

This newsletter is coming to you in the summer, but it's already harvest time for the Programme in several senses. Our research projects will soon all be complete, many publications are appearing or in train, and our research messages are going out all over the world.

It may be summertime, but public services are going into a cold climate in the UK and many other countries as the fiscal squeeze develops. So a big challenge for the Programme is to apply what we've learnt about public service performance to times of fiscal pressure as well as times of plenty. That's why we've put out a policy briefing with the Institute of Fiscal Studies on 'Government in Hard Times', which was presented at the new Institute for Government on the 1st of June and attracted a lot of discussion. It's also why we're preparing a big conference in central London on 11 December under the title 'Public Services in the 2010s: Prosperity, Austerity and Recovery.' Over the lifetime of the Programme we've already put on more than 100 conferences, workshops and seminars on our own or with others. But this major conference is designed to bring out some of the key lessons for public services in the coming decade from our four years of research.



Christopher C. Hood

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

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 reported results; fellowships and 3rd call projects began

2008

Some 2nd Call projects completed

2009

Most projects and fellowships complete

2010

All projects and fellowships complete; Programme final report submitted

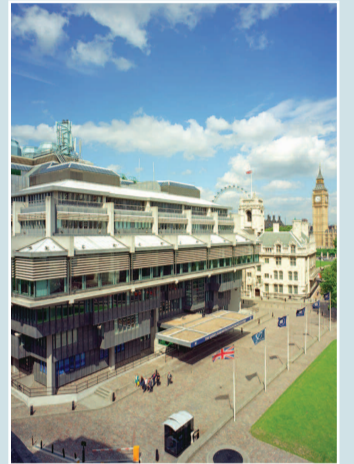
WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT?

Friday 11th December 2009

Public Services in the 2010s:
Prosperity, Austerity and Recovery

Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, London

The questions asked by the Programme – such as who sees what as good performance, what are the scope and limits of management-by-numbers approaches to public services, and how various kinds of incentives shape public service performance, to name only three – are just as relevant for times of fiscal austerity as they are for times of plenty. So this conference will draw on what we've learnt from nearly 50 research projects and over 100 conferences and workshops, to see how it can be applied to the challenges of managing public service performance in the 2010s, in the UK and elsewhere. It will combine a poster show and displays of publications with panels and round tables, including contributions from Sir Gus O'Donnell (UK Cabinet Secretary) and Martin Weale (Director of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research).



To register your interest in attending,
please email us on public-services@politics.ox.ac.uk



The
Public Services
Programme

Quality, Performance & Delivery

www.publicservices.ac.uk



Research theme: Public Attitudes

Like beauty, public service performance can be in the eye of the beholder, and subjective views of public service performance often seem to be substantially at variance with other kinds of performance measures – for example, when we compare patient reports of time waited in health care institutions against official waiting time statistics or public perceptions of crime with official crime data taken from police reports. So a key theme of the Programme's research is to produce thorough and replicable studies of public attitudes to public service design and performance in the UK. We've done that in several ways. For instance, we've looked at EU attitude data to see how British attitudes compare with those of other EU countries, and even how definitions of 'services of common interest' differ among the EU countries. To try to gauge how far individuals value choice as against other ways of getting better public services, we're asking hypothetical questions, such as whether people would send their children to

private schools if their income went up substantially. We're comparing survey data on satisfaction with and expectations of public services with administrative performance records (and supplementing that with some analysis of media responses to measures of public service performance). And, for the first time ever, we've mounted a large-scale randomized survey across all four countries of the UK to elicit attitudes to the way public services should be provided.

Among our discoveries are:

- Public attitudes to choice as a recipe for improving public service performance do vary a little across the UK countries, but the variance is much less than would be expected from the very different policies towards choice and markets in public services pursued in different parts of the UK in the recent past (see Table 1);

- Respondents tend to be more enthusiastic about choice among different providers than about provision of services by private for-profit companies (see Table 2), and are much more enthusiastic about choice in the abstract than about the sort of choice that could mean their own local school or hospital closing down;
- A study of English local government data indicates that user satisfaction with public services relates less to administrative measures of performance (such as performance on administratively-derived targets or rankings data) than to perceived performance minus the user's expectations of the service. The ironic implication of this finding is that lowering expectations may do more to raise user satisfaction than improving reported performance.

