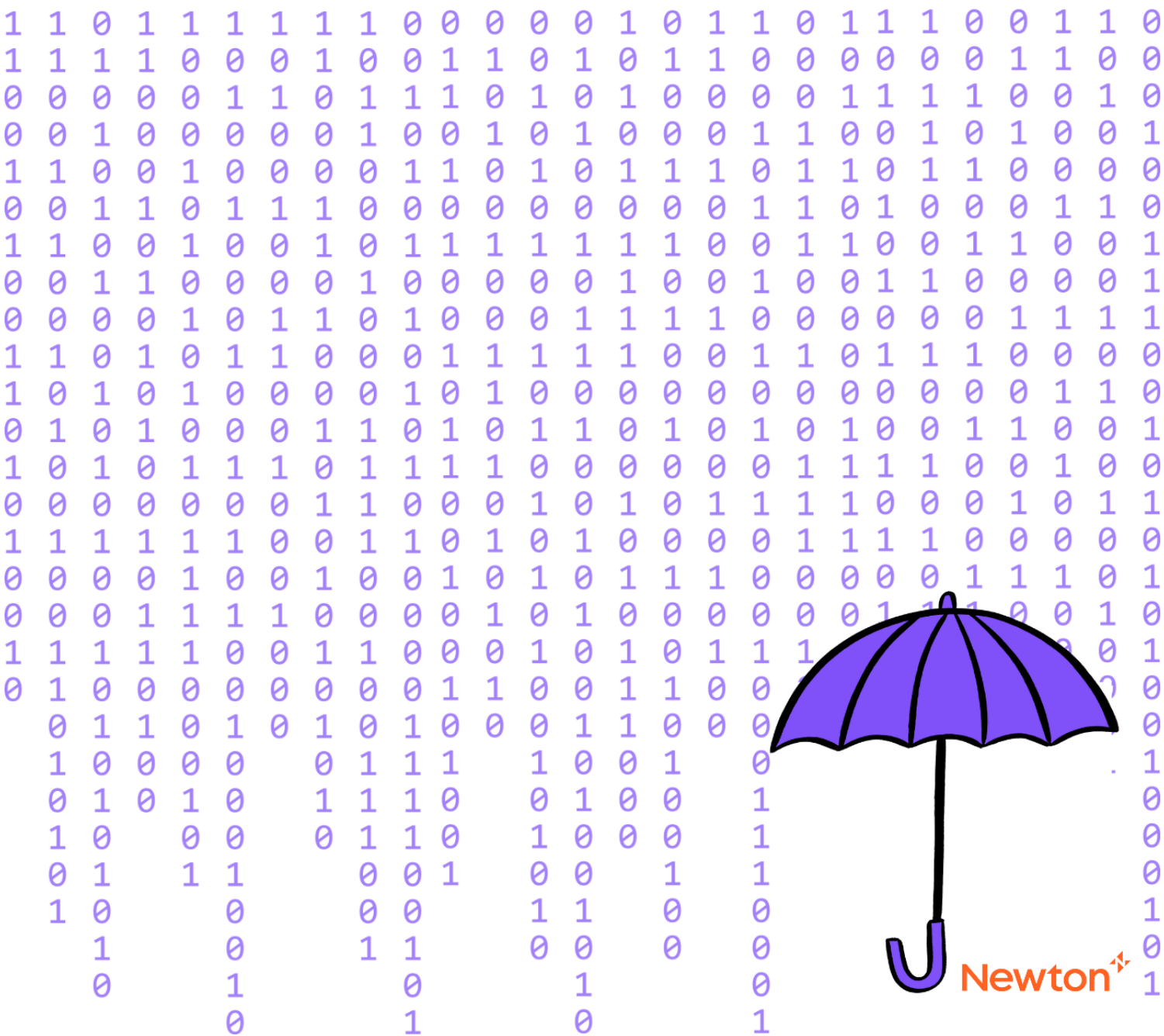


SURVEY 140

CHARITY
FOR CIVIL
SERVANTS

THE CIVIL SERVICE IN 2036

A Service Fit for the Future?



