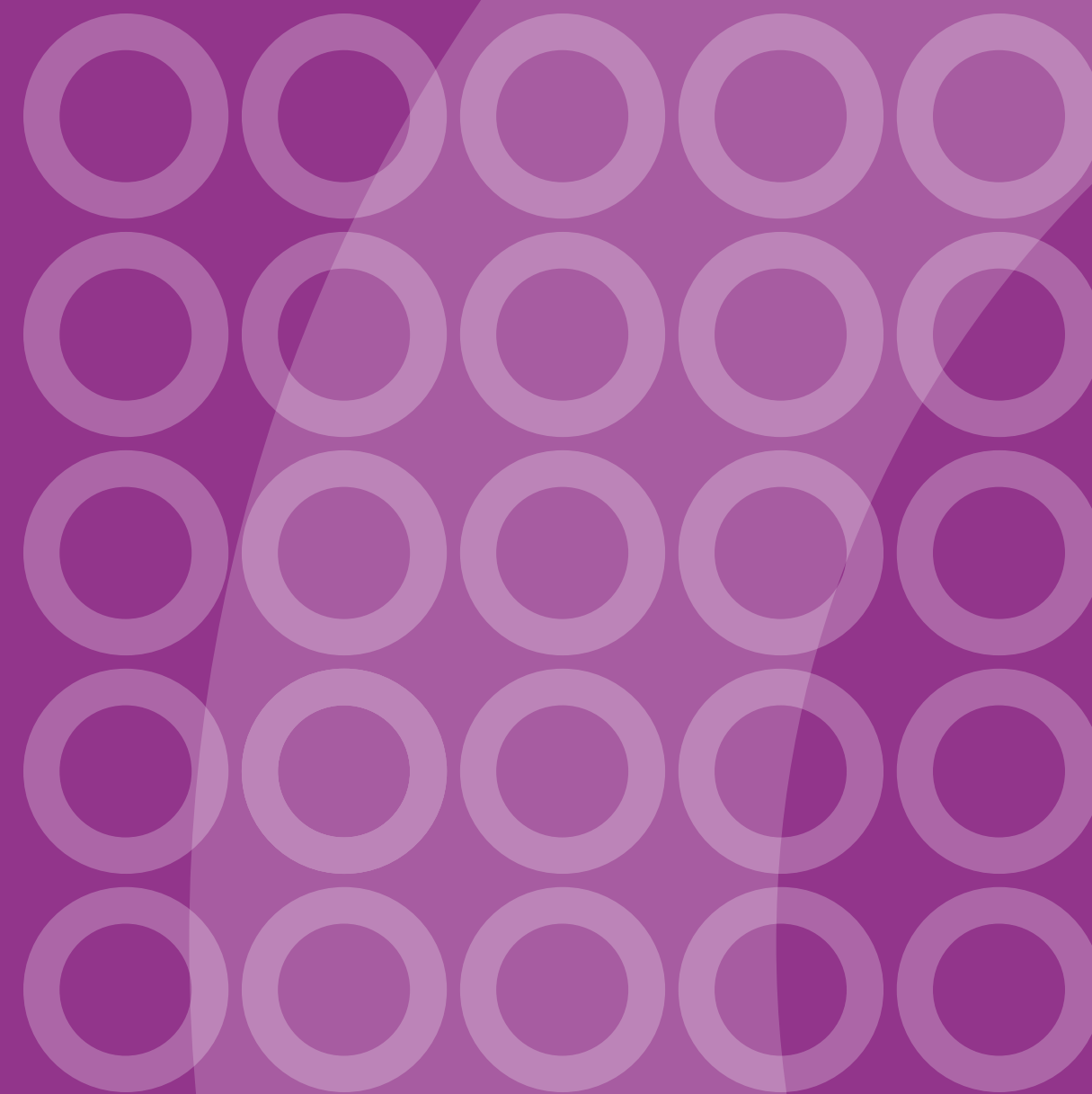




2022 Report

Accelerating Digital Transformation in **Healthcare**



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Introduction

Achieving a truly digital-first NHS has long been the dream for the UK government. Much has already been achieved. New ways of working – and of thinking – have helped drive change in the way health and care services are provided. There is, however, more to be done to reach the ambitious digitalisation goals that will bring true transformation throughout the sector.

