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FROM THE EDITOR

Poorly run, defensive, complacent – this description of the communities department, made in the final Grenfell Inquiry report this month, will not be easy reading for officials who worked there. But harder still to read is the conclusion that the deaths of all 72 people who were killed by the fire at Grenfell Tower on 14 June, 2017 were "entirely avoidable".

Inquiries are set up for many reasons, but prime among them is the desire to understand how a tragedy happened and thus to avoid it happening again.

But as the Grenfell report itself shows us, doing this isn't easy. One of the tragedies of Grenfell – a reason those deaths were entirely avoidable – is the failure to heed warnings from the 2009 Lakanal fire. The lessons were identified – by the coroner, by MPs, by safety campaigners and even by the London Fire Brigade itself – but they were not learnt.

The Grenfell report contains many specific recommendations covering areas like fire safety regulations and the construction industry. There are also specific themes, such as the impact of deregulatory pressure and austerity on the organisations which failed to prevent the tragedy.

But woven through the report's findings, we also see many lessons that other inquiries have highlighted: the challenges of groupthink; the failure to listen to or understand those outside the civil service; poor leadership at various levels. These things are harder to change than statutes and guidance.

Shortly after the Grenfell report was published, former deputy cabinet secretary Helen MacNamara – DG in the communities department at the time of the fire – called for a wider look at what major inquiries can tell the civil service about itself, adding that she "would encourage people to do that in a way which also listens to the other people who weren't part of the statutory inquiry".

So how to learn these tough lessons? One place to start is an inquiry which had a profound impact on the civil service. When the Iraq Inquiry published its final report in 2016, a team of 20 officials in the Ministry of Defence spent 10 days reading all 12 volumes to understand what it could teach the department. After distilling three key messages, the team (by then reduced to about half a dozen) began the work of understanding how things had already moved on since the Iraq war, and what still needed to change in light of Chilcot's findings.

They set about creating "tangible products", as then-director general Roger Hutton put it to *CSW* in 2018, to ensure that the "system didn't just repel this learning". These included a guide to "reasonable challenge" – an antidote to groupthink – and immersive training programmes for leaders.

Similar work was carried out in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Cabinet Office, where a team led by Liane Saunders (now ambassador to Oman) were building things like the Chilcot Checklist to address what she described as problematic behaviours and cultures "that develop when a system is under stress, and when it's dealing with something that is both long-running and wide-ranging".

All of this made a difference: in that same 2018 interview, Hutton told *CSW* that in the MoD, "the challenge agenda has really got quite a strong foothold now".

Yet although the Chilcot work was being rolled-out beyond the defence and security arena, we would see familiar failings of groupthink and cracks in a system under stress just a few years later in the government's Covid response.

Achieving real, widespread change takes time and persistence. MacNamara is right to call for a wide consideration of what inquiries can teach the civil service, but there must also be deep work to turn that understanding into action, and change. Or, as Hutton, now retired, wrote in a blog earlier this year: "We can't let the lessons learned become an orthodoxy that in time detaches itself from the problems they're supposed to address. Learning has to be constantly renewed." ■

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PPA

While we debate the future, smokers need help now

Duncan Cunningham, External Affairs Director for the UK & Ireland at Philip Morris International, believes there is an urgent need to support the 6.4 million smokers in the UK who are being overlooked by existing policy debates. He calls for a shift to a data-driven, scientific approach that prioritises offering a choice of effective, innovative smoke-free solutions to those who need them most, today

Duncan Cunningham
External Affairs Director for the UK & Ireland
Philip Morris International

Earlier this year, the debate around smoking was reignited, with policymakers and civil society revisiting how to tackle cigarettes once and for all.

The previous government's Tobacco and Vapes Bill, which has support from the current administration, proposed a "generation ban." This plan would gradually raise the minimum age for purchasing tobacco by one year, every year, starting in 2027, until no one in the UK could buy tobacco products.

There are 6.4 million reasons to rethink our approach to tobacco legislation

But in fact, smoking among 18-24 year olds has been declining rapidly[1], and if this trend continues, this age group could be "smoke-free" (less than 5% smokers) by 2028, just a year after the proposed generation ban begins.

Meanwhile, the initial Tobacco and Vapes Bill turned a blind eye to the 6.4 million adult smokers in the UK[2] who still need help in leaving cigarettes behind. This is where our focus should be.

You might wonder why Philip Morris International (PMI) is involved in this conversation. My answer is very simple: real change requires the involvement of manufacturers like PMI. We're the only global tobacco company committed to phasing out cigarettes.

Thanks to innovation from manufacturers and government support, viable smoke-free alternatives like vapes have made a significant dent in smoking rates. However, their impact appears to be plateauing — although 74% of smokers have tried vaping, only 32% of these are current vapers, according to ASH's latest report[3].

We understand that no single smoke-free product will work for all smokers, which is why embracing the full range of better alternatives is crucial. Unfortunately, too many adult smokers remain unaware of the options outside of vapes. They can't access them or are confused by false or misleading information — evidenced by ASH's report showing that 50% of smokers believe vaping is just as harmful as smoking[4].

That's why, today more than ever, decisive action is needed. Leaders should base laws and regulations on facts and data, keeping pace with technological change and innovation.

We are not asking stakeholders to trust us. We are asking them to trust the science and look at the data behind these smoke-free products.

Cigarettes, as the most harmful form of nicotine consumption, should not be equated with less harmful smoke-free products. What's needed is a clear, evidence-led strategy that levels the regulatory playing field between the various types of smoke-free products (e-cigarettes, heated tobacco, oral nicotine) and which clearly distinguishes them from traditional cigarettes.

Transparency and inclusion are at the core of modern policymaking, and tobacco control should be no exception, especially given its profound impact on public health.

A smoke-free UK is the public health opportunity of the century, but for the good of the 6.4 million existing UK smokers, it's time to remove the politics from the debate and work together to give them a chance. And to do that, we must give them a choice.

PHILIP MORRIS INTERNATIONAL

1. Adult smoking habits in the UK: 2022 ONS (ons.gov.uk) 2. Ibid 3. Use-of-vapes-among-adults-in-Great-Britain-2024.pdf (ash.org.uk) 4.Ibid

If you would like to discuss this topic further, please send an email to Duncan.Cunningham@pmi.com

MOVERS & SHAKERS

Want to hone your dinner party gossip about who's in, who's out and who's shakin' it all about? Look no further than *CSW*'s quarterly guide to all the key moves in government

If you would like to let us know about a move in your team please email csw.editor@civilserviceworld.com

MISSION: APPOINTED

Clara Swinson has been appointed second permanent secretary and head of a new Mission Delivery Unit in the Cabinet Office.

Swinson will head up the unit in implementing a mission-led government approach across the civil service and advise the prime minister and the chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on delivery of Labour's five missions and six "first steps".

Swinson joined the civil service in 1997 as a fast streamer and has been a senior civil servant since 2006, holding several roles in the Department of Health.

She has been DG for global and public health in DHSC, a role in which she works closely with the chief medical officer, since November 2016.

Prior to working in DHSC, Swinson spent four years in the then newly established Prime Minister's Delivery Unit in No.10.

POWER MOVE

Climate change expert **Chris Stark** has been appointed to lead a new clean power "mission control" centre in the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero

Mission Control for Clean Power 2030 will be "a one-stop shop, bringing together a top team of industry experts and officials to troubleshoot, negotiate and clear the way for energy projects", according to the department. Stark was chief executive of the Climate Change Committee until April, having led the watchdog for six years. Before that, he was director of energy and climate change in the Scottish Government. He has also held a variety of roles in UK government departments, including the Treasury and now-defunct BEIS. Stark was appointed without competition as an exception to the normal recruitment rules due to his experience as a long-time public and civil servant.

FOOD FLIGHT

Emily Miles has left the Food Standards Agency, returning to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs as director general for food, biosecurity and trade.

Before becoming FSA chief executive in 2019, Miles held several roles at Defra, including DG for its EU Exit Delivery Group. Katie Pettifer, FSA's director of strategy and regulatory compliance, has taken over as the agency's interim chief exec while recruitment takes place for a permanent successor.

CROSSING THE DIVIDE

Patrick Vallance, the former government chief scientific adviser, has joined the new Labour government as a science minister in the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology.

