

The programme is past its half-way stage now. But the best is yet to come. We've commissioned almost all our projects now and over the next two years we'll be seeing results from nearly thirty of them, to add to our existing work on incentives and performance metrics. The new work will include a major UK-wide survey of public attitudes to public service performance, nine related studies of what affects doctors' performance, and several studies on how politicians, managers and regulators manage performance and with what effects. We may not leave behind an army of terracotta warriors to be rediscovered in 2,000 years time, but we will be leaving a substantial legacy of investment in the analysis of public service performance across the whole spectrum of social science methods.

I think you'll like our new-look website that's designed to make the Programme more accessible to our many virtual visitors. I hope you like the new Programme poster, which can be found on the website. And I'm sure you'll like Bryony Gill, who has joined the Programme team (see page 2) and has a lot of useful experience and ideas about how to communicate our ideas effectively.

This year we've mounted two major conferences in addition to various smaller workshops and meetings; one on ranking and rating public services in August and one on the only-too-topical subject of risk and public services in December. We're already planning our conference programme for next year and beyond as the Programme moves into its final stages. So we're hoping for a high-performance 2008, and as

always we welcome any suggestions and advice on how we can do better.

Season's greetings!

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 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



New Website

The Programme's new website is now live. We have incorporated many innovations to try to make the website as user-friendly as possible, and there is plenty of new content waiting to be discovered too.

Most of our first call projects have now completed and are beginning to have their research findings published. You can find details of and links to these publications on the respective project pages.

What's more, our collection of discussion papers is beginning to grow as our projects progress. We have already had papers from Stephen Osborne and Allyson Pollock's projects. The former investigates what affects the innovative capacity of voluntary and community organisations (VCOs). Are VCOs inherently innovative, or is innovation a product of the institutional funding regime to which VCOs are subject? Allyson Pollock and her team have produced three papers on the problem of hospital 'bed-blocking' and whether the 2003 Community Care Act, which allowed hospitals in England to charge social service departments for beds when they were responsible for a patient's delayed discharge, has successfully 'unblocked' hospital beds.

Our latest discussion paper, by James Downe and colleagues, compares the differing approaches to scrutinising local government performance implemented in England, Wales and Scotland. These result in different types of performance data and access to it (for example, Wales does not have standardised performance indicators that compare services' performance against one another or over time). Despite significant differences between the regimes, public service auditors' are facing common challenges in developing assessments that do not over-burden service providers, and that are effective in identifying where services need to be bettered. Keep checking the website for new papers.



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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News and events round-up

Programme Director Scoops Award

Christopher Hood recently received the Public Management Research Association H. George Frederickson Award for Career Contributions to Public Management Research. The award is presented once every two years to a scholar who has made a major impact on the field over an extended research career.



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. The aim of this conference was to redress this neglect, and to reframe the debate about public services in terms of risk.

In the first session, Christopher Hood and Peter Miller argued that private-sector-derived risk management frameworks did not fit very easily to some key public service risks. That was followed by sessions on risks of bad doctoring and health care management (Sally Lloyd-Bostock and Ellie Scrivens), the management of risk of harm to children by social workers (Sue White), the management of risks in schools (Tony Travers) and in the criminal justice system (Rod Morgan). A common theme of the conference was that there are significant risks associated with 'risk-based regulation' across all of those domains. See our website for a full report soon.

IPMN Workshop: Ranking and Rating Public Services

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

28 participants from 15 countries met at Worcester College in Oxford to examine the growing practice of ranking and rating public services, both at an international level and within particular countries. The six papers that were presented at the conference – and the discussions they stimulated – drew on several different disciplinary and methodological perspectives as well as reflecting different international and institutional experience. The conference covered three broad questions: (i) what are the forces that lead to the emergence of ranking and rating systems; (ii) what are the forces that shape the development of such systems; and (iii) what are the behavioural consequences of their introduction. One theme that emerged from the workshop was that, while rankings and ratings are probably here to stay, the way they are used is likely to change. We need a 'second generation' of research in ratings and rankings to go beyond the standard social science assessments of validity and reliability to issues of how to manage ratings and rankings and what effects they have.

72nd Meeting of the Health Economists' Study Group

Three-day conference, 9-11 January 2008, hosted by the Health Economics Group, UEA

The Programme's special session on 'Health care metrics and reform' at this major conference will be chaired by Deborah Wilson, Programme Deputy Director, and consist of papers from three of our projects. Richard Cookson asks whether the introduction of the 'internal market' in the NHS has led to greater socio-economic inequality in the use of hospital services. Frank Windmeijer discusses whether the regime of 'targets and terror' was successful in reducing hospital waiting times in England. And, Nigel Rice argues that anchoring vignettes are a useful method of measuring and comparing health system responsiveness.

Institutions, Incentives and the Public Sector

One-day conference, 18 January, Institute of Minerals and Mining, London.

