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PCS responds to Dowden's comments on cutting civil service by using AI

The Cabinet Office secretary and deputy prime minister said the government needs to “embrace” AI to “drive the numbers down”.

In a briefing with journalists on 29 February, Cabinet Office secretary and deputy prime minister Oliver Dowden said that adopting AI could be a “significant downward driver” in reducing staff numbers in the civil service, with the [chancellor aiming to cut 66,000 jobs](#) by the end of the next Spending Review.

Dowden claimed that staffing numbers in the civil service grew “as a result of the pandemic and EU exit preparedness.”

He said “We need to really embrace this stuff to drive the numbers down. By doing those things better, you have to have fewer civil servants doing the administrative tasks that drive these things, which should lead us to savings both on headcount and on overall budget.”

In responding to Dowden's comments, PCS general secretary Fran Heathcote said: "PCS recognises that AI is an inevitable development that has been introduced and will be increasingly used in the workplace. In contrast to Mr Dowden though we want AI to enhance jobs and not to degrade them and we are opposed to mass job losses that clearly Mr Dowden wants.

"For this reason, the union's national executive on 6/7 March will discuss adopting an agreement to put to the civil service which will govern the introduction and operation of AI systems and in particular will seek to prohibit systems which automate decision making and so take humans out of the loop of such decisions.

"If Mr Dowden is serious about cutting 66,000 posts through AI then he should come clean and admit that in DWP, the justice system, HMRC and other departments that he wants software to judge and decide upon citizens; for the machine to be in charge.

"In contrast PCS wants to improve, not dehumanise work and for productivity gains made through the introduction and use of AI to be shared between the workers and the organisation in the form of reduced hours and increase pay."