



Infrastructure
and Projects
Authority



Resetting Major Programmes

December 2024

Guidance for departments,
ALBs and their project
and programme teams
undergoing a reset.

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Context

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The Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA) is the government's centre of expertise on project delivery, and supports the delivery of many of the government's large, complex, innovative and world-class projects and programmes¹.

2

The IPA works with departments to:

- Track and monitor delivery of the most strategically important of these projects on the Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP), including providing independent assurance for projects at key junctures in the project lifecycle;
- Provide expert advice to key projects, helping to set projects up for success; and
- Support the wider project delivery profession to drive successful delivery of government priorities.

3

Our strong collective oversight of government programmes allows us to more efficiently identify programmes facing challenges. These challenges can stem from within the programme and its ability to manage complexity and/or from changes in the external delivery landscape.

4

Aligned with guidance on [HM Treasury Approvals Process](#), this guidance aims to **support programmes where it is decided that the way the programme is set up means it no longer is able to achieve its intended objectives or outcomes within agreed parameters**. Based on best practice from across departments, it sets out the steps needed to approach a 'reset', taking clear, purposeful and collaborative action across government to respond positively to a need for change.

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This guidance sits within a broader body of knowledge made up of different government products including Managing Public Money, the Green Book and the Treasury Approvals Process guidance. These products support programmes to have an appropriate governance and management approach, including planning and control processes and assurance, whilst ensuring value for public money and good practice across all government departments.

¹ For clarity, project and programme are used interchangeably for the purposes of this guidance.

Focus on resetting successfully

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The IPA has published various pieces of guidance to support projects and programmes to set up for success. These include, but are not limited to:

- [IPA Project Set Up Toolkit](#) – an integrated suite of tools that aims to support programmes in the early phases of development. This includes [Opportunity Framing](#) – a structured workshop to define an opportunity, agree what success looks like and establish a decision-based roadmap and the [Project Routemap](#) – an approach to identify and develop practical actions to enhance capability, incorporating best practice from other major projects and programmes.
- [IPA Bad Omens](#) – guidance on warning signs the programme will struggle and how to avoid this.
- [IPA Assurance Review Toolkit](#) – tools that support programmes with assurance throughout the lifecycle.

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However, projects and programmes are often developed and delivered in a complex and challenging environment. There are occasions when a project is judged to have become unable to deliver on its objectives within its agreed parameters:

- using its current delivery approach;
- aiming to achieve its expected outputs;
- working within its projected risk level;
- working within its schedule; or
- within its whole life cost or funding envelope.

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In these circumstances, a decision to ‘reset’ the project or programme can be seen as a positive move to put the project on a more balanced footing or to bring the project to a clear and agreed end. This will also help to ensure projects are being delivered in line with the four Accounting Officer (AO) standards, namely: Regularity, Propriety, Value for Money and Feasibility².

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This guidance aims to provide a **high-level framework** for project professionals considering the need for a ‘reset’ of their project or programme, accounting for the wide range of different types of project across the GMPP and beyond. It also recognises that each decision is informed by the judgement of the Accounting Officer and, in the case of GMPP projects going through the Response to Red process, HM Treasury and the IPA.

² Managing Public Money – www.gov.uk/government/publications/managing-public-money

What is a 'reset'?

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A 'reset' is needed when a programme is not able to successfully deliver planned objectives within agreed parameters and there is no credible route to successful delivery. To return the project to a deliverable state, it is necessary to bring about a **fundamental or substantial change to a project's stated objectives, delivery approach, output, schedule and/or whole life costs.**

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Not every programme that receives a RED rating at an IPA assurance event will need a reset. In such cases, seeking approval for a change to the approved baseline, adjusting the delivery strategy or adjusting governance and management framework may be adequate for rectifying issues. These may include:

- making changes to levels of departmental resourcing, prioritisation or functional support, escalation of blockers outside of the control of the project;
- escalating and mitigating issues outside of the project's control, such as cross-Whitehall interdependencies or complexities with delivery partners;
- making adjustments to the delivery approach, outputs, milestones and/or costs which are discrete, partial and can be agreed through change control procedures.

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The judgement to reset a project should typically be led by the Accounting Officer. Where projects have gone through the Response to Red process, HM Treasury and IPA may make a recommendation that a project should be reset.

