



**National School
of Government**

SUNNINGDALE INSTITUTE

Engagement and Aspiration: Reconnecting Policy Making with Front Line Professionals

A Sunningdale Institute Report
for the Cabinet Office

Foreword



We all share an ambition for excellent public services, but it is our colleagues who work at the front-line who know about what our customers need, value and want. The Civil Service must work with and through others, including those at the front-line of public services, in order to make the best of opportunities to improve public services for those who need and use them. This is all the more important in challenging economic times.

By bringing together these insights with the skills and strengths of policy makers in central Government, we can work as partners to ensure that we develop policies that are innovative, effective and relevant.

To this end, I am pleased to welcome this independent report from the Fellows of the Sunningdale Institute. It has much to say about how Government can improve the way we design and develop policy. We will publish a formal response to the Fellows' recommendations setting out what Government will do to respond in June and I look forward to seeing evidence of progress in the immediate future.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gus O'Donnell". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Sir Gus O'Donnell

Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Home Civil Service

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all those who contributed their valuable opinions and views for this report through interviews and focus groups. These practical insights and real experiences have enabled us to make recommendations which we hope will be of benefit to those who make policy, front-line colleagues and, ultimately, the people who use public services.

About this report

About this report

This study was commissioned by the Cabinet Office in July 2008 to feed into a broader programme of work on public service reform. This is an independent report and has been produced by the following Fellows of the Sunningdale Institute:

- Sir David Omand GCB – Visiting Professor, King's College London and former Cabinet Office Permanent Secretary
- Professor Ken Starkey – Professor of Management and Organisational Learning, Nottingham University Business School
- Lord Victor Adebawale CBE – Visiting Professor, Lincoln University

This project was managed by the Cabinet Office (Public Service Workforce Reform Team) and was co-funded by the Cabinet Office, Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills' Innovation Hub and the Sunningdale Institute.

About the Sunningdale Institute

The Sunningdale Institute is a virtual academy of leading thinkers on management, organisation and governance. Managed by the National School with the Cabinet Secretary as its President, the Sunningdale Institute comprises Fellows from the UK, Europe and North America with expertise relevant to public service. It is directed by the National School's Professor Sue Richards and its Chairman is Professor Cary Cooper of University of Lancaster.

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Executive summary

- i. The Sunningdale Institute was commissioned by the Cabinet Office to produce an independent report looking at how to ensure better engagement and connection with front-line professionals in the design and development of policy. Building on the arguments set out in *Excellence and Fairness: Achieving World-Class Public Services* we propose an initiative to re-invent policy making for today. The challenges are to ensure policies are grounded in front-line evidence and professional experience, to make good on the Government's promise to 'reject the temptation to micro-manage from the centre' and give high performing front-line professionals the authority to address variability in performance and 'to innovate and strive for world-class outcomes'. This will represent a powerful new narrative of reform.
- ii. We have identified good practice and examples of success in engaging the front-line in policy making, but we also identify a number of aspects of current practice that act as barriers to reform. These include inadequate time for policy formulation, the proliferation of policies and front-line professional alienation attributable to policy making being perceived more as top-down command and control rather than engaged dialogue grounded in mutual learning. The appetite of professionals for improvement in service quality is being undermined by a stream of top-down, sometimes conflicting, initiatives and changes in policy priority. The growth in arms length delivery bodies controlled by policies sent down a vertical departmental delivery chain (with financial flows to match) has also often made it harder for services to be coordinated and joined up at local level to meet the needs of the citizen. Policy making that is directed in this way can lead to outcomes that are impractical for the front-line to implement and ultimately futile for the service user. This issue, of course, is particularly salient in times of economic downturn, when achieving optimal value for resources spent is critical. It is our contention therefore that in this new climate of aspiration, policy making itself will have to be re-invented, with a strong impetus to ensure value for money, efficiency and effectiveness in public service policy making and delivery.
- iii. The direction of travel seems clear from the range of examples of good front-line policy engagement in action that we examined. We also found much support for the 'localisation' agenda of *Excellence and Fairness* – what one of our informants described as 'local solutions for local contexts'. We were concerned, though, that these seem to exist as isolated examples rather than flowing from an integrated joined-up strategy for front-line engagement.
- iv. We endorse a definition of policy making as 'the process by which governments translate their political vision into programmes and actions to deliver "outcomes" – desired changes in the real world'. The first challenge is to develop a shared understanding of what such policy making should now involve.
- v. Our examination of successful policy making (vision translated into actual outcomes on the ground) demonstrated a common understanding that effective delivery has indeed usually involved better engagement and connection with front-line workers in policy formulation. Many have succeeded precisely because those involved in policy work in departments saw their role as being at the bottom of an inverted pyramid supporting and facilitating work across the front-line base of the pyramid and not as the apex directing policies downwards. Horizontal rather than vertical thinking is needed for effective collaboration.
- vi. Examples of successful policy making also appear to arise out of a 'one team' approach by the relevant Ministers and senior officials. Early endorsement by relevant professional groups makes it more likely that new policies will take root. The best sustained results on the ground have often come because the local front-line was encouraged and helped to accept the challenge of continuous improvement so that the initial policy is developed through experience of local conditions.
- vii. Such considerations lead us to the conclusion that policy activity needs to be reconceptualised as a process not of linear roll-out of initiatives and targets from the centre to the front-line but as a process of mutual problem exploration with the front-line and other stakeholders in which 'the networked public officials' responsible for policy formulation act as two-way translators and facilitators, tapping resources both of evidence and experience. Such a re-invention of policy making fits well with a development of the Professional Skills for Government agenda picking up the engagement of front-line professionals in the next phase of public service reform.
- viii. To capture our concept of modern policy making we recommend the Apogee¹ approach (Aspiring to Policy that is Grounded in Evidence and Experience).
- ix. Policy makers will have to become expert at accessing both Evidence and Experience – to ensure that practical knowledge on the front-line, of what is likely to work in practice and of how services should best be reconfigured to meet the needs of the citizen, is captured, alongside other analysis.

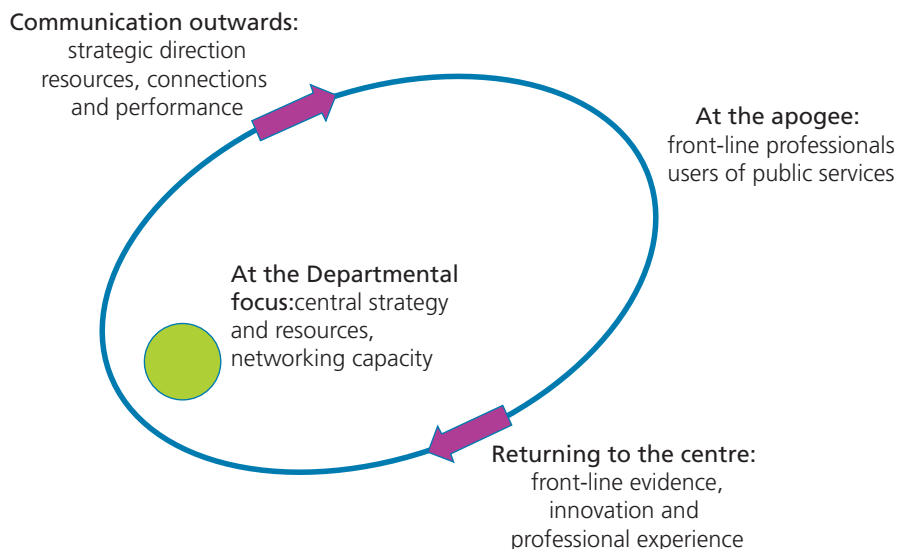
1. The Concise Oxford English Dictionary defines Apogee as 'the point of a planet's orbit at which it is farthest from the earth.'

- x. To follow this approach, policy makers will have to see themselves as high energy networkers, ‘professional’ facilitators mobilising, engaging and energising partnership across government, local government, and front-line professionals. It is only then that they can, with confidence, advise Ministers on the practical options – to cost, time and quality – for turning their policy vision into action by the front-line. *We suggest that the first, and single most important, step that could be taken in implementing further reform is to develop a shared understanding along these lines between Ministers, their Permanent Secretaries and senior officials and their key front-line leaders of what good modern policy formulation in government must now involve.*
- xi. We also considered what lessons about successful policy making can be drawn from the private and third sectors. What both the best of these sectors seem to demonstrate is leadership responsibility for policy formation and implementation, grounded in a culture of action. Analysis and delivery go hand in hand in strategy formulation.
- xii. However, many private sector firms are struggling with moving their leadership from a functionally focused, largely unconnected set of groups to a more cohesive, collaborative enterprise which accepts the collective responsibility for shaping and pursuing agreed business objectives. A key leadership challenge for all sectors is to promote *connectivity* which involves addressing issues of constituting the relevant teams, questions of responsibility

and authority, management of complex interfaces, and management style and culture. Perhaps the major challenge is to think of ways of harnessing the different skills, knowledge and experience of different groups in relation to the complex needs of new programmes that require the integration of diverse expertise and cut across existing organisational structures. The culture change required is that individual/ team commitment is no longer to department, division or function but to the overarching programme. This requires a rebalancing of responsibilities and authority and the creation of new roles. Better connectivity with the front line is also important for public service innovation. The front line is often where some of the best ideas emerge. By having better engagement with the front line policy makers can learn about how central government can best support innovation and uncover innovative practice with a view to aiding its diffusion and dissemination for broader adaptation. Front line involvement should also underpin approaches to generating innovative policy responses and service delivery systems.

- xiii. Bureaucratic and autocratic management induce competitiveness and risk-avoidance and both these tendencies need to be transcended. Good companies ensure that new policies are fully market tested on customers before rollout. The best of the private sector has invested in processes to capture relevant knowledge and learning about their customers and to ensure that it is

The Apogee Approach



shared where it is needed. Leading private sector firms are judicious in launching initiatives and will insist on driving the business through a limited number of major changes at any one time.

xiv. The *Apogee* approach has particular implications for skills development. Analytic skills are already being developed to improve the quality of analysis and evidence. The Civil Service *Capability Building Programme* is helping policy makers and analysts work together more effectively, with a strong focus on customers and frontline delivery recognising that technical skills must be complemented by developing further the interpersonal approach needed to build trust, engagement and learning among stakeholders. The programme for implementation of the next phase of public service reform must be integrated with the description and enactment of the ‘re-invented’ policy function so that it can become clear what changes in behaviour and process inside departments, between the centre of Government and departments, and with the front-line professions will be required.

xv. We are clear that changes should be made in policy making processes, including where and when advice is given to Ministers – avoiding rushed policy making, checking ‘who is in the room’ representing the front-line when the policies are constructed, and taking time to stress test new ideas with those who have to implement them. We also recommend changes in Civil Service behaviours to develop the prototype of the ‘networked public servant’ who facilitates and connects on the basis of greater understanding of the conditions experienced by citizens and professionals alike on the front-line through engagement of professionals in policy design, visits, secondments in both directions, and consultation forums. Training and development, promotion and recruitment gateways should reinforce and ensure adoption of the *Apogee approach* across Whitehall.

xvi. We conclude our report with proposals on how the *Apogee approach* might be implemented in terms of energising and preparing, raising awareness and confidence in the new approach; and organising and doing to build the strong two-way bridges with clear line of sight between Whitehall and the front-line.

Our proposals are set out as five steps:

- 1.** Ministers and Civil Service Management Board to consider and agree the approach.
- 2.** Preparation of explanatory and case study material in consultation with front-line stakeholders that captures the essence of the *Apogee approach*.
- 3.** The Cabinet Office to organise the launch of an improvement programme including conferences and seminars, and new training opportunities.
- 4.** Departments to cascade detailed awareness of the approach and engage their front-line in developing it to suit their circumstances.
- 5.** Departments to embed the new approach in the governance of day to day work including through Capability Reviews and the Professional Skills for Government framework.

