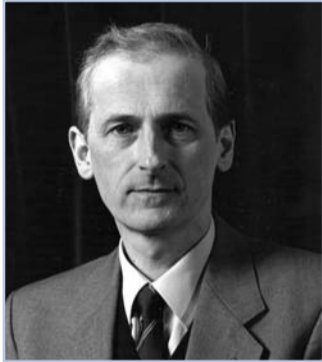


If the Public Services Programme was a space mission, it would be well into its third set of booster rockets by now and more than half way into its journey. We've finished our first fourteen research projects, have sixteen others in full swing, and have just commissioned another seven projects and six fellowships to fill gaps and work on cross-cutting issues on public service performance (details of which are on the back page). We have secured support for part of this third stage from the General Medical Council (which is providing both funding and data to help us develop new research on the relationship between regulation and medical performance) and from the Scottish Executive. We hope they'll be pleased with the results and will be working closely with both organizations to get the most out of our research.

There are new faces in the Programme team as well as in the Programme's projects, as you'll see on page two. Dr. Deborah Wilson from CMPO Bristol has joined the team as part-time Deputy Director. Her research expertise in applied economics will add greatly to the Programme's central capacity and she will be able to link the Programme's work with CMPO's extensive research on public services. Heidi Young has joined us as part-time Programme Administrator from Oxford University Press and will be helping to develop our communication plans for the next two years. Dr. Chris Wyatt will be looking after the Programme from the ESRC in place of Frances Wilkinson (now Burstow) who has moved to a different position.

What discoveries will the Programme's explorations have produced by the end of its journey? We already have important conclusions from our research on performance metrics and on the link between incentives and performance. We expect to have

equally significant discoveries to report on public attitudes to public service performance, the methodologies for analysing performance, the link between performance and regulation and the link between performance and management. Watch this space!



Christopher C. Hood

Christopher Hood
Gladstone Professor of Government
and Fellow of All Souls College,
Oxford Programme Director

The Programme at-a-glance

2004

ESRC Public Services Programme established; Professor Christopher Hood appointed as Programme Director; 1st Projects Call; first 14 Projects commissioned

2005

Programme launched; first 14 Projects began research; two further Projects commissioned in May began research in October; 2nd Projects Call

2006

First 14 Projects reported results; 2nd Call Projects commissioned in Spring to

start 2006; 3rd Call for fellowships and research on medical regulation and performance

2007

Some 2nd Call projects report results; fellowships and 3rd call projects begin

2008

First 2nd Call Projects complete

2009

Remaining Projects complete; fellowships complete; Programme Publication; Programme ends November



Instruction to Deliver

A Lunchtime Seminar with Sir Michael Barber

Thursday 7th June 2007

The Programme (together with Oxford University's Public Policy Group) hosted Sir Michael Barber, Head of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit from 2001-2005 and a key figure in New Labour's education and targets policy in its first and second terms, for a lunchtime interview with Christopher Hood. The interview focussed on Barber's recently-published book *Instruction to Deliver* and the approach to 'deliverology' that it represents.



Asked whether the 'targets mood' had passed its peak and why targets were much less prominent in public service management in the non-English parts of the UK, Sir Michael argued that some kinds of targets were necessary to create an impetus for public service improvements and for effective accountability where public spending has to be justified in light of the tax burden it involves. Asked about the scope and limits of the target approach, Sir Michael said that centrally-driven targets were better suited for raising minimum standards and improving equity than in producing 'great' public services. They could turn poor into adequate public services, but were not so good at turning adequate into excellent public services. Greatness has to be unleashed and thus once services are adequate there should be 'intervention in inverse proportion to success'. Asked about why elected politicians embraced targets in an environment where successes tended to get less public attention than failures and fiddles, Sir Michael replied that targets, particularly of a demanding kind, were not for the risk-averse politician.

Asked to comment on the Public Services Programme's own role in 'deliverology', Sir Michael responded, "It is very important for the central issues of public service reform to be analysed and debated by the best academic minds in this country. Successful delivery depends not just on practical issues but conceptual ones too."



