



National Audit Office

INSIGHT

# Lessons learned: Resetting major programmes

Jemma Dunne

**We are the UK's independent public spending watchdog.**

**We support Parliament in holding government to account and help improve public services through our high-quality audits**



# Collating our knowledge on major programmes

## Our strategic priorities

### Improving our support for effective accountability and scrutiny

We provide assurance that public resources are accounted for accurately and used as intended. When this does not happen, we point it out. We will upgrade our methodology and software to deliver higher-quality audits using data analytics. This will provide Parliament with deeper insights to scrutinise public spending, and those responsible for the governance of the bodies we audit with the assurance they need.

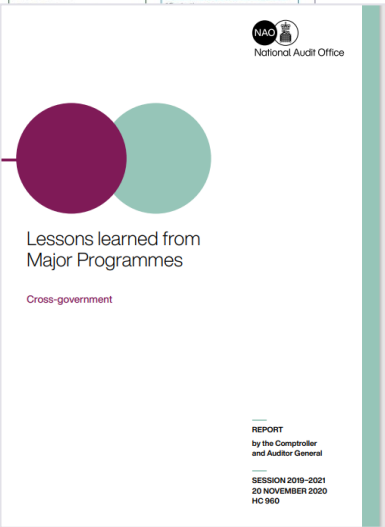
### Increasing our impact on outcomes and value for money

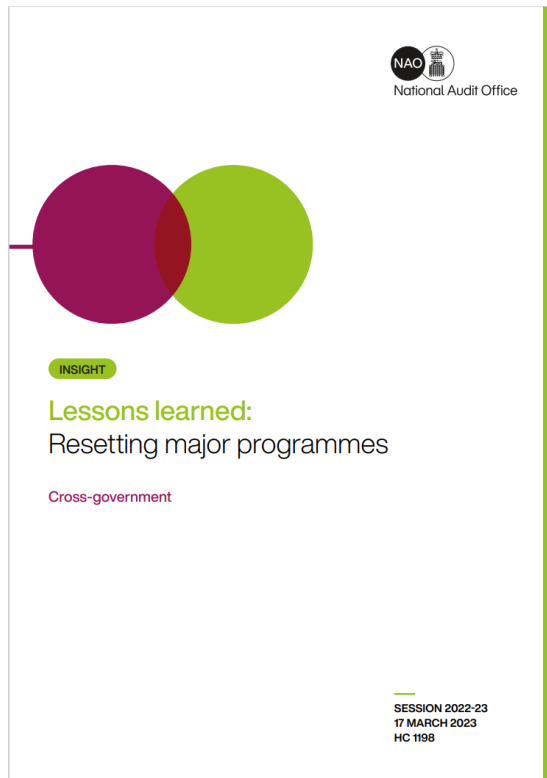
Our work focuses on the issues that matter and we will place greater emphasis on where we can influence long-term value for money. We will make better use of our analytical and audit expertise to identify how public services can be improved. This will allow more insightful and practical recommendations that lead to better outcomes.

### Providing more accessible independent insight

We will be known as a valuable source of knowledge on how well public resources are used and how the governance and performance of public services can be improved. We will synthesise what we know on important issues and make it easier for others to understand and apply the lessons from our work.

The framework comprises 18 key questions grouped into the four elements we consider when we audit programmes.





## What do we mean by resetting?

“a fundamental or substantial change to what a programme will achieve, or how it is delivered, that cannot be managed through routine change control procedures.”

# An overview of our report



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To increase the likelihood of a programme reset working...

## Assess the need for a reset as soon as possible

Identify as soon as possible when a reset is needed, or is being undertaken without being identified

Assess whether a reset is the right thing to do

## Develop a shared understanding of how a reset will be done

Have a clear and shared appreciation of what the reset needs to achieve

Ensure the right culture and behaviours exist within and beyond the reset

Explicitly consider suppliers and delivery partners

## Put in place the necessary processes and skills

Allow enough time and space

Be clear on the governance and processes needed to support the reset

Identify and recruit the specific skills required

## Assess the need for a reset as soon as possible



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Identify as soon as possible when a reset is needed, or is being undertaken without being identified



Having defined checkpoints throughout a programme to assess whether a reset is needed.



