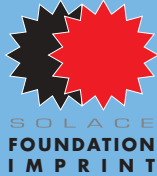


January 2006



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# **A word in your ear...**

## Advice to Sir Gus from a friendly source

Michael Bichard  
Wendy Thomson  
Christopher Foster  
Guy Lodge  
David Clark  
Sandy Bruce-Lockhart  
David Walker  
John Benington

Produced by the SOLACE Foundation, distributed by The Guardian

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## SOLACE Foundation Imprint

The Trustees of the SOLACE Foundation are pleased to bring you the second pamphlet of its publishing imprint.

The SOLACE Foundation Imprint (SFI) has been created to support and incentivise writing, reflection and research on key issues affecting public services and local government. It is financed mainly from surpluses generated by SOLACE Enterprises, the commercial arm of the SOLACE family and through the Foundation's endowment.

The Imprint offers a number of prizes and awards of up to £4000 each for work by practitioners, academics, and those involved in policy development and implementation. We are especially keen to encourage collaboration between people in those different spheres. Information about the Prizes, Awards and our partners, and how to apply, is set out on the inside back cover of this pamphlet.

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# Dear Gus, here's your chance to make a real difference

by Michael Bichard



Any cabinet secretary will be offered advice, opinions and suggestions from a myriad of different sources – some better informed than others. In Sir Gus O'Donnell we have a new cabinet secretary who has already shown himself to be prepared to listen and to respond constructively. Encouraged by that, the Solace Foundation Imprint thought it would be timely to invite a number of people with an interest in the management – and reform – of our public services to offer their own words of advice to Gus early in his tenure. These various contributions comprise this the second SFI publication and we hope you – and Gus – will find it a stimulating read.

## **Unparalleled capacity to make a difference**

As a former permanent secretary I have seen at first hand just how difficult the post can be. It is a unique mix of policy, politics, delivery and leadership played out in the floodlights on a national stage liable to be invaded at any moment: “by ‘events’ dear boy!” But it is also a post which possesses huge power and therefore probably unparalleled capacity to make a difference to every aspect of our national life – and, of course, beyond. It must therefore be exciting, exhilarating and daunting in equal measure, and I know that all our contributors wish Gus well in his task and all have different priorities for him to address.

Wendy Thomson wants Gus to find some focus outside the civil service and Whitehall, and to see himself as the head of the public service not just the civil service. Sir Christopher Foster argues passionately that Gus should address the quality of the policy process, which in his eyes has been damaged by the absence of white papers or “the spun unintelligibility and insubstantial nature of most actually written”.

Guy Lodge from ippr suggests that the post war story of the civil service is one of piecemeal change grafting reforms on to the existing system. The time has come, he says, to grapple with the “first order” issues such as permanence, neutrality and ministerial responsibility.

David Clark hopes that finally the issues that really matter to local government will be understood and addressed – the issues of survival, efficiency, capacity, legitimacy, rationing and money. Sir Sandy Bruce-Lockhart wants everyone responsible for recommending policy to ministers to have had experience of running a local service. David Walker wants Gus to give some further thought to values. He says that we need to know whether civil servants have values and what they stand for and believe in.

And John Benington detects promise in the whiff of innovation that the new cabinet secretary has already brought with him.

I find myself in agreement with most of

these views but I ought, too, to offer my own thoughts. So, I would like to see Gus:

- Restore passion, energy and creativity to a civil service which comprises some of the most talented people in our society so that they never lose the desire to change the world.

- Have the confidence to introduce greater external accountability to the civil service, while growing a new breed of civil servants comfortable with operating in a more challenging and accountable world.

- Build new levels of trust and common purpose between local and central government, the private sector and the voluntary and community sectors rooted in the shared determination to build a fair and just society.

- Personally communicate to all our many communities and cultures a total commitment to equality, respect and diversity so that they feel more part of our society and more valued by its power base.

- Generate a renewed obsession across the public service with delivery and outcomes so that people judge themselves by their achievements.

- Develop a stronger sense of corporacy among permanent secretaries and a greater willingness to focus on issues rather than departments.

Of course, no one can do all of this on his own, but two things shine through the various contributions in this pamphlet. The first is the importance of drawing on the knowledge and contributions of a wide range of sectors and partners. The second is the willingness of many of those partners to help and support the cabinet secretary in his task. Over to you Gus!

*Sir Michael Bichard is editor-in-chief of SFI and has spent 20 years in local government and nearly 10 years in central government. He left the civil service in 2001 and was appointed Rector of The London Institute, the largest art and design Institute in Europe, which became University of the Arts London. In January 2004 he was appointed by the Home Office to chair the Soham/Bichard Inquiry and on April 1 2005 he became Chair of the Legal Services Commission*

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# To succeed you need to find strength beyond Whitehall

by Wendy Thomson



You know the terrain well, and you have already succeeded in its terms. But to be an outstanding cabinet secretary who will be proud of his legacy you'll need personal resilience and a sense of perspective that is grounded outside the civil service. You'll need to decide where you stand on change, and develop a leadership team to achieve it. You'll need to make a tangible impact through some key cross-governmental projects. Oh, and you'll need to create a cabinet office that works.

## Getting a perspective

First, find some focus outside the civil service and Whitehall to give you perspective, to test out your ambitions and judge how you are doing. The British civil service can be too introspective. Look at the surveys on the senior civil service (SCS), public service managers, staff and public attitudes to reform (commissioned by the Office of Public Services Reform). These show a consistent view – people always think that their team, service or department is doing fine, and that the problems lie with the “others”.

Second, rather than legislate the limits of “special advisers”, see them (and treat them) as an asset in building a working partnership between senior cabinet ministers and top officials.

Third, make better use of the capable

leadership in local government and the government agencies. My experience of reviewing them was that many were well led and showed far more customer focus and a culture of delivery than central government departments. Treating them as factory hands is a missed opportunity.

Fourth, be an unashamed advocate of putting people at the heart of the public service. Make it your business to create a service that fully understands the public and builds that understanding into policy, target-setting, and delivery.

Fifth, think yourself into the role as head of the public service, not just the civil service. Show by example how, by tapping the learning available from the whole system, new light can be shed on old problems at the same time as relationships are forged that will deliver better solutions. A practical step would be to bring the National School of Government into the heart of government, and enable it to share its networks and infrastructure with the leadership centres in health, education, local government, police, and others. Give all these centres a common cause and incentivise them to develop a generation that provides leadership for the whole of the public service.