Vallance, who was the government's top scientist from 2018 to 2023, is minister for science, research and innovation. He has been made a peer to enable him to serve as a minister. Vallance is not the only ex-civil servant to join the new government's ministerial ranks. **Sarah Jones**, a former Department for Culture, Media and Sport senior civil servant, has been given a dual role as a minister of state in both the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and the Department for Business and Trade. New MPs **Miatta Fahnbulleh** and **Hamish Falconer** have been appointed to junior roles in DESNZ and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office respectively.

TOGETHER AGAIN

Former consultant **Emily Middleton** has been hired as a director general in DSIT. Middleton was previously a partner at consultancy firm Public Digital. At the company, she was seconded to secretary of state Peter Kyle's shadow office in the lead-up to the election, giving advice on digital public services reform. She was also seconded to Labour Together, a think tank with close links to the Labour Party.

LOVEGROVE'S NEW CHAPTER

Sir Stephen Lovegrove, a former Ministry of Defence permanent secretary and national security adviser, has been appointed to assess the UK's security partnership with Australia and the US.

Lovegrove was the MoD's top official from 2016 until 2021, when he became national security adviser. He was replaced by **Sir Tim Barrow** in 2022 during Liz Truss's brief spell as prime minister and reassigned to a short-term post as defence industrial adviser. Lovegrove will lead a piece of work to "reinforce the progress and benefits of the AUKUS programme", assess the UK's progress against AUKUS's goals so far, and identify both barriers to success and further areas of opportunity. He has been asked to report by October. Meanwhile, plans to replace Lovegrove's successor Barrow this summer with **Gen Gwyn Jenkins** have been halted and the government is set to re-run the recruitment process for the nation's next national security adviser.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Foreign secretary David Lammy has appointed former Department for International Development permanent secretary **Minouche Shafik** to conduct a review of the government's approach to international development. Shafik, who led DfID from 2008 to 2011, before it was subsumed into the Foreign Office in 2020, has left her role as president of Columbia University in the US to chair the review.

HE'S COMING HOME

The Charity for Civil Servants has appointed a new chief executive. Former senior civil servant **Jonathan Freeman** said the move felt "like coming home", having spent the first half of his career in the civil service.

He succeeds Graham Hooper, who led the charity for nine years. Freeman spent 18 years in the civil service from 1992 to 2010, before holding a number of roles in the private and charitable sectors and founding the CareTech Charitable Foundation, which provides grants in the social-care sector and supports care workers. He said he is "thrilled to have been entrusted to lead the charity at a time when the need for its support is possibly more important than at any time in its long history".

SEA CHANGE

The Home Office official in charge of tackling small-boat arrivals to the UK is stepping down from the role.

Stuart Skeates, a former lieutenant general in the Army, joined the Home Office in 2022 as an adviser to then-home secretary Suella Braverman after a stint advising ministers in the Cabinet Office. In April 2023, he became director general for strategic operations at the Home Office, with responsibility for leading operations required to implement the Conservative government's flagship Illegal Migration Act. He also worked with other DGs to coordinate operational work on irregular migration. Skeates will stay in post to oversee the setting up of Labour's new Border Security Command, which is currently searching for its first chief executive.

TOP SKILLING

The Department for Education has appointed an interim chair to set up and initially helm new arm's-length body Skills England. **Richard Pennycook**, who is DfE's lead non-executive board member, will oversee the body until a permanent board, chair and chief executive are in place.

Skills England will inform DfE's policy priorities and provide oversight of the post-16 skills system. Pennycook is a former chief executive of the Co-operative Group and has been a DfE non-exec since 2017.

TAKE CARE

Care Quality Commission chief executive **Ian Trenholm** has stepped down after a six-year spell leading the regulator. Trenholm said he had decided to depart having delivered on the organisation's "complex" transformation ambitions.

CQC chair Ian Dilks said Trenholm had led the organisation towards its ambition of being a "smarter and better regulator" and expressed the board's thanks for his contribution to the CQC. However, Wes Streeting declared the CQC "unfit for purpose" just a few weeks after becoming health secretary, after an independent review found shortcomings with inspection levels and the skills of staff.

Deputy chief exec **Kate Terroni** has been appointed interim chief executive while the organisation, a non-departmental public body overseen by the Department of Health and Social Care, searches for a permanent replacement.

LAST BUT NOT LEAST

Sir Alex Chisholm, who left his Cabinet Office permanent secretary and civil service chief operating officer positions in the spring, has joined energy giant EDF as its new UK chair in his first appointment since leaving the civil service.

And former Home Office and Department for Transport perm sec **Sir Philip Rutnam** has been appointed the chair of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research's council of management. ■

Charity for Civil Servants. Cabinet Office

REAR-VIEW MIRROR

As part of our rolling nostalgia fest, *CSW* scoured our archive for insights senior officials shared in years gone by – and asked for their current thoughts on the same theme

SIR MATTHEW RYCROFT

What did they do? Rycroft started his civil service career in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 1989. By the late 1990s, he had been posted to the British embassy in Washington DC and by 2002, he had joined No.10 as the prime minister's adviser on foreign affairs. After a stint as ambassador to Bosnia, he was made the FCO's EU director in 2008, and it was here that *CSW* first interviewed him. He next became the FCO's COO, then returned to the United States as the UK's permanent representative to the UN before being appointed permanent secretary at the Department for International Development in 2018.

What did they say? "My very first job in the civil service was as the assistant desk officer for NATO in the Foreign Office, and it was just at the end of the cold war," Rycroft recalled during his 2018 interview. "We hosted a NATO summit in London and I was the sort of deputy-assistant-junior-tea-making-summit-organiser. I remember how exciting it was to be in Lancaster House when the prime minister, Margaret Thatcher at the time, and [then-West German chancellor] Helmut Kohl and people like that were coming in and catching glimpses of them.

"I really got a buzz out of being involved in something that was making the news and, in a small way, having an influence on history. And if you work in the civil service, that is what you do every day."

Where are they now? After spending two years at DfID, Rycroft became permanent secretary at the Home Office in March 2020.

What they say now: "I still get that buzz working on issues that matter, and am hugely grateful to all my civil service colleagues over the years.

"The civil service has given me some amazing opportunities since that first job at the NATO summit. From being ringside at the Dayton peace talks, which put an end to the Bosnian war, to working as Tony Blair's private secretary and later permanent representative to the UN, it's been a fascinating ride.

"As an ambassador, chief operating officer, and now permanent secretary in two different departments, I have worked to improve the culture, ensuring that all our colleagues focus on delivery and have the opportunity to fulfil their potential."

DAME ANTONIA ROMEO

What did they do? In 2015, *CSW* interviewed Antonia Romeo shortly after she moved from the Ministry of Justice – where she had been leading the probation transformation programme – to become head of the Cabinet Office's Economic and Domestic Secretariat.

She had joined the civil service 15 years earlier as an economist on a temporary contract but, as she told *CSW*, a string of fascinating jobs kept her in government, including working as private secretary to the lord chancellor; director of the FCO's Whitehall Liaison Department, responsible among other things for relations with intelligence agencies; and executive director in the Cabinet Office's Efficiency and Reform Group under Francis Maude.

What did they say? "One of my many faults is that I don't career-plan," Romeo told *CSW* in 2015. "You never know what opportunities are going to come up. I came back to work in 2006, working three days a

week. And I was doing that for two months after the birth of my second child. Then the PPS job came up and I thought, 'I can't resist this opportunity'. And I never would have predicted that I would have done that, but I've ended up doing interesting jobs by just spotting things that happen."

She added: "The job I've got here is fantastic. But I think there's a lot of road ahead. And I think there are a lot of really great jobs on that road. I'm just hopeful at some point to luck out and get one."

Where are they now? In late 2015, Romeo left the Cabinet Office to work as the UK's special envoy to tech companies in New York. The next year she took on the role of HM consul general in New York, becoming the first woman to hold the position in its 231-year history. In 2017, she was named permanent secretary of the newly formed Department for International Trade and in 2020 she returned to the MoJ as perm sec.

What they say now: "It's fascinating to look back on this interview and consider how much has happened over the last nine years – how much has changed, and how much has stayed the same.

"I have been fortunate enough to take on a number of the 'really great jobs' I had been hoping would materialise. I knew it then and continue to believe that the civil service offers the most complex, rewarding and interesting jobs out there."

