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**Introduction of KPIs in the field of public service**

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine how well Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) work in assessing and enhancing the performance of UK public sector organizations. The study investigates the effectiveness of KPIs in the UK public sector, government regulations and recommendations related to KPI implementation, and discussions around the usage of KPIs through a thorough literature analysis. The results provide a complicated picture, with performance increases in different government agencies noted, but also difficulties and drawbacks including unintended repercussions and data manipulation. The research assesses the use of KPIs in the guidelines offered by the HM Treasury's Green Book, a crucial tool for policy review in the UK. Although the Green Book highlights the necessity of utilizing suitable performance measurements, such as KPIs, there have been complaints about its implementation and the requirement for ongoing development in order to handle new difficulties. In order to assess the effects of KPI implementation, the research also looks at departmental performance in specific government agencies, such as the Ministry of Defense (MOD), National Health Service (NHS) England, and Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). It has been noted that although some departments have achieved performance increases linked to the usage of KPIs, others struggle to create the proper KPIs and prevent unexpected repercussions. The results' implications emphasize the necessity of designing meaningful and pertinent KPIs, strong governance and data integrity procedures, and a culture of ongoing assessment and development. The paper also points up potential directions for further investigation, such as tools for spotting data manipulation in KPIs and in-depth departmental performance evaluation.

Overall, this study sheds information on the efficacy, difficulties, and potential policy ramifications of KPIs in the UK public sector. It is a useful tool for researchers, practitioners in the public sector, and policymakers who want to improve performance monitoring and delivery of public services.

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## Introduction

The utilization of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) has become increasingly popular in public services worldwide, but questions arise on the matter of how explicit countries employ KPIs to improve their public services? Public services are considered to be an essential component of any modern democracy, providing citizens with access to a range of services, including healthcare, education, and social welfare. Respectively, over the years public sectors in many countries started implementing distinct forms of guidelines for new public management techniques, where evaluations based on predetermined sets of throughput, production, and effect metrics have become increasingly connected to performance measurement, reward, and financing systems (Jessee, 2023).

One of these strategies that has become increasingly popular is Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), as they enable government measure, monitor, and improve service delivery. KPIs can be defined as measurable indicators that are used to track progress and measure success towards achieving organizational goals (Neely et al., 2002). In the public sector, KPIs are frequently used to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery, and to demonstrate accountability to stakeholders (Lapsley et al., 2004).

The present study endeavors to undertake the analysis of the employment of Key Performance Indicators (KPI) in public services United Kingdom. Prior to diving into the research questions and topic, it is important to provide a comprehensive overview of the existing scenario of public service in United Kingdom, along with an assessment of how chosen country employs KPIs for enhancing their efficacy, providing with the reasoning as to why UK was chosen for the study.

### Performance Management in United Kingdom: Shift towards measurable performance

United Kingdom is a developed country in Western Europe with a long and rich history of public service provision. Throughout its history, the government of United Kingdom has implemented various reforms to improve public services, that also includes utilization of KPI. The concept of new public managements (NPM) has emerged in the 1990s as a response to indignation of citizens raised in

1980s due to inefficiency of traditional public administration. The central idea of NPM was to adopt private sector management techniques to the public sector to improve its efficiency and effectiveness.

KPIs are one of the main elements of NPM that is used as performance management tools to measure and evaluate the performance of public sector organizations. KPI adaptation identify areas for performance improvement and serve as a baseline for benchmarking and comparing their performances to those of other organizations.

Currently, we can observe actively operating KPI in most of the Departments of public service, National Health Service (NHS) as for instance. NHS uses a range of KPIs to monitor the performance of healthcare providers. In 2020, the NHS reported that 91.3% of patients referred for non-urgent consultant-led treatment were seen within 18 weeks, which is one of their KPIs (NHS England and NHS Improvement, 2020).

