

Re:State

Rethinking regulation

Wednesday 29 April
London

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amazon

The Amazon logo, featuring the word "amazon" in a bold, black, sans-serif font, with a curved orange arrow underneath it pointing from the letter 'a' to the letter 'z'.

Agenda

09.00 - 09.30

Registration and refreshments

09.30 - 09.35

Welcome and introduction

Charlotte Pickles, Chief Executive, *Re:State*

09.35 - 10.35

Panel one – Regulating for growth: realising a new approach

This panel will explore what it means to regulate for growth in practice, and how the UK can make the institutional and political changes required.

John Fingleton, Chair, Nuclear Regulatory Taskforce

Stephen Gibson, Chair, Regulatory Policy Committee

Rachel Fletcher, Global Director of Policy and Regulation, Octopus

Iain Wood, Director of Public Policy, Amazon UK

In partnership with



10.35 - 10.55

Coffee break

10.55 - 11.40

Keynote address

Andrew Griffith MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Business and Trade

11.40 - 12.40

Panel two – Smarter regulation: encouraging innovation and managing risks

This panel will examine how the UK can build regulatory frameworks that are adaptive, proportionate, and technologically literate – capable of supporting innovation while maintaining public trust in an era of rapid change.

Samiah Anderson, Head of Digital Regulation, techUK

William Malcolm, Executive Director of Regulatory Risk and Innovation, Information Commissioner's Office

Ian Phoenix, Director of Intelligence, Digital and Innovation, Financial Conduct Authority

The Rt Hon Lord David Willetts, Chair, Regulatory Innovation Office

12.40 - 13.30

Light lunch and networking

Our mission

Britain continues to face era-defining challenges: rising geopolitical tensions and risks, an ageing and increasingly sick population, sluggish growth and crumbling infrastructure, and deep polarisation and distrust. To tackle these and secure a prosperous future, a radically different approach is needed that remakes the State.

The public service institutions and approaches we rely on – modified versions of those built as part of the post-war settlement – are no longer fit for purpose. The challenges that faced 1940s Britain are not those of today. At *Re:State* we understand that if the challenges we face are era-defining, so too must our response be.

In practice, that means overhauling the centre; dismantling top-down bureaucracies and building local capabilities; rethinking outdated institutions; and challenging existing models.

That is precisely what our ‘Re:Imagining the State’ programme is focused on: putting forward bold but implementable ideas to transform how our state infrastructure works.

Today’s conference builds on the work of our ‘Re:Imagining Whitehall’ work stream, and shines a spotlight on one of the areas needing a radical overhaul: regulation. Where smart regulation can support competition, consumer confidence and public safety – all key to a dynamic economy – ill-thought through, heavy-handed and outdated regulation can smother growth and actually lead to worse outcomes for the public. A radical rethink is needed, one that embraces proportionality, recognises the broadest value of enabling growth, and encourages innovation.

We are delighted to bring together sector experts, regulators, officials and businesses to identify better ways to regulate. This is not a technical topic, but a foundational issue – getting it right will help put us back on that path to prosperity.

Thank you for joining us.



Charlotte Pickles
Chief Executive

Our team



Joe Hill
Director of Strategy



Dr Simon Kaye
Director of Policy and Research



Cory Berman
Researcher



Beth Bradbury
Events & Partnerships
Officer



Matthew Feeney
Research Manager



Laxshia Ganesharatnam
Researcher



Rosa Humphreys
Events Assistant



Miya McFarlane
Research Assistant



Alice Semark
Researcher



Alex Walker
Senior Researcher

Regulating for growth: the law of rule



Joe Hill
Director of Strategy

After a decade of stagnation, Britain's economy is at a crossroads. The Government want to go for growth, but it will take more than sentiment to unpick the structural forces which are blocking investment, encouraging firms to cut their workforces, and making the country a less appealing place to do business for global firms – it will take careful policy design and making difficult trade-offs.

Regulating for growth starts with regulatory reform. The UK's regulatory landscape is the result of decades of incremental change – patching laws here and there and layering new regulations on top of each other without thought for the total cost. Unlike the public finances where governments are forced to account for how money is raised and spent, the benefits of a new regulation are usually over-hyped and under-delivered by Government, and the costs of it are always borne by someone else. Businesses and the public pay the price for complex, disproportionate and outdated regulations – many of which policymakers in Westminster have already forgotten that they created.