## Building a leadership team for change

With the existing structure and culture of secretaries of state and departments, the cabinet secretary can easily become isolated

and marginal. You have no discrete area of responsibility, remarkably little budget, and can be consumed by the “events” that conspire against strategic government. You have a choice to make about leading real change in government and the civil service, or not. That choice will determine everything else – your relationship to the prime minister and ministers and to other permanent secretaries, and how you build your leadership team.

Some of your predecessors have been satisfied with being in the top position, exercising influence on promotions, titles, and appointments within the service, and being privy to the internal workings of the prime minister and cabinet. Though it is a new job for you, like all those before, you have experienced the service for many years and have long-standing relationships with your top colleagues. So it would be easy to do business as usual – they have seen it all before, and some see the main job of the cabinet secretary as safeguarding the integrity and morale of the permanent civil service. They will accept the need for improvements, here and there, more training in one area or another, and so on. But that’s not real change, any more than the plethora of civil service “reform programmes” over the past decade or so have been.

If you choose to really reform the civil service, then you need a leadership team and a strategy about change, as well as practical projects to demonstrate that change in action.

This will not be the subtlety they are used to, but that may be no bad thing. In signing up a team for reform, you need to be clear what you stand for, how it is different (as well as similar) to what has gone before, and what

you are going to do. This might be dangerous stuff, and you need to be comfortable with the fact that not everyone may want to be on this team. You need people who are committed to changing the service that this time you mean business. Developing this team needs to be given time and resources – developing a strategy, building trust and honesty, and addressing leadership behaviours, will be a bigish job in itself.

Crucially, you will need to convey to the prime minister and ministers that you really do want to change the civil service, rather than merely go through the motions as so many have done before. You will need to get them to see in strategic terms what you are doing and why and get them to add their political resource to reinforce your efforts. That will be especially important when the going gets tough and the resistance stiffens, as it will, albeit no doubt couched in seeming acquiescence or even superficial commitment to your cause.

### **Cross-government projects**

I saw too many “change strategies” at central and department level that were disconnected from the reality of delivery. Such efforts were rightly experienced as add-ons, often about “capacity-building” or “culture” or “systems”, but which lay outside both the “policy” and even the “delivery” preoccupations of mainstream senior civil servants and ministers. To avoid this trap, you need to make change happen in the civil service while you are making change happen out there in the real world. Make your strategy of reform happen in practice, by doing things differently while you are doing different things.

“Place-based” projects would really benefit from effective project team working across government. You could align the whole of government behind a few of the most important urban developments. Given my ongoing affection for the east end of London, I would pitch for the Thames Gateway, including the Olympic development. It is a classic corporate project or, rather, it should be! You need to pool the significant funds being invested by different departments through transport, housing, neighbourhood renewal, school and hospital building, economic development, sustainable development, education and health services, and ensure they are aligned to deliver viable and attractive places to live.

It isn't enough to rely on local government or the dedicated regeneration agencies to join up these programmes locally. Set up a cross-government force (local and central) and charge it with devising an integrated strategy, working with the private sector. Establish coherent accountability and targets, and back people who deliver whatever their rank. Motivate people by removing obstacles, and reward results-oriented collaborative behaviours. A successful place-based strategy could show by example how the good intentions of the local area agreements might work in practice, freed from the administrative processes that have bedevilled them.

This is just one example, but the same could be applied to health inequality, drugs and early childhood services.

### **A cabinet office that works**

You will have noticed that you haven't inherited a fit-for-purpose department. The

cabinet office still needs to go through the kind of fundamental change that much of local government went through in the 1980s. You need to differentiate between its strategic, stewardship, and service or operational functions. It could be smaller as a result, but not a smaller form of the same thing.

### **Whole-government strategy and leadership**

Government needs a strategic capacity at its core, serving the prime minister and cabinet with top-quality advice and intelligence about the state of the nation, priorities and capacity for intervention, and the accumulated impact of government policy. It is a leadership role, in the modern sense.

On the truly cross-cutting issues it needs capacity to lead projects involving more than one department and the management capability to follow them through to delivery. When political imperatives demand a dedicated force to initiate change, it should recognise the role that discrete units can play in getting things moving and work with them across the public service. This is a very different mind-set, and a modern cabinet office should build this reality into how it works. It shouldn't have to seek permission to think new thoughts and challenge conventional wisdom.

### **Stewardship**

This is not an excuse for sloppy or unaccountable actions. Stewardship is also necessary, to ensure the integrity of cabinet decisions, monitor performance of key political priorities, and safeguard the proper use of public money – as you know only too

well from your previous roles in the Treasury. These are legitimate and necessary control functions. They need to be kept focused, challenged regularly, and the underlying systems continuously upgraded and streamlined. But you wouldn't really want government without them.

### **Operational support services**

The cabinet office functions that serve the rest of government are of course important but these are largely operational. They require different management, and should be driven by the department's internal "customers" of fellow civil servants. (Government strategy and stewardship, should not be exclusively driven by civil servant customers.)

Basic business processes could benefit from private sector involvement – not just as low-level contractors competing on price, but to fundamentally redesign processes and systems. Not limited to the cabinet office, the scope for efficiencies is real across Whitehall, but will only happen if the private sector is invited to look at whole systems and given the opportunity to devise solutions working in partnership. Contracting out bits of operations, specified on the basis of existing work practices and departmental boundaries, will at best make efficiency and financial gains at the margins. At worst it will create boundaries and structures which will inhibit future change.

Many of the talented people who have recently been brought into lead professional groups within the cabinet office (IT, communications, training and development) head units that perform all three of these

roles – strategy, stewardship and internal services—in their particular function. This may not be where you would want to start from, and might put structural change on a longer time horizon, so whatever the structure, you need to develop and support this team in a shared purpose – clearly distinguishing its different roles, and the different customers it has for strategy, stewardship and services.

### **And then...?**

You will have made a real difference. One that the public will recognise because services will have been designed and delivered better by a public service that is more in touch, less cynical, and takes pride in what it delivers. *Dr Wendy Thomson is a well-known figure in local government. She has recently joined McGill University in Montreal as a full-time professor, where she is pursuing her interest in public policy as director of the School of Social Work and Social Policy. Until the end of July 2005, she was Chief Executive of the Leadership Centre for Local Government. She ran the Office of Public Service Reform in the Cabinet Office and was previously director of inspection at the Audit Commission and chief executive of the London Borough of Newham*

# Policy-makers owe it to us all to set the record straight

by Christopher Foster



What is policy-making for? Is it to keep the government's standing high in the polls by gorging the media with stories? Or is it also to improve the public services? And to ensure elsewhere in government that, for example, we only go to war when we have carefully thought through what we are doing and have maximised the chances of success before and after military victory? The answer should be a no-brainer, but sadly is not in a world obsessed by the interaction of the media and politics.