FOREWORD: FACING THE FUTURE TOGETHER

This year marks an historic milestone for The Charity for Civil Servants. As we look back on 140 years of supporting the Civil Service community, we must also look forward. To understand the road ahead, we partnered with Newton to conduct our most comprehensive consultation exercise ever, gathering views from over 1,100 current, former and retired civil servants across the United Kingdom.

The findings of this survey are profound, revealing a dedicated workforce navigating a period of structural change, technological upheaval, and real personal pressures. As the Civil Service adapts to the demands of the next decade, this data provides an invaluable, real-time bellwether for senior leaders to truly understand what their people are thinking and feeling.

Unsurprisingly, given a backdrop of significant media attention on senior staffing and the State's capacity to deliver change, the survey surfaces feelings of unease around the future of public administration. In this challenging environment, the Charity's role in supporting civil servants to navigate these pressures will be more vital than ever.

Civil servants living through change.

The survey reveals a Civil Service workforce acutely aware it is on the cusp of an artificial intelligence revolution. More than a third of the workforce expects automation to result in significant headcount reductions in routine administration, while others anticipate a massive upheaval in required skills. This perhaps largely reflects the concerns of the late-career and near retirement cohort of civil servants - the largest demographic of respondents to the survey.

It also reveals a workforce feeling a sometimes overwhelming culture of reactive 'firefighting', with 60% identifying systemic short-termism as the primary barrier to long-term delivery.

Broad uncertainty emerges around departmental relocation across the United Kingdom, with 66% of respondents expecting that while roles may move outside London – which they welcome – they are concerned that true decision-making power will remain centralised.

To navigate this transition, staff are looking for stability; over half state that competitive pay and reward packages are now the single most crucial factor for retaining talent, firmly eclipsing the traditional draw of a public sector mission.

Public service, personal pressures.

Behind these once in a generation structural shifts lies a real human cost. The demographic data from our survey exposes a growing burden on the individuals who keep our public services running:

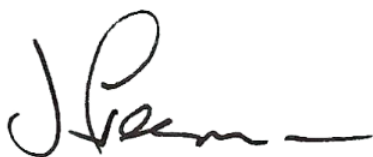
- **The care crisis:** More than half of all respondents (56.3%) expect to need support caring for an elderly or dependent loved one over the next ten years. This pressure is most acute among women aged 50 to 64, who form the largest single demographic block in the modern workforce.
- **Mental health pressures:** Mental health challenges, including burnout and anxiety, are anticipated by 44.1% of the workforce. This is the dominant concern for civil servants under the age of 40 and non-binary staff, reflecting a generational vulnerability that demands immediate attention.
- **Financial and career anxiety:** Over a third of staff fear for their future job security or face career transitions, while nearly a third expect to need help managing debt or unexpected financial shocks. In our smaller, specialized regulatory agencies, financial anxiety is often the single most pressing personal concern.

Our commitment for the next decade – and beyond

What these findings tell us is that civil servants cannot carry this burden alone. Workplace anxiety, the emotional weight of caring for loved ones, and the pressure of rapid reskilling are creating a clear strain on our community. Equally, and unsurprisingly, the survey tells us that civil servants are far from immune to wider societal change themselves.

For 140 years, this Charity has been an umbrella of support for those who serve our country. Over the next decade, our mission, with your help, must evolve to meet these emerging challenges.

The Civil Service is undergoing historic modernisation. As it does, The Charity for Civil Servants will remain steadfastly by its side, ensuring that no matter what the next ten years bring, our public servants are never left to face the future alone.



Jonathan Freeman MBE DL, Chief Executive.

THE CIVIL SERVICE IN 2036

A Service Fit for the Future?

National Survey Analysis & Executive Briefing *Methodological Alignment: YouGov and More in Common Reporting Standards Sample Size: N = 1,167 Civil Service Respondents. Fieldwork: April – June 2026.*

Q1: THE FUTURE OF DECENTRALISATION

Insight: There is scepticism regarding true decentralisation beyond the traditional centre. The Civil Service expects physical relocation, welcoming a shift to place-based delivery, but is concerned that there might not be the required matching transfer of structural authority.

- 66.0% of respondents expect Civil Service decentralisation to be only moderately successful, concerned that roles will move out of London but decision-making authority will remain in the capital.
- A further 26.1% believe the *Places for Growth* programme will be largely ineffective, predicting a re-centralisation of key functions back to London.
- Only 5.7% expect the creation of genuinely successful regional policy hubs, while 2.2% foresee a transformative shift to autonomous regional bodies.