To find out more, see <http://www.publicservices.ac.uk/category/research/public-attitudes-and-performance/>

Table 1

ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHOICE ACROSS THE UK				
% favour a great deal of choice of...	Secondary school	Hospital	Who provides care	Base
England	32	26	30	1735
Scotland	27	32	35	1697
Wales	35	40	41	982
N. Ireland	29	36	39	1179

Table 2

ATTITUDES TOWARDS PRIVATE COMPANIES PROVIDING PUBLIC SERVICES ACROSS THE UK							
	Private companies running state schools		Private companies running NHS hospitals		Private companies providing personal care		Base
	Support	Oppose	Support	Oppose	Support	Oppose	
England	20	53	23	55	31	43	1735
Scotland	12	65	17	67	28	51	1697
Wales	14	64	18	64	29	49	982
N. Ireland	14	55	17	58	27	49	1179

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News and Events Round Up

Links between Research and Practice

Our researchers continue to be in demand from the world of practice and policy. Just three recent examples are:

Professor Trudie Roberts (Head of the University of Leeds School of Medicine and Director of its Medical Education Unit), appointed a member of the General Medical Council;

Professor Sue White (Professor of Social Work, Department of Applied Social Science, Lancaster University), appointed to the Social Work Task Force, a new panel of experts formed to review frontline social work practice in England; and

Christopher Hood (Programme Director and Gladstone Professor of Government, University of Oxford), appointed a member of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics for two years and chair of its Working Party on Medical Profiling and Online Health Care: The Ethics of 'Personalized' Health Care in a Consumer Age.

Fixing Failure?

21 January 2009, London

Programme researcher Professor Kieran Walshe and his team held a policy seminar to discuss their finding that the fundamental cause of major performance problems in public services lies in the way organizations learn (or fail to do so). Developed out of their study of organizational capacity to acquire, assimilate and apply knowledge in 17 major public service organizations across the UK, Walshe and his colleagues found that it was the assimilation of knowledge that was the least understood element and the one least tackled by conventional remedies for poor public services. The implication is that too much emphasis tends to be put on treating the symptoms of failure (for example by bringing in turnaround teams to deal with poor exam results or long waiting lists) rather than tackling the root causes. And the remedy may lie more in organizations taking the initiative to develop their own intelligence systems than in reacting to the demands of external bodies or regulators.

How Must We Be Creative and Innovative to Deliver Excellence in Public Services Throughout the Economic Downturn?

26 January 2009, The Royal Commonwealth Society, London

The economic downturn and fiscal crisis has sparked many discussions of how to manage public services in this environment. At this event, hosted by the CPPS, Programme Director Christopher Hood explained how public spending and employment had been substantially reversed in the UK in the 1920s – the last time when spending went substantially into reverse – and how it had been braked in the 1970s and 1980s. For a generation that has no experience of managing public services in times of major cutback, those episodes offer key pointers to how cuts and squeezes work and what we can and can't learn from past experience. For more information, see the event archive at www.cppseminars.org.uk

Welsh Public Services in Perspective: Inspection, Performance and Public Attitudes

11 March 2009, Cardiff

Does devolution create or reflect public service differences across the UK? At this seminar, chaired by Programme Deputy Director Deborah Wilson, Programme researchers explored this question in relation to public attitudes (John Curtice) and local government audit and inspection (Steve Martin). While public service policies across the devolved administrations provide opportunities for policy learning, there is little evidence of such learning having occurred to date. There is a tendency for 'country silos' to persist as well as bureaucratic silos, with more peaceful coexistence than explicit comparative evaluation. Perhaps this is because the political and bureaucratic incentives are to differentiate rather than to converge towards a similar model, even if this doesn't reflect the sometimes smaller underlying differences in public attitudes between the countries of the UK.

