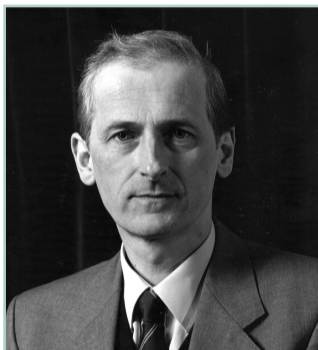


Welcome to this, the first in our series of newsletters which will be reporting on developments in the ESRC's Public Services Programme. Following on from the launch of the Programme in January, these twice-yearly newsletters will keep you up-to-date on the activities run by the Programme, its developing outputs and how to get involved to shape the future of the Programme.

As the Programme develops, we hope to produce findings that will be respected and used by scholars and practitioners alike. So this newsletter and Programme is for you if you are interested in the delivery, performance and quality of public services, whether as a researcher, a policy maker or if you are working at the sharp-end in our schools, councils, or hospitals. We want this Programme to be a success and for that to happen we need your help to ensure that our projects are bringing together the right mix of people, issues and experience.

Hopefully you will already have heard about the Programme – perhaps at the launch, through our project researchers, at a networking event or via the website – but even if it is new to you, this newsletter will provide a flavour of the wide range of issues and interrelated themes that we are going to explore over the next four years of study.

Each issue will give a round-up of the events and activities we've been involved with, supply highlights from some of the projects and news and information that can be followed up through the Programme Office in Oxford, with individual project teams around the UK or via the website, www.publicservices.ac.uk. I look forward to hearing your ideas about how we can make the best of this Programme and the exciting opportunity it offers to engage with the future of our public services; I hope that you will stay in touch with us as the Programme unfolds.



Christopher C. Hood

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

Overview of the Public Services Programme



Public services are central to the politics of modern democracies. Everyone wants good public services. Every government offers recipes for reform. But what counts as 'good' is contested, and so are the recipes for reform.

The Public Services Programme brings in researchers from across the social sciences to explore questions such as:

- how are public services changing, who wants what, and how is quality to be measured convincingly?
- what are the effects of popular reform measures like incentive pay, targets and transparency?
- what can we learn by comparing current public service arrangements with past experience, by comparing experience across the UK, and by comparing the UK with other countries?

The Programme, funded for five years by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) focuses on a number of different public service domains and on inter-linked themes:

- transparency, targets, trust and responsiveness;
- rewards, incentives, blame and liability;
- metrics evidence, management and innovation.

The Programme at-a-glance

2004

ESRC Public Services Programme established; Christopher Hood appointed Programme Director; 1st Projects Call; 14 'small' Projects commissioned

2005

Programme launches; 14 'small' Projects commence research; 2 'large' Projects commissioned (May) to commence research (October); 2nd Projects Call July/August

2006

End of Award Reports (EOARs) from 1st Call/14 'small' Projects; 2nd Call Projects commissioned February to start 2006; fellowships awarded to start 2007

2007

EOARs from 1st Call/2 'large' Projects; fellowships start

2008

2nd Call 'small' Projects complete/EOARs

2009

2nd Call 'large' Projects complete /EOARs; fellowships complete; Programme Publication; Programme ends November



DEPARTMENT OF
POLITICS
AND
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RELATIONS



The
Public Services
Programme

Quality, Performance & Delivery

www.publicservices.ac.uk

Newsletter of the ESRC Public Services Programme

Current research projects

● Performance, Strategy and Accounting

Professor Andrew Goddard (University of Southampton), arg2@soton.ac.uk

● Liability, Risk Pooling and Health Care Quality

Professor Paul Fenn (University of Nottingham), Paul.Fenn@nottingham.ac.uk

● Are Composite Measures a Robust Reflection of Performance?

Professor Rowena Jacobs (University of York), rj3@york.ac.uk

● Governance and Leadership in Education

Professor Tim Besley (London School of Economics), K.Perry@lse.ac.uk

● Expectations, Performance and Satisfaction

Professor Oliver James (University of Exeter), oj442@hotmail.com

● Analysing Delivery Chains in the Home Office

Professor Martin Smith (University of Sheffield), M.J.Smith@sheffield.ac.uk

● Financial Incentives and Discharge Policies – England and Sweden

Professor Allyson Pollock (University College London), allyson.pollock@ucl.ac.uk

● What Changes when Incentives Change in Primary Medical Care?