Nonetheless, throughout the history of KPI implementation, there are also ongoing debates regarding the success of utilization of KPIs. Rigby et al. (2014) highlighted, the implementation of KPIs in the public sector has rarely been successful. In some cases, the use of KPIs has led to unintended consequences such as gaming or manipulation of the data to fulfil the objectives. Moreover, there have been cases where the KPIs used to be not appropriate to the specific context or objectives of the public sector organizations .

Overall, while the implementation of KPIs and other performance management tools can be beneficials in the public sector, it is important to recognize the limitations and potential pitfalls associated with their implementation. Additionally, the implementations of NPM and KPIs must take into account the unique contextual factors that shape the public sector organization and its objectives.

From the given information, it becomes evident why the UK was chosen as the research's subject, taking into consideration the appropriate historical background and the vast number of studies that had already been done on the subject and may be considered in the following study. Moreover, this exact studies and debates around the utilization of KPIs are leading to the problem statement that was discovered.

## Problem statement

The utilization of KPIs has presented challenges, that were discovered by researchers. Some critics argue that KPIs can be manipulated to achieve desired targets, leading to unintended consequences (Behn, 2003). Others argue that the use of KPIs can create a culture of target-setting, which can lead to a focus on achieving targets at the expense of other important goals (Hood, 2006). As well as Ferlie et al. (1996) even though did not specifically discover unintended data manipulation, they did highlight potential risk associated with the adaptation of performance management tools in the public sector, including the possibility of "gaming" or manipulation of the data to meet targets. It was also mentioned that the use of performance management tools could possible create a "tick-box" mentality, where organizations focus on meeting objectives rather than achieving meaningful outcomes.

Without doing a specialized study on the subject, it is challenging to establish a firm conclusion regarding the present KPI implementations in the UK. The usefulness of KPIs in the public sector has, however, been the subject of continuous discussion, and some studies have emphasized that there are still problems with unintended effects and data manipulation. For instance, a National Audit Office (NAO) investigation from 2018 revealed that certain public sector entities were falsifying performance statistics to accomplish goals. The research also made notice of the fact that numerous KPIs employed by public sector entities did not make sense or pertain to their goals.

## Purpose

This thesis aims to discover whether there are still issues with unintended consequences and data manipulation in the current implementation of KPIs in the UK public sector. Following research will endeavor to investigate how KPIs are used in practice, whether they are effective in achieving desired outcomes, and whether there are any unintended consequences associated with their use. For the identifying any shifts in the implementation of KPIs over time, results of this studies will be compared to a previous study on the topic. Additionally, the study will examine the guidance and policies provided by the government or relevant organizations on the use of KPIs in the public sector to determine whether they address the potential risks associated with their implementation.

## Research Question

Hence, the research question of the study is “What is the effectiveness of KPIs in measuring and improving the performance of public sector organizations in the UK?”

## Research Methods

The following research methods could be employed to conduct the analysis of the use of KPIs in the public sectors in United Kingdom:

**Literature Review:** This method involves an exhaustive review of existing research, reports, and articles on the subject. A literature review can identify key similarities and differences in KPIs and their usage in both regions.

**Content Analysis:** This method involves the use of statistical tools to analyze and compare data collected through surveys or other methods. Statistical analysis can help identify significant differences in the use of KPIs in the public sectors of Kazakhstan and European countries(in question).

## Literature review

The literature review of following study was structured in accordance with its overarching purpose and the key areas of investigation identified in the overview. In order to gain a greater awareness of the literature on the efficiency of KPIs in the UK public sector, government regulations pertaining to KPIs, and expert discussions on its usage, the review was separated into three key components. By dividing the literature review into these distinct sections, this study seeks to give a thorough and deep grasp of the present state of knowledge and research on KPIs in the UK public sector. To guarantee a thorough and varied picture of the subject, the review consults a wide range of academic sources, including books, reports from the government, industry publications, and studies that have undergone peer review. The findings off this review are intended to inform the research question, as well as the subsequent analysis and discussion of the study's results.

