

# Excellence and fairness

Achieving world class public services



**Making  
government  
work better**

*Unlocking talent*



# Foreword



Excellent public services lie at the heart of any civilised society. They express our core values of fairness and common endeavour and they underpin a

strong economy. But more than that, they are essential if we are to meet our commitment to improve social mobility – supporting every family in Britain as they strive to make a better life for themselves and their children. That is why putting in place the investment and reforms necessary to create world class public services will always be a key priority for the government that I lead.

When Labour came to power in 1997, we were faced with the impact of decades of under-investment in our public services. So our first task was to put in place a programme of investment and repair to remedy years of neglect. As a result of these changes, together with the hard work of millions of public servants, we have seen major improvements. We have more and better qualified teachers than ever. Patients do not have to wait months on end for operations. Police numbers are at a record high.

Our top schools, hospitals, universities and police forces are admired around the world. But we should also not shy away from the fact that in some places public services are still not good enough. And if we are to build a fairer Britain, we must extend to everyone – not just those who pay privately – the advantages of personalised public services.

Our public services must combine excellence with fairness. Everyone has a right to expect a first-class service, wherever they live and whatever their background. It is unacceptable that those in our most deprived communities too often experience our worst public services, or that hard-working families cannot always rely on the services they depend on. So we will act to end unfair postcode lotteries by enshrining universal entitlements to basic standards and we will do whatever it takes to eradicate the remaining pockets of serious underperformance.

We must also be able to respond to people's rising aspirations for high-quality services that are shaped by them, available when they need them and tailored to meet their individual circumstances.

So, as we set out our plans for the next phase of reform, our priority is to put citizens in control. This will include extending choice, strengthening accountability mechanisms and ensuring that all users have access to clear and comparable information about service quality.

In addition to greater citizen empowerment, we must unleash a new professionalism in our public services. We know that real excellence depends upon liberating the imagination, creativity and commitment of the public service workforce. This requires us to create new opportunities for professionals to take control of the process of change – with less top-down control and a greater say for front-line staff.

These reforms must not mean that Government leaves people on their own. Government must provide strong leadership, clear direction and sustained investment for public services; it must stand up for citizens, challenge vested interests and take a long-term view – identifying the strategic challenges for the decade ahead.

But Government must also know its own limits and become more strategic. It must step up its efforts to cut unnecessary targets, strip out waste, and devolve responsibility to communities, councils and local service providers.

So this is my approach to achieving excellence in our public services: real and lasting change driven by the users of public services themselves, backed up by professionals with the freedom and responsibility to be responsive to service users, and supported by an enabling government that is prepared to lead, invest and put in place the necessary reforms.

I want world class to mean what it says: every element of our public services to be the best in the world. I know this is a huge challenge. But if we make the right choices, I believe this goal is now within our reach. And if we succeed, Britain will be a fairer and more prosperous country, with rising social mobility for all its citizens in the decades ahead.



**Gordon Brown**  
Prime Minister

# Introduction: A world class ambition

Better public services are at the core of the Government's mission to deliver social justice and increase social mobility. If we are to compete effectively as a country in today's globalised economy and match people's ever-rising aspirations, our public services must be able to bear comparison with the best in the world.

Over the past decade, our public services have improved across the board, in many cases dramatically so. The number of secondary schools where more than 70% of students gain five good GCSEs has risen from 83 schools in 1997 to 891 today. Long hospital waiting lists are gone, and far more people now survive diseases such as cancer and heart disease. Crime has fallen by more than a third. Nearly two million people have been helped back into work through the New Deal programme.

Yet, looking at public services in the round, a number of other countries continue to outperform Britain in educational attainment, health outcomes, crime reduction and other measures of success.

Today's challenge is for public services to move from above average in the global league of effectiveness to the top. The yardstick for success should not only be whether services have improved on last year's results but also whether they are among the best in the world. It should also not be simply how public services compare against each other, but how they compare against the best provision available to those who can afford it in the very best private sector organisations, or against the most trusted third sector providers.