Professor Bruce Guthrie (University of Dundee), b.guthrie@dundee.ac.uk

● Metrics, Targets and Performance – The Case of NHS Trusts

Professor Mary O'Mahony (National Institute of Economic and Social Research and University of Birmingham), M.OMahony@niesr.ac.uk or m.omahony@bham.ac.uk

● Creating a Clinical, Economic and Psychological Research Resource

Dr Jan Clarkson (University of Dundee), l.cardno@chs.dundee.ac.uk

● The Innovative Capacity of Voluntary and Community Organisations

Professor Stephen Osborne (Aston University), s.p.osborne@aston.ac.uk

● Exit and Voice as a Means of Enhancing Service Delivery

Professor Keith Dowding (London School of Economics), k.m.dowding@lse.ac.uk

● Performance Management of Higher Education – An Analysis

Professor Jane Broadbent (Royal Holloway College, University of London), j.broadbent@rhl.ac.uk

● Correlates of Success in Performance Assessment

Professor Iain McLean (University of Oxford), ian.mclean@politics.ox.ac.uk

Commencing Autumn 2005

● Performance Assessment and Wicked Issues – The Case of Health Inequalities

Professor Tim Blackman (University of Durham), tim.blackman@durham.ac.uk

● Impact of Litigation and Public Law on the Quality and Delivery of Public Services

Professor Maurice Sunkin (University of Essex), sunkm@essex.ac.uk

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Second Call for projects

Attention all researchers!

The Public Services Programme is entering its second commissioning phase and is looking for new projects to apply for ESRC funding in its Second Call, starting Summer 2005. What we are looking for are project proposals that combine really interesting questions about public services quality, performance and delivery with really neat methodology and important data. We are happy to have proposals from across the whole range of the social sciences, using any combination of disciplines or approaches to get to the heart of the issues facing public services.

The full Programme specification for the Second Call will be available in July/August, along with all the other details of the application process, via the Programme website www.publicservices.ac.uk, or direct from the ESRC at www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk.

Look out too for details of our Second Call workshops which are open to anyone who is thinking about applying for grants or fellowships with the Programme.



News and events round-up

Since its launch in January 2005, it has been a busy six months for the Programme; the first 14 projects began their work in April/May and we have now commissioned 2 further projects to complete the first call. Research teams from institutions across the UK in disciplines ranging from social anthropology to dentistry are currently investigating the kaleidoscopic themes of the Programme. Each project is a hive of activity in its own right but this section recaps on the year so far for the Programme and gives a flavour of the sorts of events that will be coming up in the future.

Programme Launch

14 January 2005, British Academy, London

The Public Services Programme launched with a one-day workshop on the role of 'transparency' in government and public policy. The workshop brought together UK and overseas scholars from several disciplines to consider 'transparency' instruments such as the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act and more popular faith in the importance of 'openness and accountability'. The workshop concluded that 'transparency' is not a new term and that Bentham's dictum that 'the more strictly we are watched the better we behave' can be qualified from modern agency theory. Overseas experience of FOI suggests that, far from heralding a new culture of openness, many institutions have adapted and developed strategies for centralising and controlling information ever more tightly.

'Playing the Targets Game' workshop series

Tuesdays 25 January–1 March 2005 inclusive and 13 June 2005, Oxford Internet Institute, Oxford

Targets in various forms have become a widespread instrument of public policy and governance. This series explored the way the targets game is played in different institutional settings and presented research conclusions. Targets seem to invite gaming responses in 'players' (like incentives to under-perform to avoid tougher targets in future) and counter-intuitive behaviours which result from a system based on synecdoche, that is, making a part stand for the whole. The workshops suggested many other pertinent questions and a follow-up workshop on 13 June presented further research in train on this central issue.

14 Projects Meeting

14 March 2005, All Souls College, Oxford

This was the first opportunity for the first 14 projects to get together and explore the sorts of issues and methodologies to be covered and employed by fellow researchers over the first years of the Programme. Having identified potential cross-cutting approaches, two sub-group meetings have been arranged to follow up ideas, discuss methodologies and build towards closer working:

- 'Incentives' sub-group, 28 June 2005, University of Edinburgh;
- 'Performance Indicators & Targets' sub-group, 7 July 2005, University of York.

A 'Performance Management' sub-group will meet later in the year.

