

9 Digital talent

Norway has made strong progress to date in developing talent needed to support the digitalisation of its public sector. However, Norway could aim to have a more strategic approach to digital talent across its public sector, better coordinating efforts to attract, retain, allocate and develop talent.

Digital talent and skills are a critical element to leverage digital technologies and secure sustainable outcomes in the public sector. Norway has made strong progress to date in developing some of the key digital foundations required to develop the capability of its public sector to support its digitalisation strategy. However, the Government could develop a more strategic and coherent approach to developing, retaining, and attracting digital talent to ensure Norway's public sector is equipped to drive impactful and human-centred outcomes for its digital initiatives.

Progress to date

The solid digital foundations of the Norwegian public sector reflect the maturity of the digital talent in the public administration, including needs assessments, training programmes, and actions to retain digital talent. These are complemented by a competence model for digital transformation, and well-established procedures for cross-agency mobility.

Based on Norway's results in the 2023 DGI, we can see commitment from the Government establish and maintain a digital workforce by addressing:

- **needs assessment for skills:** where Norway scored 100% (compared to the OECD average of 64%) thanks to the work undertaken by the Government as part of its One Digital Public Sector assessment of where to focus to increase the digital competence in the public sector, which recognised the need to take a more strategic approach to recruiting and developing digital talent.
- **training programmes that cover core digital skills:** where Norway scored 80% (compared to the OECD average of 55%). This is because the Government provides training through the Learning Management System or guidance via Digdir that covers awareness of the potential risks and benefits of digital for transformation; understanding users and their needs; service design skills; open collaboration; and the trustworthy use of technologies.
- **actions taken by the Government to retain digital talent:** Norway scored 75% (compared to the OECD average of 36%). This is because it provides a clear career path, has a work-life balance plan, and offers opportunities for professional and personal development.

Another critical foundation regarding the development digital skills in the public sector is the Competence Model for digital transformation developed by Digdir (Digdir, 2023^[1]). The model provides a conceptual framework to better understand competences needs to succeed in the digital transformation of the public sector. The model develops a three-layer model including policy and general guidelines, management of digital transformation, and professional knowledge and skills:

- **Policy and general guidelines:** providing institutions with an introduction to digital government, and to understand the social significance of working with digital transformation in the public sector.
- **Management of digital transformation:** guiding public sector leadership on how digital transformation transform public management.
- **Professional competence and skills:** outlining an overview of competences for public institutions to succeed with digital transformation.

The existence of the competence model can serve a valuable foundation to advance towards a strategy for digital talent in the public sector. Furthermore, a strategic approach can complement this thorough needs assessment with specific goals and corresponding actions. This would help Norway connect the existing element regarding the talent and skills in the digital governance framework.

Finally, having well-established procedures for cross-agency mobility are also a good example of concrete practices that can enhance efficiency in talent allocation and raise attractiveness of the public sector as an employer (Ministry of Digitalisation and Public Administration, 2019^[2]). Norway could coordinate further efforts focusing on attraction and allocation of digital talent across the public sector. These efforts could be

supported by the promotion of communities of practice to encourage a knowledge-sharing culture and strengthen engagement around digital government policies.

These initiatives have contributed to Norway's overall digital government maturity by fostering the digital workforce required for Norway's public sector to be able to support and implement key digital initiatives. However, as Norway looks to keep pace with a rapidly-evolving digital environment, it will also need to take a more strategic approach to bolster its efforts to address digital talent and skills.

Remaining challenges

While Norway demonstrates some key progress for its digital talent, the results of the 2023 DGI demonstrated that this is one of the areas for Norway with the most room for improvement. The Government could develop a more strategic and coherent approach to digital talent in line with the OECD Framework for Digital Talent and Skills in the Public Sector (see Box 9.1). This approach includes comprehensive measures to develop and maintain existing talent, as well as attract new talent to the public sector. These efforts could support Norway building an efficient and sustainable digital transformation, where digital government initiatives are supported by a workforce that drives impactful and human-centred outcomes.

Box 9.1. OECD Framework for Digital Talent and Skills in the Public Sector

The OECD Framework for Digital Talent and Skills in the Public Sector offers an analytical tool to help understand what leaders and public servants need to do to effectively manage digital transformation in the public sector, including for:

- creating the right environment to encourage digital transformation, which focuses on the environmental conditions that enable digital transformation.
- developing skills to support digital government maturity, which focuses on how government identifies the skills to drive transformation in the public sector.
- establishing and maintaining a digital workforce, including the institutional efforts to retain and bring in talent and skills to drive digital transformation in the public sector.