As the NHS emerges from the biggest challenge it has ever faced, work continues to manage the backlogs that inevitably built as the COVID-19 pandemic took centre stage. Organisations are continuing to evaluate the lessons of the pandemic, refining their plans and formulating new strategies to power through the recovery and on to more efficient, future-proofed provision of services.

Many have already taken the first bold steps towards digitalisation. For some, though, there remains a sense of venturing into the unknown. To gain a deep insight into the understanding of and attitudes towards innovation through emergent technology, leading digital transformation company Restore Digital, in collaboration with GovNews, conducted a wide-ranging survey into trends, practices and successful outcomes in digital acceleration in the public sector.

More than 250 responses were received, nearly 70 per cent of which were at C-Suite or senior management level. This white paper will consider the results. It will look at the barriers that have so far prevented progress and some ways to overcome them. It will help define a route along which leaders and teams can further their own digital journeys, realising the many benefits embracing transformative technologies will bring.





“

Data saves lives. If we put this plan into action, and unlock the incredible power that data possesses, we can bring the future forward, and make us all healthier and safer.

”

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care¹

Laying the foundations



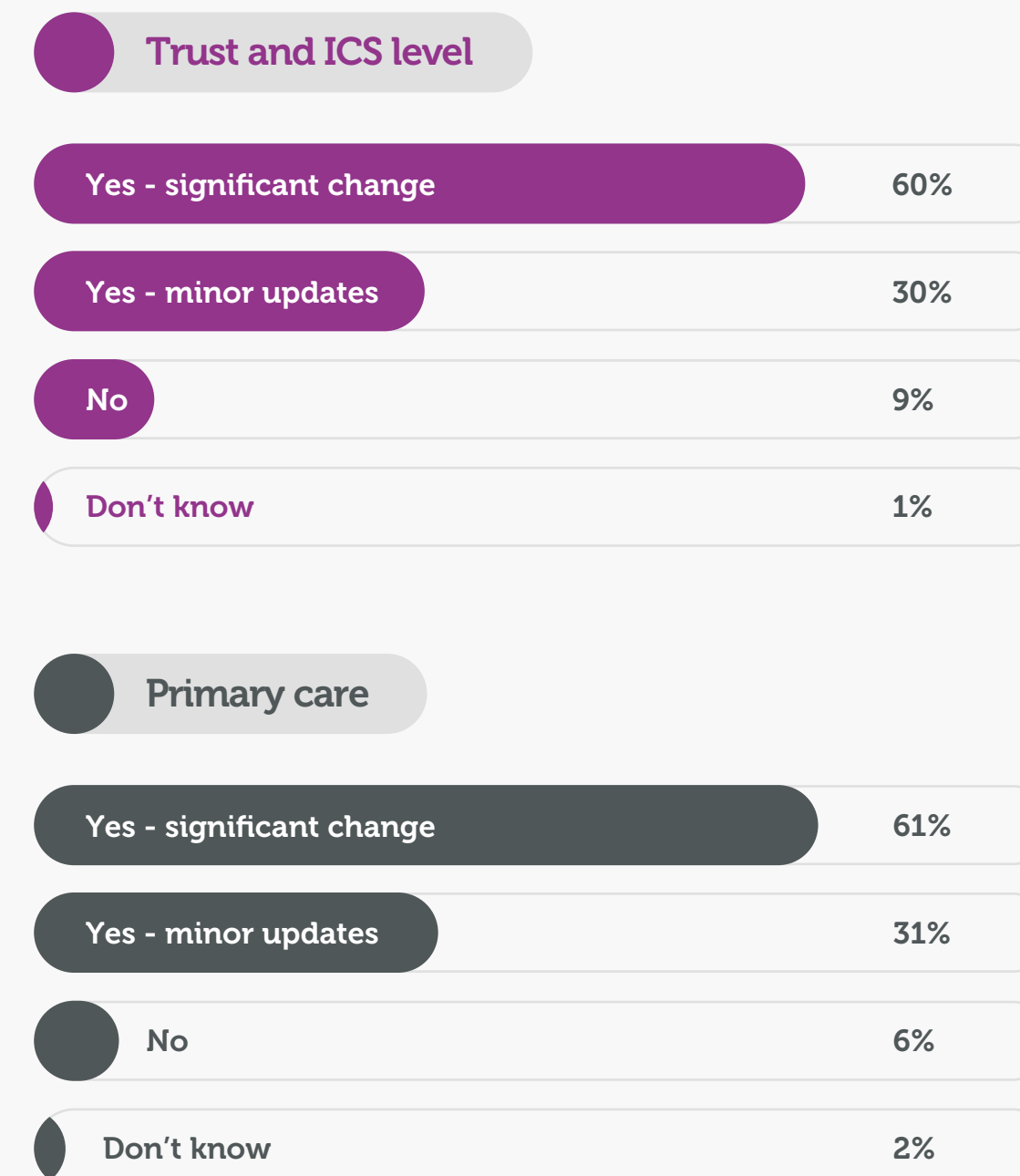
With the NHS recovery gathering pace, the Government has further signalled its intentions to ensure digitalisation remains front and centre in its strategy to transform health and care provision.