SUSAN ACLAND-HOOD

What did they do? Acland-Hood joined the civil service in 1999, working at the Department for Education and Employment. She spent time as head of strategy in the Home Office before joining No.10 as a policy adviser on home affairs and justice, then on education policy. By 2013, she had returned to the education department as director of education funding before moving to the Treasury as director of enterprise and growth.

CSW first met her in 2017, when she was chief executive at HM Courts and Tribunals Service.

What did they say? "I've spent quite a lot of my career finding things that people thought were very hard and then trying to do them," Acland-Hood said. She added that she had "always been interested in trying to find a small number of big things that make a big difference".

"I think it is quite easy to spend your career doing a large number of small things," she explained. "And sometimes you make a lot of progress by doing a large number of small things, but I think you always have to ask yourself the question: 'Are we missing the big lever, are we missing the strategic change we could make?' So I am always trying to do that."

Where are they now? After four years at HMCTS, Acland-Hood was made permanent secretary at the Department for Education, bringing her back to the policy area where her civil service career began.

What they say now: "I definitely stand by this – I'm still always trying to find the big things that will make a difference and do them even if they are hard. One example in DfE at the moment is the rollout of 30 hours of free childcare for working parents, which will cover the whole period from the end of maternity leave at nine months to the beginning of school.

"It's challenging, but we delivered the first stage well, despite a lot of people telling us it would be hard, and ultimately it will be something that is game-changing for parents, children and even the economy.

"However, when I spoke to you I think I was thinking mostly in terms of big changes. I'd probably now emphasise more that sometimes it's about sticking to big things, not just about finding new ones. For example, sticking over time to evidence-based approaches like the use of phonics in reading has made our children some of the best readers in the world."


INTERVIEW › SUSAN ACLAND-HOOD

COURTING REFORM

As head of HM Courts and Tribunals Service, the Ministry of Justice executive agency that runs the judicial system in England and Wales, **Susan Acland-Hood** is overseeing wide-ranging reforms to the operation of courts across the country. She tells **Richard Johnstone** how the changes will improve access to justice

Photos by Paul Heartfield

Susan Acland-Hood is, she insists, quite comfortable in her hammock. This might seem like an unusual place for a senior government official to be, but this is how the chief executive of HM Courts and Tribunals Service – in one of the best Whitehall analogies *CSW* has heard in a while – describes the rather odd position of her agency.

"HMCTS is unique in being run jointly by the executive and the judiciary, so I report jointly to the lord chancellor and the lord chief justice," she explains. "When I started last November, lots of people described this to me as sitting on a two-legged stool – you are actively keeping your balance.

"But having reflected on this carefully over recent months, I chose a different metaphor. It is more like lying in a hammock – it is different from a normal bed, it feels a little bit freer in a lot of ways, there's a little bit more movement there, but it is actually quite comfortable and quite appealing unless you have any doubt about the security with which your hammock is attached at each end. And you only need the hammock to feel like it is coming loose at one end for it to stop being comfortable and appealing and to start being a bit worrying.

"At the moment, I feel very secure in my hammock and I spend a lot of time attending to the knots at each end of it and making sure the relationship is secure."

Despite this lounging metaphor, Acland-Hood is most certainly not relaxing in the job. When she took over as the head of HMCTS, she inherited a £1bn reform plan for courts and tribunals in England and Wales that could transform many centuries-old practices of the law.

Under the scheme, HMCTS is working to create what Acland-Hood calls the online court, intended to make the operation of criminal, civil and family courts and tribunal cases much more efficient.

Many elements of these reforms – which range from creating an online platform for the police to share details of criminal charges with the Crown Prosecution Service and HMCTS, to an electronic rota for magistrates and even an online system for divorce proceedings – are now moving into beta testing.

"We're just at the stage where it has stopped being a thing that we wrote down on a piece of paper and started to be a thing that we are doing, and there are a lot of things that people will start to see quite soon," Acland-Hood says.

The opportunity to make a such major change is what attracted Acland-Hood to the role. "I've spent quite a lot of my career finding things that people thought were very hard and then trying to do them," she says.

This career has included a stint serving as director of enterprise and growth at the Treasury as well as head of strategy at the Home Office and home affairs and justice private secretary to Gordon Brown when he was prime minister. Through all these roles, Acland-Hood says she has "always been interested in trying to find a small number of big things that make a big difference" – a description that neatly fits the court reform plans.

"I think it is quite easy to spend your career doing a large number of small things," she explains. "And sometimes you make a lot of progress by doing a large number of small things, but I think you always have to ask yourself the question: 'are we missing the big lever, are we missing the strategic change we could make?' So I am always trying to do that."

Her time at the Treasury presented lots of opportunities to make big changes, she says, such as helping to set up the apprenticeship levy and hypothecating vehicle excise duty to fund roads. Now, at HMCTS, she is continuing with her aim of finding big changes that transform rather than small changes which merely improve.

"Sometimes you make a lot of progress by doing a large number of small things, but I think you always have to ask yourself the question: are we missing the big lever, are we missing the strategic change?"

She visits a court every week and says the current system means "a huge amount of effort goes into continuous improvement and small changes applied on a system that has some fundamentally broken national processes".

"People are spending a lot of discretionary effort figuring out how to move lots and lots of paper from point A to point B more efficiently than they did it yesterday, and how to make sure we »

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SIR LEIGH LEWIS

What did they do? Leigh Lewis joined the Department of Employment in 1973 and rose to become chief exec of Jobcentre Plus, second permanent secretary at the Home Office and then perm sec at the Department for Work and Pensions. He retired from the civil service at the end of 2010.

What did they say? Lewis told *CSW* in 2010 that there had been a "quiet revolution" under way in the civil service that had changed the way permanent secretaries operated as a group. He said that under the cabinet secretary's leadership, perm secs were "forever looking at how we operate better collectively and together to deliver ministers' objectives and better service at better value to the citizen".

He added: "I won't pretend that there's never any instance in which departments put their own interests above that of the collective, but the degree to which it's changed in recent years is not really appreciated out there. I think there has been a pretty fundamental change – and I'm really pleased about that."

Where are they now? More than 13 years after leaving Whitehall, Lewis sits on a number of third-sector boards. He describes being vice-chair of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust as "probably" the most notable. "We exist to learn the lessons from the past to help create a better future," he says. "Sadly that's probably never been more important than it is today."

Lewis adds: "Apart from these roles, I'm incredibly fortunate to have four lovely grandchildren to keep me young and I'm still supporting Watford FC to prove that there's no fool like an old fool!"

What do they say now? "I've watched with growing unease the vitriol heaped on the civil service, and on some civil servants by name, in recent years by politicians and ministers who should have known better. But I've also watched the failure of some senior civil servants to stand up and be counted when they should have done so, especially over Partygate.

"I hope that the outcome of the recent election will enable a reset in which civil servants and the advice they give are once again respected by ministers, and in which civil servants for their part undertake their overriding duty to serve the government of the day to the very best of their abilities." ■

SPECIAL DELIVERY

As *CSW* was launched in 2004, Tony Blair's Prime Minister's Delivery Unit was hitting its stride. **Jim Dunton** looks at how the centre of government's approach to implementation has evolved

Revolutions in the way UK government operates are few and far between, but 20 years ago one spearheaded by Tony Blair was gathering a real head of steam.

After his first term in office, Blair became frustrated by the extent to which being prime minister didn't necessarily provide levers to drive the delivery of policy goals – and demonstrate success to the public. His answer was to create the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit to push progress against Public Service Agreements – targets that had been introduced in 1998, aligned to New Labour pre-election pledges.

Michael Barber, previously chief adviser to education secretary David Blunkett, was drafted in to head up the PMDU in 2001. It was tasked with aiding the delivery of government "priority" objectives across 17 PSAs in four departments: the Home Office, the Department of Health, the Department for Education and Skills, and the Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions.

Blair took a direct interest in the delivery of priority PSAs and the unit provided a support-and-challenge function for departments. According to the Institute for Government, while departments remained responsible for achieving their PSA targets, the PMDU deployed a range of tools and processes to help.

Blair is said to have spent up to half a day every week focused on stocktake meetings related to the 17 priority PSAs. "Over time, senior officials and ministers came to see the stocktake process as an opportunity to discuss specific issues and delivery challenges directly with the prime minister," the IfG said.

