

**GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATIONS REVIEW GROUP**

**GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATIONS – THE STORY SINCE  
MAY 1997**

**A note by the Secretary**

1. The way the Government handles communications has itself been a recurring news story since the May 1997 election. Accusations of spin, manipulation and politicisation have run alongside recognition that media pressures have intensified and that the communication service that the Government inherited was in need of reform and modernisation.
2. The subject has featured in numerous inquiries conducted by the Public Administration Select Committee and the Committee on Standards in Public Life (Nolan, then Neill and now the Wicks Committee). These have tended to focus on the role of Alastair Campbell and the relationship between departmental information officers and Special Advisers involved in briefing the media.
3. This paper attempts a neutral statement of the story so far. It does so by offering a chronological summary of the documents of central relevance to developments over the past five and a half years. It is therefore an account based on “official sources” and it does not attempt to cover particular incidents and events or to present the perspectives offered by various external analysts and commentators. To keep the paper to a reasonable length the summaries are selective but the footnotes allow direct electronic access to the original source documents.

The Civil Service (Amendment) Order in Council, May 1997

4. This Order allows up to three Special Advisers based in No 10 to exercise executive powers over permanent civil servants. (Other Special Advisers are appointed on the basis that they are outside the management line and are employed only for the purpose of giving advice.) The Government believed that the posts in question should be undertaken by people who would not be required to perform a similar role for a different Administration.

5. In practice, this power has been conferred on only two individuals, Alastair Campbell, the Chief Press Secretary, and Jonathan Powell, the Chief of Staff. Unlike his immediate predecessors, Mr Campbell was recruited, neither from the GICS, nor from among the general body of the Civil Service. Between 1994 and May 1997 he was Tony Blair's chief press spokesman.

6. In evidence to the Committee on Standards in Public Life in 1999, Lord Butler explained that the change to the Order in Council was to some extent a technicality, a regularisation of what had actually taken place in practice under previous governments:

“The way in which the Order in Council had been drawn up in the 1980s made us doubtful whether a Special Adviser could do the things required of a Chief Press Secretary. We wanted to make clear that they were not debarred.”<sup>1</sup>

In evidence this July to the Committee's current *Inquiry into Boundaries within the Executive*, Sir Andrew Turnbull, noted that the advice-only restriction

“would either constrain their ability to do the jobs that the Prime Minister wants them to do, or worse, they would actually be doing that job but under a framework which was not accurately describing what they do. So, this is being frank about the situation that executive power is being exercised, and it is much better to acknowledge that from the start rather than pretend that it is not happening.”<sup>2</sup>

*The Ministerial Code, July 1997*

7. Authority for the co-ordinating and leadership role of the Chief Press Secretary and the No 10 Press Office was given in part 8 of *The Ministerial Code*, especially paragraph 88:

“In order to ensure the effective presentation of Government policy, all major interviews and media appearances, both print and broadcast, should be agreed with the No 10 Press Office before any commitments are entered into. The policy content of all major speeches, press releases and new policy initiatives should be cleared in good time with the No 10

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm45/4557/chap6.pdf> paragraph 6.56 of *Sixth Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life*, January 2000.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.public-standards.gov.uk/ninth%20report/witnesses.htm>

Private Office; the timing and form of announcements should be cleared with the No 10 Press Office. Each Department should keep a record of media contacts by both Ministers and officials.”

Guidance on the Work of the Government Information Service,  
July 1997

8. This sets out the basic conventions applied by successive Governments. Information activities:
- i. should be relevant to Government responsibilities;
  - ii. should be objective and explanatory, not tendentious or polemical;
  - iii. should not be, or be liable to misrepresentation as being, party political; and
  - iv. should be conducted in an economic and appropriate way, having regard to the need to be able to justify the costs as expenditure of public funds.<sup>3</sup>

This 1997 version contained no substantive changes from earlier versions. It stressed that information officers are at all times bound by the provisions of the Civil Service Code.<sup>4</sup>

Mountfield Report, November 1997

9. This internal review was set up in September 1997. Its terms of reference were: “To consider proposals to respond to concerns about how far the GIS is equipped in all areas to meet the demands of a fast-changing media world; to build on the skills and resources of the career GIS; and to maintain the established, and recently re-confirmed, propriety guidelines.”
10. Its main proposals were: bringing the standard of all Government Press Offices up to that of the best; improved co-ordination across Government; improved co-ordination within departments; closer and better working relations between policy civil servants and press officers; better leadership, training, development and personnel management; and retention of a politically impartial information service.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/central/1999/workgis/index.htm>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/central/1999/cscod.htm>