The Oxford Policy Institute, which is conducting a project on donated labour for the Programme, seeks to explore the role of incentives in public services. Reforms that shape the way public sector services are delivered around the world have introduced various organisational, managerial and financial incentives to improve quality and productivity. Understanding how organisations and individuals respond to such incentives and, in particular, how 'high-powered' incentives interact with informal incentives, presents intriguing problems that the conference will address.

The conference will begin by asking what 'good government' really means and will then 'drill down' through a consideration of the incentives that determine the performance of local government, ending with two specific public services, health and education.

The Impact of Judicial Review on Local Services in England and Wales

Afternoon workshop, Spring 2008, date and location to be confirmed...

Maurice Sunkin and his team at Essex have been investigating the effect of litigation on public service provision by local authorities in England and Wales. Their research examines, among other things, whether there is a link between the level of litigation directed at a local authority and the performance of that authority on key quality indicators and whether there are any differences between those local authorities that often find themselves in the courtroom and those that do not.

Michael O'Higgins, Chair of the Audit Commission, will open the debate, which aims to discuss the team's findings and stimulate a dialogue with practitioners and policy-makers. For more information contact Janice Webb, Janice@essex.ac.uk.

Paradoxes of Modernity

Hilary Term Workshop Series, Oxford Internet Institute

Convened by Christopher Hood, and Helen Margetts, Professor of Internet and Society (Oxford Internet Institute), the Programme's spring workshop series, Paradoxes of Modernity, focuses on the puzzles and unexpected effects of supposedly modern and rational policy and management practices. It will explore, for instance, why politicians don't invest more in commuter rail, why politicians introduce performance assessment systems that do not benefit them electorally, and what effect 'rational' nutrition programmes have on the ground. If you would like to be added to mailing list for this event, please contact the Programme office.

Risk and Public Services

Joint conference with the Centre for Analysis of Risk and Regulation, 13-14 December, 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. Health, education, social care 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. Organisations 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

Profile: Bryony Gill, (Programme Officer)

Bryony is the latest addition to the Programme's Oxford-based staff. With a background in the social sciences, she has worked on a number of studies concerned with 'brain drain' and the internationalisation of research careers and is looking forward to engaging with the research in the Programme. The rest of her time is spent writing her doctorate, decorating her house and drinking large glasses of wine.



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/research/237/>



Timing is everything

Project: The Effect of Ownership and Regulation on British Railways from 1850-2007
Research team: Tim Leunig (LSE) and Nick Crafts (Warwick)

Two trains leave Surbiton station for London Waterloo at 9.12a.m., departing from opposite sides of the same platform. One train takes ten minutes longer to reach its destination than the other, non-stop, train. As you walk onto the platform, you can see that on the faster train you will have to stand in unpleasantly packed conditions, while on the slower one you can be sure of getting a seat. Would you choose the 'armpit line' or the only slightly slower but much more comfortable train? This natural experiment (which you can observe for yourself any day and in comparable conditions in other cities) shows that commuters overwhelmingly opt for the faster train, even at the cost of considerable personal discomfort. That means people place a high value on speed when they have to trade it off against other aspects of performance

So what has happened to train speeds in Britain? Tim Leunig (LSE) and Nick Crafts (Warwick) have been computerising train times (including waiting time) for major rail journeys in a project to see just how quickly trains have been transporting us from origin to destination. By selecting various years throughout the period from 1850 to 2007, they are able to show how rail speeds have changed since the times when trains were still propelled by steam and match this against changes in ownership, regulation, investment and technology to learn about what causes significant increases in train speeds.

As one might expect, the over-arching narrative tells of rising train speeds and train frequency, but several interesting sub-plots are beginning to emerge from this story as the data is analysed further. It appears that it was only in the Victorian era that train speeds, on the whole, increased steadily. There was no improvement on many medium to long distance journeys such as London to Leeds, London to Bristol and London to Cambridge between 1910 and 1955, and the agglomeration of most of the railway companies into the 'Big Four' in 1923 coincides with decreasing speeds on some journeys (see graph).

So what's the story for you, the modern passenger? As Tim notes, "If you use the train for medium to long journeys, then the news is good. Governments have invested heavily in projects such as Bristol Mainline and East Coast Mainline and as a result journey times have decreased dramatically, but the news if you are a commuter is that on many lines trains are no faster now than they were in 1955 (see graph). Passengers who commute to stations such as Ealing and Reading that happen to fall on the Bristol Mainline are okay, but other commuter lines like Brighton and Richmond have been neglected. Waterloo, Victoria, Liverpool Street and London Bridge are Britain's busiest stations. If the first 50 miles of track from each of these stations had received investment commensurate with the number of people who use them, commuters would now be able to get up later and get home earlier. In fact, based on the speed of trains to Ealing and Reading, the average commuter in our sample of towns would save 9 days a year – the equivalent of doubling the number of bank holidays!"