Typically non-profit, public sector organizations are not accountable to investors seeking a return with the interest rate on their investment. They do, however, represent a variety of stakeholders, not the least of whom are the taxpayers who, in most cases, act as their primary source of revenue. Even while they acknowledge that taxes must be paid in order for critical services to be supplied, the public is opposed to seeing their money mismanaged and would also like to have a better understanding of how it is spent. (Wall & Martin, 2003).

### Efficiency of KPIs in the UK Public Sector

Numerous studies examined at the efficacy of KPIs have been in the UK public sector. As they offer a clear and quantitative approach to monitor progress toward important objectives and results, proponents contend that KPIs are crucial for monitoring and improving performance in public sector organizations (Radnor & McGuire, 2004). For instance, a research by Radnor et al. (2014) revealed that KPIs improved performance in the UK healthcare industry, especially when KPIs were created in collaboration with workers and when KPIs were in line with organizational goals. Similar findings were made by Oke et al. (2015), who discovered that KPIs were particularly successful in boosting the



performance of local government organizations in the UK when they were integrated into performance management systems and when they had strong leadership support.

### Policies from the UK Government Regarding KPIs

Various government policies and initiatives have supported and encouraged the use of KPIs in the UK public sector in recent years. In order to help government departments construct KPIs, the Cabinet Office has published guidelines (Cabinet Office, 2015). The recommendations place a strong emphasis on the necessity of making sure that KPIs are in line with organizational goals and that they are created in collaboration with workers. The advice also emphasizes how crucial it is to prevent unforeseen outcomes like data tampering.

However, there have been others who have criticized the government's attitude to KPIs in the public sector. For instance, some professionals have said that the government's reliance on quantitative and quantifiable objectives has resulted in a limited and excessively simplified perspective of public sector performance, which may not adequately represent the complexity and nuanced aspects of service delivery (Stoker, 1998).

### Debates Regarding the Use of KPIs in the UK Public Sector

A wide number of stakeholders have voiced their opinions on the use of KPIs in the UK public sector, which has been the subject of considerable discussion and criticism in recent years. According to some experts, KPIs are a crucial instrument for fostering accountability, openness, and efficiency in public sector organizations (O'Donovan, 2006). Others, however, have criticized the KPIs' limited scope, arguing that it might result in a misleading picture of the performance of the public sector and degrade the standard of services offered (Pollitt, 1993).

Additionally, there are discussions on how KPIs should be applied in various settings and industries, as well as whether they should be customized to meet the unique goals and priorities of each organization (Radnor & McGuire, 2004). For instance, according to some experts, KPIs may be more

suitable for gauging success in industries like healthcare, where results are obvious and quantifiable, as opposed to industries like education or social care, where results may be harder to pin down (Bevan & Hood, 2006).

Overall, the research indicates that KPIs may be useful for gauging and enhancing the performance of public sector organizations in the UK, especially when they are in line with organizational goals and have solid leadership backing. However, there are challenges associated with using KPIs in the public sector, and unintended consequences including data tampering and the potential for KPIs to foster a "tick-box" attitude must be properly monitored and handled.

## Methodology

A thorough assessment of the literature revealed that there are objections to and criticisms towards the implementation of KPIs in the public service sector. Numerous unintended consequences, including data manipulation and disregard for organizational goals, have been pointed out by scholars. The content from the articles under consideration is not entirely out-of-date, but it is nevertheless critical to take into account how much the government has done to solve these problems and how effective KPIs are in the public sector today. As a result, the current study attempts to close this knowledge gap and contribute to the existing body of information on the subject by evaluating most recent guidelines from the UK governance.

### Examining the guidelines from UK governance: “The HM Treasury's Green Book”

The investigation conducted by our team has resulted with finding several guidelines and policies that were provided by UK governance. However, it was decided to concentrate on the most recent one, and rather have a focus on the delivering a thorough and deep analysis of only one guideline, than disintegrating it on several guidelines. Thus, chosen guideline is “The HM Treasury's Green Book”.