In a speech at the NHS ConFed Expo², the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care praised the work that had already been done, recognising the many “unprecedented achievements” that had been made since the pandemic outbreak.

In swiftly transitioning to new ways of working, teams proved able to make the necessary changes in methodologies and practices at a much faster pace than would otherwise be expected. In the survey we asked leaders whether their digital transformation strategy had been modified since the start of the pandemic and over 90% answered positively. At Trust and ICS level, “Significant change” was reported by 60% with a further 30% confirming they had made “minor updates.” Just 9% said there had been no change at all and the remaining 1% were unsure. These figures were broadly comparative with responses from primary care. Here, 61% said their change had been “significant”, with 31% reporting “minor changes. 6% had made no change and 2% were unsure.

Though the Government is determined to build on the lessons learned from COVID-19, the Secretary acknowledged the enormity of the challenge ahead. It is estimated that between 11 and 13 million people stayed away from the NHS during the period³. These people are now seeking treatment and adding to the widely reported pressures, particularly on Accident and Emergency wards.

How organisations have modified their Digital Transformation strategy since the start of the pandemic:



...We keep moving forward, because this moment in time we dare not lose. It's a moment when we can combine valuable lessons from the pandemic, with incredible new technology and innovative ways of working, which when taken together help us face the challenges of the future. It's a small window of time where we can make a big difference.



Secretary of State
for Health and Care

The speech aligned with the findings of the independent 2021 Wade-Gery review, "Putting data, digital and tech at the heart of transforming the NHS"⁴, which signposted ways for the sector to capitalise on its successes and led many of the digital strategies pursued by teams across the NHS.

In its 2022/23 Priorities and Operational Planning Guidance document⁵, NHS England emphasised the urgent need for digitalisation, calling for organisations to, "Exploit the potential of digital technologies to transform the delivery of care and patient outcomes – achieving a core level of digitisation in every service across systems."⁵

Digital transformation is at the heart of the NHS England Integrated Care Systems (ICS) model, which took over the responsibility for statutory commissioning from Clinical Commissioning Groups in 2022. Recognising the necessity for infrastructure allowing interoperability and staff mobility, NHS England have set a series of digital targets⁶ for ICSs including:



A named senior officer with responsibility for digital on the ICS board



Cross-system analytical capability to enable improved decision making



Shared care records to connect health and care services



A road map for citizen-centred digital channels and services



Ensuring digital literacy throughout the workforce





Similar strategies are also being pursued in Wales⁷, while more than £1 billion in investment will increase capacity and deliver reforms under the ambitious NHS Scotland Recovery Plan.⁸

This equates to more than 5.5% of the record £18 billion in funding provided for in the 2022/23 budget. In Northern Ireland, the Department of Health has overseen the formation of a regional group to oversee its own action plan. "No More Silos"⁹ explicitly references one of the key historic barriers to digitalisation.

In the survey results, respondents frequently cited siloed data as a major factor where digital projects have stalled.

“
**Business areas and systems
seem to operate in Silos.**”

“
**Silos still dominate
the organisation.**”

Expectation vs Outcome

Given the Government's evident desire and intention to promote a "digital first" agenda, it is perhaps surprising that the pace of change has not been faster. Although some strides have been made at trust and board level, the benefits have sometimes been slow to trickle down.

When prompted by the survey to evaluate their organisation's current status, just 12% responded "mature" in reference to cloud adoption. At 7%, the number of respondents considering themselves to be "mature" in the fields of advanced automation and technology (RPA, IoT, AI, Machine Learning) was noticeably low, indicating the need for considerable change in both practice and culture.