11. Chapter 2 of the report was devoted to the strategic co-ordination of policy and its communication across Government. It included the following on the role of the Chief Press Secretary:

“The overall political strategy, direction and style of the Government is set by the Prime Minister. He looks to the Chief Press Secretary and the No 10 Press Office to ensure that the essential messages and key themes, which underpin the Government’s strategy, are sustained and not lost in the clamour of events. This means giving a clear direction from the centre.”
12. *Mountfield* also said that it would be essential for  
“Press Officers and Special Advisers active in communication matters to keep in very close personal contact, to ensure that messages endorsed by the Minister are always delivered consistently. Failure to do this is not only frustrating if one side is kept in ignorance of statements, guidance and briefings given by the other; it is fraught with danger.” “Permanent Secretaries, with their Ministers should monitor these relationships closely and take steps to correct any tendency to diverge.” (pages 12-13)

First progress report on implementing *Mountfield*, June 1998

13. The *Mountfield Report* called on the Head of GICS to report progress on implementing its recommendations after six and twelve months. A detailed questionnaire was circulated and the results set out in a report to the Cabinet Secretary entitled *Trusted values; new ways*.
14. This revealed a generally enthusiastic response to *Mountfield* that was seen as giving impetus to improvements that the best were already putting in place. It also reported some concerns – a “glass ceiling” for information staff, a distinct decline in job mobility and a refusal to release staff for transfer in good time. The report sought the “corporate commitment of all Heads of Information to staff training and career development. They must be willing to facilitate timely moves between Departments and specialisms, without which we cannot grow future managers and leaders or attract recruits.”
15. The report also recorded the view from No 10:

“The GICS has ‘raised its game’ and handling seems much smoother on the whole. There are still problems with certain departments.”

No 10 pointed out that advance warning was not as good as it should be and that too little strategic message was injected.

PASC Report, *The Government and Information and Communication Service*, August 1998

16. The Committee sought to gauge the success of the GICS in rising to the challenge of the 24/7 global news explosion and to identify problem areas.

“While in opposition, the Labour Party improved its techniques of presentation and news management. When it came into office it found government press offices which seemed, by comparison, unsophisticated and inefficient. The Government demanded a more efficient, faster-reacting, more pro-active Information Service, and was keen to find ways of co-ordinating the messages coming out of the various parts of Whitehall into a single coherent set of themes.”

“The legitimate commitment of any Government to the effective communication of its policies may give rise to concerns that the dividing lines between government information should be properly drawn, understood and, where necessary, policed.”

17. The Committee recommended the introduction of a code for Ministers and Special Advisers on contacts with the press.

“Such a code would make clear the obligations on Special Advisers and Ministers to work closely with Press Offices in general and the Prime Minister's Official Spokesman in particular, and should insist that each Minister agree a set of ground rules with the Press Office and the Permanent Secretary on what might be dealt with in contacts with the media, and ensure that it is understood by both categories of civil servants, permanent and temporary. But any code or guidance should also stress the importance of co-operation between Press Offices, Special Advisers and Ministers in presenting information to the public effectively and openly.”

18. In relation to No 10, the report said:

“Special advisers like Mr Campbell are not bound by the usual requirements that civil servants should be able to assist governments of “whatever complexion” and that they should be “impartial” ..... There is a very fine line between the promotion and defence of government policy, and the promotion and defence of the ruling party's policies ..... We welcome the Cabinet Secretary's determination to remain vigilant in ensuring that he as the Head of the Home Civil Service will ensure the policing of the difficult boundary between effective presentation and party political advocacy.”

19. The Committee noted the evidence from the Cabinet Office:  
Sir Richard Wilson suggested “it could even be helpful that Mr Campbell is “overtly political” because “everyone knows where he is coming from”.  
Mr Mountfield said “the appointment of Alastair Campbell with an explicitly political role actually clarifies the position. It is a more honest position, and I think it allows him to carry out that role in an acknowledged way and there is less of a grey area in a way than I think there was before.”