"Moving roles out of London is only effective if power is devolved alongside them. Currently, roles are relocated, but real decision-making authority remains heavily centralised."

Q2: FUTURE GOVERNANCE INTEGRITY

Insight: The integrity of the Civil Service faces equal pressure from human capital shortages and the friction between political demands and Civil Service neutrality.

- The greatest perceived risks to public service delivery are almost evenly divided between talent retention (31.8%) and political tension (31.6%) regarding impartiality.
- System stability, specifically the failure of legacy IT systems, is identified by 21.0% of respondents.
- A lack of legislative agility to manage emerging technologies is the lowest concern at 15.5%.

"We need to decide if this is an organisation that genuinely develops its people, or if it simply pulls external candidates in at higher grades to plug immediate skills gaps."

Q3: THE DELIVERY BOTTLENECK

Insight: Systemic short-termism is viewed as the overwhelming obstacle, preventing departments from focusing on structural, long-term priorities.

- A significant majority (60.0%) identify strategic atrophy—a permanent state of reactive firefighting over immediate crises—as the primary barrier to long-term delivery.
- The legacy anchor of outdated IT and legal frameworks is cited by 19.8%, while 14.0% point to an execution gap where policy implementation expertise has been lost.

"There must be a fundamental shift away from reactive firefighting and short-term fixes, redirecting focus towards long-term, sustainable structural delivery."

Q4: THE AI REVOLUTION: FUTURE WORKFORCE COMPOSITION

Insight: The workforce anticipates that automation will replace administrative functions, necessitating large-scale reskilling and a meaningful change in daily tasks, rather than expanding the service.

- The most common expectation (36.0%) is a significant headcount reduction in routine administration, focusing the service on high-skilled roles.
- A combined 57.9% expect overall size to remain stable, but anticipate either a substantial shift in skills (29.0%) or a shift in focus (28.9%) towards complex, citizen-facing challenges.
- Only 6.0% believe AI governance will lead to overall workforce growth.

Q5: MOST CRUCIAL TALENT FACTOR

Insight: Financial remuneration and work-life balance have firmly eclipsed the once core principle of public purpose/duty as the primary drivers for talent in the modern civil service.

- Over half of the respondents (55.7%) view competitive pay and reward packages as the single most crucial factor for recruitment and retention.
- Absolute flexibility, including remote and hybrid working, is the second most critical factor at 31.0%.
- Traditional draws to the public sector, such as a powerful social mission (6.7%) and specialised training (6.6%), rank lowest.

Q6: PERSONAL SUPPORT NEEDS IN THE NEXT DECADE

Insight: The workforce faces a growing burden of caring responsibilities and mental health pressures, indicating an urgent need for internal welfare and career transition networks.

- More than half of the respondents (56.3%) expect to require support with caring for an elderly or dependent loved one.

"Many of us in our 30s will be juggling work, parenthood and looking after elderly relatives at the same time. Mental health is a huge issue. If staff feel looked after, they are likely to be more productive."

- Mental health challenges, such as burnout and anxiety, are anticipated by 44.1%, while 35.8% expect to need support regarding future job security or career transition.

"Proactive mental health support will be vital to help manage anxiety, depression, and the widespread burnout caused by shifting demands and increased workloads."

- Financial pressures are also prevalent, with 31.6% expecting to need help managing debt or financial shocks, and 25.1% requiring assistance with dependents' housing or education costs.

"We will need focused financial advice and support to navigate economic pressures, manage debt, and buffer against future economic shocks."

WORKFORCE SEGMENTATION ARCHETYPES

Applying audience segmentation principles, survey respondents can be divided into three operational archetypes:

Segment	Primary Cohort	Core Outlook & Vulnerabilities
The Overburdened Spine	EO, HEO, SEO	Highly focused on pay stability; vulnerable to systemic firefighting and anxious regarding AI displacement.
The Technocratic Elite	SCS, Grade 6 & 7	Optimistic about technical optimization, but constrained by the loss of senior digital expertise to the private sector.