Many cabinet ministers highly regarded in the past never felt the need to introduce a white paper or a bill. They were sufficiently stretched taking the decisions they were expected to take within the existing law, and by the need to investigate and defend decisions taken down the line by public servants on their behalf. But when the occasion arose for a state paper to change a policy and/or introduce a bill, they went about it with some thoroughness, cabinet and parliament demanded it. Of course there were bad and unsuccessful policies at home and abroad, sometimes good ones were too rushed, and others procrastinated to death. But one almost inevitable cause of serious policy failure was avoided: new policies and legislation were reasonably well explained in advance to parliament, the public and to the people who would have to implement them.

## The decline of the white paper

Recently, a retired civil servant told me of a minister who was told that a new policy he was developing should be expressed in a white paper. He hired a Fleet Street hack and gave him an interview and a pre-prepared press release. The journalist wrote the white paper, which the minister never read. It was duly presented to parliament. In another case, a journalist told me he has never read a white paper, instead he bases his articles on press releases, press conferences and interviews.

Talking individually to MPs of different parties persuaded me of the consequences and cause of this degradation of the white paper. These MPs, too, never read the white papers, or similar public documents because they did not help them understand a new policy or bill better. They tended to rely on the helpful background papers now customarily produced by the House of Commons Library, or on what explanations they could drag from ministers frequently at private meetings rather in the House.

But does the absence of meaningful white papers matter? Are such state papers now as much dinosaurs as the state opening of parliament? If so, it is at great cost.

## Detention under the Prevention of Terrorism Bill

White papers and similar documents can on occasion, and often have been, simple.

(White and green papers, blue books, explanatory memoranda, even in some circumstances, consultation papers are names for a family of cognate documents meant to give the evidence for a major policy and/or legislative change.) Little evidence may be required to explain a need to remedy a defect in a law or regulation. In many straightforward instances a carefully prepared and expressed ministerial statement to parliament has been enough.

Here is a comparatively simple example – the most controversial part of the recent Prevention of Terrorism Bill was just like that. Should the authorities be able to detain suspects without charging them for 14 days, as it used to be, or should that period be extended to 28, 42, 60 or 90 days? Arguably, the only evidence needed to gain a parliamentary majority for the clause was an itemisation of the number and proportion of cases in which the police had failed to gain the evidence needed in 14, 28, 42 and 60 days, but had succeeded in doing so a determinate number of days later. Failure to convince MPs on the point led to parliamentary disaster, Blair's first such defeat since 1997. (The whole bill, of course, deserved an explanatory paper. The point I am making is simply that important points can often be simply justified with the right evidence.)

### **The education white paper**

A more complicated example from the recent past, but not untypical, was the October 2005 education white paper: Higher Standards, Better Schools For All: More Choice for Parents and Pupils. Though written with some trappings of seriousness,

## **White, green and not widely read – a quick guide to policy paperwork**

- **Parliamentary bill – introduced into the Lords or Commons, subject to amendment in the course of passage to royal assent. Most bills are government bills but some are 'private members'**
- **Draft bill – an innovation (on Labour's watch) allowing scope for the detail of policy to be changed before formal introduction into parliament**
- **White paper – in theory a clear statement of the government's policy intent, that marries facts and arguments. White papers are "command papers", documents presented to parliament by a minister: they include annual reports and a range of ad hoc statements**
- **Green paper – more tentative than a white paper but still aiming to indicate direction of travel. Green papers may not necessarily become white. They are intended to be consultative.**
- **Departmental paper – departments put out a great range of material some of its quasi-Biblical in its authority, such as the Treasury's 'blue' and 'red' books containing financial data. Sometimes departmental reports are filed in the Library of the House of Commons, which means they enter the public domain without being official published**
- **Ministerial statement – a statement made in parliament regarding policy, with or without notice**

like chapter numbers and headings, it was a prime example of repetitive, dogmatic assertion, rather than reasoned argument. There was no attempt to show that LEAs were responsible for failing schools. All of them? Which of them? How? Why? What characterised the poor performers? Neither were the proposed new relations between LEAs and schools well described. Indeed, it could be read as if LEAS might be landed with even more tasks related to their schools, but with a even greater fog over the powers of all involved.

Nor was there evidence presented to suggest that privately – or voluntary-led schools would be more effective. Nor on what was the greater influence parents were to have. School governors were to have “greater regard” to parental opinion. Greater than what? Than the regard they already got in many schools? What evidence anyway of the effect that has on pupil achievement? Neither – to take what might appear a small point – was there discussion of the cost and practicality of bussing pupils over greater distances to increase parental choice.

What indeed is the problem, or problems, this new policy is meant to be solving? One can question if numeracy and literacy on the one hand, and five GCSEs on the other, are the best tests of educational outcome. One might expect evidence linking such an education to employability, but is employability the be-all of education? Does it matter if schools go for the easier GCSE options because they are better to beat their targets? To what extent do children with different attitudes and ambitions require different schooling? This white paper sets

out and analyses none of the relevant facts, answers none of the relevant questions.

What seems missing from our political life is an appreciation of the black hole at the centre of our policy – and law-making – opened up by the frequent absence of any white paper or the spun unintelligibility and insubstantial nature of most actually written. Because of this, neither parliament, nor public, nor concerned professional opinion, nor in any real sense the media, can hold ministers to account over the implications of what are intended, and may well become, important policy developments.

### **The white paper as a means of securing cabinet and parliamentary approval for a policy**

There are at least two ways of describing what used to be their centrality to the birth of a new policy or law. The first is as the prime instrument of a process by which attention and approval were given to an emerging new policy or law: in sequence by its originating secretary of state, by cabinet and by parliament. The instrument changed its name as it progressed: from departmental to cabinet paper on to white paper, or its equivalent, on presentation to parliament. (If the matter were simple, it might end there as a clearly explained ministerial statement, not needing a full-blown state paper; if complex or highly controversial or both, it might need several papers to mark stages in the development of the policy.)

As a departmental minute or paper it must be revised enough to gain the secretary of state’s personal ownership and the civil servants’ imprimatur for factual accuracy

and logic. As a cabinet paper it must be modified enough to gain cabinet approval. In all but the most contentious or important instances, approval by the relevant cabinet committee was usually enough for the rest of the cabinet to accept it on trust. The upshot was that it reached parliament as an expression, not of ministerial, or even prime ministerial, policy, but as government policy. Contrast the infamous Iraq dossiers. Who had read, revised and approved them? Alastair Campbell? The prime minister? Certainly not cabinet or its overseas committee. The same with the schools white paper? Was it Ruth Kelly? The policy seemed to be the prime minister's. Who or what approved the government's policy on smoking or licensing hours?