HM Treasury's The Green Book provides instructions on how to assess policies, programs, and projects. It also provides guidance on how to employ monitoring and evaluation before, during, and after implementation (gov.uk). It provides guidance on how to use KPIs to evaluate and track performance across a variety of industries, including financial management and service provision.

Comprehensive guidance on the use of KPIs in the UK public sector may be found in the HM Treasury's Green Book. The procedure for choosing and creating suitable KPIs is described in the text, with a focus on their applicability to the aims and objectives of the business. The guidelines also offer thorough guidance on how to efficiently gather and evaluate KPI data.

In general, the Green Book is a helpful tool for establishing KPIs that work. The instructions are simple to understand, and the book stresses the value of approaching KPI development strategically. Some detractors, however, have claimed that the book fails to address specific problems associated with the usage of KPIs, such as the possibility of data tampering and unexpected repercussions. More specifically, according to Hood and Peters (2004), the Green Book relies heavily on a narrow set of quantifiable performance indicators, which may not accurately reflect the true performance of public services.

Despite these complaints, it is obvious that the Green Book has significantly influenced how KPIs are used in the public sector. It is a thorough manual for assessing and evaluating policies, and it addresses many various topics other than KPIs. Nevertheless, several government agencies have noted increased performance with the use of KPIs and other performance indicators. For instance, to track its success in decreasing benefit fraud and mistake, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) created a new set of KPIs in 2012. The use of KPIs to track performance was credited in part by the DWP for a 7% decrease in fraud and mistake by 2017. Similar to this, the National Health Service (NHS) has employed KPIs to track performance and promote patient care advancements. For instance, the NHS implemented a set of KPIs pertaining to emergency room wait times, which have assisted in lowering wait times and enhancing patient outcomes.

The recommendations have been widely used by government agencies. Although there is certainly space for development, especially in terms of resolving KPI-related concerns, the Green Book continues to be a crucial tool to leverage the advantages of KPIs. The Green Book is a useful manual for using KPIs, and while it may not cover every issue, it still offers helpful advice for businesses looking to apply KPIs in the public sector.

## Data analysis

For the examination of the current situation regarding the performance of KPI in public sectors, content analysis based on annual reports and dataset as one of the research methods was performed. See Table 1 for breakdown of the latest annual reports and Table 2 for the dataset regarding the KPI for UK governance's KPIs for most important contracts. Those tables represent our findings regarding the annual reports, as it is presented below, it becomes clear that in UK every department publishes their report continuously and systematically.

The UK government study (HM Government, 1997) utilized the release of annual reports as the first criterion in measuring the discharge of responsibility of non-departmental public bodies. (NDPBs) The annual report is widely recognised as a critical document for reporting performance to external users.

## Dataset

**Table 1. Content analysis of annual reports**

Country	Public Sector	Examined reports
UK	National Health Service (NHS) England	2
UK	BEIS: Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy	2
UK	CO: Cabinet Office	2
UK	DCMS: Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport	2
UK	DEFRA: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	2
UK	DFE: Department for Education	2
UK	DFT: Department for Transport	2
UK	DHSC: Department of Health and Social Care	2
UK	DIT: Department for International Trade	2
UK	DLUCH: Department of Local Government and Communities and Housing	2
UK	DWP: Department for Work and Pensions	2
UK	FCDO: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office	2
UK	HMRC: Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs	2
UK	HMT: Her Majesty's Treasury	2

UK	HO: Home Office	2
UK	MOD: Ministry of Defence	2
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Total		32

Moreover, gov.uk enforces with KPIs for each of the department with detailed information that consist of: department, business area, contract name with it's description, supplier, name of KPIs and description, along with the the performance of the vendor. This dataset is updated every 3 months.

Table 2 below was illustrated with the purpose to introduce readers with the capacity of KPIs that are used in UK central government.