Achieving such world class services for all will require the continued use of approaches that have been successful over the last decade. Clear standards, zero tolerance of underperformance, more choice and greater contestability will all remain important.

But the Government will also apply the lessons we have learned through this period. We know that services need clear standards but that, once high minimum outcomes have been met, persisting with too many top-down targets can be counterproductive. We know that services must value

professionals if they are to foster innovation and excellence. We know that while central government must be a key player in driving better public services there are limits to what it can achieve and if it seeks to do too much it will stifle local initiative. We know that user choice is vital and needs to be extended, and that it needs to be complemented with other approaches in order to fully empower citizens.

So the Government's established strategies now need to be accompanied by a new phase of reform:

- developing new approaches to **empowering citizens** who use public services;
- fostering a **new professionalism** across the whole public service workforce; and
- providing strong **strategic leadership** from central government.

Over the last few months, the Government has started to set out how these principles can be applied to individual services:

- *The Children's Plan*<sup>1</sup> sets out measures to empower parents and enhance the quality of teaching professionals, for example through new parental rights to regular information on their child's performance and a new Masters level qualification for teachers.
- *The NHS Next Stage Review*<sup>2</sup> put professionals at the heart of the policy-making process, drawing on the contribution of over 2,000 clinicians and other health and social care professionals. It sets out a vision for empowering patients and families and putting the quality of care at the centre of the NHS.
- *Communities in Control*,<sup>3</sup> the Government's White Paper for empowering citizens, sets out how both central and local government can act more strategically by giving local communities the power to drive real improvements in everything from the way their neighbourhoods are policed to the way that community assets are used.

- *From the Neighbourhood to the National*,<sup>4</sup> the recent Green Paper on policing, contains proposals to empower citizens to hold their local police to account through new elected crime and policing representatives. It also proposes a more strategic role for government, with fewer targets and less red tape at all levels.
- *No One Written Off*,<sup>5</sup> the welfare Green Paper, includes proposals to modernise the provision of training and welfare and devolve more decision-making powers to advisers, providers and local communities so

that services can be personalised to the needs of the individual. *Work Skills*<sup>6</sup> complements this Green Paper, setting out how we will integrate welfare services and skills development, including empowering people through new skills accounts and strengthening professionalism through a new adult advancement and careers service.

This summary paper draws from developments across different services, setting out the Government's overall approach to achieving world class standards over the next few years.<sup>7, 8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Department for Children, Schools and Families, *The Children's Plan: Building Brighter Futures*, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Health, *NHS Next Stage Review*, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Communities and Local Government, *Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power*, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Home Office, *From the Neighbourhood to the National: Policing our Communities Together*, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Department for Work and Pensions, *No One Written Off: Reforming Welfare to Reward Responsibility*, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Department for Work and Pensions and Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, *Work Skills*, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> This paper is a summary of a full report which is available from the Cabinet Office.

<sup>8</sup> The scope of this paper does not include aspects of public service policy that are devolved in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

# The characteristics of world class public services

As a country there is no reason why Britain should offer its citizens anything less than the highest quality public services.

Being world class should involve:

- Delivering **excellent outcomes**, such as high levels of literacy and numeracy, healthy populations and low levels of crime, and constantly striving to improve those outcomes.
- Offering **personalised approaches** that are responsive to individual needs and aspirations. Personalising services involves moving beyond a 'one size fits all' approach to offering services that are flexible to people's needs, fit into people's busy lives and form trusted relationships with those who use them.
- Being **fair and equitable** – not simply delivering excellence for the most assertive citizens or the better off, but helping promote a fairer society in which all can succeed.
- Offering **good value for money**. Public investment is critical to excellent services, but systems that

deliver the best outcomes need not be the most expensive.

We have examined the best public services in the world that achieve these, such as the Finnish and Canadian education systems or Dutch and Swedish health care, together with the best public services in the UK. Although the approach to improvement necessarily varies between services, there are some common lessons from high-performing services:

- **Citizens are empowered to shape the services they receive.** Excellent public services reflect the preferences and needs of those who use them, not those who provide them. Citizens therefore need clear information about the performance of services and the power to ensure that their needs and aspirations are met, both as individuals and as members of communities. They must have the opportunities and support to work collaboratively with services – parents with schools, patients with doctors, residents with police – rather than just passively receiving services.

