National Audit Office of Finland
Performance audit
D/503/04.07.02/2025

Use of artificial intelligence in central government (10/2026)

Conclusions and recommendations of the National Audit Office

The audit focused on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in central government. Its objective was to determine what kinds of preconditions central government organisations and wellbeing services counties have for effective AI use in their activities. This audit topic is particularly current as AI introduction and use are generally associated with a great deal of potential for efficiency and productivity.

While the central government is highly active in AI-related development, turning the potential benefits into reality requires a major effort

Prime Minister Orpo's Government Programme states that Finland will make full use of the opportunities provided by digitalisation and artificial intelligence in the activities of both the central government and wellbeing services counties. The Government's policies have guided experiments with and use of AI at the upper level, and most organisations also have their own goals associated with AI use.

The audit showed clearly that central government organisations and wellbeing services counties see plenty of potential in AI. Almost all authorities have identified use cases for AI, and their development has generally started with the cases that are the easiest to implement. Overall, a large number of different experiments related to AI are under way.

However, the message that narrowly focused development should be replaced by an overall reform of processes with the help of AI was repeated in the audit, as this is the only way to generate significant benefits. The processes should also be examined across administrative branches and organisational boundaries, while an understanding of how AI will change the role of humans in carrying out the work is needed. Consequently, humans rather than just technology must be put at the centre of the development.

To support the development, strong ownership and change management will be needed as the benefits of AI will not be realised without effort. Investments in development will also be required to produce benefits. While the authorities as a whole are only taking their first steps towards AI use, AI offers such high potential that it should be accounted for in all operational development.

Situational picture of AI development and the prerequisites for cooperation should be improved

The audit found that the coordination of AI development at the level of central government as a whole appears disorganised. The situation of AI development is discussed in groups that also coordinate other digital development, and separate AI coordination projects have also been appointed. In particular, cross-administrative coordination is the responsibility of the interministerial Coordination Group for Digitalisation which, however, is not in charge of such issues as resource allocation.

The central government lacks a comprehensive and up-to-date overview of how, and how extensively, AI is used. A better situational picture would help to direct this entity in the central government and serve the needs of individual authorities, which would benefit from also being informed of development work carried out by others. Essential elements of the situational picture additionally include the status of legislation and EU level development.

The wellbeing services counties stand out as a positive example in the coverage and quality of the situational picture. The AI ecosystem for social and health care launched by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has invested in compiling and sharing a situational picture of development in the wellbeing services counties, and the rest of the central government could also learn from this.

The need for cooperation in developing and using AI solutions came up clearly in the audit. Overall, it is neither sensible nor cost-effective for the authorities to develop overlapping solutions, or for each authority to procure products related to the same use cases for its own use only. Common solutions would help especially small organisations that cannot make equally large investments in the development as bigger ones.

The audit found that while the authorities are willing to work together and co-create, the central government lacks an operating model and structures that would support this. In order for cooperation to be genuinely beneficial, it should lead to the productisation and mainstreaming of solutions. Otherwise the authorities may only find such cooperation a cumbersome and slow way of making progress, which means that the possibilities offered by it may easily go unused.

The authorities could also collaborate more efficiently on introducing existing services. The authorities spend a large amount of time on investigating similar issues that might well be underpinned by a service offered by the same service provider, such as Government ICT Centre Valtori.

Cooperation between the authorities has recently been encouraged; for example, the Ministry of Finance and Sitra require that the projects funded by them produce a description of how the outputs generated through the development work could also be used by other authorities.

However, the National Audit Office finds it appropriate that, instead of descriptions required of other parties, the funding providers themselves determine what prerequisites they offer for the productisation of common solutions and how the organisations developing services can use them. Essential viewpoints include the role of common service providers as well as technical issues related to procurement and contracts, in which the aim should be ensuring the overall advantage of the central government.

While interpretations of legislation and lack of resources slow down the development, progress has been made

Legislation and different interpretations associated with it were highlighted in the audit as a key issue that hampers and slows down AI use in the central government. Especially the EU AI Act, data protection legislation, general legislation on the public administration as well as special legislation applicable to different sectors must be addressed in AI development. Whereas some legislative barriers have already been identified and certain ones also dismantled, much remains to be done in this area.

In AI use, the key question is what tasks and data may be entrusted to AI. If interpretations of legislation are uncertain, this is reflected in the development as following the precautionary principle, which means that use cases open to interpretation will be postponed, despite their potential benefits. In order to make full use of the potential offered by AI, the ministries responsible for the legislation should actively and proactively strive to determine the boundary conditions under which the authorities can use AI in their activities, and whether or not the legislation is compatible with AI. The audit findings indicate that this type of examinations have not advanced particularly rapidly, at least not in all respects. The Ministry of Justice, which is responsible for general public administration legislation, plays a special role in this examination.

Another key factor slowing down AI use is the lack of resources. Despite the challenging resource situation, the authorities have been able to launch their development work, and experiments are carried out to learn what does and does not work. However, the general challenge lies in how to move forward from experiments and ultimately achieve continuous activities. The resources available to organisations vary, and the authorities' capabilities for and possibilities of using AI may diverge increasingly. To speed up the development, proof of success is also needed, which may serve as an incentive to others.

Information steering and efforts to develop common operating models are fragmented

AI use in public administration can be supported by means of common operating models, eliminating the need for each authority to do everything by itself. For example, organisations need an AI management model that fulfils legislative requirements. The development of management models is currently hampered by incomplete and inconsistent interpretations of legislation and organisations' lack of competence.

Many authorities have made use of the central government's common operating models and support materials, which have been produced by several different authorities. Such support is scattered, however, and the authorities do not find it sufficient as a whole. Information steering has plenty of potential to offer more uniform support that meets the authorities' needs better.

In the survey conducted for the audit, the authorities said that the standard of their technical capabilities for using AI was reasonably good on average, whereas the reality may be much more varied. While government agencies are working on a transition to cloud environments that will facilitate the use of AI solutions, this will take years. Cloud services are also associated with uncertainties in the current world situation. The quality and interoperability of data in possession of the authorities still have room for improvement.

In AI-related competence development, the authorities have focused on acquiring basic skills and general training has been organised rather extensively. However, rapidly developing technology makes maintaining competence and finding experts difficult. Common models and services available for identifying role and task specific competence requirements and providing study paths are few and far between.

To tackle the competence challenges, the National Audit Office encourages especially the steering authorities to consider new solutions that could improve the situation of small organisations, in particular. Creating a common pool of resources and competences specialised in AI development could be one of the solutions.

The authorities already have many AI-related networks that share lessons learned and experiences. While the network activities are open in principle, finding suitable networks is not always easy, and participation in them may be haphazard.

If information on the networks' activities were available centrally, each organisation could select those that meet its needs. However, the active involvement of organisations that already are pioneers is often a typical feature of network activities. This is why networking, however active, will not eliminate the risk of authorities' divergence and progress at a different paces in AI use.

Recommendations of the National Audit Office

1. The Ministry of Transport and Communications and the Ministry of Finance should develop the situational picture available on AI development in central government to meet the needs and purposes of different target groups.
2. The Ministry of Finance should define operating models and structures that support the development and deployment of authorities' shared AI solutions.
3. Together with the other ministries, the Ministry of Finance should continue to dismantle legislative obstacles to digitalisation with a more determined approach and ensure that legislation with essential impact on the authorities' work is compatible with AI use.
4. The Ministry of Finance should promote more consistent, needs-based and easy-to-use information steering related to AI use.