### **The white paper as reasoned argument**

However, there is a second equally important measure of the centrality – or lack of it – of white papers, their adequacy in explaining new policy and law. Do they present a coherent, logical and as far as possible factually accurate argument? There will be variations in the amount and depth of scientific, economic and other intellectual evidence and analysis that is relevant – from, say, nuclear or environmental policy to a simple technical change in a law or regulation which in some circumstances, but far from all, may be little more than common sense. But, the form of a good explanation to cabinet, parliament and public opinion is the same:

- What is the problem?
- What will happen if one does nothing about it?
- What are the main options to consider?

- What are the principles by which the preferred option is chosen?
- What are the costs and benefits predicted for each option? Which comes out best and why?
- Demonstrate the preferred option is practical and how far reasonable objections to it will be overcome.

If new policies and laws were worked up on this basis, we would still disagree about them, but we would know where we stood. Cabinet, parliament, the media and the working places of those directly affected, could again become places of sensible scrutiny and debate.

*Sir Christopher Foster has been an academic at Oxford and MIT, a professor of economics at LSE, a consultant at Coopers & Lybrand, and then PWC, over many years and a temporary civil servant. His latest book is *British Government in Crisis* (Hart Publishing, Oxford), which was published in March 2005*

# The paradox of permanence and its effect on reform

by Guy Lodge



Addressing delegates at the 2005 Labour party conference, Tony Blair said that the purpose of the Labour party in government was to be the party of “change-makers”. But change-makers need help, and central to the effective implementation of the government’s challenging third term agenda is the civil service. Is Whitehall up to the job?

The government has ambitious plans for the public services, the delivery of which will be dependent on a high-performing Whitehall. Yet, it is striking how often this is missed and how little debate there is about civil service reform. Public services have had to adapt to the new world around them which has moved on dramatically. Society is now much more complex, diverse, and less deferential than it once was and, consequently, relations between state and citizen are being re-modelled. But, while some real progress has been made in recent years, the pace of change in the civil service seems out of step with the radical reforms experienced in the rest of the public sector.

During the 2005 election campaign, Labour put great emphasis on the continuing need to modernise public services, making it a third term priority. It was perhaps surprising, then, that civil service reform was not mentioned in Labour’s 2005 manifesto, its most detailed to date. We can no longer afford to neglect civil

service reform. The levels of public spending we have got used to are coming to an end and this means we have to get more out of less, at a time of rising expectations. The Institute for Public Policy Research (ippr) is undertaking a major research project on the future of the civil service, which has inter alia included a series of in-depth interviews with key stakeholders in Whitehall. Some key themes have emerged, not least that the civil service remains unreformed in a number of areas and that significant weaknesses in performance continue to exist. We would encourage Sir Gus to address these weaknesses, which would go a long way to creating a civil service which is fit for purpose, and ready to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

## **Diagnosing the problem**

### *Policy*

Whitehall has always prided itself on its ability to offer strong analytical policy advice to its political masters. Yet the almost exclusive focus on “delivery” has meant significant problems in the way that policy is developed and managed in Whitehall have been overlooked. This is, in part, because consensus-building is inherent in Whitehall’s culture, resulting in a tendency to produce policy which is both timid and risk-averse, often leading ministers to seek bolder thinking from outside bodies such as thinktanks and consultants.

Despite this, the policy-making process remains far too closed. Not enough thought is given to how the centre can be informed by experience on the frontline. Equally there is not enough independent challenge when policy is being developed. The creation of departmental strategy units are a welcome initiative, but many are still finding their feet. External policy reviews, similar to the Treasury's, also offer a model for how policy-making can be conducted, but challenge and interrogation need to be systematic.

Ippr's research found significant concern about the amount of evaluation and learning that takes place within Whitehall. To paraphrase one senior civil servant, the mantra of "what matters is what works" is often undermined by the fact that we don't know what works, and even when we know that something doesn't, we go ahead and do it anyway. Evaluation should be institutionalised and not just take place after-the-event, but needs to be an iterative process, ensuring the deliverability of policy is challenged throughout. We need something analogous to the Office of Government Commerce's gateway reviews and applying it to the policy-making process.

Linked to this is what might be termed the "paradox of permanency". A key justification of a permanent civil service is that it ensures strong institutional memory (and, one would assume, constant learning). However, Whitehall attaches little priority to how it manages its memory and knowledge and IT procurement is an expensive example of how Whitehall fails to learn. The memory problem partly stems from the high level of turnover –

just 8% of senior civil servants have been in their post for five or more years – and because too much of Whitehall's knowledge infrastructure is fragmented. This is one area that the private sector has much to teach Whitehall.

### *Skills*

The lack of specialist skills in Whitehall remains a formidable problem and often lies behind ineffective delivery. Bringing in outsiders has had mixed results: a key difficulty facing many people is in ingratiating themselves within the permanent structures of the civil service, which many find hard to penetrate. Often they give up, leaving unfulfilled. Outsiders also need to be given clearly defined objectives when they come into the service. One recent development has been the drive to bring in non-executive directors to sit on department boards. But as one Whitehall observer said: "they are a bit like bidets; no one knows what they are for, but they add a touch of class".

Conversely, there still needs to be much greater use of secondments and more interchange between other sectors, especially throughout the public sector, ensuring that civil servants' career paths equip them with the necessary skills. Sir Gus, therefore, is absolutely right to make the Professional Skills for Government (PSG) programme a priority. He should also consider broadening the remit of the so-called "National School of Government", so that it becomes a school for the whole public sector rather than the mandarins alone. This would signal that Whitehall sees itself

as a part of the wider public service, and that it is ready to learn and listen from others.

### *Accountability*

Perhaps the most significant challenge is to do something about the lack of direct accountability, which many suggest is a key reason for under performance. There is still no obvious price for failure in the civil service: the worst you can expect is a drumming by the Public Accounts Committee. A survey of senior civil servants in 2005 found that just 16% felt that poor performance is dealt with adequately. The planned departmental capability reviews (DCRs) are a step in the right direction, but the fact that they lack external validation will continue to fuel suspicion that this is another example of Whitehall marking its own exams. Sir Gus deserves credit for establishing the DCRs but over time they must evolve —like the CPA — becoming a fully-fledged external system of performance scrutiny.

