



A modern public sector workplace

Integrating flexibility, collaboration and technology for better outcomes

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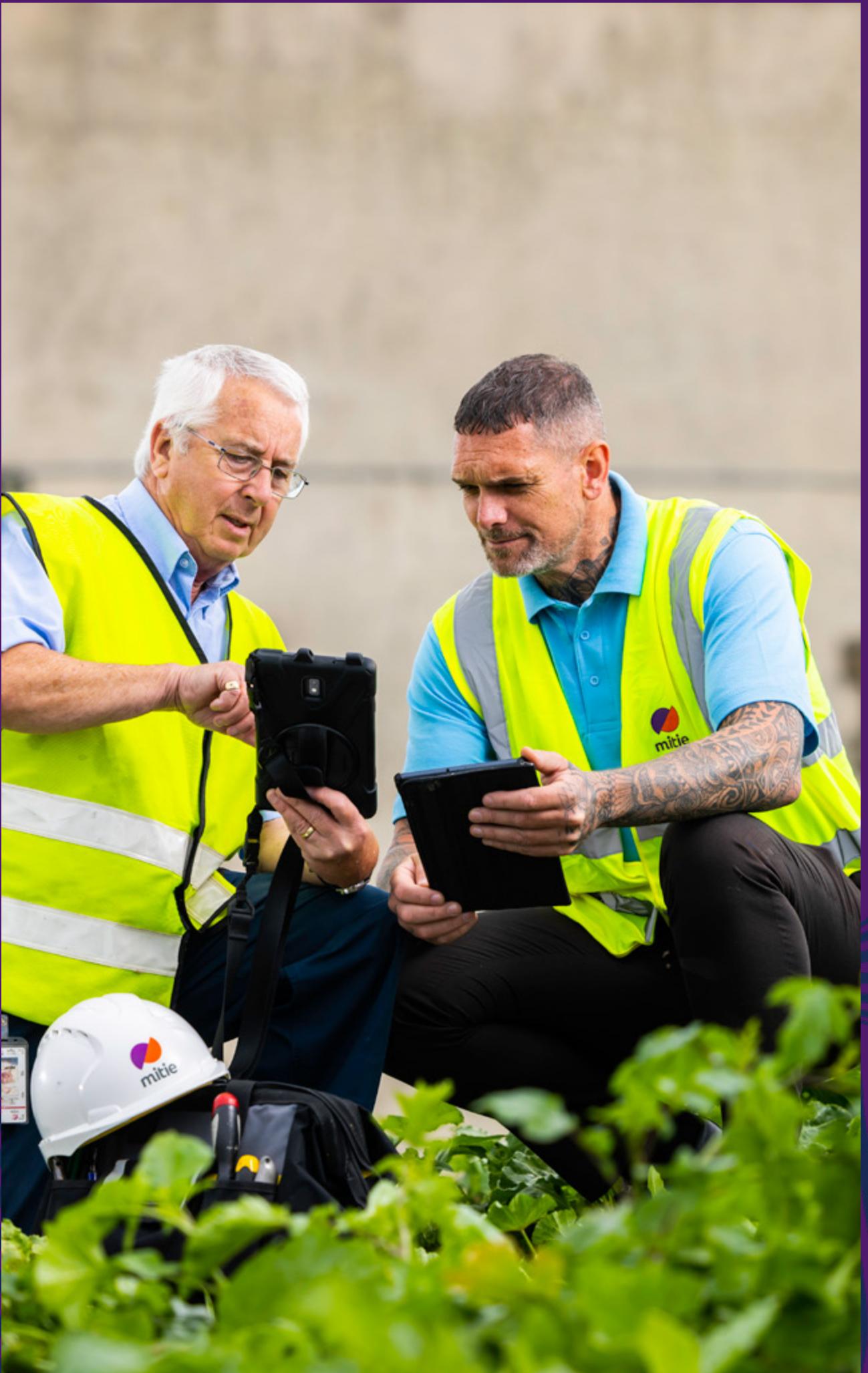
PART 2: The value of face-to-face collaboration





This report is based on a subset of a survey of 3,001 UK workers, all of whom are employed within organisations with more than 500 employees. The survey was conducted online during the fieldwork period of 26 March to 3 April 2025.