- **Public service professionals act as the catalysts of change.** Achieving world class services demands diligence – consistently implementing good practice – and innovation and flexibility to meet new challenges and individual aspirations, driven from within the public services themselves. This requires services characterised by a skilled and informed workforce, able to respond directly to the needs of the public and compare their performance with their peers.
- **Government provides strategic leadership.** World class public services depend on governments

providing leadership by setting a clear vision, a stable framework, adequate resources and effective incentives. This means rejecting the temptation for government to micro-manage from the centre. It also means rejecting the idea that public services can simply be provided by free markets. The health, welfare and education systems that succeed are not those where the government plays a very limited role, but rather those where the government's role is strategic and enabling.

The next sections set out ways in which these characteristics can be achieved.



# Citizen empowerment

The best services in the world are tailored to the unique needs of the individual, family or community. No centrally driven system can operate in this fine-grained way. Nor can it meet the increasing demand for people to play a greater role in addressing their own needs, from more actively managing their own health to working more collaboratively with schools to help their children learn.

Public services that aspire to be truly personal and form strong relationships with users must therefore put the power to shape services much closer to the individual citizen.

The exact mechanism will vary from service to service, but the aspiration will be the same: enabling more personalised services by giving citizens the information and power to shape services around their needs and aspirations, rather than by assuming that someone in the government knows best.

## **Giving people real choices**

Our starting point for empowerment will be ensuring that people are able to

make choices about which services are best suited to them.

Giving people the opportunity to choose between providers of services helps ensure that managers and professionals give greater attention to the interests of users. Contestability is especially important where services have traditionally been inflexible or performance is poor. Wherever it can help deliver our goals of fairness and excellence the Government will therefore continue to expand opportunities for voluntary and community organisations, social enterprises and private businesses to provide services; from childcare to primary health care, probation and employment services. For example, the recent welfare Green Paper includes proposals to give private and voluntary providers the right to bid for any back-to-work service. At the same time we will seek to increase the diversity of providers within the public sector, such as through the Academies programme for schools.

There also needs to be more choice *within* institutions. For instance, children and parents need and want choice of

curriculum and qualifications, more personalised learning and the offer of a far greater range of out of school activities. Across services, new choices of approach, tailored to people's needs, will be offered.

To deepen engagement further, control of resources will increasingly be transferred to service users. Early evaluations of individual budgets in social care have shown that when people are given control over the funds to be spent on them they often improve the care they receive, such as facilitating more care in the home. Now we will go further, introducing personal budgets in new areas where they can empower users without undermining our commitment to equity and universalism. They are being extended in social care and skills and tested for those with long-term health conditions.

### **A greater say in local services**

Giving people greater choice is an essential, but often insufficient, means of empowering citizens. People also need more direct and community-wide say over their local services.

Satisfaction surveys and other forms of feedback are some of the most practical means by which users of public services can be given a greater collective say over priorities, and of rewarding effective providers. So, over the next three years, the Government will be giving greater weight to explicitly including the citizen's viewpoint as a key indicator of success of services.

Such surveys will be complemented by exploiting the potential of the internet to provide far richer sources of feedback. The *NHS Choices* website, for example, is soliciting feedback on hospitals and GPs, building on the example of websites such as [patientopinion.org.uk](http://patientopinion.org.uk). The challenge for public service providers is to listen to and work with websites that provide a rich seam of feedback, even if that feedback makes for uncomfortable reading.

The next stage of reform will also be characterised by opening up services to direct forms of accountability and engagement.

In the police service, for instance, new nationally agreed rights, in the form of a

policing pledge, will clarify what everyone can expect from the police and ensure that the public's voice is heard by their local force. In addition, we propose that, for the first time, police forces will be directly accountable to local communities through new locally elected representatives.

Jobcentres, probation services, regeneration agencies and other statutory bodies will have new duties to involve users in decisions that may affect them. More generally, the Government looks to local political leaders, including directly elected mayors, to play a greater role as the voice of the citizens for their area and we will also support community and voluntary groups to play a more active campaigning role.

