

Shan Morgan
Ysgrifennydd Parhaol
Permanent Secretary



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Nick Ramsay
Public Accounts Committee Chair
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
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Dear Nick,

01 June 2017

During my introductory session with the Committee on 13 March 2017 Mr Lee Waters AM asked me about the challenges digitalisation will bring to the Welsh Government and the organisation's readiness to respond. I promised to write with considered thoughts on this important subject.

Background

In 2014 the Welsh Government Board approved the organisation's first Digital Action Plan (2014-2017). The plan set out to improve the Welsh Government's digital information and services, and is published on our website, please see a link for the Committee's reference: <http://gov.wales/topics/science-and-technology/digital/public-services/digital-first/?lang=en>

In 2014, the Welsh Government assessed itself as Level 2 on the Digital Capability Framework¹ - "senior management in place with a remit to set targets, develop overarching vision and plan, and develop necessary capability and culture. Digital is seen as a key transformation tool and advocacy is strong at key parts of the organisation."

Since then there has been significant progress. We have appointed a Chief Digital Officer and created a strategy team, established a Digital and Data Group, chaired by the Minister for Skills and Science to provide leadership and direction, implemented a digital learning programme for staff, and delivered a range of new and improved digital services.

¹ Adapted from the Framework published in the [UK Government Digital Strategy](#) and the [Digital Capability Framework](#) submitted by Kieran O'Hea (Digitigm) to the consultation phase of the Digital Agenda for Europe.



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We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding

We consider that we have now reached Level 4 of the Digital Capability Framework - “senior management making significant progress in delivering the vision and plan. Processes across the organisation have been converted to digital, providing tangible benefits and efficiencies. Advocacy is increasing.” Our aim by 2020 is to be at Level 5 - “digital is at the heart of policy and strategy, contributing to all business processes and objectives. Digital culture is strong: agile, user-centred, innovative, and responsive.”

The actions in the Digital Action Plan (2014-2017) are now largely complete, and the need for a refreshed plan has been recognised. In April 2017, the Welsh Government Board considered the draft Digital Action Plan (2017-2020) which is now being finalised.

The Digital Action Plan (2017-2020) will be a comprehensive account of our objectives and planned action, so I do not want to pre-empt it too much here. However I would like to expand on four themes raised specifically during my introductory session with the Committee: digital mindset; specialist skills; enabling good government business; and big data. Given the recent widespread cyber attacks, I would also like to comment on resilience.

Fostering a digital mind-set

Digital technologies have had over many years, and will of course continue to have, a huge impact on the way people in Wales live, including how they access information and public services. Taking Wales Forward states: ‘We need to go digital-first in our delivery of government services.’ Understanding the opportunities that these technologies present for government is an essential part of the skill-set required by modern civil servants.

During the discussion with the Committee, the excellent work carried out by some of the UK Government’s big transactional offices in Wales was mentioned. The Welsh Government also provides a small number of direct transactional services to the public. The Welsh Government currently has 22 live digital services, and we run over 100 websites. We have made good progress in the digitisation of services, exemplified by *Rural Payments Wales Online* which allows 18,000 farmers to apply for and manage payments online. *Hwb* (hwb.wales.gov.uk), which hosts a national collection of digital tools and resources to support parents, teachers and children in Wales, is an outstanding example of services being developed and delivered online; Wales is ahead of the rest of the UK in this area. Digital technologies are also challenging and changing the way that we engage with citizens. Our *Real Conversation Events*, used to develop the Welsh Government’s Youth Entrepreneurship Programme 2016-2020, are a good example, and digital engagement channels for the Valleys Taskforce are live now - see Twitter, #TrafodyCymoedd #TalkValleys.



While there are strong examples of digitally-led work, improving skills and capability in this area is, and will continue to be, a priority. As part of the Welsh Government's Digital Action Plan (2014-2017), a digital learning programme was established for staff. The programme includes beginner and intermediate digital awareness courses; courses focusing on 'Agile' ways of working; and a digital leadership master-class for the Senior Civil Service and Executive bands. More than 500 members of staff have attended over the last year and more courses are planned. Classroom learning is supported by online training modules, inter-change opportunities, and more informal 'lunch and learn' sessions.

One of my early priorities as Permanent Secretary is to ensure that the Welsh Government Civil Service has the skills and capability it needs for the future. I will soon launch an organisation-wide engagement exercise to identify our skills gaps. However, in advance of that data coming through, I have already agreed with the Senior Team that policy skills, leadership, and digital skills will be a core part of a new corporate learning programme for staff.