Further information on the methodology is available on request.



Introduction

The public sector is under increasing pressure to deliver more - with fewer resources, greater scrutiny and rising expectations from both citizens and employees. In this context, the workplace is no longer just a physical location, it's a strategic platform for collaboration, innovation and service delivery.

Despite a mandate requiring civil servants to spend 60% of their time in the office or on official business, compliance and engagement remain major challenges. Intended to promote collaboration, the policy has faced strong resistance: 78% of staff¹ say it hasn't improved productivity and many report office days dominated by virtual meetings. Unions have branded the rule "arbitrary" and harmful to flexibility, sparking industrial action, including strikes at HM Land Registry and similar threats in other departments.

Our own research underscores these issues – with Central Government workers reporting a requirement to return to the workplace, but nearly one in four reporting that face-to-face time with colleagues doesn't enhance their productivity. This disconnect signals a deeper challenge: the current workplace is not seen as a compelling environment that supports performance, engagement, or career development.

Our latest research reveals that Central Government workers value flexibility, wellbeing and purpose more than ever. They're more likely than the average UK worker to operate in hybrid arrangements and they place a higher premium on work-life balance and autonomy. However, many don't look forward to going to their place of work, while a significant proportion feel their workplace doesn't foster collaboration or offer clear pathways for progression.

This report explores how Central Government organisations can close this gap. It identifies three critical themes shaping the future of the public sector workplace:

1. Balancing flexibility with mandatory policies – understanding what drives satisfaction and how to make the workplace worth attending.
2. Rebuilding the value of face-to-face collaboration – creating environments that foster community, culture and career growth.
3. Enhancing workplace technology – focusing on reliability, usability and training to support seamless working.

By addressing these areas, public sector leaders can transform their workplaces into environments that not only meet operational needs, but also inspire their people to deliver better outcomes for society.

Balancing flexibility demands with mandatory policies

As they continue to prioritise flexible work arrangements, the benefits of working onsite aren't inherently clear to Central Government workers.

Across Central Government, the return-to-workplace is at a critical juncture. According to our proprietary workforce survey, while 56% of employees face a mandate to return onsite, compared to just 42% across the wider workforce (fig.1), the rationale behind these policies is not always resonating with employees. For many, the workplace is not perceived as a space that adds value to their day-to-day experience.

The challenge is twofold: first, to clearly articulate the benefits of in-person work; and second, to make sure that the workplace itself delivers on those promises.

Our data suggests that employees are not completely resistant to returning to the workplace, but that they find their workplace environments less productive, less flexible and less engaging than their remote setups. As such, 77% of Central Government workers operate in hybrid arrangements (1–4 days onsite), compared to 63% of the overall workforce. They also place a higher value on work-life balance (69% say it's very important) and flexibility in when and where they work (62% say it's very important) - both significantly above the UK average of 60% and 40%, respectively. Yet, 25% of Central Government workers say they do not look forward to going to their place of work and 18% disagree that their workplace fosters collaboration and teamwork - both notably higher than the national averages of 15% and 9%.

Figure 1: Employee working arrangements – Central Government workforce vs. UK average

