardised and interoperable data, 2) a system of ongoing education to foster data skills within the population, 3) data that is accessible, mobile and re-usable, and 4) data that is lawful, secure and ethical. **These principles prop up five corresponding missions, which will in turn result in five 'concrete and significant' opportunities for data** to transform the UK.

This framework is outlined in the diagram below:

Some of the action points established today for transforming public sector data use and capabilities include:

- **Government will appoint a Chief Data Officer** to lead the transformation of government data to drive efficiency and improve public services, for example by setting and driving adoption of standards and improving data quality and sharing.

- Relatedly, **a prioritised list of data standards to adopt across government will be established**. A dedicated Strategy for Standards will be set out, which will provide clarity on where the Data Standards Authority will be able to firmly mandate standards for the public sector, amongst other things.

- **Greater data expertise within government will be fostered**, for example by providing 500 data analyst jobs in the public sector. These analysts will be trained by 2021 through the Data Science Campus at the Office for National Statistics, the Government Analysis Function and the Government Digital Service. Similarly, 10 fellowships will be granted in Downing Street, giving candidates the chance to work with the new No. 10 Data Science team. These will run for 12 to 24 months, starting from April 2021.

- **The Cabinet Office will undertake additional work on ensuring transparency in algorithmic decision making in the public sector**. This will include a partnership with the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation (CDEI) to pilot a set approach to algorithmic decision making later this year, and evaluate what would be required for its full roll out across the public sector.

- **An Integrated Data Platform for government will be developed,** which will be a safe and trusted infrastructure for government's own data. This will be developed by the Office for National Statistics in collaboration with the Cabinet Office.

Meanwhile, there are other action points that apply to the private sector or the UK as a whole, such as:

- **A £2.6 million project will be launched to help companies develop AI-based solutions to detect and address online harms**, such as cyber bullying, harassment and child sexual abuse. The data standards and systems that underpin the monitoring and reporting of these online harms will also be reviewed and upgraded. Please note that the Government is also working on an Online Harms legislation, which will likely also influence the development of monitoring and reporting systems.

- DCMS will work with the data protection regulator, the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) to **clarify confusing aspects of the UK's existing data regime and lift compliance burdens** wherever possible for businesses (especially SMEs).

- The Department for Education, DCMS and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) will work to respectively integrate data science into relevant technical qualifications; to teach foundational data skills to undergraduates through university pilot schemes; and supply advanced data skills to research engineers and professionals. In addition, **DCMS will launch an online portal to support businesses' access to data skills training**.

- **Government will establish a cross-sector Smart Data working group**, which will coordinate and accelerate key initiatives in communications, finance, energy and pensions. The Smart Data programme will be to enable consumers and SMEs to share data that firms hold about them with authorised third parties. **Government will also introduce primary legislation**, "when parliamentary time allows", so that it can mandate participation in these initiatives in the future.

- **The National Data Strategy commits to improving international data availability**, in particular by seeking provisions with trade partners such as the US, Japan, Australia and New Zealand to remove unnecessary barriers to cross border data flows. The UK will also seek a positive data adequacy decision from the EU before the end of the Brexit transition period to maintain free data flows, and will establish an independent UK capability to conduct data adequacy assessments for transfers of personal data from the UK.

## NEXT STEPS

The Government has opened a consultation for stakeholders to respond to the core principles and policy proposals outlined in the strategy. **This consultation will close on 2 December 2020**. It contains 19 questions, the full list of which you can find here.

Questions posed include:
- Do the missions and pillars of the National Data Strategy focus on the right priorities?
- What impact will the proposals outlined here have on the UK?
- What role should government play in enabling better availability of data and supporting data foundations?
- How could central government support SMEs to use data effectively?
- How can the UK's data protection framework remain fit for purpose?
- To what extent do you agree with the functions proposed for the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation (e.g. AI monitoring, partnership working, piloting)?
- What requirements should be placed on data infrastructure providers?
- What are your views on future UK data adequacy arrangements?

Once the consultation closes on 2 December, Government will then analyse submissions before responding in early 2021. Subject to the consultation's findings, further consultation may be deemed necessary if there are any substantial changes to the current strategy.

In addition to the consultation, further detail on some of the proposals outlined in the National Data Strategy will be contained within the forthcoming Digital Strategy. **The Digital Strategy will be published in Autumn 2020.**

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