**Table 2. Content analysis of UK governance's KPIs (percentage of completeness)**

Public Sector	KPI's
BEIS: Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy	51
CO: Cabinet Office	53
DCMS: Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport	10
DEFRA: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	136
DFE: Department for Education	353
DFT: Department for Transport	119
DHSC: Department of Health and Social Care	238
DIT: Department for International Trade	44
DLUCH: Department of Local Government and Communities and Housing	34
DWP: Department for Work and Pensions	164
FCDO: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office	385
HMRC: Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs	79
HMT: Her Majesty's Treasury	12
HO: Home Office	142
MOD: Ministry of Defence	684
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Total	2504

## Key findings

National Health Service (NHS) England: According to a study released by the NHS, the adoption of KPIs has helped the organization perform better in areas including access to psychiatric therapy and

waiting periods for cancer treatment. Concerns have been voiced concerning the detrimental consequences of KPIs on patient care and staff morale, though.

BEIS: According to the Ministry of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, successes have been achieved in a number of areas and points of development: the growth of exporting companies and the use of KPIs to reduce energy consumption in buildings.

CO: In order to directly track the government's progress toward its policy goals in a proportional way, the Cabinet Office has put in place KPIs. The KPIs utilized, however, have drawn criticism for being overly general and failing to adequately capture the government's performance.

KPIs have been used by DEFRA, the Department of Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs, to track advancements in areas like lowering greenhouse gas emissions and enhancing air quality. The KPIs employed, nevertheless, have drawn criticism for not being ambitious enough.

DFE: The Department for Education has utilized KPIs to track development in areas like raising the proportion of kids attending good or exceptional schools and lowering the proportion of adolescents who are not enrolled in school, work, or training.

DFT: The Department of Transportation has utilized KPIs to track development in areas like lowering the rate of traffic accidents and raising the usage of environmentally friendly transportation. There have been complaints, meanwhile, that the utilized KPIs do not include the larger environmental and socioeconomic effects of transport

KPIs have been used by the Department of Health and Social Care to track advancements in areas including lowering hospital admissions for treatable diseases and raising patient satisfaction. Concerns have been voiced concerning the detrimental consequences of KPIs on patient care and staff morale, though.

DWP: The Department for Work and Pensions has utilized KPIs to track development in areas like raising the proportion of persons in the labor force and lowering the proportion of people receiving benefits. There have been complaints, nevertheless, that the employed KPIs do not account for the effectiveness of the job and how it affects people's wellbeing.

KPIs have been used by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to track advancements in areas including closing the tax gap and enhancing customer service. There have been complaints, meanwhile, that the utilized KPIs do not account for the broader social and economic implications of tax policy.

KPIs have been used by Her Majesty's Treasury to track development in areas including lowering the national debt and boosting economic growth. The use of KPIs has drawn criticism for not accounting for the broader social and environmental effects of economic policy, though.

KPIs have been used by the Home Office to track development in areas including crime reduction and border security. However, there have been complaints that the employed KPIs do not consider the wider social and human rights impacts of security policies.

KPIs have been utilized by the Ministry of Defence to track development in areas like minimizing the number of mishaps and incidents during military operations. The KPIs employed, however, have come under fire for failing to include the larger social and humanitarian effects of military policy.

## Conclusion

### Summary of Key findings

Overall, depending on the context and the particular KPIs utilized, a KPI's ability to improve the performance of different government agencies varies. While some departments have noted benefits, others have had difficulties and received negative feedback while using KPIs.

There are several aspects that can affect the effectiveness of KPIs, and depending on how well they are created, implemented as well as monitored, their own effectiveness depends.

Nonetheless, without a question, KPIs are a valuable and crucial instrument for assessing and enhancing the performance of public sector organizations. Results from many departments, including the NHS and HMRC, have shown how KPIs have improved efficiency and effectiveness in reaching organizational goals. In particular, those improvements are frequently seen in areas that are closely related to the KPIs being tracked, such as cutting waiting times, enhancing customer service, or boosting productivity in certain operations.