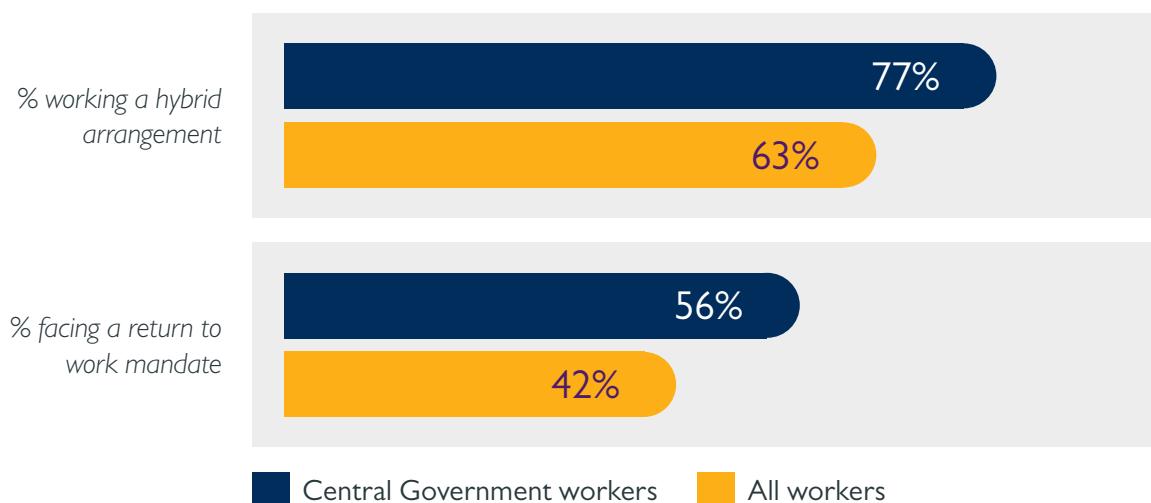
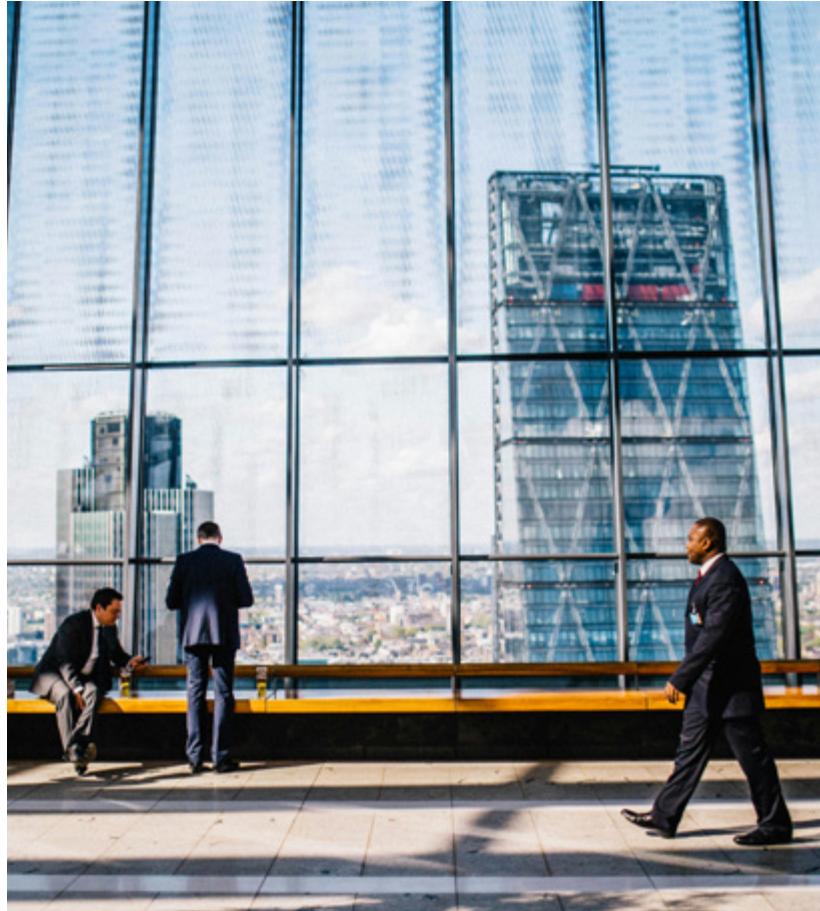


Figure 2: Central Government workplace sentiment vs. the UK average



This disconnect must be addressed – not through mandates alone, but with meaningful improvements to the workplace experience. If the workplace is to be a catalyst for collaboration, innovation and service delivery, it must be designed and communicated as such.



So what?

Central Government organisations must go beyond mandates. Messages around building culture and collaboration will fail to resonate if workers don't see this in action.