### **Strengthening partnerships between users and professionals**

World class services are characterised not only by opportunities for citizens to shape services, but also by empowering people to work with services to help meet their own needs. An effective, collaborative relationship between

service user and professional and a sense of shared responsibility are essential; for instance, in enabling someone on Incapacity Benefits to improve their health and find work, or for parents and early years workers to give children the best start in life.

The Government will therefore extend opportunities for parents, students, patients, tenants or victims of crime to become genuine partners in deciding on the best approach to solving a problem. Parents, for example, will be able to influence and support the education of their children through regular interaction with the school via email and text message, as well as regular parents' meetings and reports.

These new rights also provide the basis for extending the responsibilities of citizens. Across public services the Government will explore new ways to increase responsibility: those outside the labour market signing up to look for work and undergoing skills audits – improving job prospects and the take-up of training; patients taking more responsibility for working with the NHS

to manage their own conditions and maintain healthy lifestyles; and across the public services users attending booked appointments and not wasting resources.

### **Empowering through information**

Finally, the whole approach to empowering citizens will build on improved transparency of information about public services and their performance. Effective empowerment rests on good information.

New technologies provide the opportunity to improve the availability and timeliness of far more information, giving citizens and communities far greater direct power than before. By making government information easily accessible to third parties, data can be combined with other information and republished in innovative formats. This can stimulate independent networks that share advice and campaign for change.

Central government is therefore committed to ensuring that, as a matter of course, public services make data that is not personal accessible and available for re-use. This will include the provision of frequent, comparative performance data about services at a local level.

# New professionalism

The next stage of public service reform will involve unlocking the creativity and ambition of public sector workers, from the hospital receptionist to the surgeon, and establishing new relationships between government and professionals.

New professionalism is about a shared commitment between government and public professionals to create world class performance. This means maintaining consistent high standards of service, and intervening when these are not achieved, but at the same time providing space for the best professionals to manage and run their own services. It will require a constant dialogue between government and professional staff on how to achieve the world class standards people want.

New professionalism also rests on forging a stronger relationship between professionals and citizens. Professionals should no longer simply be accountable to their managers or to government. Nor should services return to a time in which autonomous professionals were essentially accountable to themselves. Rather, users of public services and other citizens will have the primary role in

demanding service improvements and bring more of their own expertise, time and energy to solving problems collaboratively with professionals.

## **Raising skills and increasing consistency in the quality of practice**

A more flexible, higher-skilled workforce forms the basis of new professionalism. No education system can be better than the calibre of its teachers, for instance.

The first step is recruiting the most talented and committed. Working in public services can be incredibly rewarding for individuals and benefit the whole of society. In fact, the public service ethos of many people has strengthened over recent years. Yet not all recruitment is as successful as it could be. We will therefore seek to expand programmes that recruit the most talented and committed people into key public services.

To help staff develop, more of our services also need to be characterised by continuous, regular feedback, as well as by more formal training programmes.

For example, the most successful education systems in the world are characterised by high levels of lesson observation and ongoing, regular, performance management.

Regular feedback also ensures that professionals get the basics right – providing a platform of consistent quality upon which professionals can innovate. Over the last few years, there have been improvements in practices, including the introduction of the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence in health and better evidence on teaching of numeracy and literacy in education. These need to be developed and implemented further, in partnership with professionals.

Alongside the development of feedback and professionally led standards, it will be important to foster the already growing number of websites which provide totally new and powerful ways for professionals to collaborate and learn from one another.

Underpinning all these measures to raise quality, we will increase the transparency of performance information throughout

the system. Poor-performing services should no longer be able to hide unacceptable results, hoping that nobody will notice. Raising standards to the best in the world demands a new openness.

### **Greater freedoms for high performers**

Achieving world class services requires high performers to have the freedoms and flexibilities to respond to the needs of those who use the service and to drive innovation and higher standards.

This freedom starts at the organisational level. Alongside a much smaller set of national targets, public services will move to a model of presumed autonomy. For those organisations that are high quality – there will be less inspection and central control.