Public Attitudes to Public Services

17 March 2009, Edinburgh

The Programme has held 12 events in Scotland to date and this one, held in collaboration with ScotCen for a select audience of Scottish Government policymakers, practitioners and academics, focused on research on public attitudes. Among the papers presented, Programme researcher John Curtice argued that his public attitudes survey research around the UK found much more support for choice in public services in the abstract than when respondents were faced with tradeoffs between choice and locally available service, while Peter

John showed that his internet survey research indicated that there was an inverse relationship between people's propensity to use 'voice' (participation) and 'choice' (switching providers) in public services, even though public policy tends to assume that the two are readily combinable.

Comparing for Improvement: The Future of Local Government Performance Improvement Regimes

18 March 2009, London

At this seminar Steve Martin and his colleagues fed back and tested out the findings of their Programme research to invited representatives from local and devolved governments and the audit offices of England, Scotland and Wales. Deborah Wilson gave the closing comments. Some of the discussion focused on the challenges presented by area-based assessment frameworks, which all three countries are in the process of developing or introducing. Participants agreed these developments would require more partnership working, while innovation and knowledge-sharing were likely to be given greater emphasis as budgets were squeezed.

Tackling Health Inequalities in England, Scotland and Wales: A Comparative Perspective

30 March 2009, Durham

At this conference, delegates and speakers from England, Scotland and Wales reacted to the findings of the major research project conducted by Tim Blackman and his colleagues. The study showed that health inequalities were conceived differently in different parts of the UK and pursued by different policy instruments, with the English 'gap-closing target' (of reducing the health gap between the average and most deprived areas) proving to be particularly hard to achieve, even though health outcomes have improved for the most deprived groups. These findings have been of much interest to policymakers and both English and Scottish health departments have already drawn on Tim Blackman's research.

Technology, Individuality and Public Policy

Hilary Term Workshop Series with the Oxford Internet Institute

Personalization of public services is much debated at the moment, and this lunchtime seminar series looked at 'personalizing' developments in services such as health care (for instance, genetic testing and body imaging) and education (individualized learning through new forms of software designed to allow children to work on their own and for parents and teachers to keep track of their progress). It also looked at some of the ways that technology can 'depersonalize' service delivery, for instance in eliminating sources of error by techno-regulation.

We continue to put across ideas based on the Programme's research in international forums...

International Conference on Managing the Social Impacts of Change from a Risk Perspective

14-16 April 2009, Beijing Normal University, China

Last year's Sichuan earthquake showed that risk and its management is a big issue in China, with huge populations living in hazardous areas, and the development of more complex governing arrangements increasing the scope for blame-shifting responses to crises. So Christopher Hood presented an analysis of three types of blame avoidance activity and explored the positive and negative features of each type for good governance. The conference was organized by the ESRC's SCARR Programme at the University of Kent, together with RCUK and Beijing Normal University.

World Social Science Forum

10-12 May 2009, Bergen, Norway

International rankings and ratings were a central topic at the World Social Science Forum, held by the International Social Science Council and attended by nearly 800 people. The Programme has learnt a lot about the scope and limits of ratings and rankings, so Christopher Hood was able to draw on various parts of the Programme's research to lay out three key puzzles relating to the demand and supply of international governance rankings (such as why demand for such rankings seems to be growing when all the social science research tends to emphasize their limitations as a summative tool). Christopher Hood and Ruth Dixon also presented two posters on performance measurement analysis. They are available electronically in the Library section of our website.

See our website for lots more news and events.