Under Gordon Brown, the PMDU evolved to focus on performance policy, capability-building, performance monitoring and unblocking obstacles to delivery. Brown moved the delivery unit into HM Treasury and was less personally engaged.

An autumn 2007 refresh saw the announcement of a new framework featuring 30 PSAs that were government priorities, underpinned by 153 measures. The priority areas were cross-cutting and most departments were involved. A specific cabinet committee was responsible for each cross-cutting PSA and for holding the lead secretary of state to account for delivery.

"Every time a prime minister has decided the delivery unit is unnecessary, they have almost instantly brought it back" ***Emma Norris, IfG***

Adrian Brown was part of the PMDU for two years from 2002, before moving to the Prime Minister's Office. Until recently, he was executive director of the Centre for Public Impact.

He tells *CSW* that while the unit benefited from some helpful tailwinds in its heyday, such as government spending increasing at historic rates and "pretty competent people in relevant ministries", its methods clearly delivered results.

"Blair was an unusually powerful and influential prime minister," he says. "The approach of really focusing on getting things like waiting-list numbers down undoubtedly led to those results being achieved in a way that they wouldn't have been otherwise."

Equally, he acknowledges that the focus on PSAs had the potential to be gamed – such as by manipulating the way measures like individual A&E waiting times are calculated. Brown adds that by the end of the New Labour period, targets had gone "way beyond" the "useful narrow focus of the beginning".

David Halpern, who was chief analyst in the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit under Blair, is more direct in his criticism of the continual expansion of the number of PSAs, likening it to the sorcerer's apprentice scene in the Disney classic *Fantasia*.

"You get the multiplication of these targets – you keep chopping the thing in two and there's more and more and more of them," he says.

Halpern, who went on to become founding research director of the IfG and then founder of the Behavioural Insights Team, says the system "just got completely out of control".

The coalition government of 2010 made a great show of "scrapping" the PMDU and PSAs as soon as it took office. In fact, the PMDU's talent was retained in the Treasury while a very small Prime Minister's Implementation Unit was created in No.10. Two years later the PMIU was relocated to the

Cabinet Office and expanded. Current cabinet secretary Simon Case led it at one stage.

In 2020, coalition-era chancellor George Osborne admitted to the Commission for Good Government that he and PM David Cameron had "spent years" trying to recreate the delivery system that operated under Blair and Brown.

The coalition replaced PSAs with Structural Reform Plans that were part of what the IfG describes as a "broader suite of documents" known as Departmental Business Plans. These plans were action-focused rather than target-focused, designed to explain how individual departments would contribute to meeting the coalition's programme for government.

Halpern, who worked in Downing Street during the coalition years, said the Conservatives had been "fascinated but appalled" by the delivery unit. He explains: "The Cameron style was, broadly: 'I'm not going to micro-manage you, but are you getting the job done?'"

Damningly, a National Audit Office report noted in 2016 that by the end of the 2010-15 parliament there was "no functioning cross-government approach to business planning, no clear set of objectives, no coherent set of performance measures and serious concerns about the quality of data that was available".

It added that members of the Public Accounts Committee felt departmental accounting officers across government "lacked the data on cost and performance they need for effective oversight of government spending, and to provide accountability to parliament".

The NAO said business plans had "fallen into disuse", resulting in "no up-to-date, consistent information across government on what departments were doing and what they were achieving".

Brown says the "freshness and edge" of Blair's original approach was never going to be maintained for the long haul and that looking for a new approach to performance and targets made sense.

"You don't necessarily need to have the PMDU equivalent chasing everybody all the time – it should be something that happens naturally within government," he says. "What was learned from the Blair years was incorporated into the business of government, be it through the departmental plans or the way Treasury relates to departments or through other conversations across government.

"What didn't change, and arguably still hasn't changed, is this reliance on what you might describe as a very top-down, hierarchical, managerial, metric-driven way of understanding the world and discussing performance and driving performance."

After the Conservative Party won a majority in the 2015 general election, a new business-planning and performance-management regime was created, with departments asked to put together Single Departmental Plans for the whole term of the parliament. SDPs were supposed to cover day-to-day business, formal reporting on key government priorities and cross-cutting goals that stretched beyond individual departments.

Former PM David Cameron and his chancellor George Osborne "spent years" trying to recreate Blair and Brown's delivery system, according to Osborne

The NAO subsequently observed that although SDPs were intended to be developed alongside the 2015 Spending Review, detailed planning actually took place after the review was finalised and the plans "continued to be refined well into the 2016-17 financial year".

A key element of SDPs was a cross-cutting set of 10-15 government priorities, delivered by multiple departments; reporting to the centre of government on indicators for finance, performance, people and operations; and clear links to more detailed departmental plans.

The IfG later noted that SDPs were "overly focused" on inputs like budgets and staff numbers, and outputs such as appointment numbers and waiting times – rather than "real-world outcomes" like pupil achievement or life expectancy.

It said SDPs did not do enough to enable cross-departmental working and also failed to integrate financial management in HM Treasury with No.10 and the Cabinet Office's oversight of government performance.

The think tank described them as falling short of being a tool that departments used for day-to-day planning.

"Instead they tended to be written and forgotten", it concluded.

SDPs morphed into Outcome Delivery Plans following a 2017 review by Michael Barber that called for the implementation of a new "Public Value Framework" to maximise social value achieved through public spending. After pilots, provisional "priority outcomes" were agreed for each department at the 2020 Spending Review.

The IfG describes ODPs as both a recognition of the shortcomings of SDPs and a response to Barber's Public Value Framework. The first ODPs were agreed by departments in 2021. They were supposed to include measures that could demonstrate impact, with quarterly reporting between departments and the centre of government over plans' four-year lifespan.

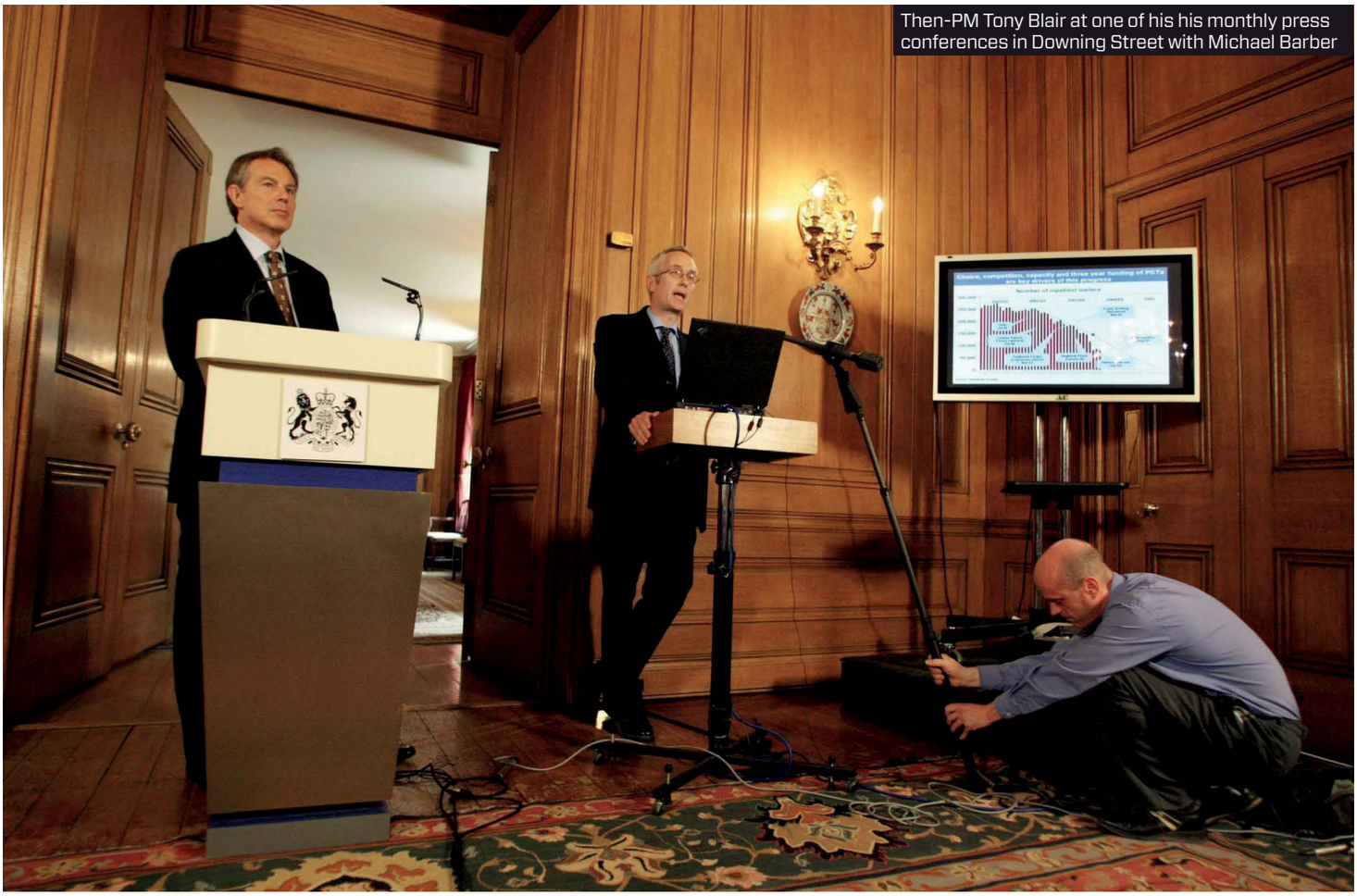
In the spring of 2021 then-PM Boris Johnson announced that he was bringing back the PMDU in the wake of a "rapid review" led by Barber that looked at ways government could be more focused, effective and efficient.