In many instances, organisations have made inroads into reducing their use of paper. This has long been a central ambition transcending political lines. The idea of a fully paperless NHS has its roots in the National Programme for IT, announced in 2002 by the Blair administration. In 2013, the (then) Secretary of State for Health made a Policy Exchange speech calling for, "The most modern digital health service in the world."¹⁰



70%

report their internal workflows are paper lite

23%

of respondents were able to report that their organisation could seamlessly share and integrate data externally via digital applications

33%

of respondents were able to report that their organisation could seamlessly share and integrate data internally via digital applications

28%

report their internal workflows are fully paperless

Encouragingly, over 70% report their internal workflows are “paper lite”, with 28% fully paperless. However, this should really be seen as a first step on the digital journey. The survey asked respondents to rate their organisation’s performance in sharing, collaborating and integrating data/information across internal boundaries and systems. Just 33% considered their processes to be, “Seamless & compliant via digital applications.” This figure fell to 23% when the same question was applied to external boundaries and systems. The concept has been proved time and again; now is the time for the knowledge that has been acquired to filter through the entire sector.

More than two thirds of survey respondents place reaching digital maturity as a priority, 25% placing it as “high” and 36% “medium. The appetite for digitalisation is evidently present, but progress is all too often stalled.

“

We are held back by out-of-date processes... that would make us more efficient.

”