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To support these judgements, there are various circumstances which may suggest the need for a reset, including where:

- project data suggests a significant or sustained deterioration in project performance. This may be supported by [IPA Bad Omens guidance](#) and the [IPA Transformation Diagnostic Tool](#);
- risk exposure is higher than what is tolerable which may result in a programme being unable to deliver within its agreed parameters;
- projects are deemed undeliverable by either IPA or other assurance reviews, or are not supported by departmental investment committees;
- having addressed critical recommendations from assurance reviews, it is agreed that continuing to deliver the project within agreed parameters risks failing any of the four AO tests outlined above;
- either the IPA Assurance event or Case Conference conditions recommend the need to reset. This applies to programmes on the GMPP and having gone through IPA's Response to Red process.

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For a reset to be successful, experience shows that project teams should work within a structured and 'phased' approach (see Annex B) to agree on assumptions with stakeholders and set the project up for success, sequence key activity, and ensure there is sufficient time to deliver the reset ahead of approval by the appropriate governing body. This may or may not include seeking approval through the HM Treasury approvals process; project teams should liaise with the appropriate spending team to agree on what approvals are required.

Different types of reset

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There is no 'one size fits all' reset. Major projects within government are increasingly complex and seek to deliver a wide range of outcomes for citizens. However, using the reset definition above, we can see that there are **different types of resets, varying in outcome and overall impact.**

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Broadly, a reset can be categorised in one of four ways:

- i. Type 1: Fundamental change to approach, timing and outputs
- ii. Type 2: Fundamental change in approach, whilst achieving same output
- iii. Type 3: Substantial change to requirements and/or milestones, but same approach
- iv. Type 4: Significant or material revision of cost and timing estimates but maintaining the same approach to delivery.

Illustrative examples of these can be found in Annex C.

'There is no 'one size fits all' reset. Major projects within government are increasingly complex and seek to deliver a wide range of outcomes for citizens.'

Phased approach to a reset

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The phased approach suggested in this guidance aims to help ensure that programmes remain on track throughout the reset process by aligning with key questions and checkpoints before moving on to each new phase of the reset approach. This allows for departments to create a sufficiently detailed plan to undergo a reset, whilst ensuring enough fluidity and flexibility that all resets are able to align with this process no matter the size or scope of the programme.

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The three-phase approach outlined below can be used to structure the reset to ensure a programme is set up for success. It is recommended that programmes about to go through the reset develop a plan that sets out the objectives, outcomes and outputs to be delivered as part of the reset, and within what schedule. This schedule should set out activities and milestones that support effective monitoring and control. Whilst this process is ongoing, the IPA will provide support throughout whilst enabling sufficient breathing space for programmes to undertake the phased approach at a suitable pace.

Phase 1 – Discovery: Identifying critical challenges and assessing the need for a reset

Key Questions:

1. What are the key issues the programme is currently facing?
2. Have specific milestones been missed?
Are current timelines unlikely to be met?
3. Have external/independent reviews highlighted a potential need for a reset, or that the programme is significantly off-track?
4. Have the potential benefits of stopping rather than resetting the programme been explored?
5. Has the reset been assessed in the context of the department's other projects/priorities?
6. Is the programme still deliverable as is, is there a credible route to 'Amber'?

Phased approach to a reset

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During Phase 1, SROs and Programme Directors should begin to identify the critical issues the programme is facing. This may be informed by performance data and the original business case, which should also flag any external factors that may be impacting the need for a reset.

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Deciding whether a reset is the correct way forward is of key importance during this phase, and the IPA and HM Treasury can provide advice on this to ensure that the correct approach is taken. Programme leads should also ensure that their departmental Chief Project Delivery Officers (CPDOs) are involved at an early stage, who can offer cross-cutting departmental advice.

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Proceeding with a reset is contingent on there being a credible route to delivery. If this is not the case, the programme may need to be stopped rather than reset. To ensure value for money, it is important that this is confirmed early in the process.

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It is recommended that programmes about to go through a reset produce an internal plan of key milestones/stages to be followed throughout the reset in order to track progress. This should be shared with the IPA and HM Treasury as required. The three phase approach can be used to structure the reset in order to ensure a programme remains on course.