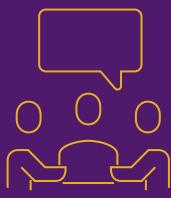


Organisations should consider the following:



Communicate the purpose behind workplace mandates with clarity and conviction

- Articulate and celebrate the tangible benefits of in-person work, such as stronger collaboration, a vibrant organisational culture and improved service delivery.
- Bring the value of the workplace to life through real examples and data, showing how face-to-face interaction accelerates organisational goals and supports individual growth.



Engage employees in shaping the workplace experience

- Conduct regular feedback sessions to understand what workers value most in their onsite and remote environments.
- Co-create workplace improvements with staff to build ownership and trust.



Design workplaces that compete with remote setups

- Invest in amenities, breakout spaces and collaborative zones that make the onsite workplace a destination, not an obligation.
- Create a physical environment that supports both focused work and informal interaction.



Support hybrid working with robust digital infrastructure

- Provide seamless tools for cross-setting collaboration, so remote workers feel equally connected and productive.
- Offer training and support to maximise the effectiveness of hybrid work technologies.



Champion flexibility as part of the employee value proposition

- Recognise that flexibility is a top driver of satisfaction and retention – embed it into workforce planning and policy.
- Avoid framing flexibility and mandates as opposing forces; instead, position them as complementary elements of a modern workplace strategy.

The value of face-to-face collaboration

Central Government organisations should encourage a sense of community among the workforce to build a workplace culture attractive to all workers.

The value of in-person interaction and collaboration isn't fully recognised across the Central Government workforce. A significant proportion of employees question the relevance of face-to-face time with colleagues, with 25% stating it is unimportant to their productivity and the overall performance of the organisation - more than double the national average of 12%.

There are a number of potential reasons why in-person interaction and collaboration are not fully recognised across the Central Government workforce. The widespread adoption of remote and hybrid working during the pandemic demonstrated that many roles could be performed effectively without physical presence, reinforcing a culture

where virtual collaboration feels sufficient. Additionally, much of government work is highly individual and process-driven, such as policy drafting and compliance, where deep focus is prioritised over group interaction. Structural realities, including geographically dispersed teams and reliance on secure digital platforms, have also further normalised virtual engagement.

Finally, the benefits of in-person collaboration - such as fostering innovation, strengthening team cohesion and accelerating problem-solving - are often not clearly communicated or demonstrated, leaving many employees unconvinced of its relevance to productivity and organisational performance.

Figure 3: Face time with colleagues is less important to those working in Central Government roles

% stating that *face-time with colleagues is not important for their productivity / overall organisational performance*

25%

12%

% stating that *NO activities are more beneficial to do in-person and that they can do their work just as effectively remotely*