Monitoring specific milestones which, if missed, could indicate that a programme will need to be reset.



Having an open and honest team culture to highlight risks and issues early.



## Assess whether a reset is the right thing to do

Consider a range of options. Think about:

- Changes in the wider environment
- How a reset will affect the envisaged outcomes
- Whether the programme should be stopped rather than reset
- The priorities and risks across the government body's wider portfolio





# Develop a shared understanding of how a reset will be done



## Have a clear and shared appreciation of what the reset needs to achieve

### Internal challenges



Poorly set-up programmes



Disagreements with key stakeholders or contractors



Poor senior leadership, or a high turnover of senior leaders

### External challenges



Financial pressures, political changes, technology developments or external events such as the COVID-19 pandemic.



## Develop a shared understanding of how a reset will be done



## Ensure the right culture and behaviours exist within and beyond the reset



### Questions to ask

- What have you done to avoid a 'good news' culture?
- Are there ways for the programme team to raise issues and to invite constructive challenge?
- Have you put in place a structure to support the programme team's wellbeing?

## Develop a shared understanding of how a reset will be done



### Explicitly consider suppliers and delivery partners



- Consider what existing arrangements with delivery partners mean for how to undertake a reset and what it could achieve.
- Work with suppliers and delivery partners to establish an effective relationship for the reset and beyond.

# Put in place the necessary processes and skills

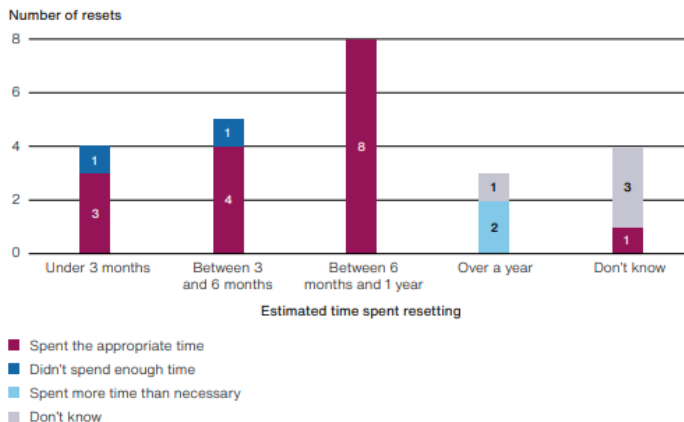


## Allow enough time and space

**Figure 4**

National Audit Office 2022 survey findings of estimated time spent resetting programmes, and whether the time spent was appropriate

Respondents identified the most common time for resetting programmes as between six months and one year



**Note**

<sup>1</sup> We surveyed senior officials across 14 government programmes, for which respondents reported a total of 24 resets. Respondents were asked: "How long did your organisation actually spend in resetting the programme, ie, from the date the relevant programme board made the decision to reset and when new plans were approved?" and "Do you think the actual time spent resetting the programme was reasonable?"

Source: National Audit Office survey of senior representatives from 14 programmes covering 24 resets, November 2022

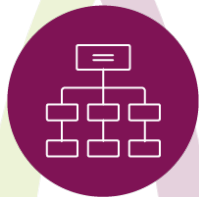
# Put in place the necessary processes and skills



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## Be clear on the governance and processes needed to support the reset



Amending governance and oversight arrangements can bring together the right people and information



Assurance reviews can help raise issues to be resolved



A reset can introduce new risks and opportunities

# Put in place the necessary processes and skills



## Identify and recruit the specific skills required



### Questions to ask

- Do you know what specific skills you need for the reset and how easy these are to get?
  - Is a dedicated reset team needed?
- Do you have the right leadership team in place for the reset?



## NAO recommendation

“As part of planning an affordable and deliverable station, DfT and HS2 Ltd should learn lessons from how other projects have approached a reset, including those we set out in our report on resetting major programmes. This will include having clear aims for the reset and establishing clear measures to monitor its success.”





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Thank you

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