IfG deputy director Emma Norris says the idea of trying to create a set of outcomes that departmental performance is managed against represented a "step forward" that the new government of Keir Starmer could build upon.

Less than 48 hours after moving into No.10, Starmer confirmed that he would personally chair five delivery boards for his five 'missions'. They are: ramping up economic development; making the UK a clean-energy 'superpower'; halving serious violent crime and boosting public confidence in the police; breaking down barriers to opportunity; and making the NHS 'fit for the future'.

He said his presence on the boards would "make sure that it's clear to everyone that they are my priority in government".

Norris expects to see a "mission delivery unit" created in the centre of government to keep track of progress, as well as to identify emerging prob-



Then-PM Tony Blair at one of his his monthly press conferences in Downing Street with Michael Barber

lems and try to overcome them.

"Unlike some previous versions of delivery units, this is likely to have some really good data capability in it," she says. "A focus on iteration, rather than just setting a goal and doggedly pulling the same lever to try and get there."

Halpern says Starmer's missions have a great strength in that they don't over-specify the target, making them "strikingly different" from the pledges of 2001-5.

"The bit we should keep an eye on is: have you got the machinery to deliver it? As well as to avoid the traps that we've seen previously around gaming and so on," he says. "It's a much bigger enterprise than it first looks.

"It took until the end of the first term with Tony Blair to realise that we needed more of those mechanics to be built. I think that there are enough people in play to realise that you can't wait five years. Let's bring that forward to get the machinery in place early in the administration."

Halpern observes that the route to delivering the missions is uncertain, and will likely require testing on the part of officials to make sure that the centre of government is pushing for the right things.

"It's that depth that sits underneath that really delivers it," he says. "You've got to keep pressing on the 'how'. Have you built a machine, a civil service, which is fit for purpose to answer those questions? We haven't had one to date, but of course we could build one."

"The Cameron style was, broadly: 'I'm not going to micro-manage you, but are you getting the job done?'"
David Halpern

Brown argues that it would be a mistake for Team Starmer to wholly revert to the Blair approach, not least because public services and the government coffers are in a markedly different place to 2001.

"If you want to transform these systems; if you want to reimagine the national healthcare system to be fit for purpose for the next generation – rather than just making it marginally more efficient than it is today, you need a different way of doing it," he says. "And that's the trick a government has to be able to pull off."

Brown says the Barber/Blair approach, known as 'Deliverology', is best used for systems that are functioning, but need to do so better, faster and cheaper. He says a crisis-management approach is currently required for many public services.

"If they want to make an impact on some of these public services, they're going to have to do it with worse-than-1997-era levels of austerity and no real prospect of that changing in the parliament," he says.

The IfG's Norris believes it will not be long before the next incarnation of the PMDU emerges, as the past two decades have shown that the centre of government needs a group of people charged with supporting the delivery of core priorities.

"Every time a prime minister has decided it is unnecessary, they have almost instantly brought it back," she says.

"There is pretty much agreement that across almost any government you need that form of capability in place. The difference is how big is it? How tight is its focus? What kind of methods does it use for working? Does it directly report to the prime minister or not? Those are all things that change." ■

How Mastek's values and expertise align with the public sector's needs and challenges

Mastek is hugely excited to be a co-headline sponsor of this year's Civil Service Awards, recognising and celebrating inspirational individuals and teams right across government. As a leading provider of digital transformation and IT services in the public sector, we see the massive achievement and contributions of Civil Servants, day in day out, working in blended teams to deliver for the UK public.

As an organisation our values are the guiding principles that shape our culture and behaviour, and they make a massive difference to how people feel both internally and externally about an organisation. Having been a Civil Servant for over 21 years before moving to the private sector, the culture and values of an organisation is the most important thing for me. I moved to an organisation with no involvement with the public sector and very quickly realised that I missed that sense of purpose and satisfaction in delivering public services that benefit the citizens of the UK, something that I am sure resonates with an audience of Civil Servants.

As a consequence I moved on relatively quickly and joined Mastek in order to achieve the balance of a different challenge, still being able to add value to public services and working for an organisation who's values aligned with the Civil Service. Being able to work across our Secure Government Services portfolio gives me a wider view across government (some illustrated below). It enables me to bring in my experience of supporting Critical National Infrastructure from within government and the view point of a customer, which is crucial for creating products, services, and experiences that exceed customer expectations.

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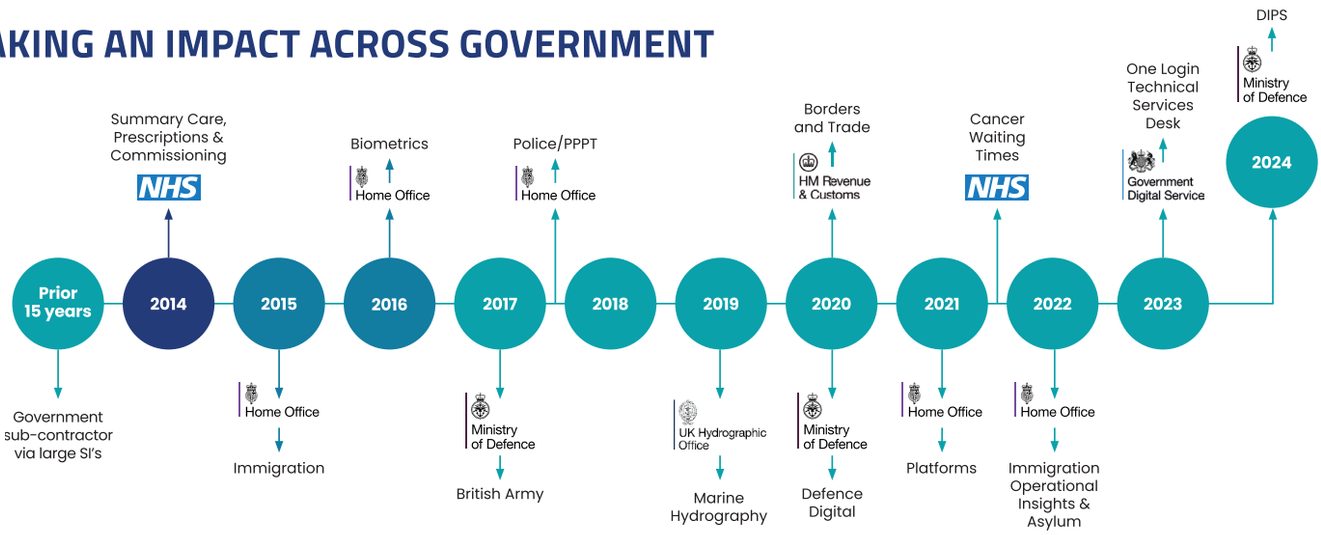

Why Mastek values align with civil service values

Mastek is a global IT services company that has been delivering innovative and impactful solutions for the public sector for over three decades. Mastek shares the same values as the civil service, such as integrity, honesty, impartiality, and objectivity. These values guide Mastek's approach to every project, ensuring that the solutions are tailored to the specific needs and goals of the public sector clients.