20%

8%

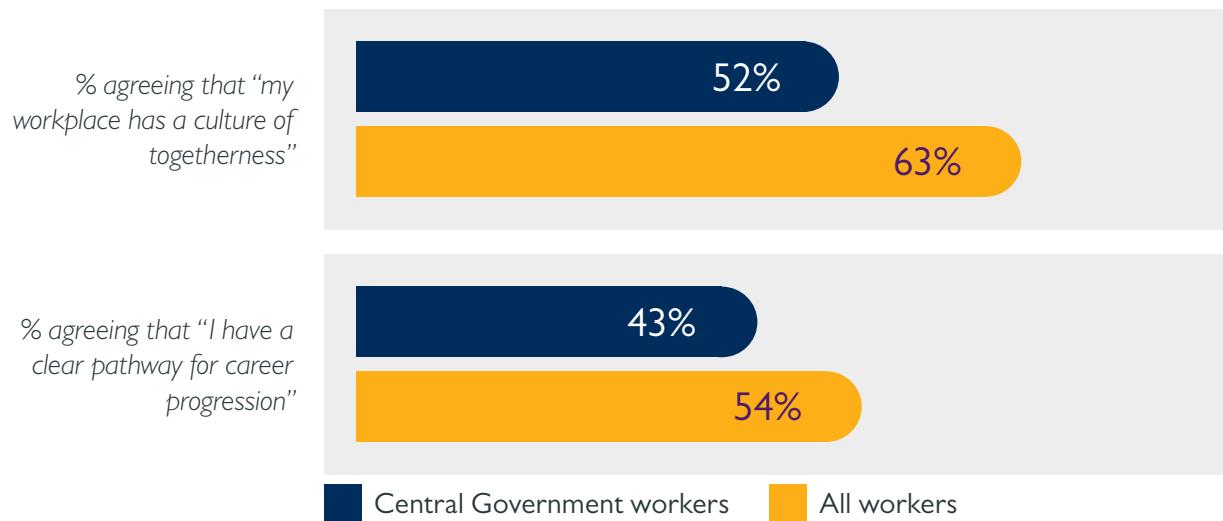


Central Government workers



All workers

Figure 4: The broader cultural challenge within Central Government roles



As a result, 20% of Central Government workers believe there are no activities that are more beneficial to do in person and that they can perform their roles just as effectively remotely. This is significantly higher than the 8% UK workforce average.

This sentiment reflects a broader cultural challenge. Only 52% of Central Government workers agree that their workplace has a culture of "togetherness," compared to 63% across the wider workforce. Additionally, just 43% feel they have a clear pathway for career progression at their current employer, significantly below the national average. These

figures suggest that the workplace is not currently perceived as a space that supports professional growth or fosters meaningful interpersonal connections.

To shift this perception, Central Government organisations must reframe the workplace as a hub for collaboration, learning and community. Face-to-face interaction should be positioned not as a requirement, but as a valuable opportunity to build relationships, share knowledge and accelerate career development. This requires intentional design, both in terms of physical space and organisational culture.



So what?

Central Government functions should intentionally foster a sense of community throughout the workplace environment.

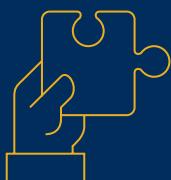


To achieve this, leaders should take the following actions:



Position in-person collaboration as a catalyst for career growth and organisational success

- Clearly communicate how face-to-face interaction accelerates mentorship, learning and professional advancement.
- Highlight real examples of breakthrough collaboration and innovation that have taken place onsite, making the benefits tangible and relatable.



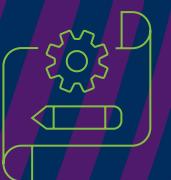
Provide inclusive opportunities for connection, regardless of working arrangement

- Design networking channels that engage both remote and onsite staff, such as virtual coffee sessions, hybrid team huddles and cross-departmental forums.
- Guarantee that all employees, wherever they work, have equal access to relationship-building and knowledge-sharing opportunities.



Invest deliberately in workplace culture and social infrastructure

- Empower social committees or appoint culture champions to organise informal events and strengthen camaraderie.
- Celebrate team achievements and milestones in shared spaces, reinforcing a sense of belonging and collective pride.



Design spaces that encourage interaction and informal engagement

- Incorporate breakout areas, communal zones and flexible layouts that support spontaneous collaboration.
- Avoid overly rigid desk-based setups that discourage movement and conversation.



Support structured development through mentorship and peer networks

- Launch mentorship programmes that pair employees across grades and departments.
- Facilitate peer learning groups to share knowledge and build cross-functional relationships.

Enhancing available workplace technology

Central Government workers want reliable technology, rather than advanced technology, and training on how to use it.

While digital transformation continues to reshape the public sector, Central Government workers are sending a clear message: they don't need the latest innovations, they need the basics to work reliably. Just 17% of Central Government employees say that access to high-quality technology and tools contributes to their workplace satisfaction, compared to 27% across the wider workforce. This suggests that advanced features are less of a priority than dependable, user-friendly systems.

The data reveals a consistent theme: reliability and usability are falling short. Only 65% of Central Government workers believe workplace equipment is used effectively, compared to 74% nationally. Similarly, just 54% say workplace technology is used effectively, versus 67% across the UK workforce. Meanwhile, nearly half of Central Government employees are losing time to IT issues, such as software malfunctions and connectivity problems (46% vs. 37% overall).