The Public Services Programme
Quality, Performance & Delivery

www.publicservices.ac.uk

New research

This summary includes only our newly commissioned research. For a full list of our projects and fellowships visit our website.

Projects

- **Learning Responsibility? Exploring Doctors' Transitions to New Levels of Medical Responsibility**
Prof. Trudie Roberts (University of Leeds) t.e.roberts@leeds.ac.uk
- **An Analysis of Data on Registration and Fitness to Practice Cases Held by the General Medical Council in the Context of Risk-Based Approaches to Medical Regulation**
Prof. Sally Lloyd-Bostock (London School of Economics) s.lloyd-bostock@lse.ac.uk
- **Regulation, 'Donated Labour' and the NHS Reforms**
Dr. Tim Ensor (Oxford Policy Institute) tensor@opi.ac.uk
- **Identifying Biographical and Biopsychosocial Risk Factors amongst Under Performing Doctors**
Dr. Debbie Cohen (Cardiff University) cohenda@cardiff.ac.uk
- **The Visible and Invisible Performance Effects of Transparency in Medical Professional Regulation**
Dr. Gerry McGivern (Royal Holloway) gerry.mcgivern@rhul.ac.uk
- **The Experiences of UK, EU and Non-EU Medical Graduates Making the Transition to the UK Workplace**
Dr. Jan Illing (Newcastle University) j.c.illing@newcastle.ac.uk

Fellowships

- **Regulating Doctors: Between Performance and Practice**
Prof. Mary Dixon-Woods (Leicester University) md11@le.ac.uk
- **Public Services Reform in Scotland: Current Knowledge and Future Prospects**
Dr. Tobias Jung (Edinburgh University) tobias.jung@ed.ac.uk
- **An Exploratory Study of Parliamentarians and their Use of Healthcare Performance Metrics: The Scottish Parliament Health and Community Care Committee**
Dr. Gordon Marnoch (University of Ulster) g.j.marnoch@ulster.ac.uk
- **Public Attitudes towards Services of General Interest in Comparative Perspective**
Dr. Stephen Van de Walle (Birmingham University) s.vandewalle@bham.ac.uk
- **Theories of Performance**
Dr. Colin Talbot (Manchester University) colin.talbot@manchester.ac.uk
- **Standards of Evidence for Assessing Public Service Performance**
Dr. Oliver James (University of Exeter) o.james@ex.ac.uk

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Photography by: Sally and Richard Greenhill and Freefoto.com

Design: Harriet Eagle

Print: Oxuniprint

Publications

Public Management by Numbers

A Special Issue of *Public Money and Management*, Vol. 27 Issue 2. Blackwell

The Programme's second publication *Public Management by Numbers*, a special issue of the journal *Public Money and Management*, was released in April.

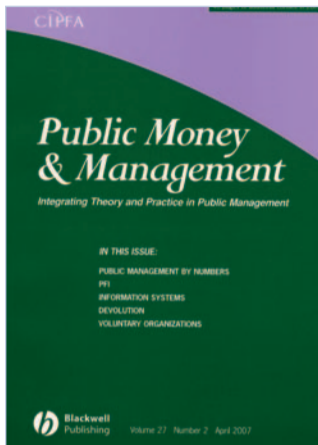
There has been an inexorable rise of public management by numbers over the past quarter of a century. Quantitative performance measurement is now a dominant feature of the landscape of public service management in the UK as well as many other countries. Yet many mistrust what they regard as the remorseless growth of an unevaluated industry, and question:

- What is the assurance that the numbers validly represent service users' experience of performance?
- When are different formats such as numerical performance data and league tables appropriate?
- How can we protect against developing an emphasis on provider and managerial gaming?
- Why do some organisations build their organisational processes around performance metrics, while others marginalise the whole business?

This special issue contains four articles taken from the Programme's research, which look at the metrics issue from different, but complementary, angles; beginning with Christopher Hood's analysis of the performance by numbers business, focussing on the way numbers are used as targets, rankings and intelligence systems. Rowena Jacobs and Maria Goddard examine the use of composite indicators to investigate whether they are robust enough to be trusted. Iain McLean, Dirk Haubrich and Roxana Gutiérrez-Romero test the design of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment, used to measure local authority performance, to discover whether it is a reliable and valid performance measure. Finally, Andrew Goddard, Martin Broad and Larissa Von Alberti analyse the very different performance management cultures of English local authorities and universities.