Like the Civil Service, Mastek's values are defined in its Code of Conduct, which sets out the ethical and professional standards that we expect from our employees, suppliers and partners.

These values are not just aspirational goals, but practical guidelines that inform the everyday ways of working. They help us to make ethical and professional decisions, to resolve conflicts and dilemmas and to deliver high standards of conduct. One of our USP's is our core principle to do the right thing for the customer/user, working as one team to deliver the right outcomes and create positive outcomes for society.

By aligning with civil service values, Mastek has built many trusted partnerships across the civil service and has a reputation of customer focus, agility, collaboration, ownership, integrity and excellence.

Mastek's values are not just compatible with the civil service values, but complementary and reinforcing. They enable us to deliver innovative and impactful solutions for the public sector, while maintaining high standards of integrity and excellence. We are proud to partner with the civil service and to celebrate its achievements through the Civil Service Awards. We look forward to continuing our collaboration and mutual learning in the future.

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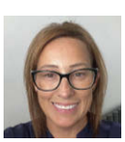

Cheryl Hartley
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UNA O'BRIEN TRUE CALLING

THE CASE FOR A DUTY OF CANDOUR ON THE CIVIL SERVICE HAS BEEN GROWING FOR YEARS. NOW IS THE TIME TO THINK ABOUT HOW IT WILL WORK IN PRACTICE

Of the announcements made in the King's Speech, none is likely to demand change across public services as profoundly as the intended 'Duty of Candour'. But what exactly is this duty and what should we look for in the proposals later this year?

The case for a legal duty of candour has been mounting over the last decade propelled by successive inquiry reports, particularly those into the Mid-Staffs NHS; the Hillsborough families' experience and the infected blood scandal. Each report, through personal testimony and evidence, reveals the deep pain caused when public organisations react defensively and evasively towards members of the public who have suffered harm and are trying to find out what went wrong. All three reports thus have compelling insights as to why a duty of candour is needed, what it means and how it might work. When proposals for the civil service duty of candour appear, will they match the challenge of these reports?

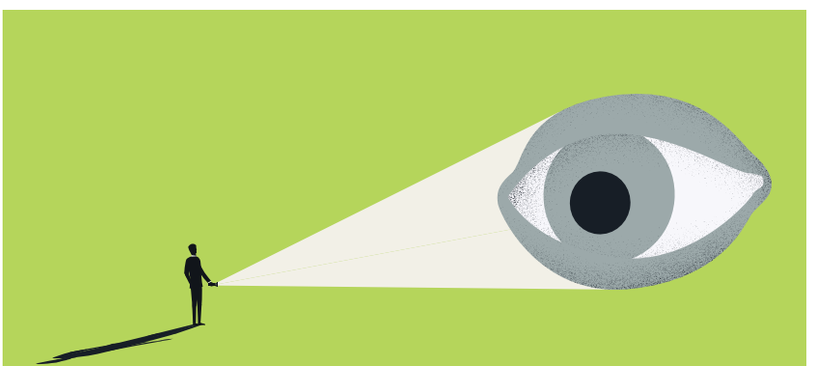
At its core, to be candid means to be honest, to tell the truth and be forthcoming, especially if doing so *reveals something difficult or uncomfortable*. A duty to do so means it is a requirement and an expectation, part of a professional obligation. Sir Robert Francis in the 2013 Mid-Staffs report defined 'candour' as an action that is proactive: "The volunteering of all relevant information to persons who have or may have been harmed by the provision of services, whether or not the information has been requested and whether or not a complaint or a report about that provision has been made."

There is already a statutory (organisational) duty of candour in the NHS – introduced for trusts in 2014, and for other health and care providers in England in 2015. An important feature of this duty is that the health regulator, the CQC, has enforcement powers up to and including criminal sanctions. More significant are the expectations placed on NHS leaders, since the duty implies a deep responsibility on them to re-shape culture and practices such that mistakes and errors can be openly acknowledged and communicated. Many would argue that the culture shift in the NHS a decade on has not gone far enough and that the public are insufficiently aware of how the duty works, both reasons why there is currently a full review of the NHS candour system, no doubt with lessons to come for the civil service.

The harrowing account of the Hillsborough families' experience and their long fight for justice was exposed in Bishop James Jones' 2017 report. He said that a duty of candour at a minimum should require police officers, serving or retired, to cooperate fully with investigations undertaken by the Independent Office for Police Conduct. He also saw the case for a wider duty of candour for the police as part of a much-needed culture shift to counter the tendency to avoid straight answers. It is time, he argued, to place the public interest above our own reputation.

Most recently, the Infected Blood Inquiry, published this spring, makes the undeniable case for change by laying bare an accretion of obfuscation and evasiveness going all the way back to the 1980s with devastating testimony from thousands of witnesses. Sir Brian Langstaff's *Overview and Recommendations* report should be compulsory reading. "Citizens", he writes, "need to be trusted with the truth rather than be misleadingly reassured."

The ambition now must be for a clear and emphatic duty of candour for the civil service, one where leaders are held accountable for how it is implemented and fulfilled in their department or agency. Some might be surprised to learn there is already a common law duty of candour on departments when responding to judicial review cases (the guidance, available on GOV.UK, bears dusting off) and when giving evidence to a public inquiry. The new, wider duty of candour for the civil service should draw on this experience.



"Care will be needed to align the new duty with the Civil Service Code, the Ministerial Code and the Official Secrets Act, amending all three if needed"

Care will be needed to align the new duty with the Civil Service Code, the Ministerial Code and the Official Secrets Act, amending all three if needed. We should look for a duty that emphasises greater openness and listening to the public; one that signals a shift away from defensiveness towards willingness to learn from failure; and one that is workable so that individual civil servants as well as ministers are aware of what is required and expected of them in specific circumstances. Whatever happens on the legal framework, we can all be active now to engage with the voice of citizens in recent inquiry reports and to start discussing how a duty of candour might best work in our teams and organisations. ■

Dame Una O'Brien is a leadership coach with the Praesta partnership and a former permanent secretary at the Department of Health

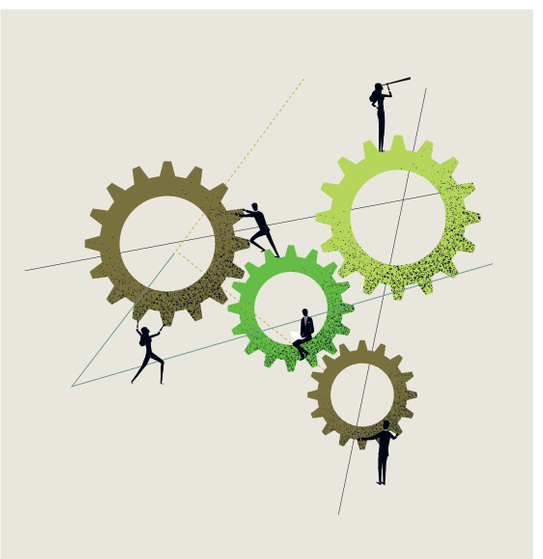
ALEXANDER EVANS ACHIEVING MISSION: POSSIBLE

STARMER'S GOVERNMENT IS COMMITTED TO BEING "MISSION-DRIVEN". WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES TO DELIVERING ON THIS? AND WHAT COULD MAKE IT HAPPEN?

A persistent friction for the civil service is around how to connect the dots across departmental, policy and operational boundaries. This is not just true of central government, but of engagement and learning from arm's-length bodies, devolved administrations, local government and the NHS. Central government officials rarely move across these de facto silos, which can distance civil servants from citizen experience. And like all large, complex systems, the potential for mission drift is always present. The worst-case scenario: well-intentioned, hard-working officials and public servants do lots but deliver little.

Maintaining strategic focus is challenging. Government suffers from weapons of mass distraction: crises, media and pressure group noise, and the persistent lure of novelty. There is a constant risk of resources being poached or pared back, staff reallocated, or ministerial changes reframing priorities. Without a laser focus on whether policies are delivering, emphatic announcements can fall short of achieving their intended effect.