Summary of recommendations

Support to and from Ministers

1. Make 'front-line insight' a compulsory part of all policy advice to Ministers on public service reform, to match and complement the increasing use of 'customer insight'.

Before policy sign-off, ensure that the following questions are asked of the supporting policy formulation and development:

- What does the front-line evidence suggest about how the policies will be received and executed in practice?
- Has there been someone 'in the room' in policy formulation who has the authority to ensure the policy is enabled and properly implemented on the ground?
- Do the proposals incorporate learning and fresh ideas from the front-line about how best to secure the relevant policy outcome or goal?
- Have proposals been sufficiently road-tested?

2. Make time and space to develop and formulate long-term policies in partnership with key stakeholders (community and professionals).

3. Ensure relevant front-line staff are engaged in the design of policies that they will be responsible for implementing before public announcements and formal consultations.

Departments to assess emerging policies through a sounding board or gateway with front-line colleagues and other stakeholders in order to capture the following insights and to provide Ministers with this advice, in turn:

- Assess the capacity of the front-line to handle fresh change.
- Stress-test new ideas and whether they will be achievable.
- Ensure coherence and comprehensiveness of messages before they hit the front-line.
- Develop a grounded view of how long change will really take before results will become evident.

(The membership should be rotated to ensure freshness of views.)

Policy making ethos and structures

4. Re-shape policy work in support of the new principles of Public Service Reform, and so ensure it is 'fit for purpose' for current and future policy challenges and their complexities.

Develop practical performance indicators for using front-line insight in policy development and integrate into government assessment frameworks such as Capability Reviews and Customer Service Excellence Framework.

Ensure all policy formation is grounded in evidence and experience from front-line professionals.

5. Organise policy teams so they have access to relevant insights, information and networks; set up specific arrangements to capture, develop and disseminate front-line thinking.

Adopt a project matrix team approach to policy making – drawing together colleagues from across sectors and different organisations to work through policy issues, and building on the model of PSA project boards.

In those policy areas where professional endorsement is essential for acceptability and/or credibility, consider organising policy teams to be led by a front-line professional with appropriate expertise and experience of the subject matter.

Where useful and relevant, central policy teams should include those with recent front-line experience, either in an explicit advisory role, or as a team member.

6. Seek out ideas and practical experiences to improve the policy – optimise use of existing networks and develop routes to new sources of front-line information.

Always work in partnership with relevant professional bodies and networks when formulating policies.

Consider reaching out beyond well-established professional networks, to capture insights through other mechanisms such as regional consultation forums; government offices to help departments develop networks outside of Whitehall.

7. Increase awareness of conditions at the front-line within departments.

Develop a more 'porous' Civil Service through more or compulsory secondments, 'acquaint' visits, placements, arranging seminars to share insights and experiences, joint conferences.

Incentives, skills and capabilities

8. Policy making skills and capability to have a stronger emphasis on connecting with and drawing professional insights from the front-line.

Civil Service training, Professional Skills Competences and promotion should give greater weight to 'front-line professional insight in policy making'.

Consideration should be given to the preparation of a core curriculum for policy work and that this be done jointly by the National School of Government and the Head of Profession for policy work, and that demonstrable achievement of the learning outcomes be a prerequisite for promotion through key career gateways such as entry to the SCS and promotion to director level.

New recruits to the Civil Service senior policy posts should also be required to take an intensive programme to familiarise them with the nature of strategic policy work.

It should be an aspiration for Fast-Streamers to gain operational experience as part of their career development.

Evidence that policy staff have drawn on front-line insights in relevant policy areas should feature as part of their overall performance assessment.

Communicating with the front-line

9. Capturing local professional pride in their work and public service ethos.

Ensure proper recognition for efforts being made by front-line and/or central policy colleagues to provide or capture relevant insights, emphasising added public value that is being contributed by the front-line.

10. Ensuring policies are accessible and understandable.

Describe policies in multiple layers and in a way that the front-line and public will understand about where they have been, are now and can reasonably be asked to go next.

As far as possible make announcements about policies once they have been introduced into the system and after ideas have been 'market tested' with the front-line.

Develop explicit models and guidance for what constitutes an effective front-line visit when capturing insights as part of policy formulation.

Always ensure that the front-line is briefed before or simultaneously with the media.

Learning

11. Ensure an active circle of learning between the front-line, intermediaries and central Whitehall departments so that relevant insights in both directions are captured.

Consider joint training on key fundamental new policies, e.g. master classes bringing together Ministers, policy and front-line in order to share insights, knowledge and ideas; joint development of training materials.

Explore opportunities for facilitating real-time feedback and dissemination of learning through more extensive use of technology, e.g. communities of practice.

Engagement and Aspiration:

Reconnecting Policy Making with Front Line Professionals

A Report for the Minister for the Cabinet Office and for the Cabinet Secretary by the Fellows of the Sunningdale Institute

'A world class public service where policy making is grounded in front-line evidence and experience'

The task

1. The Sunningdale Institute was commissioned by the Cabinet Office (Economic and Domestic Affairs Secretariat) to produce an independent report looking at how to ensure better engagement and connection with front-line professionals in the design and development of policy. A summary description of the project and a list of those consulted are at Annex A. This report concludes the project. It recommends an initiative to re-invent policy making for modern times to ensure policies are grounded in front-line evidence and professional experience.

The opportunity: why this is an important issue for Whitehall to tackle

2. The Prime Minister has launched the next phase of public service reform². The ends are transformational: Fair Rules, Fair Chances and a Fair Say for all. The means, as set out in the policy document *Excellence and Fairness: Achieving World Class Public Services*³, are ambitious: achieving greater citizen empowerment, a new professionalism, and stronger strategic leadership. The risks are significant: there are the front-line professionals to convince, Whitehall policy makers to learn to work in new ways with the front-line, and Government to make good on its promise to 'reject the temptation to micro-manage from the centre'.
3. The Government has a powerful new narrative of reform. The top-down, central target driven approach associated with 'the New Public Management' school has delivered sharpness of focus but it is not the best way to address complex problems needing greater innovation and learning. More complex challenges need a more bottom-up user driven approach. Central government will facilitate and empower, not direct and control. Services will increasingly be tailored locally to meet needs as experienced by citizens themselves in the circumstances of their locality. Professional input and local initiative will foster innovation and excellence. Front-line professionals will have the authority to take more of a lead in addressing variability in performance.
4. The new strategy is not intended to create an 'absence of government'⁴ since there will be minimum standards set centrally and effective responses to under-performance. Any risks that local initiative could degenerate into producer capture will be offset by a model of presumed autonomy for public services 'in which, for those organisations that are high performing, there will be less inspection and central control'. Then they will be given the freedom 'to innovate and strive for world-class outcomes'. Risks of 'stovepipes' being created by additional delegation by departments only down their own delivery chains will be offset by an increased capacity for joining-up provision of services at the local level.
5. In order to drive the necessary reforms, therefore, Whitehall departments are going to have to develop new models for public services that bridge the extremes of top-down and bottom-up reform. Whitehall does not always know best what to do, but then neither always does the front-line; the bridge needs to be capable of carrying the traffic of ideas in both directions. Policy makers have a key intermediary role.
6. Developing the links between Whitehall policy makers and front-line professionals must therefore be at the heart of the next phase of public service reform. Engagement with the front-line and with citizens must go far beyond more consultation documents or opportunities for surveys and focus groups with service deliverers and users. A change of the culture of policy making is needed to allow the reshaping of services to meet local needs and deliver local solutions for local contexts, within parameters negotiated with central government. Policy making will have to be re-invented for modern times. A key task for the policy maker is to synthesise and translate front-line experience and learning, together with good evidence-based learning, into good policy so that front-line staff do not have to translate bad policy into good practice.
7. Ministerial announcements and government policy documents need to translate through to relevant action on the ground. Public services need to be delivered, implemented and applied in ways that improve users' lives. There is a rich source of knowledge about the customer and what works in public services at the front-line. It is prudent to harness this and to incorporate it into our thinking on policies in order to deliver the most effective outcomes for people who use public services. Without this, we may waste time and resources and miss the key opportunity through which life chances can be improved. In the current economic downturn, the challenges and pressures on public services will continue to grow, alongside a continued push for

2. Prime Minister, speech to Party Conference, October 2008

3. A digest of that document published by the Cabinet Office in summer 2008 is at Annex B

4. The quotes in this para are from *Excellence and Fairness: Achieving World Class Public Services*, Cabinet Office 2008

efficiency and better value for money. In this context, our recommendations take on an added dimension and importance about making successful policies through the effective use of insights and know-how. This paper, therefore, suggests that policy making should bring together direct insights from customers as well as insights from the front-line in order to make policies that are practical, effective and relevant. How all this is to be achieved in practice is not spelt out in *Excellence and Fairness*. Significantly, there is no mention in the original document of how, in practice, traditional policy is carried out today by Ministers and officials in Whitehall, although the Government's most recent public service reform publication does recognise the value of policy making that incorporates front-line insights⁵. There is, therefore, a real danger here to the success of the reform programme. We could find public service reform, emphasising delegation and devolution of authority to local level, launched down a separate 'change management' track whilst traditional centre and departmental policy work continues as before, supporting day to day Ministerial announcements, legislative proposals, departmental regulation and financial control mechanisms. Were that to happen we can confidently predict on the basis of our interviews that business as usual in the policy world will end up inadvertently frustrating local initiative and undermining the credibility of the fundamental reform message.

Working well

Connected Care, Hartlepool: *If citizens are to get access to the services they need to help them improve their lives, communities need to understand in real terms what services are available. Connected Care is Turning Point's vision for bringing services together to meet the whole needs of the community. It integrates health, housing and social care in the most deprived communities, with the community playing a central role in the design and delivery of those services.*

In Hartlepool, Connected Care is a partnership between ward residents, ward councillors, community associations and local services. Connected Care found that people did not know what was available to them, where or when. They did not have the 'know how' they need to find and use services effectively. Better information about health and social care services will help the community understand and make best use of the options available. It will also enable people to take more responsibility for their own health and social care. (Source: Connected Care Audit: Owton Ward, Turning Point, January 2006)

Not working as well

The Individual Learning Account programme's aim was to widen participation in learning and to help overcome financial barriers to learning faced by individuals. The scheme was specifically targeted at bringing back into learning those people who lacked skills and qualifications, or who had not undertaken learning for some time. However, the programme was shut down after evidence of abuse by a small minority of providers and further serious allegations of potential fraud and theft involving ILAs. (Source: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/ilal/index.shtml>)

In its report, the NAO concluded that ILAs were an example of innovative policy making, but that the scheme had to be withdrawn because of various factors including pressure to implement the scheme quickly and with inadequate planning, and not actively managing risks in the design and implementation of the scheme. For example, with regards the announcement of an extension to include an 80% discount scheme for basic IT and maths learning, 'no research was carried out on how it might work in practice'. (Source: National Audit Office, Individual Learning Accounts: Report October, 2002)

8. We have found in our interviews with those involved directly in delivery of public services a high level of frustration with the way a policy can simply be announced centrally when they can see it will not fit circumstances on the ground and will not maximise the opportunities for change. There is impatience at the front line with continual changes of course and central-over prescription. There is also a strong sense of not being able to serve the public to best effect because Whitehall departments find it hard to join up their efforts. Equally, in Whitehall we have found few who would disagree that present practices would not be adequate to support the new reform agenda. We were told that the following have occurred too often:

- a. Public announcements of new policies were rushed out (often to meet media management pressures) before proper analysis of their implications by the departments concerned and certainly before engagement with those who would have to implement them.
- b. Too little time for policy formulation also led to inadequate preparation of legislation, with much Parliamentary time wasted putting it right as a result.
- c. Public confidence in new policy was undermined because of a barrage of criticism at the outset by front-line professionals even before they learn the details – because the proposals come as a surprise.
- d. Implementation can subsequently stall, not represent best value for money, or even turn out to be impracticable for reasons that would in fact have been known to local management at the time the policy was announced.
- e. Failure by policy makers to network outwards sufficiently meant that new policies can fail to capture best practice, or fail to reflect current experience on the front-line, so opportunities for additional improvement in public service are missed.
- f. The appetite of professionals for improvement in service quality is undermined by a stream of top-down, sometimes conflicting, initiatives and changes in priority.
- g. The growth in arms length delivery bodies controlled down a vertical departmental delivery chain (with financial flows to match) has often made it harder for services to be coordinated and joined up at local level to meet the needs of the citizen. We found much support for the 'localisation' agenda of *Excellence and Fairness*.