Figure 5: Worker sentiment towards workplace technology and tools

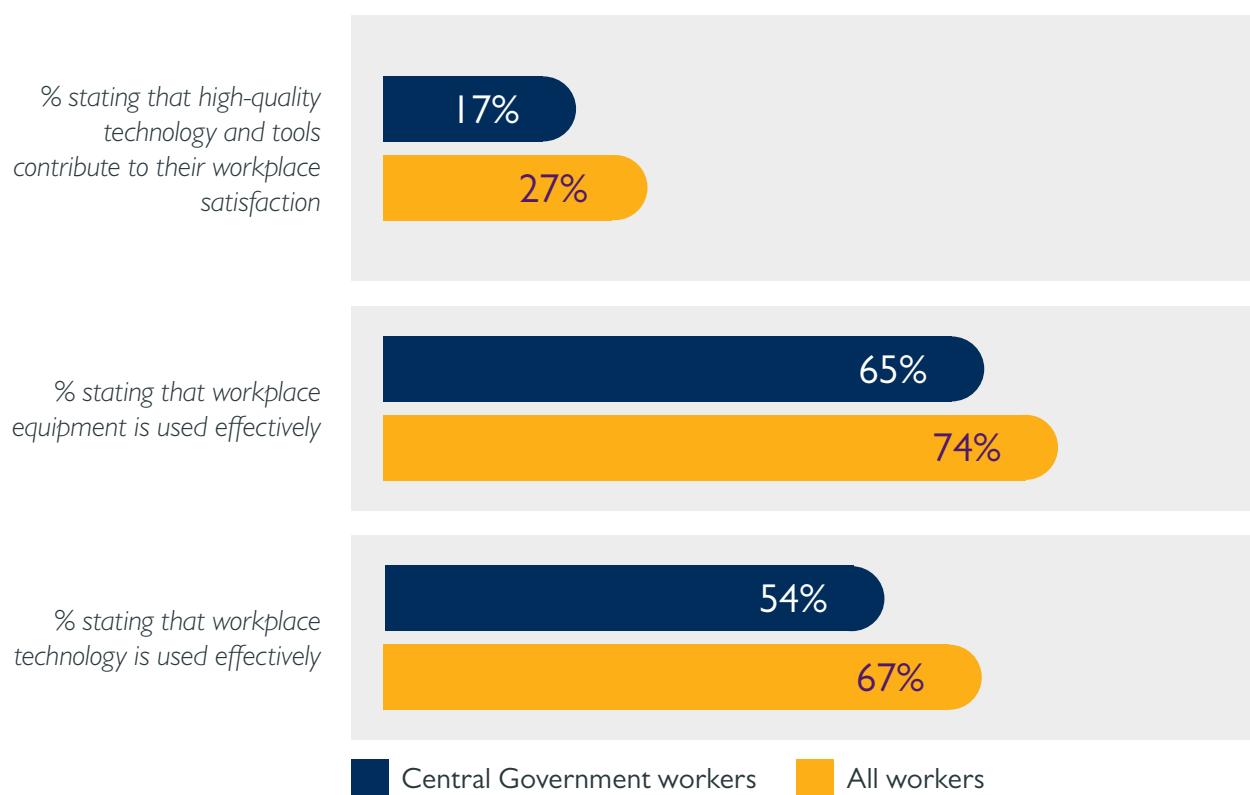