### **Why don't things change?**

Many of these problems have a timeless feel to them, as do some of the current reforms being implemented. It is 38 years since the Fulton Committee, yet the rhetoric is almost indistinguishable from that of PSG. So while there has been some significant change over the years, much of it has been cosmetic. Since the 1960s the central aim of civil service reform has been concerned with improving the managerial and delivery effectiveness of Whitehall, yet genuine reform has either failed or certainly fallen short of its aims. This

has been attempted through what might be called “second order” solutions: “up-skilling” civil servants, setting up policy units, moving the departmental deckchairs around, and making the service more porous and open to the outside world.

Recent reforms fall within this tradition and, while they may improve matters, they will not achieve the genuine transformation that many desire. The post war story of the civil service is one of piecemeal change, grafting reforms onto the existing system without ever fundamentally questioning Whitehall's foundations: the core ethos, culture and entrenched incentives of the service have remained largely untouched.

We shouldn't, therefore, be surprised when reforms have limited impact, since they have never addressed the deeper causes of the “problem”.

The time has come to look at the first-order issues. If we want a more effective “delivery” machine, then we need to go back to first principles and review the constitutional make-up of the civil service. This is what shapes its culture, incentives and outlook. The principles of permanence, neutrality and, above all, that of ministerial responsibility are ultimately what determines how and why the civil service behaves as it does. Yet these are what we have emphatically refused to look at when discussing reform in the past. Fulton explicitly ruled out of its terms of reference any discussion of the relationship between ministers and officials, while the Next Steps reforms of the 1980s deliberately sought to preserve untouched the concept of ministerial responsibility.

These are serious and profoundly complex issues and there is an understandable temptation to keep them off the table. However, two factors suggest that it is both right and timely to take these issues on. First, there is the sheer persistence of so many of the problems outlined here. Second, satisfying political and public expectations for improvements to the delivery of public services will depend upon a more effective civil service.

Of course, Sir Gus can't raise these issues alone. What we need is a broader debate, similar to the one that Sir Ian Blair called for in his 2005 Richard Dimbleby lecture on the future of the police service. There are some early signs of movement here: the Public Administration Select Committee has recently launched an inquiry into politicisation, asking whether we have been hypnotised by the principles of Northcote-Trevelyan. However, successful reform must go beyond issues of politicisation and place at its heart the need to clarify the roles and relationship of ministers and officials and decide what sort of civil service we want in the 21st century. Until such a debate has taken place, Sir Gus should avoid pushing for a civil service act. Before we reach for the statute book, we need to make sure we've got the right civil service in place.

*Guy Lodge is a research fellow in the democracy team at the Institute for Public Policy Research (ippr). Guy is leading ippr's work on the future of the civil service, Rethinking Whitehall, which will report later in the year*

# Six good reasons to listen to the chief executives

by David Clark



Over the past year, I have held discussions with a large number of chief executives and senior managers in local government, and asked them to describe the issues that really concern them. They usually come up with about six separate items which are remarkably consistent. The odd thing is that they are not all issues that are often talked about in Whitehall and Westminster.

## Survival

The first issue affecting a large proportion of colleagues is survival. The rumour mill of local government reorganisation and a move towards unitary local authorities throughout England has become quite incapacitating.

We know from the reorganisations of 1973 and 1994 that the very idea that some authorities may be abolished often leads to the brightest and the best of staff being deployed to defend their existing institutional form. In the past, this has often meant that the eye is taken off the service delivery ball. While it is interesting to note that most chief executives, even in smaller district councils, take the view that unitary authorities are a good thing, but change must be swift. The problem they fear the most is a long drawn out process, preceded by months of rumour and prevarication, when inevitably, performance will slip. They are acutely aware that this could happen

when the performance of public services is as high as it could possibly be on the political agenda.

## Efficiency

The second issue they are worried about is efficiency. They do not mean the so-called "Gershon targets": the majority seem to believe these are eminently deliverable and, in most cases, give rise to no great concerns. The efficiency issue that they are addressing is how to drive out long-term costs in their organisational bases. As someone once said 'the dilemma facing English public services is that their customers have Scandinavian expectations of service but American expectations of taxation'. Put in strict business terms, what people are now demanding is a bespoke service at a commoditised price.

These conflicting demands are felt very keenly within local government which has striven over recent years to connect itself more closely to its communities, citizens and customers and to listen to their needs. Perversely, the move towards greater access, particularly through e-government has actually led to more citizen and customer discontent as access to services now outstrips, by a considerable amount, the service supply in many council areas. It is all very well to produce whole new channels of access to, for example, nursery provision,

## Six good reasons to listen to the chief executives

but this does not help if you have not built considerably more nursery classes.

With citizens now demanding more, and with a relatively static income base, local authorities are struggling to drive out fixed costs and make economies. Departments of state can clearly help by ensuring that the local authorities are not burdened with a whole range of new, unconnected, mandates.

### Capacity

The third point is corporate capacity. This chimes well in Whitehall where people have their own concerns about capacity but, in the localities, this is now causing some serious problems. The core issue is this. Over the past few years, many local authorities have stripped out their central departments. The days when a small unitary might have expected to have a chief executive and three assistant chief executives have long gone, as the money has been used to fund teachers in classrooms and other front-line services.

On one level, this might be applauded in that there was a "frontline first" strategy, promoted by government, which was all about taking out costs and providing services direct to the customer. Unfortunately, this has had a very bad side-effect. It was these posts that enabled organisations to think. As they have disappeared, many local authorities have lost the ability to manage these vital areas of activity.

With an increasing need for partnership work to join up government at the local level, and an increasing desire to work with private sector partners to make economies of scale and drive out costs, many local authorities find themselves in a position of not having

anybody on their staff who can address these issues. Where once this was an issue for small districts and, perhaps, for small unitaries, the problem now appears endemic, in that even large counties are pointing out that they stripped out massive amounts of central staff in order to fund educational settlements and the like. If this problem is not addressed, with recognition that front line is not always the right answer, I believe that local authorities' ability to respond and innovate will be, at best, patchy.

### Legitimacy

Slightly linked to the capacity issue is that of legitimacy. Again, with the plethora of partnerships, it is sometimes difficult to work out to whom any given partnership is genuinely accountable and which partners are really carrying the risk and responsibility.

Council officers often take the lead on these bodies because councils represent the only democratically-elected body in any given locality. When one is managing these complex partnerships, it is increasingly difficult to work out the lines of accountability. This has led to a whole range of unnecessary problems which can only be resolved if some overall clarity is given to the often ministerially-inspired partnership arrangement.

### Rationing

My fifth point goes right to the heart of public sector service provision. As resources become tight, it is becoming increasingly clear that the role of the public servant is essentially one of rationing. There is now considerable debate about the tension

between an expectation of universal service provision and the need to target resources to those most in need. While public sector managers share many tasks, processes and competencies with their private sector partners, it is this need to understand the rationing model and the tension between universal taxation and targeted service provision that lies at the heart of many of the service dilemmas currently being experienced within local government. A national debate on this issue is long overdue and must be led from the top.