Specialist digital skills

In addition to what we might describe as 'generalist' Civil Servants working on policy development and delivery, there are over 100 members of staff in the Welsh Government with digital and ICT roles that require specialist skills and qualifications, such as programmers, IT support specialists, and web designers. There are clearly potential benefits from reducing reliance on external contractors for this kind of work, in terms of cost, security, and sustainability. Bringing specialist skills in-house often necessitates external recruitment rather than retraining, and in a time of very tight resource constraints this is clearly a difficult challenge. However, the First Minister recognises that certain key skills sets will require this approach.

In April 2017, the organisation's external recruitment panel agreed the appointment of ten people with specialist digital skills to be deployed across departments. The Welsh Government's next apprenticeship scheme will include a digital cohort. We are also bringing data apprentices into the organisation in partnership with the ONS. In the longer term, workforce planning for digital roles will need to be built into the Welsh Government's wider workforce planning work. A cross-organisation digital workforce group has been established to support this.

Enabling good government business

During my introductory session I spoke about the opportunities that digital technologies offer to support better ways of doing the nuts and bolts of government business – I had in mind working effectively as a team, holding productive meetings, and communicating with colleagues across geographical boundaries. I know that my predecessor led a significant piece of work to improve the Welsh Government's use of email and electronic record keeping. Work is ongoing to upgrade the Welsh Government's telephone provision and support staff to connect more effectively with their colleagues using instant messaging and real-time online availability. Feedback from staff participating in the recent flexible working pilot in our Merthyr office particularly emphasised the importance of reliable and readily available mobile IT equipment to support working at home and on the move. The Welsh Government's Board has been testing software and hardware which allows its meetings to be 'paperless'. I have just approved a further year of this trial to make sure we learn as much as possible about the benefits and the changes in skills and behaviour this kind of working requires.

Resilience

While I agree with the point that Mr Waters made during my recent introductory session that this is *not all about kit*, having the right equipment available and operating effectively is of course essential for digital working - which brings me to resilience. The recent unprecedented cyber attacks on organisations across the world have emphasised once again the huge challenges posed by keeping IT systems and equipment operational, and crucially, secure. As the Welsh Government has developed more digital services and ways of working our dependence on the technology that supports them has increased. The impact of technology failure and increasingly cyber crime presents a much higher risk to the delivery of our work than previously. To address this risk the Welsh Government has invested in its core systems and requires assurance standards for its suppliers to be met. We have also developed the procedures needed to mobilise quickly in the case of an incident. IT resilience is on the Welsh Government's Corporate Risk Register and will remain a priority area for the Board. The First Minister's statement on 16 May 2017 also gives due praise to the IT resilience and emergency response work carried out by NHS Wales and other public bodies in Wales.

Exploiting Big Data

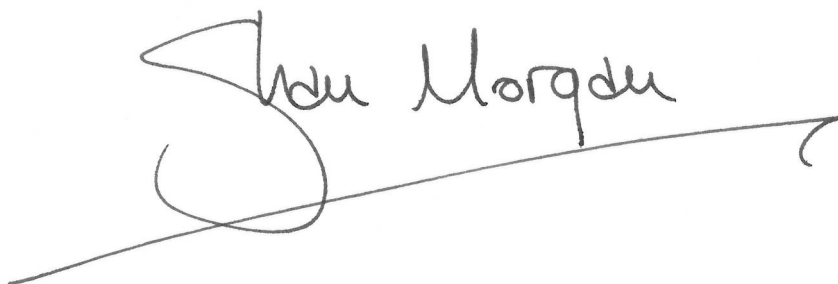
Digital transformation not only results in more data being produced, in a more timely fashion, it also provides new ways to collect, manage and analyse data. As an organisation the Welsh Government continues to look at ways in which we can better exploit data using both traditional and innovative techniques. For example, colleagues in Transport are making innovative use of anonymous big data sets on GPS and mobile phone data for transport analysis.

In recent years the Welsh Government has also improved its own statistical and spatial data, making it available in machine readable formats, and as outlined in the Welsh Government Open Data Plan, is committed to pushing forward with the open data agenda.

With an increasing number of data driven organisations being established – as noted by Mr Waters - there is the potential for Wales to become a world leading data-hub. Colleagues are already working on projects with both the ONS Data Science Campus and the Administrative Data Research Centre for Wales, and over the years we have provided significant funding to develop the SAIL data bank in Swansea University. Our work with the Administrative Data Research Centre for Wales has led to publications looking at the outcomes of policy interventions such as supporting people and fuel poverty by linking data – securely and ethically – from different sources. The Welsh Government is seen as one of the leading partners of the UK Administrative Data Research Network.

I hope that this update has provided the Committee with assurance that digital technologies and the challenges and opportunities they present are high on the Welsh Government's agenda and that progress is being made. I look forward to sharing the Digital Action Plan (2017 – 2020) with the Committee in due course.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shan Morgan". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a long, horizontal, slightly wavy line that extends across the width of the signature.

Shan Morgan

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