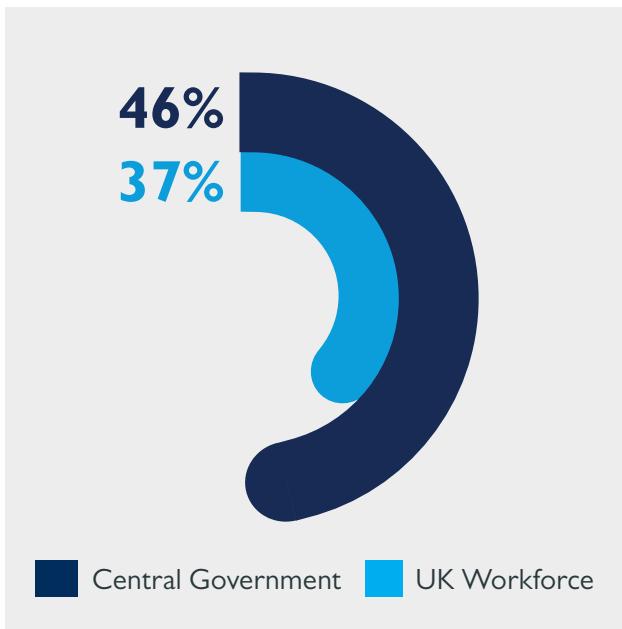
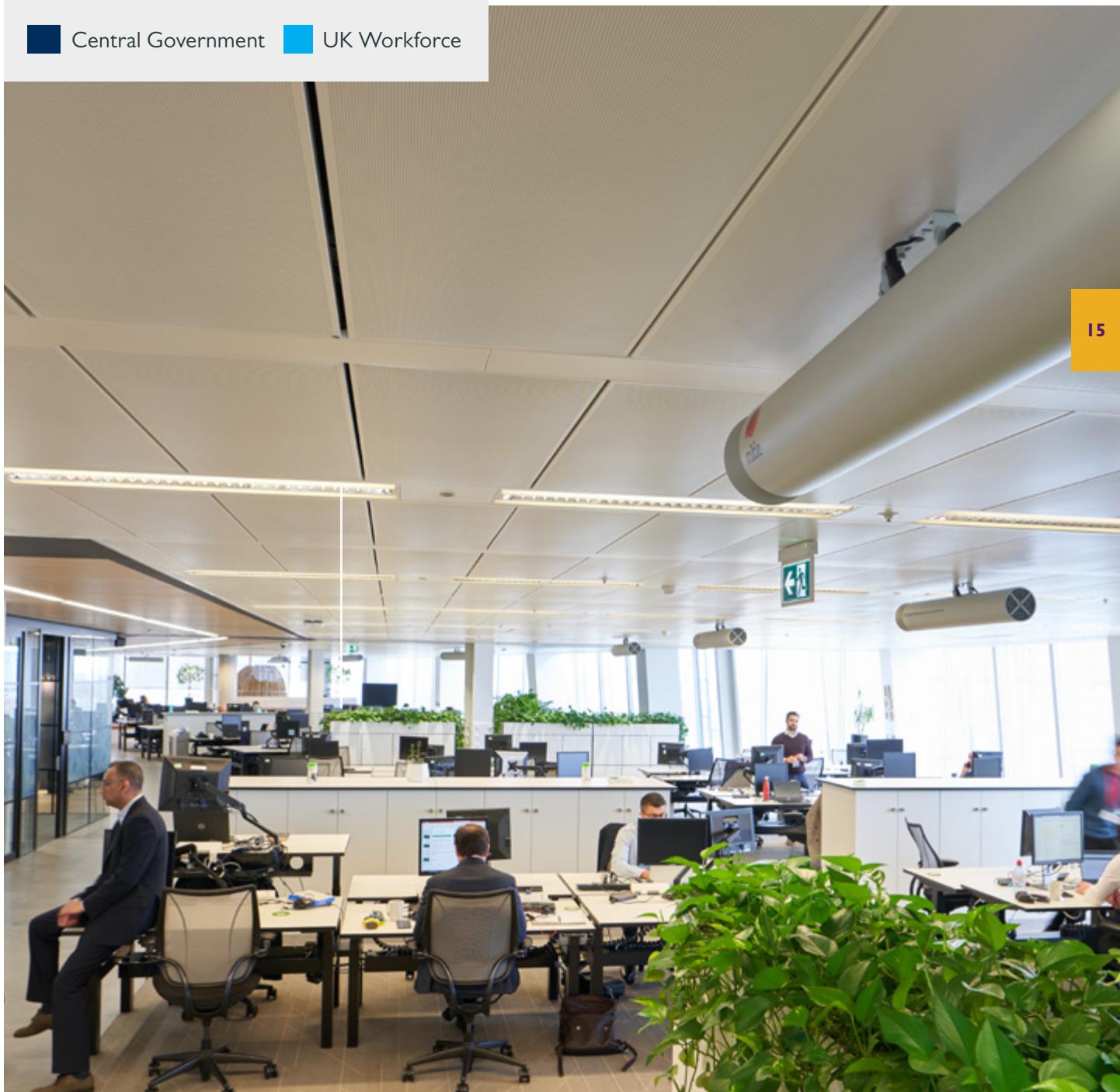