### **Money**

The final point is one that some might have thought would be the first but in fact, is not. That is the issue of money and of resources in general. Resources are tight now and they will be even tighter after the next spending review. Local authorities are trapped in having significant fixed costs but little capacity at their centres to try and manage some of these issues out. The issue is not one of grant formula or any of the other esoterica of local government finance. It is simply that the drive to make services more accessible and accountable have driven up expectations with little thought for resources.

### **What is local government for?**

It is timely that Sir Michael Lyons is undertaking a review of the function of local government. It should be remembered that its two main purposes are to ration scarce resources to those that require them and to govern the community that they serve and that its legitimacy to do one may well depend on its capacity to do the other.

There are many issues that senior government officials discuss about the local authority strengths and weaknesses, but in the six issues of survival, efficiency, capacity, legitimacy, universal service delivery and resources, I see the ones that they return to time and time again.

*David Clark is Director General of SOLACE. Prior to joining SOLACE, he was chief executive of the City of York Council, one of the first unitary authorities created under the last reorganisation of local government*

# Real localism needs devolution of power

by Sandy Bruce-Lockhart



The LGA has called for a bold and ambitious devolution of power from central government to local councils, and, through them, to local people, communities and organisations. Our argument is that the benefits of localism go wider than local flexibility and the capacity to respond to local needs, in at least three ways. Devolution of responsibility is, in effect, a vote of confidence in council leaders and frontline managers, a powerful motivation to increase the effort and creativity they put into it, achieve more and take pride in their achievements.

Localism is also the key to restoring trust in our political institutions, by closing the gap between decision-making and those affected by it, establishing clear local accountability for final decisions. Devolution cannot stop at the door of the town or county hall. It will also allow local people and local communities more choice, more involvement and more influence in the services they receive.

All governments have difficulty in joining and co-ordinating centrally. The third benefit of localism is that it is easier and more effective to join government locally. Across the country, councils are beginning to bring together the local chief constables, chief fire officers, chairmen of health trusts, heads of learning and skills councils, university vice-chancellors and the local heads of the

Department of Work and Pensions into small local boards to join the totality of public services in their areas to co-ordinate, drive and focus public service innovation and improvement. The potential benefits embrace both services better joined-up for the user, the potential for single-point access and the more efficient use of back office functions to deliver better value-for-money for the taxpayer.

## **A 'deal for devolution'**

These arguments are widely accepted in government. David Miliband has committed to work with us over the next 18 months to settle the details of a "deal for devolution" to be implemented in the context of the comprehensive spending review and the local government white paper expected later this year. For us, the key points of the deal are to achieve a dramatic reduction in the imposition of national targets, standards and performance indicators on local government, a radical overhaul of the burdensome system of inspection and regulation, and to build a new way of managing the central-local relationship on the foundation provided by local area agreements.

We want to agree with government the very few national outcomes that need to be specified nationally. We want the spending review to strip away the rest and set localities free to set and meet their own priorities. We

want the burden of inspection to be reduced in step with local government demonstrating its capacity to regulate its own affairs, driving up performance across the sector. We want local partnerships to grow into local public service boards responsible for deploying the totality of local public resources to meet local priorities, with a single dialogue with central government through the regional offices to ensure national interests are met, not a plethora of parallel and conflicting conversations between central and local silos.

All three reforms have major implications not just for the way local government does business, but for central government as well. Ministers must be ready to hand over visible accountability to local councils, and admit that responsibility for chewing gum on the streets of Bradford lies with the city council, not the deputy prime minister. And the civil service, similarly, must think about its future role, skills and culture.

The old civil service view that policy is about making the rules within which public services operate has to give way to a culture dedicated to empowering and equipping the front line to act independently. Whitehall must learn to celebrate the fact that it does not know best, and that a large part of its job is to help frontline staff know, and act, better.

A key step in achieving this is to encourage a better understanding of each others' roles. A freer flow of staff between central and local government – in both directions – is needed. Recent years have seen a welcome increase in the number of senior civil servants recruited externally, including a significant number from local government. But this trend should be taken

further. In France, no one can access the higher reaches of the civil service without having spent at least two years in the field. We should aim for a position where everyone responsible for recommending policy to ministers has first-hand experience of running a local service within a framework devised in Whitehall.

### **All it needs is political will**

Devolution of responsibility must go hand-in-hand with the devolution of power, which must include the devolution of the power to deploy local resources. The current local finance system is discredited in the eyes of central and local government and the public. Without reform, the other elements of the deal for devolution will amount to little. We need the Lyons review to bring forward a workable formula for local finance reform, and we need early government action to put it into effect. The LGA's contribution to the balance of funding review in 2004 showed that reform is feasible. All it needs is the political will. Tax reform is never easy, but it is not in the long-term national interest for any government to take the easy way of putting off difficult decisions. The decision to defer council tax revaluation is a bad omen, echoing the similar decision to defer rating revaluation 20 years ago, which led to a financial blind alley. One important factor in stiffening ministerial sinews is clear and independent advice that emphasises the need for a sustainable solution. We look to Whitehall to provide the advice on this issue and on the shared benefits of a localist agenda.  
*Cllr Sir Sandy Bruce-Lockhart has been Chairman of the LGA since July 2004*

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# 'Passionate', yes, but tell us what civil servants value

by David Walker



I think, Sir Gus, that you need to give some further thought to values. When you arrived last September you quite deliberately started talking about what civil servants should believe in, you spoke of "ethos". Civil servants, you said, should go home at night feeling they had made a difference: that they had added to welfare, enhanced the collective being of society.

You even pleaded with civil servants to show "passion". It's a provocative word: did you mean to imply they should be prepared to cross Max Weber's line dividing the vocation of politics from that of bureaucracy? Since then you have avoided programmatic statements, though that stunning appearance before the Commons' public administration select committee (PASC) in October suggested you do want to leave a mark. You should: the general question of civil service values remains as puzzling as ever.

## **The minister's nephew**

The Civil Service Commission might claim to be a custodian of values but, on inspection, its commitment is only to an ideal type of recruitment procedure which pivots on the idea of "merit". A candidate who passes an examination starts official life more accountably, perhaps, than someone given a job because they knew the minister's nephew at Oxford. That, in retrospect, has

been labelled the Northcote-Trevelyan principle. But Victorian reformers knew that passing examinations was a better determinant of social status than knowing the minister's nephew.

