Civil Service Quarterly: Great data is all around us...

The new year always brings thoughts of a new start and fresh challenges. I am struck by the need to keep learning to remain up to speed with a world that moves at pace. Technology has dramatically changed the ways in which we can store, access and use the vast amounts of data now being produced. When I first joined the Civil Service – just as the first desk-top computers and word-processors were beginning to appear – I could not have imagined that so many government services would be delivered online or that more than half of all adults in the UK would own a smartphone.

Today we are able to use technologies to connect data and see the world in ways that were not previously possible. In this issue of CSQ you can read about some of the ways that Government is using and releasing data, and the changes this is enabling. For example, insurance companies aren't able to check licence details at the moment, so have to 'price in' the risk that drivers lie or make mistakes; civil servants can help drive down the cost of insurance by digitising driving records, giving insurance companies quicker access. And we know that entrepreneurs can build new apps and provide new services if we release data like bus and train timetables; but civil servants themselves can also use newly released data to solve difficult problems and innovate.

I hope you will find inspiration in this edition of CSQ to learn something new, whether it is finding new ways to evaluate benefits as the GREAT campaign has done, helping make Britain the best place to set up and grow a business like UK Trade and Investment, or engaging with the public in new ways like the Defra social media team did. I am proud to encourage civil servants to learn, to take calculated risks and to try out new things.

Let us know what you think by email (csq@cabinet-office.gsi.gov.uk) or on twitter #CSQuarterly.