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Checkpoints to consider before moving forward to Phase 2:

- i. Are senior leaders agreed on the rationale and need for a reset? The SRO, CPDO, AO, relevant minister/s and IPA/HM Treasury leads should be fully sighted and in agreement on the proposal to move forward with a reset.
- ii. Do key stakeholders agree that the spending implications of a reset are clear and appropriate? Is there agreement that a reset programme is still likely to represent value for money? Is there agreement that a credible route to AMBER can be found, or alternatively, do stakeholders agree that the programme should stop?
- iii. Is the senior leadership of the programme equipped to move forward with the planning and delivery of a reset programme?

Phased approach to a reset



Phase 2 – Setting up for success: Developing a shared understanding of the way forward

Key Questions:

1. How will a reset affect the outcomes? Are there new planned outcomes as a result of the reset?
2. Who will be responsible for taking the reset forward?
3. What new checkpoints have been put in place?
4. Is there a clear and shared understanding of the reasoning behind undergoing a reset?

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During Phase 2, clear objectives need to be put in place, which will help to monitor how the programme reset is progressing. A plan needs to be established that will set out a route to deliverability, with predicted time frames and cost estimations in place. The IPA will provide guidance and advice during this process.

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If the programme previously required HM Treasury approval, it will require interim approval from HM Treasury for the duration of the reset process. Where significant changes to the programme are needed/planned, Ministerial clearances may be required.

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Teams also need to build the right capacity and capability to undertake the reset. The [IPA Project Set Up Toolkit](#) should be utilised to ensure a good starting foundation. Discussions should take place regarding whether a dedicated 'reset team' will be needed, which would be accountable to the AO. If and when specialist expertise is required, it is important that teams identify the correct individuals to be involved as early in the process as needed.

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Checkpoints to consider before moving forward to Phase 3:

- i. Is a detailed plan now in place that will provide a path to delivery?
- ii. Has it been decided who is taking the reset forward? Does the reset have the right resources and support in place?
- iii. Are agreed time frames and cost estimations in place?
- iv. Have significant changes been through the appropriate level of departmental clearance, including Ministerial, where needed?

Phased approach to a reset

Phase 3 – Delivery: Progressing with the planned reset, aligning with objectives and time frames

Key Questions:

1. Has the reset been approved by OGDs/ HM Treasury as needed?
2. How will the new proposed plan be explained to stakeholders?
3. Is there adequate support available for the team throughout the reset process?
4. Has the reset aligned with what was set out in Phase 2?
5. Has the reset been delivered as planned?
6. What lessons have been learnt?

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Phase 3 focuses on implementing actions identified in Phases 1 and 2, keeping track of timeframes and objectives.

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The IPA will provide support as and when needed, including allowing for a level of ‘breathing room’ whilst the programme undertakes the delivery part of the reset. IPA actions as part of this ‘breathing room’ include:

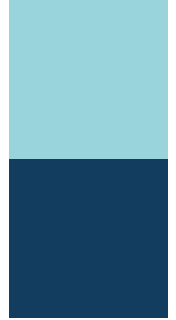
- i. agreeing a streamlined GMPP data return with the programme whilst the reset is in progress.
- ii. updating the Delivery Board on projects entering ‘reset’ each quarter, so that the Centre can agree proportionate scrutiny throughout the period.
- iii. updating the NAO on a quarterly basis on projects entering ‘reset’.
- iv. highlighting in the IPA Annual Report where projects are being ‘reset’.

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The reset team will need to seek appropriate approvals from departmental InvestCo and HM Treasury, where necessary.



Phased approach to a reset



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At the end of the reset process, an updated business case should be produced for the newly reset programme. Unless otherwise agreed with HM Treasury, this will normally require HM Treasury approval if the programme required HM Treasury approval prior to the reset process. Further information on this can be found within the [Treasury Approvals Process guidance document](#).

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Checkpoints to consider before closing the reset process and returning to a BAU assurance and approval process:

- i. Has the updated business case been signed off by the appropriate governing body?
- ii. Have the reset objectives as decided in Phase 2 been delivered successfully?
- iii. Are the correct procedures in place to allow the programme to progress without the added support of the reset framework?
- iv. Have arrangements been agreed with the IPA for a return to normal assurance and oversight?