Working with legacy tech

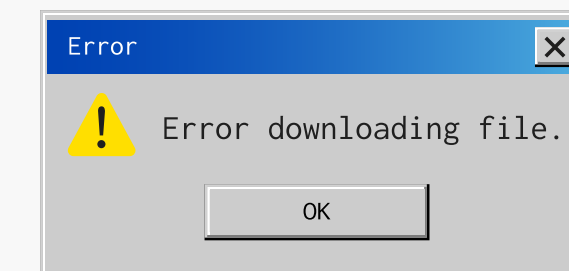
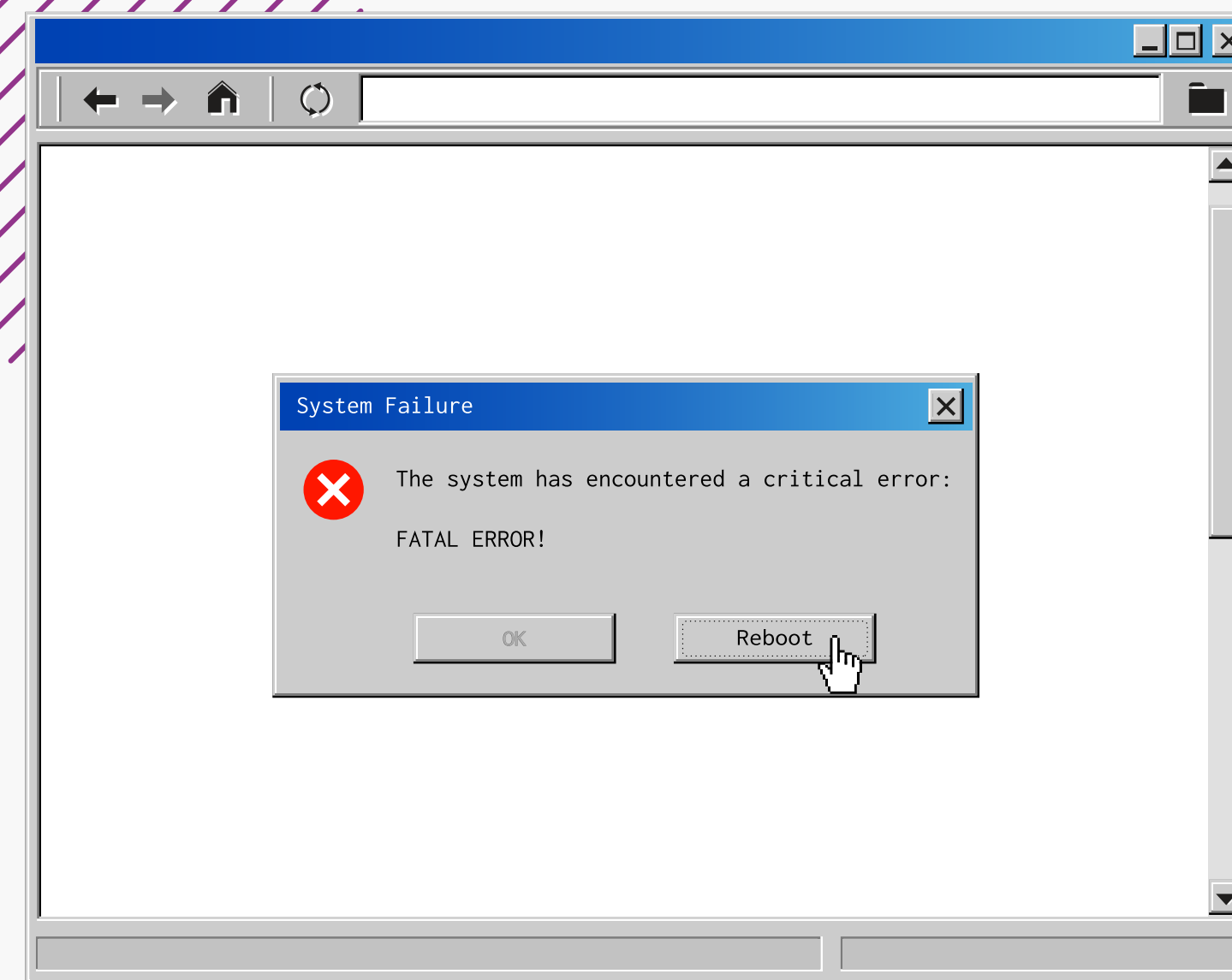
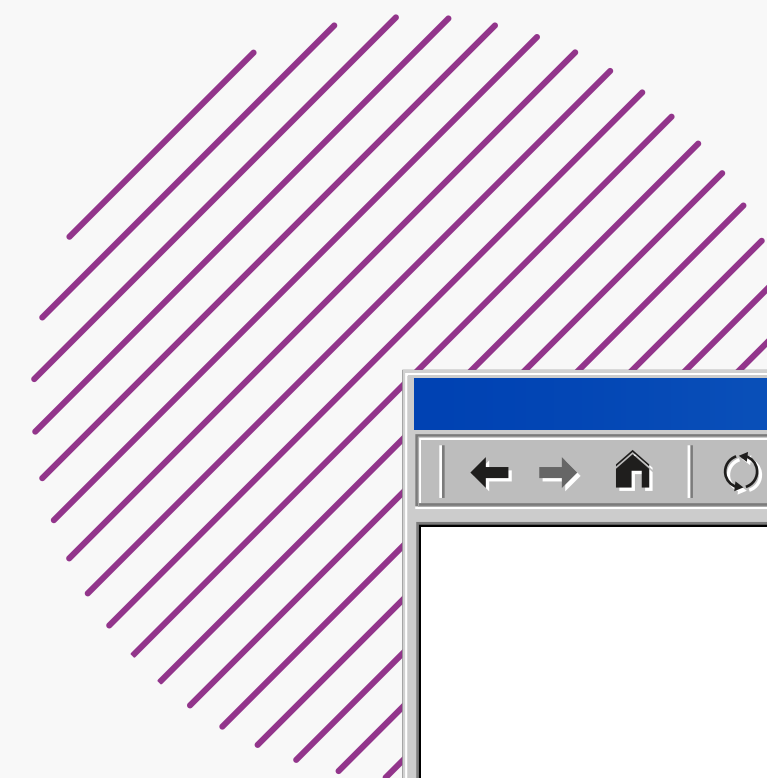
In line with the wider public sector, the NHS IT estate consists of a complex mix of divergent solutions, evolved over many decades. Working with legacy systems presents its own set of challenges. In the far-reaching Cabinet Office report, Organising for Digital Delivery¹², it was found that half of the Government's £4.7 billion annual IT spend is used to maintain obsolete systems. Naturally, wholesale replacement would be an unrealistic proposition, prohibitive on grounds of cost.

How then, can a balance be struck? How can the problems, both real and perceived, be overcome? How can the vast store of NHS data be empowered to drive digital transformation across systems which were never designed with interoperability in mind?



"[...I] heard stories of where there is much more to do, and where outdated silos and systems were causing frustration. We must see these disparities as just as unacceptable and unjust as disparities in access to education and employment."

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care¹¹



When asked for reasons why applications were slow or failing, some of the responses given were telling:



“
Inherited legacy IT networks and systems that will take time to integrate.”



“
Incomplete/mismatched IT platforms.”