20. The Committee concluded that

“Whilst we recognise the current system needs to be kept under review we believe the current arrangements work well, particularly as a result of recent changes.”<sup>5</sup>

Government Response to the PASC Report, January 1999

21. The Government accepted the broad thrust of the Committee's thinking. It believed that the implementation of its recommendations, together with the continuing programme of action to give effect to the Mountfield Report, would sustain the continuing improvement of the service provided by the GICS.
22. But the Government saw no need for further guidance:

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<sup>5</sup><http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199798/cmselect/cmpubad/m/770/77007.htm>

“Guidance for Ministers and civil servants, including Special Advisers, on their duties and responsibilities is already set out in the *Ministerial Code*, the *Model Contract for Special Advisers* and *Guidance on the Work of the Government Information Service*. The issue of co-ordination between Ministers and their Special Advisers and departmental Press Offices was specifically covered in Chapter 3 of the Mountfield Report. The Government is not convinced that further guidance is necessary but it will take the most careful account of the Committee's thinking in taking forward the exercise that is now underway to produce a *Best Practice Guide* for members of the GICS and other civil servants, including Special Advisers, that have contact with the media.”

23. The Government endorsed the Committee's view that “sensitivity and common sense are the keys to successful monitoring of the boundaries between political and impartial presentation of policy. This ‘grey area’ is not new and has faced all Governments of modern times. This reinforces the need for senior information staff in each department who can draw on a range and depth of experience to ensure the boundaries are properly maintained. The Cabinet Secretary, working closely with Permanent Secretaries, the Head of Profession and the Prime Minister's Official Spokesman continue to be vigilant in the policing of the boundary between effective presentation and party political advocacy.”<sup>6</sup>

Second progress report on implementing *Mountfield*, January 1999

24. Using the same questionnaire system (but now extended to cover publicity sections as well as press offices), this report recorded “steady general improvement” across the range of *Mountfield* recommendations, with concern at problems of retention and high turnover.
25. While re-emphasising the value of progress overall since *Mountfield*, No 10 pointed to the need for greater efforts on follow

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<sup>6</sup><http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199899/cmselect/cmpubadm/162/16204.htm>

through and for more attention to be given to publicising the delivery of policy and programmes.

26. Following this second audit of departments against the *Mountfield* recommendations, the Head of GICS has produced annual reports to take forward a “continuous process of development and reform” (Annual Report 2000/01). In November 2002, the latest report issued as *The GICS Today* with the following introductory note from Mike Granatt:

“A year in the communications business is a long time. The substance and format of our traditional Annual Report are out of date even before publication. This has persuaded us to capitalise on the flexibility and success of our web site. The web site will now be the primary vehicle for reporting on our business. On these pages you will find all the information that we would normally have included in our Report. There will be quarterly updates on activity and change. Old material will be archived and remain accessible, and I will still report annual trends for the financial year.”<sup>7</sup>

6<sup>th</sup> Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, Reinforcing Standards, January 2000

27. The Committee revisited the issue of Special Advisers. It recommended that there should be a separate code of conduct for special advisers that should
- “include a section on the direct media contacts of special advisers, making clear the role they play in relation to the work of Civil Service information staff and in particular the role of the departmental head of information, as set out in the *Guidance on the Work of the Government Information Service* (July 1997).<sup>8</sup>
28. The Committee “had no testimony to the effect that the exercise of executive powers by special advisers at No 10 was causing problems at the moment (and evidence from the Head of the GICS that it was working well)”.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.gics.gov.uk/thegicstoday/introduction.htm>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm45/4557/chap6.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm45/4557/chap6.pdf> paragraph 6.57.



New edition of the *Handbook on the Government Information and Communication Service*, March 2000

29. The *GICS Handbook*<sup>10</sup> – known for many years as the *Red Book* – was updated and issued in loose-leaf form. It provides an overview of GICS, its work and its procedures. One section describes acceptable ways to reconcile Ministers’ party-political needs and their duty to protect the position of civil servants. However, there is no reference to the working relationship with special advisers. The bulk of the *Handbook* is given over to a Toolkit that introduces the working practices that members of the GICS should follow to ensure the Service maintains the high professional standards expected by Ministers. This gives all staff “an effective benchmark against which to gauge their practice.”