All this makes prime minister Keir Starmer's focus on five missions (economic stability and growth, clean energy, NHS reform, safer streets, and improving education) a compelling frame for cross-government action. As Starmer wrote before the election: "Mission-driven government means raising our sights as a nation and focusing on ambitious, measurable, long-term objectives that provide a driving sense of purpose for the country. It means a new way of doing government that is more joined up, pushes power out to communities and harnesses new technology, all with one aim in mind – to put the country back in the service of working people." This is his "commander's intent" – a phrase military planners use to set out what success looks like, and to drive coherence in a dynamic environment. While politicians and civil servants aren't usually intending to use lethal force, they do sometimes kill off policy initiatives.



"Government suffers from weapons of mass distraction: crises, media noise, and the persistent lure of novelty"

Most governments try to focus on a few core goals. Frequently they get distracted from these by the sheer multitude of issues (and left-field crises) they are responsible for. The bureaucratic tools and approaches that can help are well rehearsed, even if experts argue over which have most purchase. From my perspective, three are key.

The first is money. Shared money; shared goals. As one leader of a complex bureaucracy once told me, it's challenging to direct from the centre in an environment that is not "command and control". Think of the parts of your organisation as cats, they said. You can't tell cats what to do – but you can move their food. Shared funding fosters shared effort. One good example of this in British public policy was the introduction of shared conflict funds between the FCO (as was), the MoD and DfID (as was). Pooled programme funding outside an individual departmental envelope not only forced DGs and directors to work collaboratively, but it also brought together interdepartmental teams at G7 and SEO level – leading to better information-sharing and more coherent spend.

The second is (properly) excellent performance and input data. This needs to flow to the centre, independent of "editing rights" shaped by worries about how it makes an individual minister or department look. Such data does not need to be secretive. Working off a single version of the truth is additive to good policy delivery.

The third is consistently fostering challenge, and red-teaming. Government spends large amounts on research; stakeholders fill meeting rooms up and down the country. But the rituals of funding research and engaging with stakeholders can become tame. Research isn't always digested by strategic decision-makers (both ministers and very senior officials) while stakeholder engagement can be formulaic. This is where bringing properly diverse and challenging externals into the room can help far more than a passing meeting or two with the usual suspects. Add greater porosity in and out of central government and missions can benefit from properly interdisciplinary insight. Non-executive directors picked to challenge as well as sustain delivery are another plus, as is extensive policy experimentation (as Ravi Gurumurthy from the innovation agency Nesta has rightly proposed). A confident, excellent minister or permanent secretary should not be afraid of challenge.

A novel approach alone is not enough. The language of mission-led government is compelling: it communicates intent and focus. But, as Sue Gray knows, the "how" really matters. Cross-government working is about the mechanics as well as the design. For mission focus to become mission: possible, this will need close attention. ■

Alexander Evans is a professor in practice in public policy at the London School of Economics and former strategy director in the Cabinet Office

DAVE PENMAN WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE

THE APPOINTMENTS ROW RAISES QUESTIONS OVER PROCESSES AND PAY LEVELS

If you'd been taking bets on the new Labour government's first big political challenge, you'd have got pretty long odds on a cronyism row involving the impartiality of the civil service. Yet somehow that's where we've ended up.

Starm in a teacup – or genuine scandal?

First, the facts. The brouhaha mainly centres around three appointments: Ian Corfield, Emily Middleton and Jess Sargeant. All three were appointed under the "exceptions" process, which is meant to be used where the civil service needs to appoint urgently or where a certain set of skills is needed. Most of these come with restrictions, as these three appointments did, and are time-limited so the individuals can't move directly to a permanent role without a further open competition.

When the political row first erupted, the Civil Service Commission did a handy explainer on the exceptions process. It's worth a read and will probably surprise you that in the last reporting year, there were around 80,000 civil service appointments through open competition and around 9,000 through the "exceptions" process. The commission is required to approve any "exceptions" at SCS pay band 2 or above or equivalent in salary, plus extensions to contracts and the like. The majority of "exceptions" appointments are done by departments within a set of rules and they are audited annually.

Now to the appointments themselves. Ian Corfield is the one that sticks out the most. He was a personal Labour donor with strong links to the chancellor. His role relates to organising an investment conference – so a specific, time limited role – and by all accounts he's well connected to help deliver this. His appointment has now been converted to an unpaid advisor role. Given the nature of the role and his personal links to the chancellor, that really should have been the original decision. A misstep by the new government.

Emily Middleton in many ways has the CV the civil service craves on digital, including being a Kennedy Scholar at Harvard University. She worked for Public Digital, founded by one Mike Bracken – who, readers may remember, was appointed by Francis Maude to lead the Government Digital Service. She was seconded to advise Labour in a non-political role on digital transformation in the runup to the election. She's now been appointed on a short-term contract at director general level at the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, leading the work on redesigning the government's approach to digital, and her appointment was approved by the commission.

It's not unusual, when an opposition party looks on course to win an election, that organisations will second staff in to help them work on policy. The third appointment was also in this category. Jess Sargeant was the constitutional go-to at the Institute for Government. She was seconded to Labour Together late last year supporting work by Nick Thomas-Symonds (now Cabinet Office and constitution minister) on, you guessed it, the constitution. She's doing exactly this work in the Cabinet Office on a short-term exceptions appointment.

I'll be honest here, I'm not a fan of "exceptions" appointments, mainly because they often happen when departments don't get their act together on time and then have a panicked pick. They are, however, a fact of life and every government does them. Cameron's government had dozens, Michael Gove famously stacking DfE with his "experts". Some of those making hay right now might just be a little hypocritical as they were champions of Extended Ministerial Offices whilst in government, where these appointments would have been the norm. But hey, if you've got Substack subscriptions to flog you need a hobby horse.

"I'm not a fan of 'exceptions' appointments, mainly because they often happen when departments don't get their act together on time"

What's surprising isn't that there are a few appointments like this from a new government that's been out of power for so long, it's that they have been so appalling at defending these decisions. During silly season they left a vacuum that's been filled by criticisms of appointments that, with the exception of Corfield, should have been unexceptional. The Civil Service Commission has now decided to review all exceptions appointments since July, rather than wait for the annual audit process – a sensible decision given the publicity and potential damage to the image of the civil service.

There's a bigger issue here, though. How does government attract the right talent and are the current processes – and pay levels – fit for purpose? That's a piece of work the new government needs to get on with, as well as working out how exactly they've allowed this story to run away from them so quickly. ■

Dave Penman is general secretary of the FDA union

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

The policy proposals in Torsten Bell's clear and well-evidenced book might appeal to think tank economists, says **Thomas Pope**, but only time will tell if his political strategy will convince his new colleagues and bosses in the Labour government

› Great Britain? How we get our future back
› Penguin Books

Should British economic policy pursue "radical incrementalism" to turn around the stagnation that has engulfed the UK economy for nearly two decades? That is the contention of Torsten Bell in *Great Britain?*, a book that, in both its diagnosis and policy prescriptions, draws heavily on his years as director of the Resolution Foundation think tank. It also prompts a broader question: can think tanks' hard-headed economic analysis provide the basis of a politically popular policy programme?

First and foremost, *Great Britain?* presents a clear and well-evidenced (there are over 500 references across its 230 pages) diagnosis of the UK's economic ills. The UK is now more unequal and/or much poorer than most of our natural international comparators. Neither public nor private sector has invested enough, most apparent in our housing crisis. And our economy is geographically imbalanced.

Bell strikes a more optimistic note than some. Our economic problems are as bad – indeed in many cases even worse – than we think. But he explicitly rails against the "wrong kind of radicalism" that things are so broken that we might as well try something drastic. Instead, he argues there is a clear path to a more prosperous future: we broadly know what policies will make a difference, and poor performance over past decades gives us more potential to catch up so that just bringing Britain in line with international averages would represent substantial progress.

To this point, most wonks are nodding along. Most of the diagnosis and many of the policies prescribed match the conventional wisdom: we need more public investment, our planning and tax systems are inefficient, the UK should decentralise power. Others, like proposals for stronger employment rights and proposals to increase taxes on wealth, represent a centre-left perspective, and explain why the author has chosen to become a Labour MP, but still sit squarely within the economic policy mainstream.