'Blame Avoidance' workshop

14–19 April, European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR), Granada, Spain

Programme Director, Christopher Hood, co-convened and presented a joint paper on 'Blame Avoidance' and reported some intriguing findings. An experimental study of public inquiries found that public inquiry reports tend to be credible with the public only when they produce findings critical of government behaviour and that governments are affected and blamed differently in the wake of the same world event (e.g. the Scandinavian countries whose tourists were killed by the 2004 Asian tsunami). The workshop also asked why the withdrawal of prescription drugs that are found to be dangerous attracts 100% media publicity in Australia and New Zealand but only 30% in the UK, USA or Canada? And if delegation to agencies, transparent rules, naming and shaming can be seen as the product of blame-avoidance strategies, why do they often seem ineffective in deflecting blame from governments?



Other events in brief

We have also been meeting with and making the Programme known to different audiences. A sample includes Christopher Hood giving evidence on the competence and effectiveness of the UK's civil service to the Public Administration Select Committee in March. On April 20 he presented a joint paper on the role of gaming in NHS targets to a National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) Westminster Economic Forum seminar, run with the ESRC. And on 26 April the Director and five of the projects were invited to introduce the Programme to policy-makers at an Office of Public Service Reform (OPSR) public policy seminar at the Treasury. While there is clearly much to do in raising the profile of the Programme in Westminster, future months will also see us having increased engagement with all the devolved administrations of the UK. Let us know of any other networks who might like to learn more about the Public Services Programme and keep checking the website for more news and events – www.publicservices.ac.uk.

Project spotlight

With so many projects to introduce, we can't cover all our research teams in a single newsletter. Instead, each edition will spotlight the work of one project, to give an insight into the range of issues being investigated by the Programme.

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



Project: **Creating a Clinical, Economic and Psychological Research Resource**

Research team: Dr Jan Clarkson, Professor Martin Chalkley, Dr Colin Tilley, Ms Linda Young, Dr Debbie Bonetti, Dr Kim Stringer – University of Dundee

If you have ever had problems getting an appointment with – let alone getting on the books of – your local NHS dentist, you will already understand the well documented difficulties facing NHS dentistry. Concern amongst patients and in the media suggests a widespread perception of dwindling access to treatment, rising costs and falling quality in NHS dental practices. In an attempt to address these issues, various changes to the NHS dental contract are being implemented across the UK. But how will these contractual arrangements affect NHS dental care and will they lead to changes in the amount of treatment provided by dentists?

These are the questions the research team at the University of Dundee will be tackling over the next 18 months. It is early days for the project, which showcases multidisciplinary working in its clinical, psychological and economic aspects but the team are already laying the foundations for creating and piloting a new cross-national dataset which links questionnaire data on dentists' attitudes and beliefs with data from the NHS on the levels of dental treatment provided.

As Linda Young explains: 'At present the project is in the setting-up stage. We are beginning our review of the clinical, psychological and economic incentive literature to identify areas of difference and commonality and hope to have that completed in the next six months. We have also been working hard to submit applications to give us access to routinely collected service level data in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and we will soon be meeting with the research team at the Dental Practice Board to discuss our study's requirements for England and Wales. We are also developing the dentist questionnaire using a psychological framework.'

Regular project meetings, updating the project's dentist contact information and the recruitment of project administrator Kim Stringer means the team will soon begin establishing the framework for the new database that will need to be ready for returns from the first questionnaires that will be going out to dentists across the UK in the coming months. For the first time, treatment patterns and contracts will be investigated across the UK in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England. The project will also measure the short and longer term impact of contractual change; identify the psychological factors which may influence how dentists work and the treatment they deliver; and inform workforce planning by monitoring the numbers of and reasons for dentists leaving the NHS.

The team will also be joining four other projects from the Public Services Programme to explore disciplinary assumptions and methodological implications at the Incentives sub-group meeting in Edinburgh on 28 June (see 'News and events round-up'); Linda hopes that their methodology will help inform current policy initiatives on contractual changes across a range of other public services.

She concludes: 'After all these preparations, we are looking forward to starting data collection and getting the responses entered into the new database. We will carry out an interim analysis at the 8–9 month point and by then I hope we will be able to see what results are starting to take shape.'

To contact the project directly e-mail Kim Stringer, Project Administrator, k.stringer@chs.dundee.ac.uk.