Government Response to the 6<sup>th</sup> Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, Cm 4817, July 2000

30. The Government accepted the recommendation that there should be a separate Code for special advisers, and that it should include a section on the direct media contacts of advisers. It said that this new Code would come into force after next General Election.
31. The Government said that it had made it clear when it was elected that
- “it intended to strengthen the centre of Government. It has therefore expanded the Policy Unit and created a Strategic Communications Unit and a Research Information Unit in Number 10, staffed by a mixture of permanent civil servants and special advisers. It has no plans to expand these units but believes that they have been valuable developments.”<sup>11</sup>

PASC Report *Special Advisers: Boon or Bane?* March 2001

32. The Committee noted that many Special Advisers in No 10 work in the area of communications.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.gics.gov.uk/handbook/introduction/default.htm>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm48/4817/4817-05.htm> response to chapter

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“These posts would not appear to be very dissimilar from positions in the GICS and we question whether they really need to be filled by special advisers. The whole area of communications is a difficult one, especially the line between effective communication of policy and party propaganda. There might seem to be advantages for government in having special advisers in this area but such advantages will soon disappear if the information disseminated comes to be seen as partial or unreliable. We hope to return to this subject. Meanwhile, we recommend that the Government consider whether these posts really need to be classified as special adviser posts or whether they too could be subject to open competition.”<sup>12</sup>

33. The Committee also particularly endorsed the Neill Committee's criticisms of the Model Contract insofar as that failed to mention relations between Special Advisers and the GICS, and said that the proposed Code of Conduct should give clear guidance on this matter.
34. The Committee expressed reservations about special advisers exercising executive powers.

“It was meant to be a helpful development (just as the shift of the Chief Press Secretary from being a civil servant to being a special adviser could be seen as serving the cause of honesty) but it has unhelpful implications for established relations within government. The role of special advisers should add to the effectiveness of these relations, not compromise them. Not only should the experiment not be extended but the existing arrangements should be reviewed.”<sup>13</sup>

35. The Committee noted that in 1998 it had found no evidence to substantiate claims that the Prime Minister's Chief Press Secretary had been using his office to forward the interests of the Government in a way inappropriate to someone paid from public funds as a special adviser.

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<sup>12</sup><http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200001/cmselect/cmpubadm/293/29302.htm>

<sup>13</sup><http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200001/cmselect/cmpubadm/293/29305.htm#a11> paragraph 66.

“Since then Alastair Campbell has been reminded by Sir Richard Wilson of the relevant guidelines. In our 1998 Report we said ‘it is difficult to avoid some advantage naturally accruing to the party in power from the use of public money to present the Government's policies in their best light’. That remains the intractable fact. We note that the FDA told us in the course of this inquiry that it was not a completely new concept having a special adviser in the role of Chief Press Secretary and that it was not necessarily inappropriate to do so. Whether it is wise for a government to fill the post in this way is another matter. We welcomed then and welcome now Sir Richard's repeated assurances that he remained vigilant to ensure that advisers do not overstep the mark, but we note that the *GICS Handbook* says little or nothing about the Service's relation to advisers and recommend that the next edition should set out the relationship in more detail. Tensions in this area are inevitable, which is why continuing vigilance is appropriate in policing the boundary line.”<sup>14</sup>

General Election, May 2001

36. After the Election Alastair Campbell became Director of Communications and Strategy at No 10. He withdrew from giving lobby briefings. Since then, Tom Kelly and Godric Smith, GICS members of the No 10 Press Office have jointly discharged the role of the Prime Minister's Official Spokesperson (PMOS).

*Model Contract for Special Advisers including the Schedule, Code of Conduct for Special Advisers, September 2001*

37. The *Code of Conduct* includes amongst the sorts of work a special adviser may do:  
“representing the views of their Minister to the media including a Party viewpoint” (paragraph 3ix of the Code).
38. The *Code* also has a section on contacts with the media:

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<sup>14</sup><http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200001/cmselect/cmpubadm/293/29305.htm#a11> paragraph 75.

“Special advisers are able to represent Ministers’ views on Government policy to the media with a degree of political commitment that would not be possible for the permanent Civil Service. Briefing on purely Party political matters should however be handled by the Party machine.

“All contacts with the news media should be authorised by the appointing Minister and be conducted in accordance with the *Guidance on the Work of the Government Information Service* (GWGIS), issued on behalf of the Prime Minister. Departmental Heads of Information are responsible for managing press and publicity operations in their department, and should be kept informed of Special Advisers’ contacts with the news media not only to ensure consistency of briefing, but also to ensure that contacts are recorded. Heads of Information are the department’s source of advice on the GWGIS.