Segment	Primary Cohort	Core Outlook & Vulnerabilities
The Regional Sceptics	Non-London Staff	Physically relocated but structurally isolated; calling for authentic devolution of executive decision-making.

THE CIVIL SERVICE IN 2036: EARLY AND MID-CAREER TRENDS

Examining the survey data for respondents aged between 20 and 49 (a sample cohort of 337 civil servants primarily operating at the HEO, SEO, and Grade 7 levels) reveals a distinct set of priorities and anxieties shaping the future of the public sector workforce.

The dual mandate for talent retention

Attracting and retaining the next generation of senior leaders will require navigating a perceived set of rigid workforce demands.

- A driving motivation for public service: Over half (52.1%) identify competitive pay and reward packages as the absolute priority for retention. The historical appeal of a "powerful social mission" barely registers with this cohort, commanding only 7.1% of responses.
- Flexibility is a powerful attraction: 36.6% of this demographic view hybrid or remote working flexibility as the most crucial factor. This represents a significantly higher demand for agile working conditions compared to colleagues over the age of 50.

Optimism on automation

In contrast to the broader anxiety seen in older cohorts, early and mid-career professionals approach artificial intelligence with pragmatic optimism.

- Shifting the focus: 35.5% believe the AI revolution will successfully redirect time away from administrative burdens toward complex, citizen-facing service challenges.

- Evolving competencies: Another 31.3% predict a substantial change in required skills but expect minimal impact on the overall size of the workforce, foreseeing an evolution of their roles rather than outright replacement.

Frustration with short-termism

The operational spine of the Civil Service feels frustrated by reactive governance.

- A commanding 65.8% identify "Strategic Atrophy" as the core delivery bottleneck. This generation of civil servants feels trapped in a permanent state of firefighting, where immediate crises consistently override long-term structural delivery.
- Outdated IT systems and inflexible legal frameworks ("The Legacy Anchor") represent the primary barrier for a further 19.0%, highlighting the drag of technical debt on modern public administration.

The devolution of regional power

At the time this survey was conducted in Q1 2026, this cohort viewed the historic approach to decentralisation with scepticism, seeing a disconnect between physical geography and actual influence.

- 71.9% judge the dispersal of roles outside London as only moderately successful. They firmly note that while jobs have moved physically, real decision-making authority remains at the centre.
- An additional 20.7% view the initiative as ineffective, anticipating a likely re-centralisation of key functions in the future.

The well-being and support needs of the 20–49 cohort

An analysis of the 20 to 49-year-old demographic reveals a workforce under acute personal and professional strain. The data indicates that their support needs over the next decade are dominated by a dual crisis of caring responsibilities and mental health challenges, closely followed by systemic economic and professional insecurity.

The primary pressures: caring and mental health

When asked to identify their anticipated personal support needs for the coming decade, two issues emerged as equal priorities for this cohort:

- Caring for dependents (25.1%): Despite being in the early-to-mid stages of their careers, a quarter of the anticipated support needs relate to caring for an elderly or dependent loved one. This suggests the sandwich generation

squeeze is impacting civil servants earlier than traditional demographic models might predict.

- Mental health challenges (25.1%): An exactly equal proportion highlighted the need for support with anxiety, depression, and acute burnout.

Economic and professional insecurity

The data shows that structural anxieties about the future of work and the cost of living are deeply embedded in this group.

- Career transition and job security (21.2%): Reflecting their earlier concerns about the impact of artificial intelligence, over a fifth of the required support relates to future job security and the need for career reskilling.
- Financial shocks and debt (15.6%): Managing debt and unexpected financial shocks remains a significant, compounding concern.
- Housing and education (13.0%): Supporting the housing or education costs of dependents rounds out the primary pressures on this cohort.

Practical, financial, and wellbeing support.

Early and Mid-career civil servants consistently emphasize a need for a triad of interventions: Practical, Financial, and Wellbeing.

The general consensus on economic realities and technological disruption facing those aged between 20 and 49 years old indicates that institutional support must focus on the transition to AI and aiding those displaced by automation.

"I think it is going to be beneficial for the charity to focus on the transition to AI, across the Civil Service and how it impacts on us. I also think that with sustained high inflation, the pay gap is going to get bigger and bigger, with the need for CS [Civil Service] guidance and charities to adapt their guidance on financial wellbeing - you can't budget your way out of poverty."