Turning the tide starts by recognising that new rules are disproportionately easy to create, under-scrutinised by independent experts, rarely reviewed and almost never removed. The answer isn't just another

bonfire of red tape, but a durable approach which makes policymakers consider the total burden of regulation on business, and budget for new measures against their ambitions to grow the economy. A 25 per cent target to reduce compliance costs is a start, but the Government must go further and faster.

At the same time as they look to streamline the regulatory burden, new regulations in employment and rental protection introduced since the general election threaten to significantly increase the cost of housing and employing someone.

The Government has an opportunity to usher in a new pro-growth approaches to regulation – one which balances public safety and trust with the need to have a dynamic and innovative economy for tomorrow. But a change of direction on this scale requires a radical shift in policy.

The UK could be world-leading in its approach to regulatory reform: improving the quality of scrutiny by introducing a stricter tests for new regulation, setting a clearer responsibilities for regulators, introducing a more proportionate approach to risk and benefit, and establishing a first-of-its kind holistic system for budgeting regulatory costs across the economy.

Rewarding the risk-takers



Andrew Griffith MP
Shadow Secretary of State
for Business and Trade

Britain's regulatory landscape has been plagued for decades by an ever-increasing desire to stamp out risk. The result has been little to no regard for the merit or even the practicality of any particular regulation, while the corpora of regulations as well as the bodies that administer them have each grown unchecked.

Successive governments of all stripes have promised to cut regulation only to see that the thicket of red tape has grown when they glance back on their way out of the door. While it is easy to blame the 'blob', or the demands of well-meaning but misguided interest groups, the blame ultimately sits squarely with those at the top of the system. Ministers have a responsibility to take charge of the regulatory environment that spews forth from their brief just as they do for other actions of their departments. More ministers arriving seasoned from a life outside of Westminster and more conviction politicians willing to make first-principles arguments would help.

Getting to a place where Britain has simpler and fewer regulations will require a sea-change in our approach to risk. Risk must be respected as an essential ingredient of a modern economy which is to be nurtured and, at times, encouraged. Without risk in financial markets, returns will not materialise. Without risk in public infrastructure, the railways would not have criss-crossed Britain. Without risk in innovation, artificial intelligence would remain a pipe dream. In pursuit of much needed growth, Britain must fall back in love with risk.

A future Conservative government would

reorient the machinery of a smaller and more agile state toward risk takers. Doing fewer things, better. This will naturally involve paring back the number of regulators and their remit. Time and again during my tenure as a minister, I saw regulators whose missions had crept well beyond the formal responsibilities set out for them by Parliament. This included financial regulators who devoted more time to encouraging diversity initiatives than to ensuring the international competitiveness of the City of London.

The costs of overmighty regulators in a global, competitive environment are not trivial. Every enterprise and investor has choice as to where to locate themselves, investment, and talent. At present, Britain ranks a lowly 29th in the IMD International World Competitiveness Index. If Britain does not embrace a competitive regulatory regime that balances the innate desire of systems to minimise risk with the innate costs of a risk-free environment, we will lose that race.

Many of the individuals who go to work for regulators or in the civil service do so out of genuine, noble intentions. Once they meet the incentives of a zero-risk culture, they are quickly demoralised or prevented from reaching their full potential. Whitehall rarely rewards those who take risks, think in the long term, and innovate, instead preferencing those who have done all they can to ensure the system stands still. This corrosive culture cannot continue.

It is my mission to ensure that a future Conservative government succeeds where others have failed. We will trim back the thicket of regulation; we will make Britain a country that values risk. Ultimately, we will reclaim our position as an internationally competitive market.

Why Independent Regulation matters



Stephen Gibson
Chair, Regulatory Policy
Committee

In the race for economic growth, regulation is often cast as either a brake or an accelerator – governments typically want to reduce the burden of regulation and prioritise deregulation in order to encourage growth. But this framing misses a more fundamental element: the institutional architecture and independence of regulators together with the quality and credibility of regulation matters as much as, if not more than, its quantity.

By insulating decision-making from short-term political pressures, independent regulators provide consistency and predictability. Regulators, can take a long-term view, setting frameworks that endure beyond the term of a parliament. This is particularly important in sectors like energy, transportation, telecommunications and financial services, where investment horizons stretch over decades. Businesses are more likely to commit capital when they believe that rules will not shift unpredictably with each change of government, and investors seek assurance that regulatory decisions are made on objective and transparent grounds. Independent regulation can reduce uncertainty, lowering risk premiums and thereby increase investment and boost growth.

Independence can also strengthen accountability, shifting it from political responsiveness to institutional integrity. Independent regulators are bound by clear mandates, statutory objectives, and rigorous scrutiny – from courts, legislatures and the public. This form of accountability is often more effective than politically-driven intervention.