9. Many people we interviewed could point to recent examples where these problems had been avoided and suggested that difficulties were primarily those that came with old ways of policy working. They ought to be avoidable. We found widespread agreement therefore that **there is a pressing need to re-invent policy making for the modern era.**

The evidence: developing a shared understanding of what good policy making should now involve

10. Policy making is multi-faceted. Examples we have examined show that good policy making does not stop at high-level Ministerial statements of objective. Good policy making looks hard at what will be needed to turn vision into effective action on the ground. In particular, at what facilitating steps – new legislation, regulation, organisation, finance, communications, etc – should be taken by government to enable this to happen, drawing on experience and evidence from the front-line of what resources of people, money and time they will need. The **Modernising Government White Paper (1999)** defined good policy making as:

'The process by which governments translate their political vision into programmes and actions to deliver "outcomes" – desired changes in the real world'

We endorse that definition. It correctly sees policy making as a process that has to reach out to the front-line and to the citizen to deliver outcomes. We also read it as covering not just the development of new initiatives but also the review of the effectiveness of current policies and the search for improvement and greater value for money.

'Many front-line professionals don't know how policy making works while many senior civil servants don't know how front-line institutions work'

(Children's sector)

11. As argued in paragraph 5 above, there are two extremes of top-down and bottom-up approaches, and our aspiration should be to achieve a better balance between the two. In policy formulation it is important to ensure diversity of insights and expertise – mixing *both* the strengths that good civil servants bring to policy making

with the insights of colleagues at the front-line⁶. For example, front-line colleagues will need the support of central policy staff in order to scale up their experiences into national policy. There is a need for bottom-up continuous improvement together with informed top-down strategic direction.

12. The best practice that we have seen (an example being Pathways to Work) occurs when there is devolved authority given to the front-line to draw up instructions, produce guidance for the citizen, and to experiment taking account of local circumstances – within a strategic framework set by ‘the centre’. It is rare that a central ‘policy’ can be given directly to the front-line for implementation in the terms in which it is conceived in central policy discussion or passed in legislation. Policy makers do not always seem to have recognised that significant interpretation of policy and translation into operational language has to be added by professional management at successive levels in the delivery hierarchy or private/ third sector contractual network. The role of the departmental policy official is usually best regarded as the facilitation of the work of others, not the direction of those efforts.

‘Pathways to work’ is an example of a policy area that made use of insights and experiences from the front-line. In a workshop of stakeholders that were involved in this policy’s development and implementation, the following features were suggested as reasons for its success in this respect:

1. Unified understanding of how this policy was beneficial to service users. A ‘one team’ approach emerged through the adoption of a clear and common goal.
2. Front-line staff were involved right from the start – creating a strong sense of empowerment and motivation.
3. Training was an essential element in the success of this policy implementation.
4. A strong sense of communication was key. Everyone involved had a clear understanding of the intended outcomes for the service user.
5. There was no undue pressure for quick solutions, including from Ministers. There was space and time for the process and policy to be developed with rigour and care.

13. Our recommended definition of policy making, rightly, sees the process starting with political vision. In many areas of policy, however, while the vision of the final outcome (reduced levels of teenage pregnancy or knife crime for example) can be clearly stated centrally, the best set of detailed policies to give effect to those aims may not be so obvious. Sufficient time must be allowed for departmental policy staff to model which combination of policy levers can best produce the desired effect on the ground. Again, it is at the front-line that knowledge will have built up about the effectiveness of previous initiatives, and the conditions that may have to be established for new policies to succeed in each locality. The *Excellence and Fairness* document is rightly clear that this is expertise that must be tapped throughout the policy process; the innovative fresh ideas for how better to achieve the political vision ought to be welling upwards from the front-line, grounded in hard experience.

‘There is a distinct time lapse between conception of a policy and its implementation at the front-line. This time lapse leads to policy ideas, motivation and impetus being lost in translation’

(Senior Whitehall official)

14. A related issue is that any individual policy initiative, although desirable in itself, may not fit well with existing policies from other departments (or other parts of the originating department) in terms of the impact on the citizen or the locality. The best source of advice on this translation process is the local implementers who will be able to alert Whitehall to conflicting pressures. They are also the best judges of where value for money can be found.

‘In my experience, officials do generally try to iterate policy development with others, including the front-line, but not as much as they could or should’

(Director General, Whitehall)

6. This is a key feature of the Civil Service *Capability Building Programme*, which was established to respond to the capability gaps identified in Departmental Capability Reviews. The programme aims to help departments learn from one another by capturing leading practice. The first project (September - December 2008) focused on building capability around evidence based policy making. This work on evidence-based policy making has described a spectrum of evidence types for policy of which ‘front-line intelligence’ is one

15. On the positive side, examination of successful (and some less successful) past policy making does encouragingly show a common understanding that:

- Examples of effective policies at the sharp end of delivery have indeed usually involved better engagement and connection with front-line workers in policy formulation, and many succeeded precisely because those involved in the policy work in departments saw their role as at the bottom of an inverted pyramid supporting and facilitating the front-line work of the base and not as the apex directing downwards.

To inform the 2020 Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy, the DCSF set up an expert group drawn from across the workforce. The group developed a shared vision for the integrated working and for development of all the professional groups that work with children and young people. There is a strong belief that, by working together, people in the workforce can make a bigger difference – particularly for the most disadvantaged children. (Source: 2020 Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy, DCSF Dec 2008).

- More horizontal rather than vertical thinking is needed for effective collaboration. The spirit of devolution in Local Area Agreements has created conditions that can lead to innovation and experimentation by local authorities, but parts of government remain risk-averse. Pre-existing prescriptive guidance from regulatory authorities has for example not caught up with the approach being taken in the Comprehensive Area Assessments of the Audit Commission.
- Better results have come from engaging with all those groups whose ideas can inspire new policies and whose contribution will be needed to give them effect, and not just the visible obvious 'front-line professionals'. (Nurses and doctors are visible front-line professionals but so are the technicians in the laboratories who will have to cope with, for example, expansion of screening programmes, and the private sector cleaners on whose work the control of infection rests, or the HR teams engaged in recruiting hard to find skills.) Such wider engagement also has helped to manage any tendency for 'capture' by individual professional groupings. In the context of this paper the term 'professional' should be interpreted widely. There are obvious public service groups subject to professional inspection and regulation of their conduct, such as the police, nurses, teachers, social workers, doctors and government lawyers. Border agency staff,

DEFRA environmental officers, planning inspectors, prison, probation and court staff, HR and finance experts, coastguards, Met Office forecasters, merchant seamen and IT programmers are just examples from the huge range of professions employed in the public service. The third sector should also be considered to be at the front-line of public service delivery, alongside colleagues from private sector providers (see paragraphs 41-52 below).

- Good examples of policy making appear to arise out of a 'one team' approach by the relevant Ministers and senior officials. Policy making is therefore not an activity reserved to senior Ministers and their 'policy staffs' that work directly with them either in the centre of government (No. 10, Cabinet Office, and HM Treasury) or in the centre of departments.

'We worked as one team – across both departments and including Ministers. This was incredibly motivating and critical to our success'

(Front-line colleague)

- At its best it is evidently a team effort between the politically committed who share the vision and the politically impartial permanent staff whose job is to enable its execution through enabling appropriate lower level policies, regulations, contracts and instructions to be available to guide the front-line⁷. That cannot be achieved without staff in departments themselves having a team approach outwards both with the professionals who are managing the issues on the front-line, and those in other areas of government whose efforts can help – or hinder – achievement of the vision. It is also evident that where Ministers regularly visit the front-line to thank the service deliverers the effect is positive.
- Early endorsement by relevant professional groups has made it more likely that new policies will take root. That has normally followed their being taken into the confidence of government so that announcements do not come as a surprise. The best examples are where departments have explicitly agreed 'rules of engagement' with professional groupings (including in the private and charitable sectors) to allow for their experience to be tapped and for forewarning of likely changes (including the content of major speeches) with an acceptance of confidentiality until policies are announced. Officials need to be clear about how effectively to engage key colleagues, and the point at which such engagement happens. Without this, there is a risk of wasting resources and efforts of all involved, not capturing relevant insights

7. Team effort was a key characteristic of DWP's Pathways to Work programme: Ministers, departments, front-line colleagues (both in the NHS and in DWP) and providers were all galvanised around the central value of improving people's lives, and there was compelling evidence of genuine collaboration and each-way learning between different layers of the delivery chain, e.g. Ministers and senior officials met direct with front-line job centre plus colleagues. See text box on page 14.

that could improve the policy and of damaging relations with key partners. An example cited in our fieldwork of where these risks manifested themselves was the Department of Health's work on developing a standard contract for the engagement of health services.

- The best sustained results on the ground have often come because the local front-line was encouraged and helped to accept the challenge of continuous improvement so that the initial policy is developed through experience of local conditions (the LEAN initiatives in several departments provide good current examples⁸). Piloting is not always an option, but it is noticeable that where new programmes were piloted and the experience captured, analysed and fed back into the final policy, the results were consistently improved.
16. A further example of good practice that we point to is the way that some Ministers work with their Permanent Secretaries and senior officials consciously to question the policy process supporting them, asking:
- Do those in their department with the key policy making roles have sufficient feel for the current circumstances of front-line delivery? Are they sensitive to how the policies will be received and executed in practice, and thus be led to ask the right questions? This is not just about what policy makers 'need to know' in detail about work on the front-line but also about what they 'need to understand' about the feelings of those that work on it, particularly in being open to listening to inconvenient voices.
 - Is there someone 'in the room' when policies come to be discussed who will accept responsibility – and has the necessary authority – to enforce consistency in policy throughout the delivery system in support of the initiative and to ensure outcomes on the ground in accordance with the policy are enabled rather than frustrated?

And, most importantly:

- Do the proposed policies incorporate learning and fresh ideas from the front-line about what will best secure the policy goal? Does a proposal capture innovation and best practice as it would be recognised by front-line professionals or have built-in proposals for establishing best practice through experimentation (such as pilots to test ideas)? Have proposals been sufficiently road-tested in terms of achievability, timescales and resources as well as the management of knock-on effects on other priorities?

17. Such considerations lead us to the conclusion that policy activity needs to be reconceptualised as a process of problem exploration with the front-line and other stakeholders in which 'the networked public officials'⁹ responsible for policy formulation act as two-way translators and facilitators, tapping resources both of evidence and experience.
18. Such a re-invention of policy making would fit well with a development of the Professional Skills for Government agenda concerning the engagement of front-line professionals in the next phase of public service reform. The benefits will however be felt beyond the greater professionalism agenda since all three themes of the next phase of reform – citizen empowerment, new professionalism, and strategic leadership – will involve changes in the nature of policy work within departments and between departments and their delivery networks. In future, the front-line professionals will be written firmly into the policy process.