“
IT system is not fit for purpose.”



However, legacy systems do not have to prevent a barrier to digitalisation. Given the size and nature of the IT estate, it is in fact inevitable that digital solutions will have to be deployed alongside existing systems. Sitting in front of current platforms, low-code solutions can work to eliminate silos. AI software is able to provide common interfaces, bridging gaps and actually enhancing the performance and reliability of existing tech.

Proof-of-concept trials and further rollout can be carried out without the major investment in system replacement that has previously characterised technological change. Digitalisation is an evolutionary process, with solutions deployed incrementally and able to scale up or down to meet changes in need. Growth is organic, becoming part of the existing infrastructure. Organisations are able to make significant gains without the necessity to rebuild their IT architecture.

“
I don't see digital transformation as a flash in the pan, a quick fix at a time of crisis. It is fundamental to the mission to clear the COVID backlog, and to the long-term health and happiness of this country.”

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care¹²

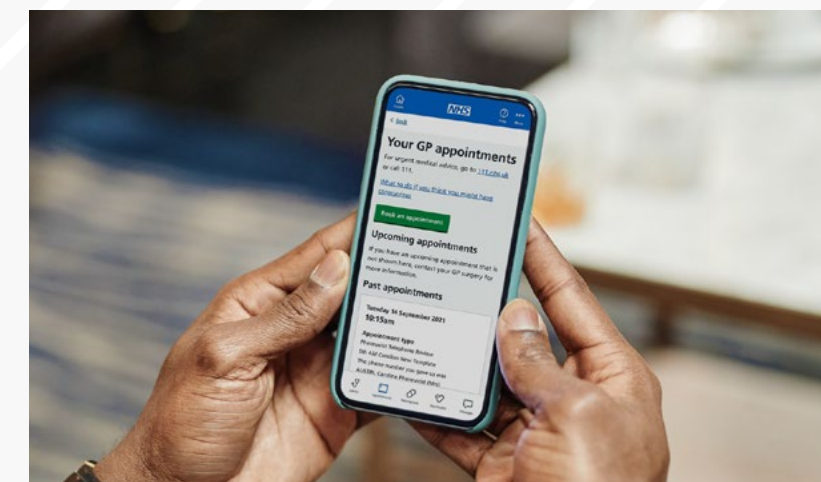
Environmental, Social and Governance

Adhering to best practice in ethical matters is increasingly seen as essential to the provision of public services. Effective social and governance practices are intrinsically linked with the provision of health and care services.

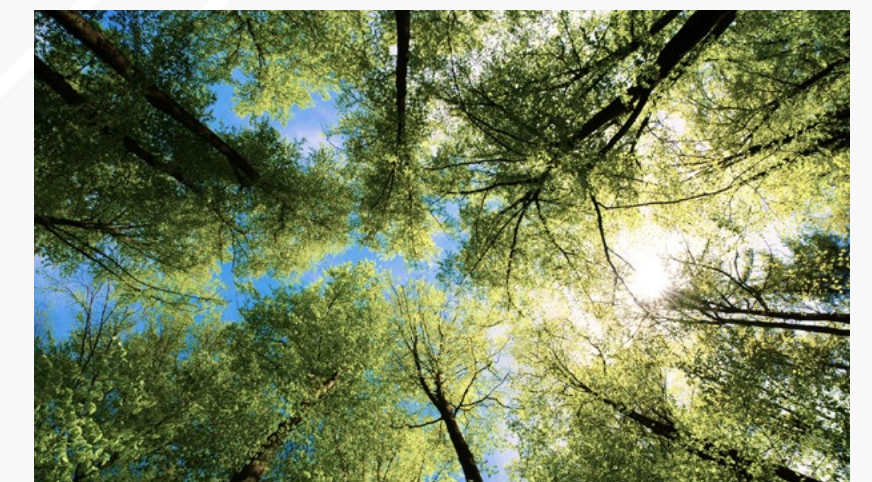
For the NHS, it is imperative that robust frameworks are in place to ensure patients are always treated safely and in an expeditious manner. Failure here can lead to catastrophic impacts, meaning good governance must be embedded at every level – present in the very DNA of the organisation. For leaders, the necessity to ensure budgets are managed is also imperative. Public money must be demonstrably used to deliver optimal outcomes in order to ensure continuing public confidence in the service.