This paints a clear picture of a generation of civil servants requiring highly practical, financially grounded support systems to navigate a period of intense structural and economic transition.

DEPARTMENTAL BREAKDOWN

Across **Survey 140**, respondents universally agree that the *Places for Growth* decentralisation programme will be *moderately successful*, with concerns that although roles will move, real authority will remain in London. They also widely agree that *Strategic Atrophy* (reactive firefighting) is the primary delivery bottleneck.

Therefore, the appraisals below focus on how departments diverge on the **AI Revolution, Talent Retention, Governance Integrity**, and **Personal Support**, highlighting the unique pressures facing different areas of the Civil Service.

MAJOR OPERATIONAL DEPARTMENTS

- **Department for Work & Pensions (DWP):** The workforce expects AI to drive a significant headcount reduction in routine administration, identifying competitive pay the absolute priority for retaining the remaining high-skilled staff. Structurally, staff feel caught between political demands and impartiality. On a personal level, a majority (54.6%) anticipate needing support to care for an elderly or dependent loved one.
- **HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC):** Facing an AI-driven reduction in administrative roles, HMRC staff view competitive pay as critical to competing for scarce digital talent. The department's primary risk is failing to retain this senior technical expertise. Over half (57.9%) identify eldercare/dependent care as their primary future support need.
- **Home Office:** Expecting significant job losses in routine administration due to AI, competitive pay is seen as the only viable mechanism to retain high-performing talent. The failure to recruit senior technical experts is viewed as the greatest governance threat. The top personal support need is caring for an elderly or dependent loved one (54.0%).
- **Ministry of Justice (MoJ):** Unlike other large operational bodies, the MoJ expects AI to drive a substantial shift in required competencies rather than immediate headcount reductions, though competitive pay remains the primary retention tool. Notably, MoJ is one of the few departments where the highest personal support need is mental health challenges (e.g., anxiety, depression, burnout), cited by 53.5% of respondents.
- **Ministry of Defence (MoD):** Anticipating AI will eliminate routine administration; the workforce identifies competitive pay as the crucial factor for securing highly skilled replacements. The MoD is acutely vulnerable to a shortage of digital talent, with staff simultaneously managing significant caring responsibilities the top personal concern (56.6%).

POLICY, CENTRAL, AND DEVOLVED ADMINISTRATIONS*

** Due to the smaller sample size of this dataset, these are indicative trends.*

- **Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA):** Predicting AI will reduce administrative headcount, DEFRA relies on competitive reward packages to secure necessary expertise. However, retaining senior technical staff remains their greatest structural vulnerability. At a personal level, caring

for an elderly or dependent loved one is the most pressing anticipated need (55.4%).

- **Scottish Government:** Expecting AI to shift skill requirements rather than size, this devolved body is unique in viewing *absolute flexibility and hybrid working* as the most crucial talent retention factor over pay. Politically, they face sustained tension regarding impartiality, while caring for an elderly or dependent loved one is the dominant personal support need (59.5%).
- **Department for Education (DfE):** Anticipating a shift in skills due to AI, staff demand competitive pay to navigate the changing competency landscape. The DfE operates under intense political tension regarding impartiality. Alongside the MoJ, DfE respondents uniquely identify mental health challenges (burnout, depression) as their top personal support need (51.4%).
- **Department for Business & Trade:** Staff believe AI will primarily redirect their focus toward complex, citizen-facing challenges, requiring competitive pay to retain an adaptable workforce. Tension between political requirements and impartiality is the dominant structural risk. The primary personal support need is caring for an elderly or dependent loved one (51.9%).
- **Department for Transport (DfT):** Expecting AI to redirect time toward complex challenges, DfT staff view competitive pay as essential for retention. The department's primary governance risk is the inability to retain senior digital expertise, compounding the personal strain of eldercare.
- **Department of Health & Social Care (DHSC):** Predicting significant AI-driven headcount reductions in administration, competitive pay is the primary anchor for retaining remaining staff. DHSC faces intense political tension and uniquely cites anxiety over *future job security and career transition* as its top personal concern.
- **Welsh Government:** Staff anticipate structural challenges stemming from a lack of legislative agility to manage emerging technologies, requiring competitive pay to retain staff through the transition. On a personal level, an overwhelming majority (90%) anticipate needing support for caring.