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Once the questions above have been fully considered and completed, the updated business case has full approval from the relevant governance body and arrangements have been made for a return to BAU assurance with the IPA, the IPA and HM Treasury will formally notify the relevant AO, SRO and CPDO that the programme has been successfully reset.

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This structure and the guidance as a whole will allow for programmes to better understand how to successfully undertake a reset process, and the positive impact a reset can have on deliverability and programme success. The IPA and HMT play a supportive and constructive role throughout, with this guidance providing departments and programmes with further information on the specific aspects of resets the IPA and HMT can best help support.

‘Phase 3 focuses on implementing actions identified in Phases 1 and 2, keeping track of timeframes and objectives.’



Annex A Case Study 1:

Department for Work and Pensions - Pensions Dashboards Programme

Context

Around half of workplace pension holders do not know how many pension pots they hold with previous employers and it is estimated the total value of lost pension pots may have grown from £19.4bn in 2018 to £26.6bn in 2022 (Pensions Policy Institute).

Research shows 55% of people had undertaken no pension engagement activities at all in the past year, and a Money and Pensions Service (MaPS) Financial Wellbeing Survey shows not even half (47%) of working-age adults said they understood enough about pensions to plan for their retirement.

The Pensions Dashboards Programme (PDP) was established in 2019 by MaPS, an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department for Work and Pensions, with the core aim of enabling individuals to access their pensions information online, securely and all in one place, through a pensions dashboard, thereby supporting better planning for retirement and growing financial wellbeing.

The dashboard will provide clear and simple information about an individual's multiple pension savings, including their State Pension. PDP is responsible for the creation of the digital architecture underpinning the dashboards, as well as the standards and governance for the connection of all pension schemes and providers in scope.

In March 2023 following multiple red rated reviews, DWP initiated a reset for the Pensions Dashboards Programme.

Key aims

DWP and MaPS identified the following focus areas for the reset:

- i. Ways of working
- ii. Planning and controls
- iii. Technical assessment of the architecture
- iv. Commercial assessment and supplier relationships
- v. Resourcing
- vi. Finances
- vii. Communications

For each of these focal points, a dedicated Reset Director established a set of criteria, jointly agreed by both the sponsoring Department and the Arm's Length Body, to satisfy before moving out of reset. To support the reset, the IPA gave PDP and MaPS 'breathing room', while providing an appropriate level of support, advice and assurance as needed.

In addition, the Programme worked with DWP and MaPS to develop an appropriate level of governance and oversight. This enabled the reset to be delivered at pace whilst also providing the necessary levels of assurance back into the department.

A joint Reset Team, reporting to the Reset Director, was established bringing together the programme leadership team with additional subject matter experts from the Department to help address immediate skills gaps.

The Reset Team developed a three-stage framework consisting of 'Assess, Plan and Mobilise' stages which have informed the basis of this guidance.

- The '**Assess**' stage involved deep dive workshops to help understand the key issues affecting deliverability, and identify the routes and estimated approximate timescales to resolution and sequencing.

- The '**Plan**' stage centred around building the revised delivery plan, resetting the relationship with suppliers, filling capability gaps and strengthening the governance model for post reset. Discussions with HMT and IPA were also undertaken to assist with refreshing the business case at this stage.
- The '**Mobilise**' stage involved executing the plan developed in the previous stage with the core aim of exiting the reset successfully.

Exiting reset

The IPA supported the Programme throughout reset, initiating an 'associate review' to provide assurance on the revised delivery timeline; facilitating an Opportunity Framing Workshop with other delivery partners to inform the future strategic direction of the policy; and taking a seat on the Board.

In April 2024 the IPA improved their delivery confidence rating for the programme to amber. The Programme was then able to exit Reset in May 2024 following the appointment of a new SRO, and having met all of its exit criteria.

A stable and committed senior leadership team is in place, the relationship between the programme and DWP is stronger, there is a clear and independently verified delivery plan, a robust resourcing strategy, improved governance and assurance and a renewed focus on industry engagement.