Figure 6: % of workers losing time to IT issues
(e.g. software malfunctions, connectivity problems)



While this loss of time is no doubt reflective of the perceived lack of effectiveness of how workplace technology and equipment are used, it may also reflect a skills issue. 40% of Central Government workers say they would benefit from training on how to use available technology more effectively - well above the national average of 31%.

Taken together, all of these figures highlight a pressing need to address legacy systems, improve digital literacy and make sure that the technology already in place is working as intended.



So what?

Central Government organisations should prioritise existing workplace equipment and technology being fully operational before considering advancements and upgrades.



Key actions include:

Prioritise reliability of workplace technology



- Guarantee consistent performance of essential infrastructure - hardware, connectivity, collaboration platforms and building management systems - through proactive monitoring and maintenance.
- Implement predictive analytics and automated alerts to identify and resolve recurring IT issues before they impact operations.

Address legacy technology challenges



- Conduct a technology health assessment to map outdated systems that hinder efficiency and plan phased upgrades aligned with organisational priorities.
- Ensure new solutions are interoperable with existing platforms, minimising disruption and enabling a seamless transition.



Invest in targeted training and support

- Deliver role-specific training modules and on-demand digital guidance to help employees fully leverage available tools.
- Use data-driven insights to tailor support based on user behaviour and confidence levels, improving adoption and satisfaction.



Enhance hybrid working capabilities

- Provide secure, reliable remote-working tools, including cloud-based collaboration platforms, ergonomic setups and integrated video conferencing solutions.
- Enable seamless collaboration between onsite and remote teams through smart meeting spaces and unified communication systems.



Leverage employee feedback for continuous improvements

- Deploy real-time feedback tools and sentiment analysis to capture user pain points and preferences.
- Involve employees in pilot programmes and co-design workshops to ensure new technologies meet practical needs and drive engagement.

Conclusion and key recommendations

The Central Government workplace is at a pivotal moment. As departments and agencies strive to deliver more with less, meet rising citizen expectations and retain skilled public servants, the workplace must evolve - from a legacy environment into a modern, strategic enabler of public sector performance.

Our research highlights three critical imperatives:



Clarify the purpose of the workplace

by aligning return-to-office policies with meaningful benefits for collaboration, culture and service delivery.



Rebuild the value of in-person interaction

fostering a sense of community, shared purpose and career development.



Strengthen the foundations of workplace technology

focusing on reliability, usability and support to enable seamless hybrid working.



The opportunity is clear. By reimagining the workplace, Central Government organisations can recover lost productivity, improve employee satisfaction and create environments that support both operational excellence and public service outcomes.

To support this transformation, we recommend the following actions:

<p>1. Treat the workplace as a lever for public value, aligning space, technology and culture with strategic goals.</p>	<p>2. Invest in reliable, fit-for-purpose infrastructure, addressing legacy systems and making sure the basics work well before pursuing advanced solutions.</p>	<p>3. Reframe office mandates as purposeful invitations, positioning the workplace as a space for collaboration, innovation and community.</p>
<p>4. Design for flexibility and inclusion, with environments that support diverse workstyles and foster a sense of belonging.</p>	<p>5. Embed employee voice into workplace planning, using feedback and data to shape spaces that reflect real needs and aspirations.</p>	<p>6. Champion a culture of connection and development, with structured opportunities for mentorship, networking and informal engagement.</p>

Those who act now will not only improve how their people work, but will also redefine what the workplace means to the public sector workforce.



About Mitie

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employees

149
different nationalities

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