Professionals, in turn, will be given greater freedoms to run their own services. In the NHS, for instance, Foundation Trusts are beginning to pass their autonomy down from their management boards to the clinicians who deliver front-line services. The

Productive Ward programme, available across England, asks every ward team, including nurses, health care assistants and others, to take responsibility for the services delivered on their ward.

The importance of enabling professional innovation is one of the reasons why new more arm's-length organisational models for public services, such as Foundation Hospitals and City Academies and Trust Schools, are so important. It is why social enterprises and other third sector organisations have such potential to deliver public services. And it is why maintaining a high-quality workforce throughout any management changes, with the terms and conditions of staff protected, is so important. Introducing new providers should never be about creating a race to the bottom on costs or quality.

### **Rewarding success**

Services will also need to encourage the best professionals to work in the most challenging areas and recognise those who deliver the most outstanding results. Too often the incentives work in the opposite direction. For example, the

best schools find it easy to attract high-quality teachers whereas the schools in the most disadvantaged areas can struggle to attract applicants. In addition, public service leaders will be increasingly judged by their contribution to the skills and motivation of their workforce, how they encourage innovation and how they bring on talent.

At the same time, the Government will look to professional leaders and managers to take more responsibility themselves for dealing with those who are not up to the job. In the best systems, not only is there continuous improvement but also the professions themselves set high standards and ensure that they are consistently met. In future, those professionals who are struggling must be better helped to improve, while those who still do not match up to acceptable standards should move on.

## **Excellent leadership and management**

Excellent leadership and management are central to the quality of public services. A recent study of NHS hospitals found a strong link between better management practices and external performance indicators such as clinical quality and financial and operational performance.

In every service, the Government and professions collectively have a responsibility to grow the next generation of leaders. We must build on the success of organisations such as the National College for School Leadership to ensure that the highest-quality leadership development and support are available to all our future and current public service leaders.

## **Professionals defining excellence**

The final element of new professionalism involves professionals themselves defining what 'excellence' constitutes and how it can be achieved.

Professionals have much of the knowledge, understanding and experience to know what works in the present and what is achievable in the future. These invaluable resources must increasingly be drawn upon by individuals and networks of professionals in setting high but achievable objectives, sharing best practice, improving cost-effectiveness and tackling underperformance.

An example of this has been Lord Darzi's *Next Stage Review* of the NHS. Rather than seeking to design a Whitehall national blueprint for services, he instead sought to empower clinical groups in every area of the country to review existing practice and draw up recommendations for change, putting clinical decision-making at the heart of the NHS.

This will lead to a fundamentally different approach from government. As with the NHS, the centre will look 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.

# Strategic leadership

No country in the world offers excellent public services to all its citizens without active, enabling government. This means government that provides a clear sense of direction as well as the freedoms for front-line staff to innovate; that guarantees minimum standards without putting a ceiling on quality; and that ensures value for money without controlling how each pound is spent. In short, government that provides strategic leadership.

Governments cannot simply leave the provision of services to the market or individuals. If left simply to private markets, excellent and equitable outcomes would not be achieved in health, education or welfare. As the health care system in the United States demonstrates, such approaches can be more expensive, less equitable and lead to poorer outcomes overall.

Nor should governments seek to micro-manage the performance of front-line public services. The establishment of national minimum standards – and clear national targets that reflect the views of the public – have played an important role over the last decade in rebuilding

public confidence in the NHS and the state education system. But getting from ‘good’ to ‘world class’ cannot be mandated from the centre. The new focus for the Government will therefore be on setting the overall direction and frameworks for improvement. Alongside retaining the capacity to intervene rapidly and effectively to address failure or a crisis, the Government will play a more strategic role.

## Leading change

The first role of government in a world class system is to provide the vision and direction of change for public services, so that everyone working in them understands the guiding principles within which they should be operating.

This is about establishing overall strategy but holding back from excessive involvement in the detail of implementation, as is exemplified by a new constitution for the NHS and a reduced number of targets for the police service.