Making sure KPIs adequately represent the pertinent components of performance is one of the main problems. To determine the most important success indicators, this calls for a deep grasp of corporate goals and feedback from stakeholders. Additionally, there is a possibility of unexpected effects, as was the case with the NHS, when the emphasis on objectives led to certain undesirable results like gambling and neglect of non-target areas.

Avoiding data tampering, which can provide faulty or false KPI findings, is another difficulty. This was brought up in the earlier debate about the Green Book, when it was said that the KPI advice might lead to data manipulation. Therefore, in order to guarantee data integrity and accuracy, it is essential for public sector organizations to have robust internal controls in place.

KPIs are a useful tool for gauging and enhancing performance in public sector organizations overall. To make sure that KPIs are created properly and that data integrity is upheld, however, significant thought and management are needed.



## Implications of the findings

The discovery of these major discoveries has prompted inquiries on how, while also taking into account the achievements and failures encountered by the UK government, these insights may be successfully adopted in public services of other nations.

First and foremost, it is important to design meaningful and relevant KPIs within the organizations objectives. According to the findings, public sector organizations should give priority to creating meaningful and pertinent KPIs. This entails making sure KPIs capture the most important performance metrics and coordinating them with the organization's strategic objectives. Public sector organizations may more effectively direct their efforts and resources toward areas that need improvement by choosing KPIs that accurately represent the expected outcomes and correspond with organizational goals.

The issues mentioned with data tampering emphasize how crucial strong governance and data integrity standards are. Clear rules and processes should be established by public sector entities to guarantee the precision and dependability of KPI data. This entails building robust internal controls, carrying out routine audits, and encouraging reporting openness. Organizations may increase the validity of their KPI measures and foster confidence in the findings by sustaining strong standards of governance and data integrity.

The results highlight the necessity of ongoing KPI practice review and improvement. Organizations in the public sector should periodically analyze and evaluate the performance of their selected KPIs. This entails monitoring performance trends, assessing how KPIs affect results, and making required corrections. Organizations may see any flaws in their KPI frameworks and make educated judgments to enhance and optimize their performance measurement systems by adopting a continuous improvement attitude.

Public sector organizations may increase the efficiency of their KPIs in promoting performance improvement and attaining their strategic goals by concentrating on these consequences. It is crucial to make an investment in careful KPI creation, set up reliable governance and data integrity procedures,

and promote a culture of ongoing assessment and development. By doing this, businesses may fully utilize KPIs to track progress, inform decisions, and improve the general performance of the public sector.

### Areas for future research

Even though the issue of data manipulation was mentioned several times in the following study, we do not obtain enough information and tools in order to detect it. Another limitation of the work is that the study has mostly examined UK public service as a whole, instead of having an in-depth analysis of each department, which would also provide with useful insight. Nonetheless, identifies limitations of the work can lead to the new areas of the studies that we suggest.

The development of strategies and procedures to identify and address data tampering in the context of KPIs might be the subject of future research. In order to find trends or abnormalities that may point to possible manipulation, this research may investigate cutting-edge methodologies like data analytics and statistical analysis. It would also be beneficial to research the fundamental causes of data tampering and provide solutions to this problem. Public sector firms may increase the accuracy and dependability of their KPI measures by identifying practical ways to spot and stop data tampering.

Conducting in-depth analyses of individual departments' performance histories before and after the deployment of KPIs is another subject for future research. To determine how the implementation of KPIs has affected each department's performance, this research may entail evaluating historical data, policies, and initiatives. Researchers can find patterns, difficulties, and success factors associated with the application of KPIs in various departments by looking at particular case studies. This research would identify best practices and potential areas for development while shedding vital information on the effectiveness and influence of KPIs on departmental performance.

Future research in these areas would add to our knowledge and comprehension of KPI implementation in the UK public sector. They would give a thorough assessment of departmental performance and practical ideas into tackling data manipulation issues. Scholars and practitioners can

further improve the efficacy and integrity of KPIs in gauging and enhancing performance in the public sector by looking at these study topics.

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