Conclusion

Input from the PDP Reset Director helped shape the IPA guidance which has at its core the three-stage approach. Although every reset will be different, key elements of this case study have contributed to the successful reset and subsequent move away from red for PDP. A dedicated reset Director ensured strong leadership; exit criteria agreed with the sponsoring body and the department ensured a good, shared understanding of what needed to be in place before exiting reset to minimise the risk of returning to red. A good working relationship with the IPA meant that support could be provided where necessary whilst the programme had the space to execute their plan.



Annex B Case Study 2:

Ministry of Defence Ajax Programme

Context

The Armoured Cavalry Programme, more commonly referred to as Ajax, will deliver a family of armoured fighting vehicles. The programme sits at the heart of the British Army's future modernised warfighting division, providing the army with its first fully digitalised platform. It is a transformational capability that features open digital architecture to support evolution through continuous upgrades of emerging technologies.

The programme's total overall cost is approved at £5.5 billion, making it the single biggest order for a UK armoured vehicle in over 20 years. The size, cost and complexity of the programme means that the IPA has had a high level of involvement to help ensure its success.

In 2021, issues with the programme came to light following an IPA assurance review³, which gave it a red rating. This rating was driven by technical, programmatic, and commercial challenges. As a result, a programme reset commenced with an MOD-led recovery plan, supported by cross-government colleagues, including IPA, providing specialist skills and resources. Determining the appropriate cross-government support, IPA and HMT convened a case conference, which agreed the plan of action with the SRO, the programme team and industry partners.

³ IPA Gate Review Process
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/60f019b0e90e0764ccfbd7b1/1174-APS-4-CCS0521656666-001_Gateway_Web1.pdf

Key aims

The Ajax programme implemented multiple actions targeted to improving deliverability and get the programme back on track. The key areas of focus for this reset process were:

- **Technical:** resolving noise and vibration issues;
- **Commercial:** contract negotiations to align payment incentives with the revised programme schedule.;
- **Schedule:** developing a jointly agreed risk adjusted and 'red teamed' schedule which sets out a detailed plan to deliver out to the 589th vehicle to the required standards; and
- **Delivery:** Transforming the governance and management framework to improve the relationship across the programme enterprise by creating a 'one team' ethos, establishing co-located working arrangements with a joint leadership team and governance arrangements that support timely resolution of issues.

In January 2023, following MOD approval of the programme reset, the Major Project Review Group (MPRG) recommended to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury approval of a revised business case. This acknowledged the efforts of the programme team and in particular the focus on 'a collaborative approach, driving towards one version of the truth culminating in a deliverable and jointly agreed schedule, the implementation of a joint leadership team led by a full-time SRO, and embedding support from wider government through an IPA lead support offer.

Key outcome of the reset

Armoured Cavalry is now on track to deliver against this revised business case. Key lessons learned from Ajax's reset and its focus on a one-team approach demonstrates the importance of collaboration across government and industry partners.

Placing a clear focus on 'getting the basics right' and creating a psychologically safe environment, the team demonstrated that resets are an effective and sometimes necessary tool to support successful project delivery.



Annex C

Reset examples

HO Digital Services at the Border in 2019:

Fundamental change to approach, timing and outputs – clarified scope, adding new elements, with increase in costs.

This programme aimed to replace existing ICT systems to provide better information to the UK Border Force to assist them in making decisions about people crossing the border. The programme was reset in 2019 as the Home Office was unable to deliver the original ambition and timeline of this programme. The scope and schedule were changed and costs were adjusted.

HO Emergency Services Mobile Communication Programme (ESMCP) in 2020:

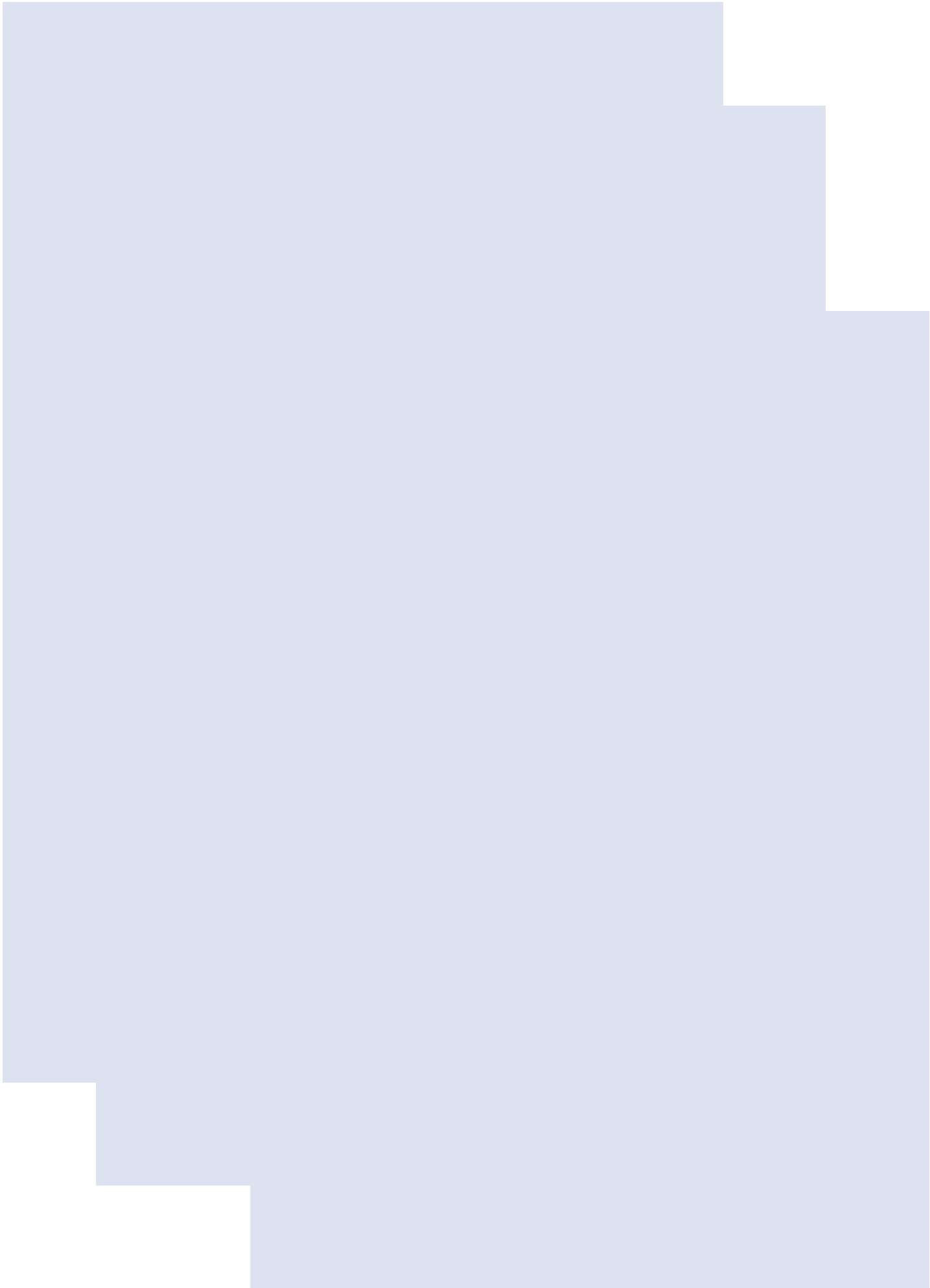
Fundamental change in approach, whilst achieving same output – shift in commercial strategy.

The Emergency Service Network (ESN) vision is to deliver improved voice and data services to the emergency services at a significantly lower cost and transform emergency services' mobile working. ESMCP aimed to replace Airwave, which provided the essential dedicated mobile network that the police, fire, ambulance and other emergency services use to communicate securely. The programme agreed to change its core supplier, fundamentally changing the approach, but keeping the same objectives, output schedule and costs.

MOD Ajax in 2021:

Substantial change to requirements and/or milestones, but same approach – significant change in schedule to allow testing of tank safety.

Ajax will deliver a family of armoured fighting vehicles and will provide the army with its first fully digitalised platform. In 2021, following an IPA Case Conference, it was agreed between the Senior Responsible Officer (SRO), Programme Team, HM Treasury and IPA that a programme 'reset' was necessary due to increasing delays and significant concerns regarding health and safety. The key outcome of the reset was a new schedule for the programme, with the objectives, approach and costs remaining the same.





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