It has, however, become increasingly clear that environmental protection may be the most urgent challenge faced by us all. Following COP26, the UN Climate Conference in Glasgow, calls for action have grown in volume and intensity. Committed to achieve Net Zero carbon emissions by 2050, the UK Government has enshrined carbon reduction targets into law¹⁴.

In the ongoing fight against climate change, the NHS has a significant role to play. In part because of its sheer size, the service is responsible for approximately 40% of public sector emissions and 4% of all road transport¹⁵. Digitalisation provides a number of opportunities to reduce the environmental impact of health and care services.



In the year to June 2021, the NHS App managed 247,000 GP appointments and 365,000 online consultations. This reduced carbon dioxide output by approximately 386 tonnes.¹⁶



By improving efficiencies in data hosting and adopting a Cloud First strategy, NHS Digital (now part of the NHS Transformation Directorate) have been able to save more than 4000 tonnes of carbon.¹⁶



“... I believe that transitioning to more sustainable and resilient healthcare systems will deliver improved health for all our citizens now and for future generations to come.



Northern Ireland Health Minister¹³

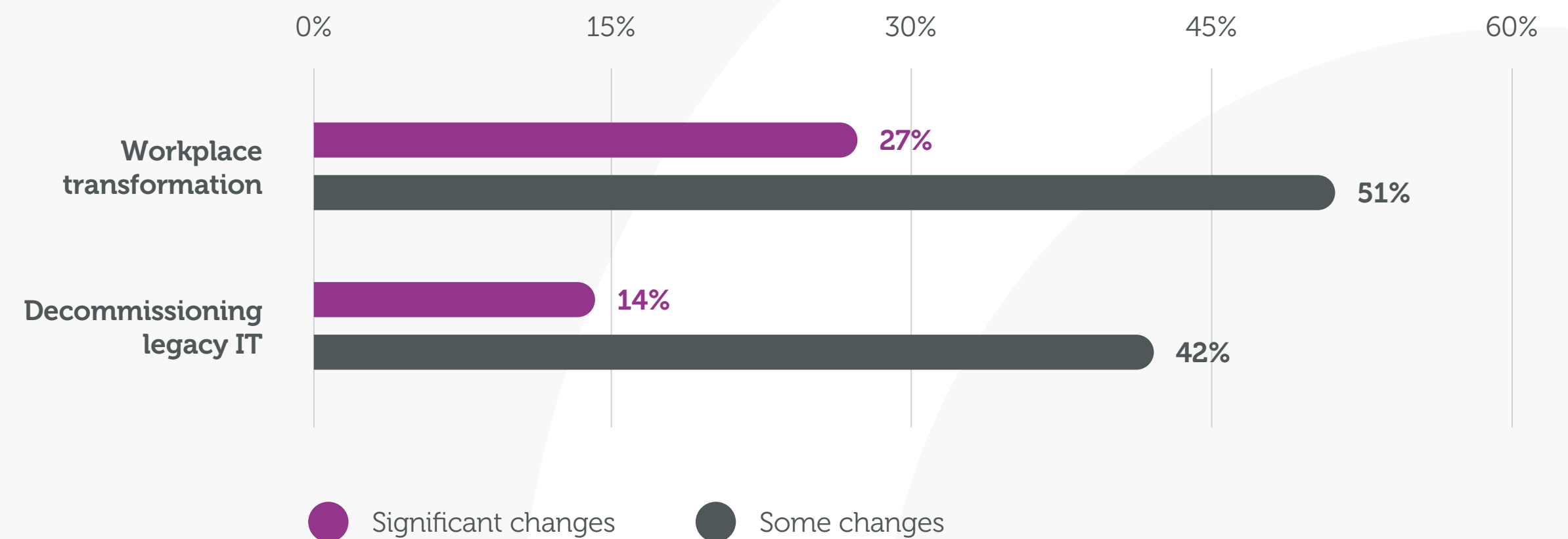
Again, the survey shows there is still work to be done. When asked to define their progress towards achieving their zero carbon goals, just 4% suggested it had been “very good”. 45% stated “average” and 25% “good.” While it appears there is acceptance that change is needed, meeting targets will require a further push.

More than a quarter recognised the need to make “significant” changes to workplace transformation and at 51%, more than half require “some”, in order to reach their ambitions.