The concept of modern policy making: the Apogee approach

19. The description of modern policy making in *Excellence and Fairness* includes the ability to:
- identify long term challenges
 - establish overall operating frameworks
 - develop external partnerships
 - understand the aspirations of citizens
 - foster a culture of innovation
 - avoid the temptation to dictate change
 - empower local front-line professionals to link up in new ways 'to shape services much closer to the citizen'.
20. Policy makers in departments will thus have to become expert at accessing both **Evidence** and **Experience** to ensure that policies are formulated on the basis of the best possible quantitative modelling of outcomes incorporating data on citizen behaviours, needs and aspirations, and to ensure that practical knowledge on the front-line of what is likely to work in practice, and how services should best be reconfigured to meet the needs of the citizen, is captured.

8. For example, DWP established the DWP Lean Way in 2007 as a key enabler to meet the department's customer, efficiency and capability challenges. The DWP Lean Way is an ambitious four-year programme to embed continuous improvement using Lean behaviours and techniques across a department of over 100,000 staff. It puts the customer at the centre of everything the department does, and utilises front-line staff expertise to continuously improve the customer and staff experience by removing waste (anything that does not add value to the customer experience) from the department's delivery services. An example from the NHS is 'Productive Ward', an innovative and practical programme of work which aims to release time to care.

9. Dean, 2008

We must operate at two levels:

1. *Heighten the voice of the front-line*
2. *Ensure Whitehall policy makers have the appetite to hear this voice*

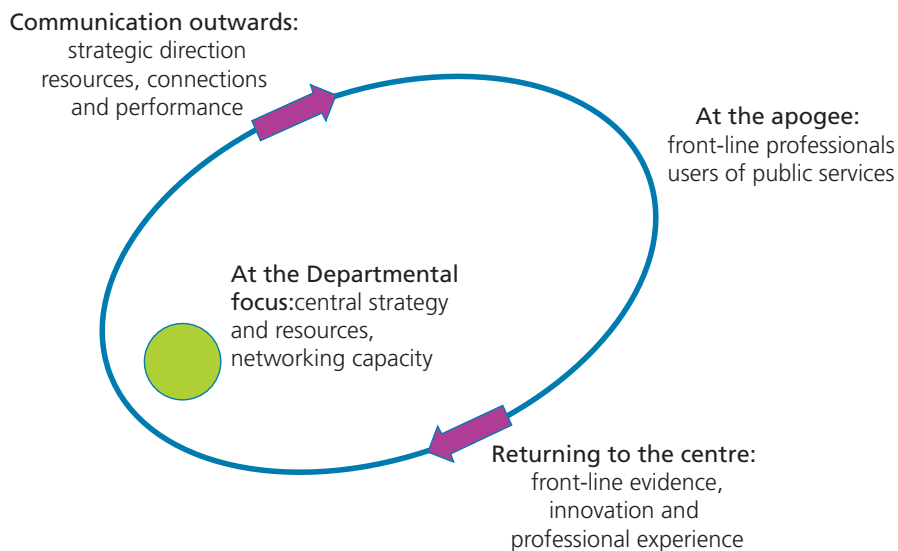
(Permanent Secretary)

21. Policy makers will have to see themselves as high energy networkers, mobilising, engaging and energising partnerships across government, local government and the front-line professionals themselves. Their job will be to synthesise and translate front-line experience (and good analysis) into good policy – so that front-line staff don't have to translate bad policy into good practice. Key to this is the idea that policy advisors have the insight to ensure that the evidence and analysis that is captured and synthesised contains qualitative, credible front-line experience and ideas (including ideas on how to deliver the policy, deliverability being a criterion for good policy making) alongside quantitative data – and that innovative ways are used to capture that front-line evidence base. The civil servant of the future will need to be trained and developed as 'the networked public official'. In addition, better processes will need to be developed to engage actively the front-line professionals in the formulation of policy itself from the outset in developing priorities and turning political visions into workable policies and plans.

Those processes will need to be two-way: harnessing front-line ideas for innovation and investment (as indeed is happening in the Darzi NHS review, but this is so far the exception rather than the rule for day to day policy making across Whitehall). We have found almost universal support for the analysis in this paper of where behaviours need to change.

22. We coin a shorthand term for this pro-active networking, facilitative approach that could act as a T-shirt slogan for the way modern policy staffs should re-invent themselves: the *Apogee* approach – **Aspiring to Policy making Grounded in Evidence and Experience.**
23. The policy maker must of course remain guided by close contact with the parent department. But the orbit of the policy maker must be extensive enough to cover all the stakeholders including those in the professions that make up the furthest front-line. Working outwards is the communication of thinking on strategic guidance, national standards, value for money objectives and resource constraints. On the return journey the essential evidence and experience from the front-line and the essential feel for the requirements and circumstances of the citizen at the locality come into departments. To extend the analogy, many orbits may be needed before communication and understanding in both directions is satisfactorily achieved.

The Apogee Approach



The relative roles of Ministers, Special Advisers and officials in policy making

24. Civil servants have never had a monopoly on policy advice to Ministers, nor have we found anyone arguing that they should have such. Ministers are accountable for their decisions on the choice of policies for the Government to follow and can look for ideas from any quarter. On their behalf, Special Advisers maintain very close links with policy think tanks and professional institutes at home and overseas. But officials, precisely because of their political neutrality and continuity, must remain the principal advisers on how best to connect, in the spirit of our definition, the political vision to outcomes on the ground.

'In an ideal world, Ministers or officials would always collect a range of views on a policy area and then have considered discussion about policy details and direction on the basis of this'

(Director General, Whitehall)

25. In order to be able to do that, departmental policy officials need to see themselves as 'professional' facilitators and networkers, connecting up all those with a potential stake in the policy area including active front-line engagement and consultation in the synthesis and translation of convincing and coherent policy narratives. Key to this is the idea that policy advisers have the insight to ensure that the evidence and analysis that is captured and synthesised contains qualitative, credible front-line experience and ideas, including about how to deliver the policy, alongside quantitative data. They can then with confidence advise Ministers on the practical options – to cost, time and quality – for turning their policy vision into action by the front-line. It should also be the task of the Civil Servant policy maker to ensure that experience and ideas are drawn in continuously from the front-line (whether public, private or voluntary sector) from the earliest stage of thinking about the policy issue and to inject understanding of the issues around implementation at the earliest stage. The role of a 'policy' desk officer in a government department must therefore be defined to be a pro-active, energetic one. Drafting the submissions and speeches, answering the Parliamentary Questions and correspondence, and briefing the Bill teams is all necessary, but should not define the role. Training should be reshaped to reflect the *Apogee* approach. We have

found private industry has a better understanding of the pro-active role of their executives than government in that respect.

26. In our discussions we have found the term 'policy formulation' useful to describe what policy officials do as part of the policy making team, as distinct from choice of policies by the elected Government of the day. Policy formulation thus involves encouraging the inward flow of innovation, networking with colleagues in other departments and agencies and with front-line professionals, and putting together proposals for consideration by government. Policy formulation should normally include examining alternatives, often involving parallel action by other parts of government, with assessment of their likely effect, risks and costs, value for money and at least in outline a feel for what would be involved in implementation.

27. We suggest that the first, and single most important, step that could be taken in implementing further reform is to develop a shared understanding along these lines between Ministers, their Permanent Secretaries and senior officials and their key front-line leaders of what good modern policy formulation in government must now involve.

Overcoming the obstacles: learning from past experience of government

28. None of these are completely new thoughts. Government already has a substantial literature, based on research, on what makes for good policy making. For example, one Cabinet Office study¹⁰ from 2000/2001 identifies nine features of good policy making:

- forward looking
- outward looking
- innovative, flexible and creative
- evidence-based
- inclusive
- joined up
- subject to review
- outcomes evaluated
- with lessons learned.

29. A parallel Cabinet Office study of the same period concluded that front-line staff do indeed offer an effective route to meaningful evidence of the implementation and effectiveness of policy proposals, but to do so requires:

- clear objectives for the policy development and policy process

- consideration of the front-line as relevant to the policy in question
 - a whole system approach to the involvement of the front-line (and others)
 - proper resourcing and planning and up front investment in the involvement.
- 30.** That these sensible reports have not been fully followed up in recent years suggests that there are some deep-seated cultural issues that have held government back and that now need to be tackled. From our interviews we identify four such main issues.
- 31.** First, the new public management agenda with its legacy of contracting out, contestability, purchaser-provider splits, quasi-markets, and the consolidation of power at the centre still casts a long shadow. Part of the answer to the relative stagnation of thinking about policy making itself has been the perceived need to concentrate effort on improving ‘delivery’. As *Excellence and Fairness* explains, the public services have had to operate within a ‘top-down’ target-driven culture. It was necessary to develop, for example through the work of Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit (PMDU), much clearer ideas about effective delivery networks, as well as engage in a major effort led by the Office of Government Commerce (OGC) to improve delivery skills in project and programme management. However, thinking inside government about modern policy making in terms of bottom-up innovation took a back seat and the interest groups outside government came to be seen as barriers to change to be defeated rather than partners in change to be wooed. We can also see this effect in the emphasis that departments have rightly expected the National School of Government to give to training in delivery skills and in strategic leadership. The development of the curriculum should be based on an agreed top management view of what is required in policy work in the coming period, given the challenges facing government and the need to move to a new whole system approach to public service reform, as expressed in *Excellence and Fairness*.
- 32.** Secondly, the emphasis on the objective setting delivery model operated within individual commands in departments has also meant that the ‘whole system’ approach has been under-developed since the early days of pioneering work on ‘joined up government’ in the late 1990s. There are outstanding recent exceptions (the current work on counter-radicalisation is one such) but the holistic approach does not seem to have been mainstreamed into day to day policy work. For example, a child can be in more than one vulnerable group, but until recently Whitehall has run different schemes with separate initiatives for each vulnerable group. The cross-cutting PSA cross-departmental boards to support the delivery of particular PSAs are an example of good practice.
- 33.** Thirdly, we have the strains introduced by the need to manage media pressure. Several of those we interviewed pointed to examples where the media-driven world has led to dates being fixed for policy speeches and announcements, publication of policy papers and legislative proposals before departments had any idea of what would be sensible policy content. The inevitable result is that the Centre of Government scrambles for initiatives at the last minute, with little chance of the experience of front-line professionals being brought to bear. Considerations of secrecy in the build up to Ministerial announcements have also tended to make the few civil servants in the know nervous about consulting, even to alert civil servants in other departments. This may well be linked to perceptions that Ministers might not welcome early wider consultation and policy ideas. Like trying to build a wall from the top row of ornamental bricks downwards, such examples rely on the hope that later on someone will be able to dig solid foundations to hold the whole construction up. Such behaviours increase hugely the risk of failure of policies to be implementable and to generate the desired outcomes on the ground. An alternative approach, taking a leaf from Treasury budget planning, is for Ministers to plan work programmes with their policy teams during the year to develop lines of thinking with the evidence and experience of the front-line so that when legislative or policy windows appear, the necessary foundations have already been prepared.
- 34.** Finally, many of those we have interviewed have told us that in some parts of the Civil Service there is still too much emphasis on what was described as an old ‘Fast Stream’ culture: too much abstract analysis and not enough injection of practical common sense and the lessons of experience of those who actually have to deliver the outcomes sought. The reason staff get themselves recruited for central policy posts is usually that they are smart, well-informed and quick on the uptake as well as being effective in small group interactions. Some of them need positive encouragement to get out of Whitehall and mix with others who have practical understanding of how organisations employing large numbers of different professionals are run. Very busy, very clever ‘policy’ people need reminding of what life outside the centre is like for those implementing their policies, where there is often not the same sense of certainty about the right thing to do and where results come not from diktat or exhortation but from leadership, patiently building networks of trust and support. Training and development, and promotion

gateways should reinforce and ensure compliance to this. The Chairman of PASC recently said¹¹: 'The whole culture of the senior Civil Service needs to be changed. The top jobs should go to those who have successfully managed programmes and projects – in health, social welfare and taxation, as well as construction and defence. At the moment they are given to those best at helping their Ministers get through the political week. Changing this would produce a new breed of civil servants, who would concentrate on securing successful public services. It would alter ambition and behaviour right down the line.'