However, independence is not without its challenges. It must be carefully designed and continually reinforced. There is always a risk of regulatory capture, where institutions become too aligned with the industries they oversee. Safeguards, such as clear governance structures, transparency requirements, and appeals processes are essential to ensure

that independence does not become isolation.

It is right that government sets the strategic direction – signalling that growth matters and shaping the overall policy framework. But regulators must interpret this in a fair and evidence-based way. Growth is not the sole objective and needs to be balanced against other priorities such as consumer protection, competition, financial stability, environmental sustainability and affordability.

This balancing role extends beyond frontline regulators to the system of independent watchdogs that scrutinise government itself. Institutions such as the NAO, the OBR, the Office for Environmental Protection, the Office for Statistics Regulation and the Regulatory Policy Committee play a vital role in underpinning credible growth. These bodies do not deliver policy directly, but they ensure that government decisions, claims and analysis are robust, transparent, and grounded in evidence. They provide assurance to Parliament, businesses, and the public that ministers are not ‘marking their own homework’ or providing ‘policy-based evidence’ in place of making good, evidence-based policy. In doing so, they strengthen confidence and trust in the overall regulatory and policy framework – an essential foundation for investment and growth.

Growth is not simply about deregulation or burden-reduction, it is about creating an environment where businesses, consumers and investors have confidence in the rules of the game. A system that combines clear government direction with strong, independent regulators and watchdogs provides the institutional framework to support the delivery of stable markets, effective competition, investment, innovation and ultimately growth.

A new approach to competition



Philip Salter
Founder, The
Entrepreneurs
Network

It can often feel like the amount of attention any given policy debate receives is inverse to its actual importance. New regulation mandating jars of marmalade add the word ‘citrus’ before their name recently made the BBC News homepage; proposals to radically overhaul Britain’s competition regime did not. It might feel like a trivial point to make, but in this instance, we have reason to worry that ministers are sleepwalking into a nightmare.

For those who missed it, the Government recently closed a consultation on “refining our competition regime”. The broad intention – to improve how competition policy works and get the economy growing more quickly – is commendable. But as entrepreneurs and investors told us when we canvassed them, many of the key proposals it made pose a serious threat to Britain’s reputation as a dynamic startup economy.

Without getting too deep into the weeds, in the proposed model responsibility over mergers would become even more centralised within the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), and it would be given greater discretion when making decisions. Opportunities for outside expertise would

be reduced – leaving the CMA less equipped to handle niche cases and making it likelier that groupthink goes unchallenged. New and open-ended powers would be afforded to the CMA to not only investigate algorithms used by some of Britain’s most innovative businesses, but also force them to alter how they function.

However well-intentioned the proposals to shake up our competition regime are, the real impact they will have is to make Britain a less attractive place to start, grow and exit a business. Adding to the thicket of general regulation would be bad enough, but changing the fundamental architecture that dictates how businesses can scale risks chilling the entire startup ecosystem. There’s a grim irony that these changes would do far more to stifle effective competition than anything they purport to address.

Government should think again – and if it proceeds at all, it must build in far greater safeguards against the kind of institutional overreach that unchecked discretion invites. Entrepreneurs and investors need reassurance that Britain’s competition regime will remain a platform for ambition, not a constraint on it.

Smarter regulation: encouraging innovation and managing risks



The Rt Hon Lord David
Willetts
Chair, Regulatory
Innovation Office

Too much of the debate about regulating technologies is framed as a choice between innovation and safety. It is not. The real task is to manage risk in a way that protects the public while still allowing new ideas to improve lives, strengthen services and reach the market.

That is not easy. Regulators are often at the front line of fast-moving technologies. They are asked to uphold protections while responding to innovations that do not fit neatly within old categories. They deserve credit for doing that under pressure. But smarter regulation is not only a matter for regulators. It also depends on decisions across government and Parliament.

That is because decisions about risk are not purely technical. They involve judgement about public benefit, economic opportunity and the costs of delay or inaction. Regulators bring expertise, discipline and independence. Ministers and Parliament bring democratic legitimacy and a wider view across priorities. We need both.

The UK has many of the right institutions and policy objectives. The challenge is to make them work together more effectively in practice. Regulators may not necessarily see the wider benefits of a new technology. They may have limited evidence, precedent or scope to judge them with confidence, especially when innovation is upstream. There can be a focus on risks that are more immediate even though there could be wider long-term risk reduction. That can make the system more cautious than intended and regulations so restrictive that wider benefits, including lowering risk, are lost.