The trouble with the merit principle was that it ended once a candidate got the job. Procedures adopted in Whitehall for moving civil servants upwards were, and remain, far from transparent and depends on certain criteria such as personality, knowledge and skills. But does that add up to saying the senior civil service has identifiable values?

We can, it's true, identify departmental values which transcend mere ministers and their manifestos. The genetic code of what used to be the Ministry of Power, later unfolded in departments of energy and now embedded in the Department of Trade and Industry is pro nuclear. The value set of the former Department of the Environment embraced a tutelary relationship with local authorities. That seems to have changed. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, in its higher reaches, has become more of a partner, with the tutor mentality relocated to the Government Offices for the Regions.

## **Mere procedure?**

We have heard, in the aftermath of the UK's participation in the invasion of Iraq, suggestions that civil servants should express their values of proper procedure, inhibiting

ministers. This thought lay behind the criticism, by your predecessor, Lord Butler of Brockwell, of Tony Blair’s alleged style of sofa government. But civil servants, corporately, rarely engage in discussion about themselves. No formal claim has been lodged giving them ownership of an identifiable value set.

The civil service, still, prefers to work with implicit understandings and “what everyone knows” and that despite the moves in recent years towards professionalising the service. The dialectic of identity is much more evident in local government, thanks to the professional associations, even there professional managers have been diffident about claiming they own an explicit value set that might stand alongside and be contrasted with party political values.

### **Technocratic values?**

Would you agree that recently, in both central and local government, an almost deliberate effort has been made to evacuate values from debate? Technocratic consensus reigns OK. The only legitimate value, it has seemed, is public satisfaction at improved public service delivery and “everyone shares it”. In debates about health or education, the line is that the end (better results) is much more important than means.

Describing, let alone encoding, a value set for Whitehall isn’t going to be easy. British public service values have predominantly to do with process. They prize rule (convention), rather than outcome. Decisions are valid if proper procedure is followed.

Yet public officials themselves, especially civil servants, who have been indifferent to codification of procedural rules have usually

colluded with ministers in retaining “understandings” against formal statements, even after such trauma as the arms to Iraq investigation in the 1990s. They have, equally, never chosen to set down for public inspection and debate what it is they do believe, and hold dear. Official doctrine for the civil service is that in terms of what they believe and cherish, they are empty vessels, filled only when the executive government changes. How can morally empty heads deliver policy advice? Let’s leave that puzzle for a few paragraphs.

### **Municipal values?**

In local government, the formal position is at once both clearer and as obscure. During the Thatcher era, new legislation reinforced the identity of executive managers as non partisans – with no right to an interest in the general outcomes of policy. But officials serve the local authority as a corporate body, with the implication that they have some claim on values which are longer run and transcend party political toing and froing.

So, informally, the servants of some councils have espoused the values deriving from place as an expression of this wider corporate commitment. Some chief executives have boldly envisioned the future, making value judgements about the shape of the bounded geographical areas they are paid to serve.

In health, managers have found it hard to find a space for autonomous values in between the rock of clinical professionalism and the hard place of political edict, albeit expressed inside high rhetorical commitments to the NHS as an (egalitarian) idea.

## **Mandarin values?**

Historians have so far only teased at the question whether civil servants have also espoused values to do with the nation, deploying a set of beliefs “above” the level of political partisanship in the House of Commons. In the 1950s, it is said, civil servants helped steer ministers away from membership of the fledgling European Communities partly because of their Atlanticist bias, partly on the back of a value set prizing Britain as a great nation.

In the 1970s and 1980s, UK withdrawal from NATO was deemed by some civil servants (especially in defence) a resigning issue, on the basis that they carried in their heads a conception of UK interests larger than that brought to executive decision-making by the ministers in power.

This doctrine of higher commitment wasn’t essentially right wing. It is thought to have reared its head when Clive Ponting passed secret material to MPs, and the then cabinet secretary Sir Robert Armstrong felt obliged to issue his encyclical\* in February 1985: the values of civil servants are no more nor less than those of the ministers they happen to serve and have no right to interpret a constitutional duty beyond that.

The intellectual vacuity of this position, which has not been officially revised since, is staggering. It implies civil servants have no moral compass, no capacity to judge policy in the round (for that would imply they had appeal to values above and beyond what ministers believed). Alternatively, it implies that civil servants can ask about the “how” but not the “why” of policy, but we have never had a public debate about what this

custodianship of values of process means and how far it should go. Hasn’t the time come for that effort to be made? As Sir Peter Gershon’s efficiency precepts wash through the system, we need to know whether senior civil servants have values, even if they are only to do with procedure.

## **Values and the prerogative**

Civil servants do, surreptitiously, seem to want to lay claim to such values. Cabinet secretaries have, de facto, cast themselves as custodians of the constitution. By law, permanent secretaries have whistleblowing and reporting obligations (in their role as accounting officers for example), which suggests they are in some measure keepers of the flame of good governance. The UK constitution may nowadays be a lot firmer than before, thanks to the Human Rights Act, the devolution legislation and other translations of convention into statute. But there are still great marshy expanses, for instance the exercise of prerogative powers, over which PASC has been trying to lay some planks. In the swamps of prerogative, the civil service plays a double game, as the beneficiaries of the flexible unaccountability of prerogative and, ostensibly, guardians against ministers going “too far”. If you agree we need such guardians, don’t you also agree their accountability at least starts with our identifying what they believe in?

*\* Note of Guidance on the Duties and Responsibilities of Civil Servants in Relation to Ministers (HMSO, London).*

*David Walker edits Public, the Guardian’s monthly magazine for the public sector*

# A breath of fresh air, and promising signs of change

by John Benington



Dear Gus, Congratulations on your appointment, and on the breath of fresh air that you have already brought to the fusty cloisters of Whitehall. I may be biased because you are a Warwick graduate, but I am impressed by the innovations you have already introduced in your first 100 days, most notably:

- The unexpected combination of “pride, pace, passion and professionalism” which you want to foster in the civil service.
- Your lively performance in front of the Public Administration Select Committee.
- Your energetic “hands-on involvement” in shaping up new initiatives, like the National School of Government.
- Your quick and clever re-shuffling of permanent secretaries to match ministers and departments (though it would have been good to have seen open competition for more of these posts – only one in five senior civil servants has been recruited from outside).
- Your rapid introduction of performance assessment for senior civil servants and departments.

It is clearly presumptuous for academics like me to try to bend your ear but you may find it helpful to have some friendly voices from outside Westminster supporting you in your radical reform programme.