- 35.** We recognise that this criticism has often been levelled at those whose careers have been confined to a limited range of central posts (not least we were told in HM Treasury where the emphasis traditionally was on the power of intellectual, not to say forensic, analysis to solve policy problems at an abstract level of economic theory). We also agree with those 'old hands' we interviewed who emphasised that the so-called old-fashioned policy skills are still very much needed to keep the system running – and in practice much appreciated by Ministers when in crisis those skills come to be most needed. There does not, however, have to be a conflict between the generations here. We were told of practice in some departments to mandate front-line experience as part of a 'Fast Stream' career¹², and initiatives such as those in DWP that create the expectation that headquarters officials will go 'back to the shop floor' for periods to refresh their experience¹³. Such steps have not devalued the old skills but, if anything, have improved the ability of the key individuals in these departments to support their Ministers with grounded advice. It is also fair to point to the figures showing just how many individuals have been recruited over the last few years directly into the Senior Civil Service after successful careers outside and who provide relevant external experience. Of course, for these mid and late career entrants, training in the requirements of working with Ministers and Parliament is also necessary.
- 36.** An extra dimension now added in the 2008 *Excellence and Fairness* document is the need to 'co-create' at a local level new ways of delivering services to meet the needs of citizens and to allow local choice within a framework of national standards and to be able to take advantage of the *Transforming Government* agenda. From our research we suggest that there should be no difficulty in gaining widespread agreement today among public servants to tackle that agenda with enthusiasm and commitment; steps already taken such as Local Area
- Agreements have great potential in that respect. The drafting of the guidance on the Children's Act was done by a writing group of policy makers and implementers together, creating ownership for the policies in the Act. On the other hand, the Children's Plan had a simple guide prepared for children and parents – but not for the front-line workers who had to implement it. To get everyone on the same page, we have been reminded repeatedly in our interviews, does require changes in behaviours. 'Learning by doing' has to become a virtuous circle of active learning¹⁴.
- 37.** As Michael Barber told the Cabinet in December 2004, command and control can shift a service from 'awful' to 'adequate' but not from 'adequate' to 'good' or 'great'¹⁵. Command and control will always be appropriate in certain circumstances, especially when the front-line lacks the capacity and/ or capability. But the legacy of command control, and its impact upon the relationship between government and the front-line, can make further change more difficult as it tends to disempower the front-line by failing to adequately consult it in the process of change. Part of the current challenge facing government is to create the conditions and relationships to engender an approach to and an agenda of change that aligns the interests of both parties. In the words of a recent Demos report (see Bibliography), 'the alliance for change remains fragile. The operating system of government is still dominated by the new public management, expensive consultants and notions of delivery chains that start with policy and end with a one-dimensional "customer"'. A shift of language and aspirations is not enough to reorient the substance of how government works. New tools, practices, organising frameworks and sources of disruption are needed.'
- 38.** It is also evident to us that earlier work on improving policy making has often started from the premise that 'what works' already exists either at home or overseas. The major task has often been seen as finding the best practice and then devising incentives to encourage the spread of such best practice. The agenda for citizen empowerment in the next phase of public reform is, however, of a different nature. It is not clear what will be the institutions, financial mechanisms, structures and processes that will make many of these transformations happen. Much new ground will have to be broken. The solutions will therefore have to be co-created across organisational boundaries of central and local government with the front-line professions of the many

11. Tony Wright MP, evidence session, PASC 17th July, 2008

12. It is not a mandatory requirement for Fast Streamers to obtain operational experience as part of the development programme. However, some departments have set a requirement for Fast Streamers to obtain operational experience as a core part of their career progression. Departments that have emphasised the importance of gaining operational experience include DWP, HMRC, BERR and DCSF.

13. The DWP 'back to the floor' programme requires DWP senior managers in headquarters to spend a week a year working at the front-line (as opposed to observing). There is a high uptake of the programme across senior civil servants in DWP and the department's Permanent Secretary personally champions it. The powerful messages created by 'back to the floor' are reinforced through the use of technology, e.g. writing about lessons learned on department-wide management blogs.

14. Rapid, real-time feedback was clearly important in the development of the Literacy Hour (evidence from Sir Michael Barber) and in the handover from Phase 1 to Phase 2 of the rollout of Pathways to Work. See also the NAO findings at http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/workingprogress/gov_learn.htm

15. Sir Michael Barber, *Instruction to Deliver*, London 2008

agencies, charities and companies involved. Organising and animating this ‘learning through doing’ will be central to the new culture of modern policy making – and will be testing for all concerned.

39. In summary on this point, we feel that there is an element of cultural time lag in the fashionable criticism of a decade ago of senior civil servants as being too ‘policy oriented’ in an old-fashioned way. Much has been done over the last few years to dispel these perceptions, for example through building up delivery skills and injecting talent from outside. But we believe from our interviews that there is nevertheless a need to produce a new image of what good policy work looks like, and that it is not a separate universe from ‘delivery’. Policy work should be seen as a key function of the departmental civil servant, working in a team with Ministers and their special advisers and with front-line professionals. What is needed is a new policy making narrative that meets the criticism expressed by Dr Gillian Morgan¹⁶, Chief Executive of the NHS Federation (October 2007), among others, that ‘to date, staff and public have not had a compelling story setting out the need to change and this has resulted in their increasing levels of disengagement.’

Police Stop and Search/Stop and Account Policy Workshop

As part of our fieldwork, we held a workshop of key front-line and policy making representatives who jointly came up with the following conclusions and learnings for future policy making:

- Policies must have clear objectives and measurable outcomes must be communicated effectively to avoid confusion and poor practice.
- Training for front-line staff to ensure smooth implementation of a policy is vital.
- Bodies such as national policing organisations and community groups play a crucial role in policy development and front-line rollout.
- Front-line and strategic professionals and community leaders must have a role in the policy making process and be able to hold policy makers to account. Effective engagement must be at national, regional and local level.
- Reliable evidence on operational and strategic issues must be available to take into account for changes in policy direction.
- Engagement and learning from the community should be achieved through direct contact and engagement with local statutory bodies.

Learning the right lessons from the private and third sectors about encouraging upwards pressure for continuous improvement

40. The approach we are advocating is one of *services to the public* in which the best can be found from statutory, third or private sectors in the interest of providing better, and constantly improving, services to the public. We have looked at how the private sector and the third sector uses equivalent high level strategies for growing the enterprise, moving into new markets, and developing new products and services to meet emerging customer and client needs.
41. Big companies need hierarchies of policies to launch new product lines, ensure consistency of customer experience, control investment and ensure compliance with corporate governance. The best of the private sector does, however, empower local management to manage the business within these limits. In the third sector there has to be a very direct and immediate link from the organisation to its front-line since it is the very nature of voluntary activity that services have to be driven by the needs of the user.
42. What is clear in both the private and third sectors is leadership responsibility for policy formation and implementation, grounded in a culture of action rather than analysis. Analysis and delivery go hand in hand in the strategy process. Top management sets objectives, based on clear criteria, which are communicated on an ongoing basis throughout the organisation. Leaders are clearly visible and involved with the front-line. To take a private sector example, in British Petroleum, success was based on a strategic planning process designed to challenge existing thinking, constantly re-examining what the company and its competitors were doing and what its customers wanted. The starting point of the strategy process was conversations about purpose: Who we are? What business are we in? What makes the company distinctive? What are our key capabilities and where do we need to strengthen them? What kind of knowledge is critical and how do we optimise learning relationships? A third sector example might be the NHS strategy to back PCTs that commission employee-led social enterprises, such as the Surrey nurses’ health visiting social enterprise. This new strategy came about because of the strategic recognition that the health needs of the local population would be better understood by such local social enterprises rather than formal NHS structures. Again, a culture grounded in action not analysis.
43. A major thrust in successful private sector firms has been to break down the barriers between organisational silos

16. Gillian Morgan now holds the appointment of Permanent Secretary to the Welsh Assembly Government

and to foster joint ownership of strategy, supporting this with explicit policies for sharing knowledge and learning. In such an environment, effective policy formation is conceptualised as an emergent process, not the linear rollout of ideas and targets from the centre outwards and downwards. Policy development is a process of experimentation, learning and translation, a dialogue in which top management and the front-line 'negotiate' and agree a language, a narrative and a strategy for meeting complex strategic challenges. Command and control gives way to responsible autonomy. Hierarchy and vertical organisation gives way to horizontal organisation, with teams which own a particular issue and have the authority, skills, capabilities, and networks of relationships to effect change. Organisational innovations to support this include matrix and project management and new organisational structures, intermediary structures such as 'overlay teams'¹⁷, which cut across departments or divisions to pull together expertise and knowledge that would not come together in a hierarchical system. Such units provide the basis for new forms of focus. For example, McKinsey is organised geographically with overlay units to pool knowledge about different industry customer groups; Unilever's business units are based on product line, with overlay units focusing on relationships with key retail customers.

44. A recent Towers Perrin Talent Report¹⁸ on what drives employee engagement found the following among the key factors: employees' decision-making authority; customer focus; a collaborative work environment where people work well in teams; employee input into decision making; and senior management having a clear vision for long-term success. Knowledge management is important. There are good examples of this in the public sector, for example in GCHQ's move from a 'need to know' culture to a 'need to share' culture, but there needs to be a consistent mechanism or process for capturing, for example, good examples of front-line engagement. The capturing and leveraging of knowledge is a key issue.
45. One should not over-exaggerate the management superiority of the private sector nor see its lessons as offering a panacea for public sector reform. Recent events demonstrate that the private sector has its own problems to resolve. Some leading firms have gone astray by losing the connection between top management and the front-line. For example, in the 2005 tragedy at BP's Texas City oil refinery some criticised organisational deficiencies and a lack of focus in senior management on operational management and a top management that had become increasingly remote. Nor does the present financial crisis
- show banking sector reward structures, or financial sector governance generally, in a good light. Many private sector firms are struggling with moving their leadership from a functionally focused, largely unconnected set of groups to a more cohesive, collaborative enterprise which accepts the collective responsibility for shaping and pursuing agreed business objectives.
46. A key leadership challenge here is to promote *connectivity* which involves addressing issues of constituting the relevant teams, questions of responsibility and authority, management of complex interfaces, and management style and culture. Perhaps the major challenge is to think of ways of harnessing the different skills, knowledge and experience of different groups in relation to the complex needs of new programmes that require the integration of diverse expertise and cut across existing organisational structures. In firms that have adopted this approach it has been of primary importance to develop a new breed of managers ('programme managers' in the automobile industry, for example) responsible for the whole but not 'tied' to any one functional discipline, tasked with aligning the interests of the different groups.
47. The culture change required is that individual/ team commitment is no longer to department, division or function but to the overarching programme. This requires a rebalancing of responsibilities and authority and the creation of new roles. Bureaucratic and autocratic management induce competitiveness and risk-avoidance and both these tendencies need to be transcended.
48. Factors drawn from the private sector that mitigate poor policy design include:
- *Confusion over roles and responsibilities during the design phase.* To counter this, more complete definition of the problem space and the mission of the policy are useful, together with an agreed matrix of responsibilities. The earlier in the development process this is started the better. Authority needs to be defined and agreed.
 - *Problems of delivering different parts of the organisation.* Here it is crucial to develop a cadre of managers who serve as linking pins and knowledge brokers, have requisite ties and experience of different organisational interests but with strong allegiance to the overarching needs and mission of the policy. This raises the question of who are the key knowledge brokers and leaders in the policy development process, what is their network of contact and influence and how this can be optimised.
 - *Career development.* Performance appraisal systems might need redesigning to reward working across organisational silos and new career paths developed.