Publications

Risk and Austerity in Public Services

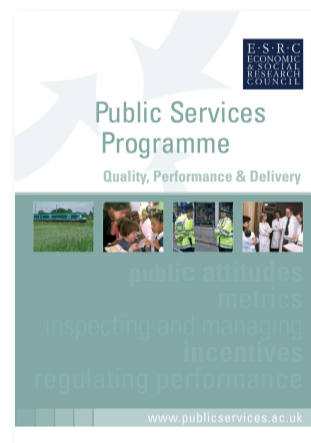
Coming to you with this bumper issue are two Programme publications. One is a policy briefing on 'Government in Hard Times', written together with Carl Emmerson of the Institute of Fiscal Studies. It looks at historical evidence about how UK governments handled earlier periods of fiscal pressure in two key periods and about how public spending relates to the economic cycle. If you think that the 2010s could be more like the 1970s or the 1920s than the last three decades, and if you think that public spending will be easily reined back in when recovery comes, you should take a look at this short briefing.

Also included with this newsletter is a 20-page supplement on 'Risk and Public Services', produced jointly with the ESRC's Centre for Analysis of Risk and Regulation (CARR). Why should you read this supplement? For at least three reasons:

- much of the risk literature focuses on regulation of business and many risk management models come out of the private corporate sector, but public services are a major theatre of risk and this supplement tells you why, by putting the focus on what's distinctive about risk in the public services;
- while 'defensive medicine' (practice of medicine to avoid blame and liability) has been a marked feature of health care services in the United States for forty years or so, defensiveness is becoming a feature of public service provision in other places and policy domains as well, for instance in the development of 'defensive education'; and
- a major challenge for future public service management, in good times and bad, is to find ways of managing risk that are more than devices for shifting blame.

If you would like additional copies please email the Programme Office (public-services@politics.ox.ac.uk). Risk and Public Services is also available electronically at: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CARR/documents/specialReports.htm>

Programme Brochure



Responding to demand from policymakers, we've produced a new and accessible brochure that catalogues our nearly 50 projects and lays out the six broad analytic themes we're working on and what we're finding out about them.

This brochure is for you if you need a handy hard-copy source to:

- check who's working on what in the Programme and who has what kind of expertise;
- get an overview of the main analytic themes the Programme's exploring; or
- find out about our emerging findings and their significance.

To request a copy, contact the Programme Office at public-services@politics.ox.ac.uk

Options for a New Britain

Options for a New Britain, the most ambitious independent policy review in the UK for over a decade, published on 12 March 2009. Speakers at the launch event included the Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP (Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change) and David Willetts MP (Shadow Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills).

Options for a New Britain gives ratings for UK government policy performance over the past decade – clear 'C's for its performance on the environment, transport, housing and planning, straight 'A's for performance on science and technology policy, health and Northern Ireland, with the other areas of public policy somewhere in between. Among the more striking policy options for the 2010s to be found in this book are: joining the Eurozone (which could finally be opportune at a time of falling asset prices); refocusing military efforts on smaller UK-led interventions; more user fees and vouchers for public services; and tighter controls on immigration linked to more active attempts at integration.

Peter Riddell, Chief Political Commentator of *The Times*, says, '[the book is] An independent and authoritative audit of public policy that is detached from day to day Westminster and media battles. The authors challenge many conventional political assumptions on, for instance, housing and public transport. The party manifestos for the next election should be judged alongside this book.'

For more details about the book, and Professor Iain McLean's Programme research on which it is based, please visit: www.publicservices.ac.uk/research/options-for-britain-ii/

To purchase a copy visit the Palgrave Macmillan website: www.palgrave.com/products/title.aspx?PID=333476

Staff News

It will be all change again in the Programme Office this summer, because Bryony Gill will be departing for maternity leave and Heidi Young will be leaving to join her husband at Princeton University for the 2009-10 academic year (and we hope spreading the word about the Programme's work over there). We're most grateful to Bryony and Heidi for their valuable contribution to the Programme and wish them all the best for the future.

Mathew Kladney joined us in April as part-time temporary Programme Assistant, and we hope to make another appointment in the Programme Office soon. That will be our fifth Programme administrator in five years and there's bound to be some disruption while the new appointee gets into the job, so we ask for your understanding about that.