“Special Advisers must not take public part in political controversy whether in speeches or letters to the Press, or in books, articles or leaflets; must observe discretion and express comment with moderation, avoiding personal attacks; and would not normally speak in public for their Minister or the Department.”<sup>15</sup>

Government Response to PASC report *Special Advisers: Boon or Bane?* December 2001

39. The Government set out the position as follows:

“At 31 October, there were 81 special advisers in post of whom 11 were employed primarily in the area of communications. Some but not all are in No. 10. Successive administrations have used special advisers to brief the media. Special advisers are required to conduct themselves in accordance with the *Civil Service Code* except for those provisions relating to impartiality and objectivity. They are able to represent Ministers' views on Government policy to the media with a degree of political commitment that would not be possible for the permanent Civil Service.”

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/central/2001/modconspads.htm>

“As recommended by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, the *Code of Conduct for Special Advisers* includes a section on contacts with the media. This makes it clear that special advisers' contacts with the media should be conducted in accordance with the *Guidance on the Work of the Government Information Service*. The Government continues to believe that the current arrangements are working satisfactorily. Permanent members of the Government Information and Communication Service will continue to be appointed in accordance with the rules of the Civil Service Commissioners and the GICS Development Centre.<sup>16</sup>

40. The Government decided to maintain the position of May 1997 and rejected PASC's recommendation that the experiment to give special advisers executive authority over civil servants should not be extended. The Committee noted that:

“Whilst the Government has no plans to extend the number of advisers with executive authority (currently only two of the potential three), we believed that the experiment itself should be ended following the recent general election, and the concerns we raised in our original report remain.”<sup>17</sup>

Committee on Standards in Public Life launches inquiry into *Defining the Boundaries within the Executive*, March 2002

41. The Committee's issues paper includes a section on relationships between special advisers and permanent civil servants:

“4.18 In most government departments, there will be two special advisers working alongside the permanent civil servants. There may be a particularly close working relationship with the government information officers in the department's Press Office. In this context, questions have arisen as to how far a special adviser may go in communicating the views of the Minister to the permanent civil servants. Furthermore, given the reference in the CCSA

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<sup>16</sup><http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200102/cmselect/cmpubadm/463/46304.htm>

<sup>17</sup><http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200102/cmselect/cmpubadm/463/46303.htm>

to their role “in representing the views of their Minister to the media including a Party viewpoint” there have been questions as to how this fits with the role of the departmental press officers.”<sup>18</sup>

42. The Committee raised three questions:

“How can the boundaries in the working relationship between special advisers and permanent civil servants best be defined? How effective are the provisions of the Code of Conduct for Special Advisers in defining those boundaries? How effective are the provisions of the *Guidance on the Work of the Government Information Service* in the case of special advisers and information officers?”

43. The Committee spent nine days taking oral evidence from 48 witnesses (see GCRG Paper 6). In concluding this evidence gathering phase of the exercise on 18 September, the Chairman said he hoped the report would be published around the end of the year.

Prime Minister’s first open Press Conference, June 2002

44. The Prime Minister held the first such conference on 20 June 2002. It included the following exchange:

Question: Your Director of Communications has spoken of moving into a new era of presentation, basically admitting that in the past there was too much spin. The idea of moving into a new area would perhaps be more recognised if there was an acceptance here in No 10 that in the past there has been too much, do you believe that on occasions in the past there was too much emphasis on spin and presentation?

Answer: Look, all governments are going to try and present their policy, and we live in a 24-hour media world. But what I do think, is that in the end it is substance that is important and the public knows that and we know that, and I think you know it too, is the honest truth.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> [http://www.public-standards.gov.uk/ninth%20report/executive\\_i&q.pdf](http://www.public-standards.gov.uk/ninth%20report/executive_i&q.pdf)  
paragraphs 4.18 to 4.22

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/page5390.asp>

The seventh conference in this series was held on 13 January.<sup>20</sup>

Government submission to inquiry on *Defining the Boundaries within the Executive*, July 2002

45. The submission addresses the issue of special advisers who brief the media:

“It is important to make clear that the *Guidance on the Work of the Government Information Service* applies to all civil servants, including special advisers, who have contact with the media. It is specifically referred to in the *Code of Conduct for Special Advisers*. However, the Government recognises that there would be benefit in providing guidance on the respective and complementary roles of information officers and special advisers employed on media related activities, and will update *Guidance on the Work of the Government Information Service* to provide a clarification of these relationships. It has also been recognised that more could be done to support special advisers particularly in their relationships with the permanent Civil Service and Whitehall departments. The Centre for Management and Policy Studies is designing induction training specifically to help new special advisers understand better these relationships.”