17. Gould and Campbell

18. Towers Perrin (2003) Working today: Understanding What Drives Employee Engagement. Towers Perrin HR Services.

- *Politics and internal competition.* Effective policy development requires a culture of consensus seeking, with focus on the mission, open communication and sharing of information (particularly of a problematic kind), high levels of trust, respect and confidence, and a prioritisation of the end customer's needs, not politics, personalities or sectional game-playing.
49. Good companies ensure that new policies are fully market-tested on customers before rollout, and most importantly, successful companies ensure central initiatives reinforce rather than weaken local initiatives to improve service delivery and customer experience. As an example consider the TESCO steering wheel (page 24). The theme is continuous striving for improvement in little things as well as big. The connection is evident between the contribution of central policies and local initiative, with staff reminded that 'every little helps'. Such an approach is only possible if TESCO HQ sees its corporate policy role as enabling the stores to be the heart of the business. This attitude matches the developments sought by the Government in its latest reform document.
 50. The best of the private sector has invested in processes to capture relevant knowledge and learning about their customers and to ensure that it is shared where it is needed. In order to integrate their 'policy' and delivery teams TESCO set up a new structural mechanism to link its buyers and stores' staff so that they could come together to operationalise strategy. A Support Office acts as an intermediate mechanism between head office strategists and the stores. Dell computers have used the 'Dell Ideas' website to capture feedback from users about their products and services and how they might be improved. In the private sector, a key driver of change has been the use of new technologies to promote innovative ways of connecting in virtual space to supplement face-to-face contact¹⁹. Web 2.0 tools are helping firms to encourage and develop new and different ways of collaborating and of engaging with customers. Using 'wikis' and 'blogs' can strengthen stakeholder communication and develop a stronger sense of involvement, community, buy-in to decision making and more compelling policy narratives. Wikis, for example, can help achieve an agreed terminology/ language. The front-line (employees and customers) is empowered to engage with messages from the centre and 'translate that into a set of terms that is meaningful in their own context'. A model of effective policy development as a process of translation challenges the image of policy making as diffusion in which ideas originate in top management or management consultants and are meant to be implemented as designed. In policy making as translation, engagement is aimed at surfacing friction and resistance. 'Translation is seen as a collective act of creation and not as a bothersome impediment to swift diffusion'²⁰. Firms such as BP have reorganised around virtual team networks, constantly exploring the possibilities of new technology and the effects of the physical ecology on working relations.
 51. Time pressure is clearly a barrier to the development of the relationships necessary to ensure proposals are adequately grounded in evidence and experience²¹. That is made worse in the public sector by the proliferation of initiatives and announcements. Private sector firms are much more judicious in launching initiatives and will insist on driving the business through a limited number of major changes at any one time. TESCO spends 80% of the time designing a solution to a problem and then only needs to spend 20% on implementation. As they would put it, you have to slow down to go fast. As a result the private sector is able to keep things simple; the public sector complicates through the need to try to explain the endless streams of instructions and initiatives that descend on the front-line.
 52. The Chief Executives of the private sector (along with senior officials) also seem to have a much better grasp than senior decision-makers, Ministers and officials, of the time lags between new initiatives being announced and results appearing on the ground. It is less common to find the public sector phenomenon of new instructions arriving on the front-line to change course just as they are gearing up to implement the last initiative: 'order, counter-order, disorder' as the military saying has it. Companies such as Kingfisher operate models of change management that by public sector standards would be regarded as cautious – but because they involve continuous improvement the results can be more impressive.

19. See, for example, the recent McKinsey report on the potential revolutionary impact of Web 2.0 – "How businesses are using Web 2.0: A McKinsey Global Survey", (http://www.mckinseyquarterly.com/article_print.aspx?L2=16&L3=16&ar=1913)

20. Czarniawska

21. Time is necessary for engagement and co-production, for example in the design of innovative new schools' http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/politics_show/7630170.stm

TESCO STEERING WHEEL



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What is to be done? Applying the Apogee Approach

53. There is a 'bootstraps' paradox²² here. The cultural change needed for public service reform involves letting go of old centralist habits – any attempt to impose new behaviours by diktat will undermine the content of the message of reform itself. Tempting as it is, we therefore resist the urge to lay down a blueprint for how this should be done. This is, par excellence, a case where one size will not fit all. Instead, as our recommendations, we offer a three-tier approach that should help policy makers and front-line professionals create together the new arrangements that are likely to suit best their client groups. This is a case where the medium becomes the message, and care will be needed to ensure that the new approach of front-line engagement is itself being used to promote front-line engagement.

54. Our proposals, set out in the five steps below, are intended to achieve:

a. *Energising and preparing for the Apogee approach:* reinventing policy making for the modern age, ensuring that the new approach is developed to meet the needs of the public sector reform strategy in a form that allows departments and agencies to adapt it for their purposes and that provides teaching material as inputs for the National School of Government and the other public sector leadership academies.

b. *Raising awareness and confidence in the new approach,* stimulating the necessary leadership to deliver new practices among Ministers, officials and professionals. Promoting 'front-line insight' as a compulsory feature of all policy advice to Ministers on relevant policies, to match and complement the increasing use of 'customer insight' (the former supporting the citizen empowerment theme of public service reform).

c. *Organising and doing:* building the strong two-way bridges between Whitehall and the front-line, and embedding these steps through the Capability Review programme.

55. The first step in preparation we suggest should be for the Cabinet Office to seek Ministerial and then Civil Service Steering Board (CSSB) support for re-inventing policy along the lines recommended for this paper. Work would then need to be commissioned to capture the essence of what we have termed (paragraph 21 above) the *Apogee approach* in explanatory and case study material that can be used widely in departments, agencies and with professional groupings.

56. To repeat, the *Apogee approach* involves seeing policy making as the process by which governments translate their political vision into programmes and actions to deliver outcomes, desired changes in the real world. The process relies on teamwork from the outset between

22. The bootstraps paradox refers to the legendary feat of Baron von Munchausen in being strong enough to be able to lift himself by his own bootstraps

Ministers, their advisers and their policy officials across departments. Policy officials have to become expert at accessing that professional expertise in order to formulate policies and provide sound advice to Ministers. Ministers in turn must recognise that good policy is well grounded in evidence and experience, and must ensure that there has been the necessary engagement with front-line professionals before final decisions are taken. Evidence, to ensure that policies are formulated on the basis of the best possible quantitative modelling of local and national outcomes incorporating data on citizen behaviours, needs and aspirations. Experience, to ensure that practical knowledge on the front-line of what is likely to work in practice, and how services should best be reconfigured to meet the needs of the citizen, is captured.

57. A feature of major policy formulation is that it usually brings together the contributions of different parts of government, and often the private and voluntary sectors, in delivering the policy on the ground. Policy teams need therefore to be conscious of their role in joining up the components of the delivery network. Perceptions may well differ between the different professional groupings of the merits of a policy change – nurses and doctors may for example react very differently to new concepts of patient care, as may prison officers and probation officers to new correctional policies. And quite apart from what they think of the policies themselves, there may be very different perceptions out there of the policy makers who created them. The experienced policy maker will have developed a feel for the psychodynamics of the interaction between these groups, and that needs to be encouraged.
58. Analytic skills are already being developed to improve the quality of analysis and evidence under an initiative sponsored by the Cabinet Secretary, but to be effective this must be complemented by developing further the interpersonal approach needed to build trust and engagement among stakeholders. Clearly such an approach will only become embedded once visible commitment can be seen at the top of Government. This is one of those subjects where strategic leadership really is essential, as the 2008 reform document itself recognised. It is a test case of whether the third theme in that document – stronger strategic leadership – can be made a reality.
59. In this report we have set down what from our evidence collection we believe to be both the best features of current policy making – and the worst. The direction of travel seems clear to us, and to most of those we interviewed. It will require change of behaviours in formulating and announcing new or revised policies of all those involved in policy making. It will require Whitehall to establish a clear culture of engagement, firmly built into behaviours, competences, training and development of policy officials. There needs to be compulsion for change built into the system. The thinking behind what we term for convenience the *Apogee approach* should be taught to newcomers and become the expectation of the behaviours that mark out the effective policy maker.
60. **The first step** in implementation we suggest should be for the Cabinet Office to seek Ministerial and CSSB support.
61. **The second step** should be for the CSSB to develop the description of the *Apogee approach* as a set of communications materials and teaching case studies in close consultation with key front-line stakeholders:
- The work should be supervised by the CSSB ‘policy’ champion and the Cabinet Secretary.
 - The Delivery Unit and No.10 Policy Unit must be closely engaged and supportive.
 - Departments should use their own links to their agencies and delivery network and related professional associations to help develop the approach.
 - The Permanent Secretary for Government Communications should provide support in promoting the desired changes and to assist with the preparation of internal communications and training material.
 - The programme for implementation of the next phase of public service reform must be integrated with the description of the ‘re-invented’ policy function so that it can become clear what changes in behaviour and process inside departments, between the Centre of Government and departments, and with the front-line professionals will be required.
 - Communications material to be prepared for Ministers and departments should be attuned to reinforcing positive messages about the public service and public service ethos. In particular, rhetoric about middle managers or professional groups blocking progress should be avoided since it has been shown to be debilitating²³. The new Government Code of Practice on Consultation process emphasises the positive need to recognise real time feedback provided through such consultation exercises on matters of policy or policy implementation.

‘As long as engaging with the front-line is non-compulsory, talking to people outside of Whitehall is going to play second fiddle to talking to those inside Whitehall’
(Permanent Secretary)

23. An important message emerging from the DWP Pathways experience is that the key value of improving lives really brought the various stakeholders together to a common purpose.

'The Civil Service needs partnerships and intermediaries to deliver its objectives'
(Local Government colleague)

62. The third step, in parallel, is for the Cabinet Office to organise the launch of an improvement programme for policy making, promoting the *Apogee approach*.