Source : (OECD, 2021^[3]). <https://doi.org/10.1787/4e7c3f58-en>.

A more strategic approach to digital talent

The dynamic pace of digital technologies requires governments to rethink the way they are attracting and retaining talent, especially in the context of a mature digital society such as Norway. However, Norway's public sector has not yet adopted a dedicated strategy focused on digital skills and talent. Without such a strategy, Norway scored 0% (compared to the OECD average of 50%) for this in the 2023 DGI, which meant that it also scored 0% for the aims of what the strategy is seeking to achieve and for the public officials that are targeted by such a strategy (compared to the OECD average of 68% for both).

In contrast to other digital government policy areas, Digdir also lacks an explicit mandate for guiding the development of digital skills within the public sector. DFØ has a leading role in “offering[ing] professional development to leaders and employees of government agencies and enterprises”, but also without an explicit focus on digital talent and skills. (DFØ, 2024^[4]) Further coordination between Digdir and DFØ could enhance coherence and efficiency when attracting and retaining digital talent.

Despite the existence of comprehensive practices for digital talent, the effectiveness of these efforts is hindered by this disjointed approach and the lack of a clear policy roadmap with concrete goals and targets. A strategy could better steer institutional efforts to identify, promote and develop digital skill and secure a sustainable and digital transformation of the public sector. Without specific actions to establish and maintain a digital workforce, the public sector could face challenges in securing impact and sustainability of digital government in the long-term.

Developing and retaining existing talent

Norway could benefit by implementing structured approaches to develop and maintain a digital talent in the public sector. In the 2023 DGI, Norway scored 40% for its approach to maintaining the digital skills of its existing workforce (compared to the OECD average of 51%). While employees are able to participate in formal trainings and there are mechanisms in place for mobility and skills transfer, the Government could bolster its approach by also offering on-demand training to help employees develop at their own pace, as well as informal learning through communities-of-practices, 'show-and-tell' sessions, and retrospectives. This would be complemented by establishing more multi-disciplinary teams for service delivery to enable the cross-pollination of key skills and practices.

The lack of a strategic approach to developing digital talent is also reflected in the implementation of training for public officials. For example, both the Digdir and the Norwegian Agency for Public and Financial Management (DFØ) offer separate training programmes related to digital government. Digdir has developed several training programmes addressing essential core skills required by public servants including modules on awareness of the potential risks and benefits of digital for transformation, understanding users and needs, service design skills, open collaboration, and trustworthy use of technologies. The DFØ delivers several trainings including digital development in the public sector, digital transformation of the public sector and information security for managers. These synergies stress the opportunity for Norway to strategise the planning and management of digital talent in the public sector.

Finally, while Norway scored well in the 2023 DGI for its approach to retaining digital talent, there could be opportunity to do more to complement professional development with a formal reward system to incentivise digital talent to remain in the public sector. This would complement the work to develop existing talent and support efforts to attract, promote and retain digital talent for the public sector.

Attracting new talent

There is also opportunity for Norway to take a more strategic approach to how it attracts digital talent to the public sector. In the 2023 DGI, Norway scored 0% initiatives to attract digital talent (compared to the OECD average of 58%). To address this, the Government could run proactive recruitment strategies, promote public sector as an employer, and to consider any improvements that might be needed to the recruitment process (including clear job descriptions, job profiles, and measures to minimise any potential biases in the process). A proactive approach would allow the public sector to identify digital talent needs in advance and act proactively on them. This would help ensure that its public sector has the skills and capabilities to complement existing talent in the delivery of the new digitalisation strategy.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, the Government could consider incorporating the strategic objective below into its new digitalisation strategy, which could be achieved by addressing the associated recommendations:

Strategic objective: Digital Talent

Norway could aim to have a more strategic approach to digital talent across its public sector, better coordinating efforts to attract, retain, allocate and develop talent.

- **Recommendation 18:**
The Government could strengthen the coordination between Digdir and DFØ to enhance Norway's approach to attracting and retaining digital talent in the public sector.
- **Recommendation 19:**
The Government could develop a strategy for digital talent and skills in the public sector. Building on the competence model, the government can benefit from a strategic approach to the institutional efforts to attract, retain and develop talent in the public sector. This strategy could connect individual initiatives with specific goals and targets to secure accountability and maximise impact.
- **Recommendation 20:**
The Government could establish structured and coordinated efforts to attract, maintain, develop and allocate digital talent across the public sector. By fostering cross-institutional learning and facilitating mobility, the country can enhance the attractiveness of the public function and improve the allocation of digital talent across the public sector.

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