Old and obsolete technology was also considered a barrier in this field. Almost two thirds of respondents reported a need to decommission legacy IT, 42% requiring “some” changes and 14% “significant.”

“
We already know that nine in ten staff support a net zero NHS, because they understand the impact it will have on improving health, now and for future generations. And because greener care simply equals high-quality care.
 ”

Dr Nick Watts, Chief Sustainability Officer, NHS England¹⁷



Conclusion

Digitalisation delivers the future. By getting it right today, organisations throughout the NHS can harness the power of this truly innovative technology, driving true transformation for tomorrow and beyond. The opportunity is here now. By grasping it, a new future can be imagined – a future in which greater productivity brings efficiency gains right through the sector, boosting workplace morale and enhancing outcomes for all.

A comprehensive Digital Health Plan is about to be published. It will demonstrate once again the Government's commitment to pursuing its DDaT strategies. Restore Digital has the experience and knowhow to work with organisations of all sizes, driving real transformation from Trust to individual GP level.

“
Today, following the most successful vaccine programme in the world, we're beginning the biggest catch-up programme in the history of the NHS.”

Former Prime Minister
of the UK

“
This is not a time to slow down and look in the rear-view mirror. It's a time to accelerate.”

Secretary of State for
Health and Social Care¹¹



Case study



How a leading London NHS Trust drove digital transformation at pace, putting its vast data resource to work in improving outcomes.

As one of the largest integrated care trusts in the UK, London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust is responsible for providing hospital and community care services to people across three London boroughs.

Prior to the onset of the pandemic, all the Trust's patient records were paper based. Such was the volume that four separate library facilities within the estate were required, as well as significant off-site storage. Though digitalisation had been under consideration, in March 2020, when the country went into its first period of lockdown, the situation took on a new degree of urgency.

In order to manage infection risk, the Trust accelerated plans to digitise their medical records. This would enable Virtual Outpatient Clinics to be established and cut down on the need to physically move paper between locations, helping to limit contamination.

Given the then lack of knowledge about COVID-19 and genuine concerns over transmission rates, it was essential that solutions were quickly put in place. The Trust turned to Restore Digital.

Driven by Sonia Patel, CIO of the Trust at the time and now System CIO (and Director of Levelling Up) NHS England, in conjunction with IMMJ Systems MediViewer™, the service to scan medical records provided by Restore Digital was up and running in just 6 weeks, as opposed to the originally planned 6 months project timeframe.

Restore were chosen as the partner due to the company's own longstanding partnership with EDM Group (acquired by Restore Digital in 2021). EDM Group had already provided electronic document management systems (EDMS) to the Trust for several years, excelling in the provision of governance around data and digital security.



The digitisation of outpatient records was initially planned to take 6 months, leading to a project to digitise all active patient records over a 3-year period. This was revised following further planning, scanning patients on the waiting list and on discharge while the rollout of EDMS was accelerated to encompass more specialities.

The project was up and running within a very short timeframe. Scanning started at the end of May 2020 and Restore have gone on to scan more than 50 million images. It is planned that all active records will be scanned by 2022. The project is delivering significant improvements in patient care, enabling faster access to patient information and helping to reduce the costs (both financial and environmental) associated with management of paper records.

Praising the collaborative approach to solving the problem, Sonia Patel (former CIO), said:

“
Restore’s ability to respond in a short time frame with a secure scanning service for outpatient clinics has been a phenomenal effort and played a major part in enabling us to respond more effectively to the COVID-19 emergency. We are now embarking on a digital journey that will transform the way we work, by providing our clinicians instant access to patient records electronically, which will reduce risk and ultimately improve patient care.”



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About us

Founded in 2004, Restore has grown to become a leading light in the field of digital transformation.

Today, Restore has over 55000 active customers and provides services to 85% of NHS trusts, as well as 70% of UK local authorities.

As a champion of the digital revolution, Restore works with clients to provide innovative solutions across the full spectrum of digitalisation, whether a departmental digital mailroom or an enterprise-wide digital transformation strategy.

Their agile, cloud-based approach is transforming workflows across the public and private sectors creating efficient, paperless or paper light back-office systems.

Through mailrooms, accounting systems, complaints, claims handling and even HR systems Restore can automate and apply intelligent robotics and AI to workflows.

Recognised as a true innovator, Restore Digital's parent company, Restore plc, was awarded Company of the Year at the prestigious AIM Awards in 2016.¹⁸

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