We are aware of a number of coming opportunities:

- The Government will be issuing a further policy document on Public Service Reform following Excellence and Fairness, and that could highlight a decision to modernise the policy function²⁴.
- Work with the 'Top 200' involves periodic seminars in which the *Apogee approach* could figure.
- Initial recruitment and ongoing development must be based on attitude, aptitude and skill. Civil Service training, competences and promotion should give greater weight to 'front-line professional insight in policy making'. For example, the ability to demonstrate previous or current experience of working outside of the Civil Service in different organisational cultures should be a firm expectation in promotion gateways, which should be explained fully at the recruitment stage.
- The National School of Government should rework its strategy, policy and delivery course material to incorporate the *Apogee approach* as part of the Professional Skills for Government agenda. Consideration should be given to the preparation of a core curriculum for policy work and this should be done jointly by the National School and the Head of Profession for policy work. Demonstrable achievement of the learning outcomes should be a prerequisite for promotion through key career gateways such as entry to the SCS and promotion to director level. New recruits to such posts could also be required to take an intensive programme to familiarise them with the nature of strategic policy work.
- The Cabinet Office Civil Service Capability Group could also usefully review how proficiency in the *Apogee approach* is reflected in the Professional Skills portfolio and in individual competency frameworks that apply to civil servants in policy posts to generate more incentive to demonstrate new-style policy experience.
- The message can be incorporated into core scripts for the 'Make a Difference' type conferences.
- There are plenty of opportunities to provide articles in *Westminster World*, *Management Today*, etc, and to brief ACPO, LGA, ACEVO and many other professional gatherings at their annual conferences.
- The Public Accounts Committee could be briefed in advance of the *Apogee approach* – it goes with the grain of their recent reports and NAO investigations of policy failures.
- The National School of Government and the Institute of Government should be approached to work together to organise seminars to allow Ministers to debate these issues and to become familiar with material on the *Apogee approach*. The behaviour of Ministers will be crucial. Ministers will need to clarify what is expected of their policy officials, the time allowed for policy formulation and engaging the front-line before public announcements. The risks of damaging media speculation on the basis of leaks from such engagement will be very much less if the engagement is open ended and not crammed into a short period before an announcement (see paragraph 33).
- As Treasury/ Cabinet Office/ CLG work on examining new financial frameworks for delegation and development of the Area Agreements advances then that will provide further impetus for the *Apogee approach*. Government Regional Offices could play an important part in helping departments develop their networks outside Whitehall, as, for example, the National Policing Improvement Agency have established through regional consultation forums.

Regional Consultation Forums – a concept drawn from best practice at the National Policy Improvement Agency (NPIA)

- Regional consultation forums were set up by the NPIA Equality, Diversity and Human Rights (EDHR) Unit to garner opinion and insight surrounding issues of equality and diversity at a *local level*.
- The forums are managed by NPIA and are split into regions across the country.
- They include about 20 Equality and Diversity Practitioners, including some local government officials usually from the host force area (e.g. Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships) and guest speakers from other national government departments (e.g. MOJ, Home Office). This depends upon the agenda.
- The forums are used for these practitioners to voice opinion about specific policies or issues that arise.
- They are also used by NPIA to sense-check specific policies/ initiatives that may be on the horizon.
- A huge benefit of these forums is the access to local evidence. The practitioners involved go back to their local communities and gather evidence and ideas which can then be fed back at a national level.

24. "Working Together: Public services on your side" was published by the Cabinet Office in March 2009 and recognises the value of policy making that incorporates front-line insights

63. The fourth step is for departments to create greatly increased awareness of conditions on the front-line on the part of their policy staff. The Civil Service has to demonstrate a shift and immediate action, rather than just indicate what it might do in the future. Our discussions with those working in departments and front-line alike have provided examples of ways of improving the ‘feel’ for the conditions at the sharp end on the part of those formulating and making policy, whether in the Centre of Government itself or in the centre of departments. One size will not fit all, but these examples should be seen as a menu for departments:

- Taking time to emphasise to policy teams the importance of having sympathy and understanding for those at the sharp end of policy. That should become a universal and visible part of the ethos of the policy world.
- Assessing systematically the current mood of the front-line, and their ability to manage fresh change (in large part a function of what has gone before and the level of scepticism – not to say cynicism – that may have engendered, which is key information for shaping the presentation of new proposals).
- Arranging visits and seminars to share basic experience of delivering change in large or complex organisations (such as HM Treasury’s Public Service and Growth Directorate’s ‘day a month’ visits to the front-line and the requirement placed on Fast-Streamers to gain operational experience operated by DWP, HMRC, BERR and DCSF – although we note that is not a mandatory requirement of the scheme across the Civil Service).
- Developing ways of explaining policy that the public and front-line professionals will understand as an honest expression of where they have been, are now, and can reasonably be asked to go next.
- Capturing local professional pride in their work and in the public service ethos, and ensuring proper recognition of the efforts being made, including through visits by Ministers and emphasising the added public value that is being contributed on the front-line.
- Exploring the inevitable constraints of time, staff, skills and money that will always apply at the sharp end and having a grounded view of how long change really takes before results become evident. This is territory that is very vulnerable to stereotypes on the part of central staffs and front-line alike, and from which much mutual misunderstanding can arise. The Darzi clinical pathway groups provide an excellent example of bringing public service professionals, government and voluntary sector representatives together to examine evidence for the best care, identify the best practice careways and recommend where investment in improvements can best be made locally, and then through national conferences sharing the resulting knowledge²⁵.
- Taking into account the inevitable knock-on effects that any new policy will have on existing policies and priorities. For the central team nothing is more important at that moment than their new policy: for the front-line there will be a raft of competing objectives, none of which are usually reprioritised when the new idea comes down the line. Again this can be a fertile source of discord in the acceptance by the front-line of new policies and needs to be anticipated by the Minister and senior team in the department.
- Being eager to seek out ideas and practical experience from the sharp end to improve the soundness of the policy itself. (This will help convince the front-line that the policy is in practice a good way of delivering the sought for outcome and not just a response to media or political pressure for a new initiative).

Many departments, for example, are encouraging the following:

- Visits by policy staff to the front-line, (including in the case of DWP ‘back to the floor’ experiences) and visits from front-line professionals, particularly in the early stages of policy formulation before specific proposals emerge, including visits to third sector organisations working with relevant client groups.
- Closer and more transparent working relationships between policy staffs in Cabinet Office, HMT and Downing Street and policy civil servants (as well as special advisers) in departments, including ensuring that their respective contacts with the front-line become a collaborative enterprise and not a competitive one.
- Having attached to a policy team one or more professionals with very recent front-line experience when specific areas of policy are being worked on. As noted above, however, care is needed not to encourage policy staffs to bypass the ‘chain of command’ for the management of delivery or to ‘cherry pick’ for consultation individual professionals with views known to be sympathetic to the proposed policy.
- Secondments for limited periods for policy staff to gain experience of being with front-line professionals (in all three sectors) to help fill experience gaps and vice versa. Many departments have programmes of ‘acquaint’ visits to their operational areas for their own staff and it should be standard practice for central policy and secretariat staff involved with those departments to be invited as a matter

25. Including through a dedicated web forum on the NHS site, www.ournhs.uk

of course (it has been the MOD practice for many years to include central departments in programmes of visits by MOD civil servants to warships and other combat units). But such visits need to be carefully prepared so as to avoid the 'goldfish bowl' effect.

- Those recruiting staff for policy units should also be encouraged to continue to look beyond the normal pools of central departments to widen the experience base in the centre.
- Using posting policies to encourage talented high-flyers to spend time in jobs that bring them into close contact with front-line professionals, and trying to slow down the merry-go-round for policy staff that means that inadequate expertise is built up within a policy area.
- Introducing 'gateways' in departments (such as DCSF) staffed by those with front-line experience to ensure coherence and comprehensibility of the various directives and messages before they reach the front-line – although it is recognised that care will be needed to prevent gateways becoming bottlenecks restricting the two-way traffic between policy makers and the professionals on the ground.
- New technology such as web 2.0 applications being used in the private sector can allow tailor-made information to be made available to individuals on a personal basis rather than individuals being expected to search web pages.
- Introducing consultative forums/ sounding boards where central policy makers can meet cross-sections of stakeholders (such as DCSF's Social Partnership Forum) – although care will be needed to ensure that policy makers are also exposed to the hard to reach and hard to convince.

All the ideas above apply to broadening the experience base of departmental policy staffs as well. In addition, departments can be encouraged, including for example through the Capability Review process, to consider:

- Deliberately organising their own policy staffs to be led by a professional with the appropriate qualification. This may be, for example, where the team has delegated authority to take specific decisions (such as authorising the use of new clinical procedures) and a professional endorsement is essential for acceptability, or at least credibility.
- Including in their policy teams professionals and those with recent front-line experience, either in an explicit advisory role or as members of the line management in the team. This is not the same as having professionalised such teams (see above) but provides the policy team with ready access to up-to-date knowledge or a guide to those in the field they ought to consult.

- Setting up specific arrangements to capture, develop and disseminate front-line thinking. Such functions usually go beyond capturing 'what works' and 'best practice' and involve those with recent experience building on their work to develop new ideas, concepts and doctrine: those in turn can become powerful drivers for future policy (an example would be the National Policing Improvement Agency and the development of intelligence-led policing).

64. The fifth step is to ensure that the new *Apogee approach* is properly embedded in the governance of day-to-day work. The CSSB should ensure that the approach is reflected

- in the regulation and audit of departments
- in the competency assessment and performance management of individuals
- in the parameters for the Capability Review programme, for the next round to support departments as they gradually adopt it
- in the Cabinet Office and HM Treasury guidance to provide support should departments run into obstacles
- in the Professional Skills for Government framework, adapted to embrace modern policy making, and
- Ministers, and Cabinet Secretariats on their behalf, should more intensively question whether proposals coming forward for collective consideration have benefited from engagement with the front-line and from consultation with colleagues. One major consultancy in the private sector has a rule that proposals may not be put up to senior colleagues without it being clear that colleagues have been consulted.

Headlines for improvement

In brief, we recommend:

- Re-inventing policy work to support the strategy for the next phase of public service reform – the *Apogee approach* to the policy making culture that emphasises the two-way bridge enabling the translation of political vision into effective personalised services for the citizen. As Professor Michael Barber has put it, constructing 'a more effective relationship between government and the public service professionals, one in which they develop a deeper understanding not just of each other's views of the world, but also of the profound forces which are reshaping everyone's world and their implications for public services.'²⁶

Changes in behaviours:

- Checking 'who is in the room' when the policies are constructed and making time to stress-test new ideas with those who have to implement them, with Ministers and MPs making time to see for themselves conditions on the ground and thanking those who work on the front-line.
- Developing the 'networked public servant' who facilitates and connects on the basis of greater understanding of the conditions experienced by citizens and professionals alike on the front-line through engagement of professionals in policy design, visits, secondments in both directions, consultation forums and adopting the *Apogee approach* in training for policy work, especially for Fast-Streamers. Ensuring that policy proposals are grounded in 'front-line insight', to match and complement the increasing use of 'customer insight'.
- Ensuring Cabinet Ministerial and official committees are encouraged (and have the support available) to challenge whether the policy processes in their area of collective responsibility embody the *Apogee approach*, and using the Capability Review process to support departments as they move to embrace the new culture.

Sunningdale Institute
March 2009

Annex A

Methodology

Objective

To analyse, challenge and propose solutions for how to ensure better connections between central policy makers and front-line public service workers as an integral part of Government policy development. In particular, whether elements of Civil Service culture particularly prevent or encourage this. The desired outcome is for more effective policies that make sense to the front-line workforce, make efficient use of their knowledge, insights and experience, and deliver what is important for service users.

Methodology

Project managed by the Public Service Workforce Team in Cabinet Office, a multi-pronged approach was adopted in gathering evidence to inform this study. This included:

- Relevant literature and case study reviews (private and public sector)
- Interviews with key leaders from across public services
- Intensive workshops with a diagonal slice of stakeholders/workforce that were involved in a specific policy's formulation and implementation
- Informative meetings with relevant colleagues across Whitehall and delivery organisations.

Literature and case study reviews

Case studies and academic literature were examined. Relevant private and public sector examples of learning and knowledge capture from front-line staff were identified.