Government’s vision should inspire leaders and front-line professionals,

engage the public and challenge the system continually to raise its game. To achieve this, government must focus on assessing where public services need to adapt and policy needs to change to meet new circumstances. We will also share leadership, learning constantly from those at the cutting edge of change, such as the way in which professionals, parents and young people were involved in the development of the Children's Plan.

The lesson from around the world, as well as in the UK, is that public services thrive when local and national leadership operate in tandem. Central government retains an important role in promoting minimum standards, reducing postcode lotteries, and intervening where local systems fail.

However, local leadership and accountability will become more important as the agenda shifts from simply raising core standards to a greater emphasis on increasing responsiveness to the users of services. 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. In turn, local commissioners of services, including local government, must also act strategically rather than micro-manage or control front-line services.

### **Guaranteeing standards and fairness**

The providers of public services enjoy many freedoms in world class systems, allowing them to innovate and raise standards further.

These freedoms must exist within a clear framework, established by the government, in conjunction with regulators and inspectorates. Such a framework must include setting the standards below which providers must not fall and clearly state the implications of failure.

But high minimum standards alone are not sufficient to ensure that services are fair or world class. World class services exceed minimum standards by encouraging diversity and experimentation while still ensuring equality of access. The Government will

therefore continue to ensure that fair access to schools, NHS treatment, social housing and support for victims of crime is embedded in services. Examples include the recently revised schools admissions code, the new NHS Constitution, the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime, and expanded entitlements to student grants that help pay university tuition fees.

### **Investing for the long term**

All governments have a responsibility to ensure that taxpayers' spending achieves value for money and that public services are as efficient as possible. World class systems achieve high levels of productivity but they do so without dictating how every pound should be spent. Resources are often allocated through multi-year funding settlements and without ring-fencing.

To help achieve these changes, the Government will seek to further increase the stability required for services to plan for the future, such as through multi-year pay settlements in preference to annual pay deals. Expected outcomes will usually be used to measure

performance, rather than inputs. Departments will ensure that incentives are in place to encourage innovation and prevent problems occurring rather than spending large sums on dealing with them after the event. Clearer accountabilities will be established so that each part of the system knows what is expected of them and who is responsible for what.

### **Capacity-building and connecting**

The quality of the professionals working in public services is a key determining factor of world class performance. Government therefore has an important role to play as a capacity-builder – ensuring that sufficient numbers of skilled staff are recruited and developed; and that incentives are in place to encourage innovation and appropriate levels of risk taking. In Whitehall, the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills will therefore support government departments in responding to this challenge.

In the past, too many new 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.

Central government is also one of the few actors able to take a system-wide perspective, which means it is well placed to bring organisations together to broker agreements and build coalitions of change. Government has successfully worked, for instance, with manufacturers to reduce car crime and with charities to invest in science and medical research.

Government is best placed to change the organisational architecture – changing the type of organisations that deliver services and how they relate to one another. This is important, given how fragmented public services can be from the citizen's point of view – especially for the most disadvantaged.

In turn, these changes will require central government departments to renew themselves and improve performance. They require the agility to address crises and intervene if basic standards are under threat, and step back quickly when these problems are addressed.

The next stage of public service reform will therefore be as much about improving the work of central government as about change among front-line services, establishing a more highly qualified, flexible and smaller civil service.

# Conclusion

Only strong, reformed public services can deliver the personal opportunities and the secure communities Britain needs to thrive in the coming decades.

This does not mean rolling back the investment and reforms of the past 10 years. Instead we must build on the progress already made. This means empowering citizens not only by further extending choice, but also by strengthening accountability mechanisms and radically increasing transparency. It means unlocking the creativity and ambition of public sector workers to innovate and drive up standards in partnership with service users. And it means more strategic leadership from central government.

It is through these new measures and the further development of these approaches in the forthcoming months and years that excellent outcomes, more personalised approaches, better value for money and greater fairness can be achieved.

This paper is a summary of a fuller Cabinet Office report.  
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Publication date: August 2008

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Ref: 289532/0808

Prepared for Cabinet Office by COI Communications