SPECIALISED AND REGULATORY BODIES*

For the remaining 50+ smaller agencies (including bodies like the ONS, Ofgem, and the Charity Commission), a distinct narrative emerges outside of the major departments:

- **The Regulatory and Legacy Squeeze:** Agencies dealing directly with data or enforcement (such as the Valuation Office Agency, Land Registry, and Ofsted) cite the failure of *legacy IT systems* and a lack of *legislative agility* as their primary risks, expecting AI to heavily shift their required competencies.

Uniquely, these smaller, specialized bodies frequently cite **managing debt and unexpected financial shocks** as their primary personal support need, suggesting that current reward packages are failing to provide baseline financial security for niche public sector roles.

INSIGHTS BY AGE GROUP

There is a clear generational divide regarding both the expected impact of AI and immediate personal concerns:

- **Under 40s (148 respondents):** Younger cohorts (20-39) are generally more optimistic about AI, viewing it as a tool that will redirect time away from administrative tasks toward more complex work. Crucially, their primary personal support need is overwhelmingly related to **mental health challenges** (such as anxiety, depression, and burnout).
- **Mid-Career 40-49, (189 respondents):** This group shares the younger cohort's view that AI will redirect their focus away from routine administration. However, their personal support needs shift fundamentally toward **caring for an elderly or dependent loved one**.
- **Late-Career and Retirement Approaching 50+, (736 respondents):** The vast majority of the civil service workforce surveyed falls into this bracket. Unlike their younger colleagues, they anticipate AI will drive **significant headcount reductions in routine administration**. Their primary support need is universally focused on eldercare and supporting dependents.

Note: The very youngest cohort (16-19) is statistically small (1 respondent), but highlights managing debt as a primary concern.

INSIGHTS BY GENDER

When segmenting by gender, the broad structural challenges align, but specific workforce anxieties differ at the margins:

- **Female (704 respondents):** The largest demographic group in the survey. They anticipate AI will cause a significant headcount reduction in routine administration. **Their most pressing personal support need is caring for an elderly or dependent loved one.**
- **Male (354 respondents):** Aligning with the female cohort, they foresee significant headcount reductions due to AI and **identify eldercare/dependents as their primary support need.**

- **Non-Binary (6 respondents):** Also anticipate headcount reductions driven by AI. However, their primary personal support need diverges, focusing acutely on **mental health challenges** and burnout.
- **Prefer not to say (16 respondents):** This group anticipates a substantial shift in required competencies rather than immediate headcount reductions, and their primary concern is **future job security and career reskilling**.

COMBINED DEMOGRAPHIC HIGHLIGHTS

By combining the largest demographic intersections, the core challenges facing the network over the next decade become highly visible:

1. **Women aged 50-59 (224 respondents):** The largest single group. They anticipate AI-driven headcount reductions and require robust support for dependent care.
2. **Women aged 60-64 (136 respondents):** Mirror the 50-59 group exactly in their AI expectations and support needs.
3. **Women aged 40-49 (132 respondents):** Expect a substantial change in required competencies (reskilling) rather than direct headcount reduction, but share the primary need for dependent care support.
4. **Men aged 65+ (118 respondents):** Anticipate significant AI headcount reductions and prioritise dependent care.
5. **Women aged 65+ (110 respondents):** Align completely with their male counterparts in this age bracket.

A WORD FROM OUR PARTNER NEWTON

As a strategic delivery partner to central government, we work alongside colleagues in the Civil Service every day - from the frontline to leadership.

Supporting the Charity for Civil Servant's mission of assisting those who dedicate their lives to public good is a cause that Newton believes in whole heartedly and one that is especially close to me being an ex-civil servant myself.

We at Newton are driven to make a positive, lasting difference and as a data, insights, and outcomes led organisation, we believe this survey will be paramount in designing and delivering the right strategy to meet the evolving needs of Civil Servants over the next decade.

We are proud to present the results of Survey 140, alongside the Charity for Civil Servants, to you.



Darra Singh OBE, Strategy Partner.