Together the articles help us to understand the scope and limits of public service management by numbers. However, there is more than a hint of paradox: that, in theory and practice, many scholars and practitioners are coming to regard performance measurement as an obstacle as much as a facilitator of performance delivery.

<http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/toc/pmam/27/2>



News and events round-up

Analysing Performance Indicators: Data, Behaviour, Impacts

Two-day workshop, 15-16 March 2007, Erasmus University, Rotterdam

This meeting was held in March 2007 at Erasmus University Rotterdam, jointly convened by Christopher Hood, Director of the Public Services Programme and Christopher Pollitt (University of Leuven and Netherlands Institute of Government). The discussion was divided into three sessions, focusing on Data (techniques for data collection and analysis), Behaviour (gaming and perverse effects as well as those leading to service improvements) and Impacts (how they can be assessed and attributed). Each session opened with brief presentations from a Dutch-based and a UK-based participant, and then broadened into more general discussion, with the closing session led by current or recently completed doctoral students from both countries.

A major area for debate was the impact, positive or negative, of Performance Indicator (PI) systems on service providers. The evidence indicates that this effect may depend less on the quality of the PI data than on how tightly the PI is coupled to rewards and sanctions (for example, doctors have changed their behaviour more in systems where there is tighter coupling to resource allocation and public reputation). Indicators could also be coupled to budgets (as with the UK Research Assessment Exercise), to reputations (as with school league tables) or even directly to job security (as where most of the chief executives of UK NHS hospitals that scored no stars in the star system lost their jobs). A report of proceedings and some of the papers presented at the meeting are available on our website.

International Public Management Network Workshop

Three-day workshop, 7-9 August 2007, Worcester College, Oxford.

This summer the Programme is bringing the internationally renowned International Public Management Network workshop to Britain for the first time for a three-day event on the growing practice of ranking and rating public services; both at the international level and within particular countries.

The event is an opportunity to gather together researchers from across the world for an in depth discussion of the problems, paradoxes and consequent challenges associated with the development of rankings – the continuing gaps in coverage despite dramatic growth in numbers of rankings; the apparently rising demand for data that is seriously problematic as a management tool; and the observer bias problem and its implications – and how to get beyond them. Participants, drawn from Canada to Thailand, will aim to identify what we know and what we know we don't know; what we agree about and what is contested; and what seem to be fruitful ways forward for research and analysis.

Whilst we have a full list of participants for the main body of this event, the opening evening lecture is open to a larger audience. If you would like an invitation contact Ruth.Dixon@politics.ox.ac.uk.

Risk and Public Services

Joint conference with the Centre for Analysis of Risk and Regulation, 13-14 December 2007, LSE Tower 3

Risk is fundamental to the provision of public services. Yet the links between risk and public services have not received the attention they deserve. Transport, health, education and the control of crime are among the most publicly visible and politically sensitive public services, even in the current era of markets and quasi-markets. Organizations that provide such services both respond to risks in their environment, and create risks to others. MRSA infections, prison escapes, and the abuse of children or the elderly are just some of the most prominent recent examples. But debates about public services across at least the past two decades have tended to frame the issues wholly or primarily in terms of markets and monitoring. This conference seeks to redress this neglect, and to reframe the debate about public services in terms of risk. More details are available on our website.

Evaluating Health Policy: New Evidence from Administrative Data

20 September 2007, University of York.

The Programme is holding this first in a series of two one-day conferences in collaboration with CMPO examining what can be learnt about current health reforms from the rich source of UK health sector administrative data. See our website for further details.

Profiles

Heidi Young

(Programme Administrator)

Heidi Young joined the Programme in mid-April after working in academic publishing at OUP and Cornell University Press. Asked the best thing about her new role Heidi said, 'It's part-time!' She went on to explain she is happy to have found in this post the elusive combination of part-time hours and challenging, engaging work.