Interviews with key witnesses and leaders

Key witnesses and leaders from across public services were invited to a private interview with the project's researchers. The following organisations provided their views through this process:

- Association of Chief Police Officers
- Association of Directors of Children's Services
- Department of Children, Schools and Families
- Department of Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform
- Department of Health
- Economic and Domestic Affairs Secretariat, Cabinet Office
- Government Offices
- Local Government Association
- London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
- London Strategic Health Authority

- Ministry of Justice
- Prime Minister's Strategy Unit
- Prime Minister's Delivery Unit
- National College for School Leadership, Nottingham
- No.10 Downing Street
- The Minister School, Southwell

Informative meetings

Relevant initiatives taking place across Government were identified. Key colleagues involved in these initiatives were interviewed for their opinions and insights, including:

- Civil Service Capability Building Programme
- Department of Health, Darzi Next Stage Review
- Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
- Fast Stream Policy and Development team
- Innovation Team, DIUS
- Policy and Government Team, National School of Government
- Strategy and Change colleagues, DWP
- Transformational Government, Cabinet Office

Intensive workshops

Intensive workshops were conducted involving a diagonal slice of policy makers, stakeholders and workforce who were instrumental in a specific policy's formulation and implementation. The discussion focused, not on the policy content per se, but on the learning and experiences of those involved with the policy process for the chosen subject. The policy areas studied were:

- Pathways to Work, Department of Work and Pensions
- Police Stop and Search, Home Office

Expert facilitation for these workshops was provided by Tetlow Associates.

Annex B

2008 UK Government Paper on *Excellence and Fairness*²⁷: A Sunningdale Institute Digest

Achieving world-class public services

Better public services are at the core of the UK Government's mission to deliver social justice and increase social mobility.

In the first stage of its reform programme, the Government sought to use the explicit introduction of clear national standards and targets to drive up performance while increasing investment. In its second phase it added clearer incentives to improve, generated from within the public services themselves rather than imposed from Whitehall, thus encouraging diversity of providers, widening choice of services and incentivising providers. The next challenge identified in the Paper is to ensure that all UK public services are world class, applying the lessons learned through those two stages of reform in valuing professionals more, and avoiding stifling local initiative through trying to do too much.

The Paper provides a framework for a new phase of reform by:

- developing new approaches to empowering citizens
- fostering a new professionalism across the whole public service workforce with increased responsiveness to users, consistent quality in day-to-day practices and higher levels of autonomy from central government
- providing strong strategic leadership from central government to ensure that direct intervention is more sharply concentrated on underperforming organisations, growing local capacity and promoting innovation.

The characteristics of world-class public services

Government is adopting new approaches, learning from the experience of the countries with the very best outcomes.

Being world class is seen as involving:

- delivering excellent outcomes
- offering personalised approaches
- being fair and equitable
- offering good value for money.

Central government therefore has to ensure that the right incentives, behaviours and cultures are in place to generate self-sustaining improvement, through three mutually reinforcing themes:

- Citizen empowerment to work collaboratively with public services, armed with information about their performance. Services must be shaped much closer to the citizen. Local professionals and managers must have the power to respond to specific priorities and needs of their own local customer base with, where appropriate, control of resources transferred to the service user within a fair set of rules with funding systems that support equitable outcomes.

- New professionalism with public servants as the catalysts of change: innovation, consistency, continuous self-improvement and responsiveness driven from within the public services themselves. The next stage will involve unlocking the creativity and ambition of public sector workers and establishing new relationships between the Government and professionals. Accepted good practice is changing rapidly as evaluation improves and with transformational technology, as has already occurred in the best businesses.
- Strategic leadership from government setting a clear vision, a stable framework, adequate resources, effective incentives, and accessible and consistent information on performance. Government must reject the temptation to micro-manage from the centre, and reject the laissez-faire option of an absentee administration in favour of a model of presumed autonomy with less inspection and central control for high-performing organisations.

The Paper describes how highly-skilled and motivated professionals:

- Hold and develop the knowledge about what works and make the day-to-day decisions that determine how well the system performs. Official guidelines will never be able to cover all individual cases in detail.
- Form direct relationships with citizens and are best placed to respond to their needs and aspirations.
- Innovate from a platform of consistent quality and create new services to meet new challenges as they develop. They use continuous, regular, near-real time feedback (increasingly web-based) to update their skills, challenging existing ways of working. Networks of professionals set high but achievable objectives, share best practice, improve cost-effectiveness and tackle underperformance. They are enabled to exercise a major role in management and service delivery.

Implications for central government

The Paper concludes: 'In the past, too many initiatives have been introduced from the top down – rather than testing out reforms first. To become world class, services must take a more systematic approach in which new ideas are developed by professionals in conjunction with service users, tested on a small scale and, if successful, implemented more widely.'

Government will provide vision and direction. It will establish the overall framework and accountability systems, in conjunction with regulators and inspectors, as guarantors of standards and fairness without putting a ceiling on quality.

27. Cabinet Office, Summer 2008, with a foreword by the Prime Minister

It will devolve extensive responsibility to the front-line, giving the freedom to innovate. It will provide funding stability, allocating resources to areas of greatest need and rewarding outcomes and innovation. It will act as capacity builder and connector, taking a system-wide perspective to change the organisational architecture, and bring organisations together to broker agreements and build coalitions of change. As the Local Area Agreement negotiations on local targets and funding show, local leaders are well placed to bring services together and help professionals weigh up competing priorities bringing legitimacy to difficult local decisions.

Strategic planning will 'make far greater use of professionals and expert evidence. This will allow public services to move from a system in which professionals are consulted to one in which their views are at the heart of designing the approaches which will deliver world-class outcomes.' This requires the centre to find the right structures to empower professionals, as expert partners. In key sectors, the Government will

work with public sector leaders to create forums in which world-class standards can be identified, debated and agreed, ensuring that leading professionals are right at the heart of the drive to improve services.

These changes will require the Government's own role to evolve with central government departments renewing themselves so as to identify long term challenges; establish overall operating frameworks; develop external partnerships; understand the aspirations of citizens; foster a culture of innovation; and avoid the temptation to dictate change.

The next stage of reform will be as much about improving the work of central government, facilitating and empowering rather than directing and controlling, as about change among front-line services.

Sunningdale Institute
March 2009

Annex C

The Management Challenge of Moving from Good to Great

Crucial in Good to Great firms is having the right people in the right place, empowered to act, at the right time. There is trust between top management, faith in what they are trying to achieve together at all levels of the organisation, and discipline, but it is a culture of self-discipline rather than management control. The guiding principle here is that if you have the right people the key is not to motivate them but how not to demotivate them! Good to Great leaders do not have to spend their time creating alignment, motivating the troops or managing change because '[u]nder the right conditions, the problems of commitment, alignment, motivation and change largely take care of themselves.' (Collins, 2001: 187).

The transition from good to great is generally associated not with radical change but with a process of incremental change, adaptive and organic, built up through a series (not too many) of small well-focused and well-managed moves. Good to Great companies spend as much time focusing on what not to do and what to stop doing as on what to do to become great. Good to Great leaders generally come from within the company rather than in the form of heroic, charismatic leaders recruited from the outside. They tend to be servant-leaders, ambitious for the company rather than themselves, exhibit personal humility as well as professional will, and 'display a compelling modesty, are self-effacing and understated', in contrast to less successful companies whose leaders have 'gargantuan personal egos' which are associated with under-performance or failure.

Good to Great companies develop by promoting a particular form of organisational culture, 'creating a climate where the truth is told' using four basic practices:

1. Lead with questions, not answers.
2. Engage in dialogue and debate, not coercion.
3. Conduct autopsies, without blame.
4. Build red flag mechanisms that turn information into information that cannot be ignored.

In the transition from good to great, certain principles have proved to be effective – for example, Honda's management philosophy of Learn, Think, Analyse, Evaluate, Inquire. But Good to Great companies were not differentiated by the way in which they did strategy but by how they enacted it. Bad companies spent as much time on long-range strategic planning and had well-defined strategies too but struggled with implementation.

Implications for the public sector

At Ford, when it was performing well, the management philosophy was described as 'regulated discretion' (Pascale, 1990). The challenge for government is to balance regulation (command and control) with front-line discretion (autonomy/empowerment). An excess of discretion creates its own problems. We have seen what happens when the front-line is allowed to exercise discretion without regulation in the current crisis in the City. (One should add here that the customer also contributed to this crisis by a lack of self-regulation in terms of his/ her avid consumption of credit products!)

Command and control was effective in moving services from awful to adequate but is less suited to moving organisations from good to great where a policy of responsible autonomy is much more appropriate. However, the complexity/ size of the public sector is such that in the same sector there is a very variable spectrum of performances, ranging from poor to adequate to good to great. Government has a basic philosophical and practical challenge in rolling out front-line engagement as it has to balance the loss of control this entails with the necessity to control where performance is unacceptable. The way forward is to agree, through authentic dialogue at all levels of the system from central to front-line, what constitutes regulated discretion and to empower when the front-line passes the confidence test that it can achieve Good to Great standards.

The challenge is to achieve the requisite balance between regulation and discretion. It is necessary to involve front-line professionals more directly in how to put their own houses in order when performance is unsatisfactory. Using intermediaries is a crucial part of the process both in moving from good to great and in eliminating the 'awful'. Key intermediaries include professional bodies, non-departmental public bodies such as the National College for School Leadership and regional bodies which should be key players in framing policies fit for local contexts.

Sunningdale Institute
March 2009

Annex D

Fieldwork – quotes from colleagues

Translating and communicating policies

The following quotes represent opinions from organisations and individuals that were interviewed as part of the fieldwork for this study:

'Relatively radical reforms can experience a smooth transition into implementation when managed well, with genuine engagement of key colleagues, including front-line'

Welfare services

'There is a distinct time lapse between conception of a policy and its implementation at the front-line. This time lapse leads to policy ideas, motivation and impetus being lost in translation'

Whitehall

'Government needs intermediaries – its role is not to communicate directly to, or to be a supplement for, the front-line'

Think tank

'An understanding of what motivates people on the front-line is key to successful implementation of policy. Saying the right thing when announcing a policy is crucial'

Whitehall

'Where the front-line are not engaged or listened to, there is often a major, negative impact'

Police

'Traction is needed at the middle level'

Local government

'Translation between different levels is often fudged'

Health service

'Civil servants need to understand the bigger picture and how to prioritise their single policy within the wider context'

Children's services

'Public services are value-driven, but we don't reflect that in how we engage and motivate our colleagues at the front-line'

Whitehall

'Engaging with front-line professionals enhances communication with local communities'

Police

Cultures, rewards and incentives

'As long as engaging with the front-line is non compulsory, talking to people outside of Whitehall is going to play second fiddle to talking to those inside Whitehall'

Whitehall

'It is important to reward collaborative behaviour'

Local government

'Many front-line professionals don't know how policy making works while many senior civil servants don't know how front-line institutions work'

Whitehall

'Policy makers need constant reminders of how things look on the ground'

Whitehall

'There is a fear in the Civil Service that empowering the front-line will lead to their own disempowerment. This is not true'

Health services

'The centre must allow time for ideas to flourish – create time to work up solutions where possible'

Welfare services

Organising and doing

'Whitehall has improved cross-departmental working over the last 10 years'

Police

'In an ideal world, Ministers or officials would always collect a range of views on a policy area and then have considered discussion about policy details and direction on the basis of this'

Whitehall

'Government needs to slow down to go fast'

Health services

'Ministers invited us to a master-class to capture our insights and knowledge, and to share their vision in turn'

Welfare services

'We must operate at two levels:

1. Heighten the voice of the front-line

2. Ensure Whitehall policy makers have the appetite to hear this voice'

Whitehall

'Front-line organisations are well placed to advise on how to avoid the "law of unintended consequences"'

Wider public services

'The emphasis on policy as distinct from delivery has been unhelpful'

Think tank

'Customer and front-line insights are powerful tools'

Welfare services

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