PASC Report “*These Unfortunate Events*”: *Lessons of Recent Events at the former DTLR*, July 2002

45. The Committee found that “The officials working at the centre of Government, those based in Downing Street and the Cabinet Office, were not pivotal to these events” in DTLR relating to the Jo Moore/Martin Sixsmith affair.<sup>21</sup>
46. The section headed *Reviewing Government Communication* is reproduced in full below.

“We recognise that one of the main driving forces behind the introduction of media special advisers from 1997 was the

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page5780.asp>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200102/cmselect/cmpublicad/303/30305.htm#a12> paragraph 25.

perception that GICS and other permanent civil servants were not skilled or proactive enough in their approach to communications. We consider that the central aim should be to improve and maintain professional standards among the career civil servants of the GICS. As we have seen, special advisers have not in themselves been the answer to the service's problems.

“The Government has recently announced that it would provide more guidance "on the respective and complementary roles of information officers and special advisers employed on media related activities". We welcome the Government's action, but it needs to go further.

“There is a need, first, for a sustainable improvement in the quality of the service provided by the permanent civil servants in the GICS. In the Committee's Sixth Report of 1997-98, it recommended an efficiency scrutiny for the GICS. There have been a number of changes to the GICS since then, and Mr Granatt was able to point to some improvements. But the climate for the GICS is constantly changing, and there are major new challenges on the way, including the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act. There needs to be continued pressure to achieve and sustain high levels of performance. A wide-ranging, objective, external look at the quality of the GICS is now necessary. The last major examination of this kind was carried out by Sir Robin Mountfield five years ago, and a new review, by an expert from outside the GICS, would be timely.

“The review should also examine the roles of all others, both civil servants and special advisers, who have a role in communications. The functions of the Director of Communications at No 10 Downing Street (currently Alastair Campbell, a special adviser) should also come within the scope of the review. Mr Campbell recently took over the supervision of the Government's major communications agency, the Central Office of Information, an arrangement which represents a major extension of the reach of the special adviser system. As Mike Granatt of the GICS told us: some special advisers "advise on presentational strategy and planning". The precise roles of



these advisers, though not as prominent as those of the advisers whose primary task it is to brief the media, need to be understood much more clearly.

“We believe that, five years after the Mountfield Report examined the operation of government information services, a radical external review of Government communications would be of great value, and we so recommend. The review should examine not only the effectiveness of the Government Information and Communication Service, but also the roles played by other civil servants and special advisers who have a responsibility for communications. This should clarify the boundaries between the work that is appropriate to special advisers and work that is not appropriate to them.”<sup>22</sup>

Prime Minister’s appearance before the House of Commons  
Liaison Committee, 16 July 2002

46. Tony Wright MP put the following question:

“this Government has got the word “spin” attached to it; and we have now got a whole trail of people, from Alastair Campbell, Peter Mandelson, Robin Cook and Clare Short saying, “We spun too much; we must do it differently”. Is this part of doing it differently?”

47. The Prime Minister answered:

“When you are in Opposition for 18 years, as we were, there was a tendency (because this is the way that Opposition works) that you believe the announcement is the reality. In many ways in Opposition it is, because what matters is the policy you are announcing; you are not actually in a position to deliver anything on the ground. I think for the first period of time in Government there was a tendency to believe, as it were, that the same situation still applied. It does not, in fact. For Government the announcement is merely the intention; the reality is what you have to go on and deliver on the ground. I think, in a sense, doing it this way, making sure

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<sup>22</sup><http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200102/cmselect/cmpubad/m/303/30302.htm>

that we have more ministerial statements, making sure that we try and find new ways of reaching out in direct conversation with people is a way of overcoming what is perceived, I think, often unfairly, as issues to do simply with news management.”<sup>23</sup>

**DAVID WILKINSON**  
Cabinet Office

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<sup>23</sup><http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200102/cmselect/cmliaisn/1065/106501.htm>