There has never been a time since the foundation of the welfare state in 1945/8

when there has been a greater need for the rigorous policy analysis and sharp strategic thinking for which the British civil service is renowned. Britain faces a series of fundamental policy questions and profound strategic choices (for example pensions and the ageing population, future funding of the health service, violent crime, drink and drugs, climate change, post-oil energy policy, the rise of China as a key global player).

## Strategic thinking

Strategic thinking and corporate action within central government has to be led from the top by cabinet ministers and permanent secretaries. This raises questions about values, roles, and organisational frameworks. The Northcote-Trevelyan and Fulton reports imply that the values of a permanent civil service like the UK’s include a responsibility to pay fearless attention to longer-term strategic issues that go beyond the life and interest of any political party, and to be willing to “speak truth to power” impartially. This is a separate role from that of providing policy advice to the current political administration on their shorter-term agenda, and involves senior civil servants in opening up policy questions for wider informed debate.

The complexity of the cross-cutting issues facing the UK suggests that policy analysis and development of this more fundamental kind needs new organisational frameworks

to support it. It needs not just sustained thinking within government and the civil service, but also contributions from other stakeholders outside central government, and research evidence and ideas from the better thinktanks and universities – as was the case in the design and development of the post-war welfare state. The newly-formed Sunningdale Institute linked to the National School of Government provides a good framework within which ministers, civil servants and academics can work jointly on strategic issues.

The critical question is how to engage ministers in scenario planning and corporate strategic thinking, before issues are opened up for wider public debate. Cabinet is far too large for this role and the cabinet's "miscellaneous sub-committees" are too numerous and disparate to be an effective vehicle for this kind of policy development. Could the prime minister establish a small strategic group of not more than 10 or 12 core cabinet ministers, meeting regularly with you and a similar number of permanent secretaries (supported by research from the Strategy Unit and the Sunningdale Institute) to develop corporate policy on key cross-cutting issues? And perhaps we could organise a number of high level "Ditchley Park dialogues" to share and compare ideas, evidence and experience on some of these issues between the UK and other countries.

However, if government is not only to analyse such policy questions, but also to develop and test innovative strategies and programmes to address them, then the civil service will have to learn to work in real strategic partnership with other levels of

government and other stakeholders in the public, private and voluntary sectors. This means linking the civil service much more closely into the wider public service.

Talk of "joined-up" government, to provide a more integrated response to the needs of users and communities, is an established part of today's gospel; but it is important not to underestimate just how much credibility the civil service has lost by failing to practice what it preaches.

For over a decade, many other public organisations such as local and regional authorities, health and police services have been developing and testing innovative forms of inter-departmental and inter-organisational planning, partnership working and integrated service delivery at the frontline. A wealth of practical experience of "joining up" is being gained, shared and documented. However, too often this horizontal inter-organisational networking is undermined by disconnected vertical silos of funding from, and accountability to, different central government departments.

### **Embarrassing joke**

In spite of commitment to joined-up government at the top, the rigid departmentalism and inflexible practices of many civil servants at third-tier and below frequently undermines improvement and innovation at the frontline. This is not just a matter of individual attitudes and organisational cultures; central government procedures and practices remain so deeply trapped in departmental stovepipes, inter-departmental competition, and micro-management, as to have become an

## A breath of fresh air, and promising signs of change

embarrassing joke to many others in the wider public service. In order to re-win credibility for the reform programme, you may need to signal that the civil service can no longer afford to act as a supercilious observer and castigator of the failings of lesser and lower mortals, but has to accept that it is currently the cause of many problems and that it can learn from other parts of the public service.

Part of the solution may be to recognise that the governmental system is a complex conglomerate, and to address the “loose/tight” dilemma which has faced many conglomerate organisations in the private sector. This involves re-thinking the role of the centre in relation to the frontline. We need to distinguish those issues on which the centre has to exercise tight control in order to achieve minimum “floor” standards (e.g literacy and numeracy in schools), from those on which it has to loosen control, in order to foster the innovation and creativity which flourishes on the frontline, in processes of “co-creation” between professionals and users and local communities.

One of the problems for the civil service is that so few have knowledge, experience or understanding of what happens at the front. There are three practical ways in which this might be addressed

First, by seconding senior civil servants to work “shoulder to shoulder” with their colleagues in other organisations closer to the frontline, and to learn first hand about the whole public value chain.

Second, by involving more senior civil servants in inter-organisational networks and multi-level partnerships to design and deliver practical programmes on the ground. This

includes learning from private sector experience of managing supply chains, networks and strategic alliances; and insisting that government programmes be planned and managed as a whole system, in partnership with stakeholders both inside and outside central government, so that policy-making, programme design, development, delivery, monitoring and evaluation be managed as an integrated process.

### **Movers and shakers**

Third, by linking civil service training more closely to the leadership and management development programmes for other parts of the public service, at three key career stages – starting with some joint modules on the fast-track graduate entry schemes; moving on to shared programmes for “movers and shakers” among middle managers from all services; and linking up again in public sector MBA programmes like the Warwick MPA, where senior civil servants can share knowledge with senior managers from the health service, the police, local government and other countries.

This reorientation would require the civil service to recognise that it may be more effective to act as a key player within (and sometimes conductor of) a larger public sector orchestra, than to stand back from the action.

*John Benington is professor of Public Policy and Management at Warwick Business School. He was the founding director of Warwick's Local Government Centre in 1988; the Institute of Governance and Public Management in 2000; and the Warwick MPA degree in 2001. His research is on public value, leadership, and networked governance*

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Applications for SFI Awards are made by submitting a 300-500 word outline, together with brief CVs of the applicants.

They should be submitted to [john.mullooly@solace.org.uk](mailto:john.mullooly@solace.org.uk) by 1st January 2006, with a view to the completed work being available by 1st May 2006. Initial decisions on the Award will be made by early February 2006.

SFI Award and Prize Winners have a high expectation of publication, either by distribution through our publishing partner Public, or through SOLACE itself. All authors of entries of sufficient quality will be offered publication on the SFI website or in hard copy. They may also be invited to present their work through participation at SOLACE Conferences, or other special events. However, such participation will not be a condition of an Award or Prize.

Some Prizes and Awards will be made in conjunction with our Partners:

**Audit Commission**  
**Audit Scotland**  
**Centre for Public Scrutiny**  
**IDeA**  
**Improvement Service for Scottish Local Government**  
**Leadership Centre for Local Government**  
**Wales Audit Office**

Submissions for Prizes and Awards can be made on any aspect of public services and local government. Further information including a list of topics which indicates the potential scope and range of our interests is available from [www.solacefoundation.org.uk/imprint](http://www.solacefoundation.org.uk/imprint)

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