Dr. Ruth Dixon

(Project Assistant to Programme Director)

Ruth joined us back in November from a background in biochemistry, working for the John Radcliffe Hospital and Oxford University investigating aspects of human disease. After a recent career break during which she obtained a diploma in statistical methods, she has changed her focus to the social sciences and is looking forward to learning more about social science research, while also spending time with her family and three chickens.



Dr. Deborah Wilson

(Deputy Director)

Deborah is the newest recruit to the Programme. She combines her post as Deputy Director with her role as Senior Research Officer at the Centre for Market and Public Organisation (Bristol) where her current research – on incentives, choice and performance management in the public sector, with particular emphasis on education – fits neatly within the themes of the Programme.



Project spotlight

Full details of all our projects are available at www.publicservices.ac.uk.

To learn more about the project and how to contact the researchers, please visit http://www.publicservices.ac.uk/our_research/Composite_Measures.asp



Project: Public Services in a High-Blame Environment: Developing a 'Flight Deck' Simulator

Research team: Sue White (Lancaster); Andy Pithouse (Cardiff); David Wastell (Nottingham); Chris Hall (Huddersfield); Sue Peckover (Huddersfield) and Delores Davey (Cardiff).

Imagine you are a manager or front-line practitioner in a local authority social services department with the responsibility to ensure the safety of children. The department has just had a phone call to say a child is in imminent danger of death or serious injury unless something is done immediately. The department has had ten other similar phone calls that afternoon, is running over budget and is heavily understaffed. You work in a highly pressured and constantly-reorganized environment with importunate pressures from the top to fulfil clear-up targets, avoid overspending, and produce paperwork within strict deadlines. What do you do?

The worst outcome you can face in those circumstances is the death of a child as a result of errors of commission or omission on your part, as in the Victoria Climbié (pictured) case. That could potentially produce a lifetime of remorse, notoriety and dismissal. If you follow a minimax approach to decision-making (minimizing the likelihood of the maximum loss) in these circumstances, the outcome you will be most concerned to prevent is the avoidable death of a child on your watch, even if it means missing the other bureaucratic-process imperatives. But the difficulty you face lies precisely in identifying what is a 'maximum loss' case, given that outside callers often 'talk up' the risks to children in the hope of getting a swift response from pressured and under-staffed bureaucracies, and that the first point of contact is often a customer service reception worker rather than a qualified social worker or manager.

To try to map out the decision process in such an environment, Sue White at Lancaster, leading a team from Cardiff, Huddersfield and Nottingham universities, is exploring how it works in four local selected

authorities (three in England, one in Wales). That means entering a work world of response to major social risk where rationing of effort is unavoidable and tricky risk assessments have to be made in a chain of decision-making running from the first call from a distressed parent or neighbour through risk assessments, rationing of scarce resources (such as available foster parents and case workers themselves), and the various tradeoffs that those involved in the process face – between quality and speed, between risk and risk, between working in the field and data entry in the office, and between avoiding worst-case outcomes and meeting process targets.

That research work will give us a qualitative picture of the way the decision process works, the competing pressures it involves and the way it is shaped by blame-avoidance imperatives (for instance in minimizing discretion, collective decision-taking over allocation, completing paperwork by due dates). But the next stage is to turn that qualitative analysis into a computer-based 'flight simulator' to assist social workers and their managers to make the right decision, by simulating the points of passage that cases go through in the system. One of Sue White's fellow researchers, Dave Wastell, has for many years produced computer simulations of complex decision tasks, such as those on ship's bridges, or in space flight, where people make complex decisions in the face of uncertainty and competing demands. This approach has also been extended to medical decision-making and the team's aim is to apply it to the child-welfare risk problem. The simulator will comprise several scenarios, including detail on other professional opinion and resource availability. It will thus represent an innovative way of organizing the team's research results. But the simulations – like their flight-deck equivalents – will also have obvious value as training instruments, since they will allow managers and practitioners to play out various scenarios in the simulated world. And that should help them to learn from their mistakes the best strategies to apply when dealing with similar problems in the real world.