So what should change?

First, we should make better use of standards. Good standards can provide clarity

without locking us into rigid rules too early. They are often better suited to technologies that are evolving quickly. Used well, they can support interoperability, safe adoption and a more adaptable route to market.

Second, decisions about the overall risk environment should be informed by wider perspectives across government. Many emerging technologies cut across regulators, departments and traditional policy boundaries. In such cases, better outcomes depend on stronger coordination, clearer ministerial steers and a more explicit approach to how risks and benefits are weighed across the system. This is not about second guessing regulators. It is about making sure important societal choices are shared, rather than left to individual regulators alone.

That is where the Regulatory Innovation Office can help. We exist to support government and regulators in working together more effectively so that regulation can enable innovation while maintaining public trust. We help identify practical barriers, build capability, support experimentation and draw on the expertise of the Regulatory Horizons Council and others across the system. In doing so, we help turn broad ambitions for smarter regulation into practical action.

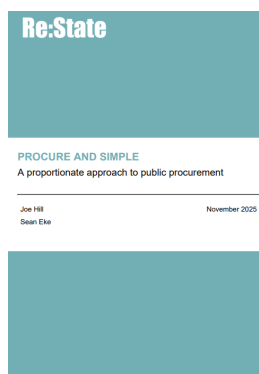
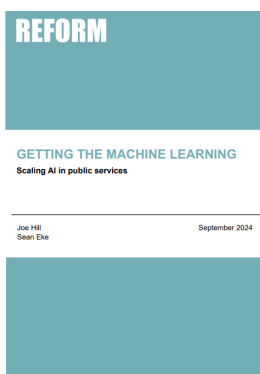
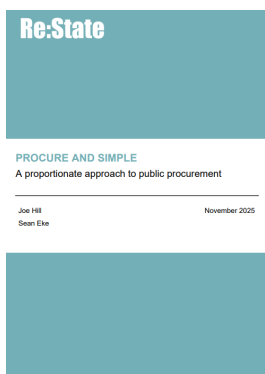
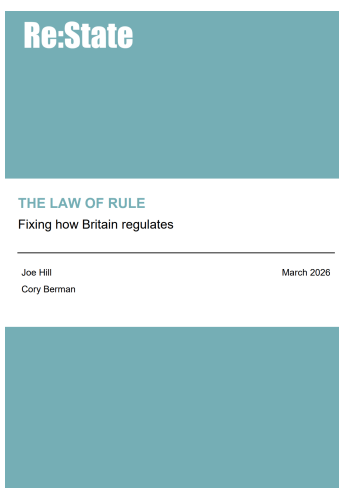
The prize is significant. We can improve public services, help businesses to grow, scale and stay in the UK, and help promising technologies to reach markets and the public faster. But that will depend on a system in which regulators, ministers and Parliament coordinate their contributions. Smarter regulation comes from clearer choices, shared judgement and a balanced approach to managing both the risks and the benefits of innovation. That is how we can help innovation and safety advance together.

Our work

Our ‘Re:Imagining Whitehall’ research programme is defining how the centre of government must reform in order to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world. It is the playbook for rebuilding Whitehall to make it fit for the future: from cultivating talent and performance, to adopting transformative technologies, rethinking processes, and strengthening delivery structures.

Reforming the way Whitehall makes and manages the UK’s regulatory environment is crucial to supporting growth and innovation.

Our recent research paper ‘The law of rule: fixing how Britain regulates’ examines the systemic forces driving regulatory creep and accumulation, identifying ways to strengthen analysis, scrutiny, and monitoring of new regulations. It makes the case for reversing the ‘regulatory ratchet’ effect by creating a world-leading system of regulatory scrutiny and budgeting, to control the impact of regulation on the wider economy and support the Government’s ambition to “regulate for growth”.



Join us

As an educational charity, *Re:State* conducts robust, evidence-led research to produce innovative but practical policy solutions. We convene reform-minded people from across the political spectrum to advance debate and generate fresh thinking.

In a nutshell, we are home to bold ideas and big conversations.

Our Corporate Partnership programme brings together individuals and organisations who share our commitment to tackling major public policy challenges with radical but workable solutions. It provides a space to engage with new ideas, connect with influential thinkers, and gain insight into our shaping of the reform agenda.

We value the commitment of our partners very highly. We pride ourselves on building strong and mutually beneficial relationships, and work with our partners so they can get the most out of joining our network.

To find out more, please contact beth.bradbury@re-state.co.uk