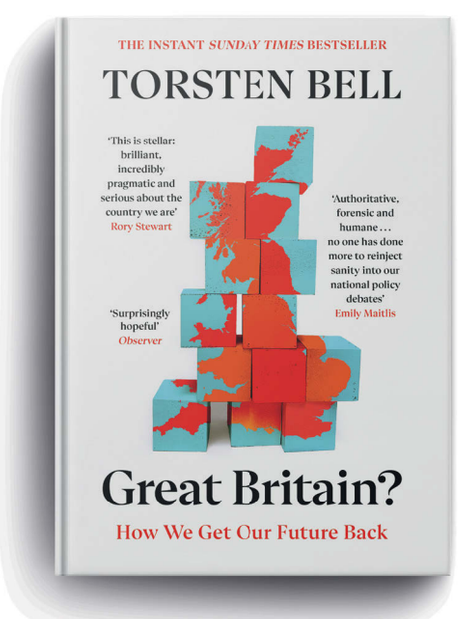
The big challenge *Great Britain?* sets itself is to show that this agenda doesn't just work in the glossy pages of think tank reports or academic seminars, but that it is a viable political project. Think tank researchers understand that their analysis can, and at times does, improve policy. In his years at the Resolution Foundation, Bell had more than his fair share of successes. But equally, there are policies that seem like no-brainers economically that politicians will not countenance, perhaps most evident in our mess of a tax system that reflects years of tinkering for political expedience without coherent strategy.

Bell makes his pitch for "a new patriotism", transforming from think tank director to political strategist. He argues that the state we find ourselves in is sufficiently dire that a political coalition can be built in favour of these reforms. Echoing the language of Keir Starmer and Rachel Reeves, Bell calls for a decade of "national renewal", acknowledging that many of these fixes are not quick, while also calling for "downpayments" like reforms to employment rights to demonstrate early progress.

Is this political case convincing? A think tank economist predisposed to many of the reforms this book proposes is not best placed to judge. Far more important is whether Starmer and Reeves find it compelling. There is already evidence of alignment between *Great Britain?* and the Labour government's approach in its early days, through its plans to liberalise the planning system and strengthen employment rights. But in other places, its prescriptions go far beyond current political orthodoxy, such as calls to devolve income tax to big city regions. The big increases in public investment proposed are the opposite of the current plans for the next few years. And there are several hard truths in the book that you might expect a chancellor to struggle to say out loud, for example that becoming a higher-investment country will require cutting back on consumption.

The path of economic policy over the life of this new government is not yet set. And no book can have a better chance of becoming its intellectual underpinning, especially because its author is expected to be on the government payroll before too long. Can a wonkish policy agenda be a mainstream political project? The progress, or otherwise, of "radical incrementalism" over the next decade should provide a clear answer. ■

"The big challenge *Great Britain?* sets itself is to show that Bell's agenda doesn't just work in the glossy pages of think tank reports, but is a viable political project"



Thomas Pope is the deputy chief economist at the Institute for Government

DOUBLE TAKE

Job-sharing has taken off across the civil service, and is being hailed as an important means of unlocking diversity at senior levels. But, asks **Susan Allott**, how did we get here? And is it really as rosy as it looks?

The winds of change were notably absent from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the early 2000s, according to Sir Martin Donnelly, who was the department's gender diversity champion – alongside his role as director general – from 2004. He remembers an era of very male, very traditional working practices, which were increasingly out of step with the rest of society. "I got women together and was powerfully struck by the depth of anger about expectations around being a man and not having other responsibilities," he says.

And yet, by common consensus, the FCO would go on to blaze a trail for job-sharing and flexible working. Looking back, Donnelly wonders if this was borne out of the difficulty of transforming that stubbornly old-fashioned environment – whether it forced an innovative approach. "It was clear to me that we were going to have to offer a range of career options," he says. "And the general response to that was: 'We've never done it before and all these jobs are very busy.' So it took a bit of challenge to say: 'We are going to do this.'"

Dame Menna Rawlings, who is now British ambassador to France, was HR director at the FCO from 2011-2014. There had been a welcome rise in the number of women working in the civil service, Rawlings says, but there was a distinct lack of career progression for those women, many of whom worked part-time due to childcare commitments. She believes the frustration of that cohort forced the pace of change: "I know a lot of colleagues found part-time working difficult, as often it felt as if a full-time job was simply being squeezed into half the time." A small number of job-shares started emerging as a preferred model, and those arrangements – while few and far between – were successful.

Rawlings realised that a policy change was needed if the job-sharing model was going to take off. "A key shift was moving the burden of proof on job-shares from the employee to the manager," she explains. Prior to this, staff had been expected to make a case to their boss if they wanted

"You might worry that your line manager would judge you if you went to them and said, 'I'm really struggling.' But your job-share partner would never do that" ***Ruth Hannant, DG, DCMS***

a role to be anything other than full-time. The new approach flipped this on its head. "The manager had to justify why the job could *not* be done as a job-share or another type of flexible working," Rawlings says.

The results of this adjustment surprised everyone involved. Job-sharing was popular, and it was working. "The headaches and concerns people had about it turned out not to be actually true," recalls Professor Alexander Evans, a career diplomat who was the SCS band representative on the FCO HR Committee as Rawlings' policy shift came into play. "People with very varying styles of working turned out to be a plus not a minus. There might be the odd case where you have to say: 'This isn't working', but the bulk of them worked, even at SCS level." Applications came in from policy professionals who wanted to job-share overseas ambassador roles – a job which had long been off-putting to women, whose partners were reluctant to abandon their own careers. Ambitious women started to see the FCO as offering an attractive but manageable career path.

Within a few years, the evidence base for job-sharing and flexible working patterns in the FCO was firmly established, Evans says. "The organisation had flipped from having a very small number of flexible posts to the vast majority of staff working flexibly in one form or another. »

And this had a particular effect on retention rates for female civil servants, some of whom might otherwise have left."

Donnelly remembers taking this new approach with him to his perm sec position at BIS in 2010, which involved a significant mind-shift for existing staff. "We got away from people thinking that working long hours was necessary. It had been part of the wider unspoken culture, and we changed that," he says. "We made it clear that this was the new normal, it wasn't an exception, we wanted part-time working and job-shares and a recognition that high performance requires teamwork." By 2015 this had paid off: "We ended up with a 50:50 split between men and women among senior managers at all levels – across the exec level, the DGs, the directors and the deputy directors – which had not happened in any department that I was aware of before."

Donnelly's drive for change was a little too late for Ruth Hannant, who went part-time at BIS when her daughter was born in 2006. "My non-working time was very interrupted," she says of her part-time years prior to job-sharing. "I thought more roles would be open to me as a job-share and I could properly focus on my children on my days off. So when an opportunity came up at the Treasury I moved across."

Hannant remembers a bit of scepticism about job-sharing back then, around "whether people could make it work, whether the overhead was too much for the organisation". And there were teething problems, mostly around technology. "It was hard to access shared email or calendars on your phone, so one of us would have the work phone for six months and the other would get every single email forwarded to a personal email account."

Despite these early challenges, Hannant's job-share with Polly Payne is a renowned success story: they have job-shared five different roles in five departments, with two joint promotions. They were the first job-sharers to break the DG ceiling, and are currently directors general for policy at DCMS. "We were acting perm secs at DCMS for five or six months," Hannant says. "That's still a ceiling that needs to be broken through."

This story appears to repeat itself across the civil service, with job-shares springing up across the SCS and in innovative, unexpected places. Men are job-sharing too, sometimes because of child-care commitments but sometimes because they want to do more with their life than work. According to the 2022 People Survey, 1139 respondents from across the civil service described themselves as job-sharers, up from 798 in 2014. The true number is likely to be higher, since some job-sharers may have declared as part-time.

Working arrangements are becoming increasingly experimental, says Rawlings: "I've seen some of our heads of mission overseas job-shares work through a 'three months on, three months off' approach, rather than divvying up the working week. My diplomatic colleagues are often fascinated and curious about how we do it. We are seen as cutting-edge on this in the world of diplomacy, which also helps Brand Britain."

Are there really no drawbacks to job-sharing?

A small number of civil servants who did not want to be named told *CSW* that being managed by job-sharers is not always easy. Some spoke of handover day – when both job-sharing partners are in the office – as being lost to the process of handing over, eating into the working week. And some spoke of different personalities and different levels of competency, meaning the manager "who would know what to do" might not always be available when needed.

Katherine Green, a director general in DWP who has job-shared with Sophie Dean since 2018, says there are ways around these potential pitfalls. "We're different leaders and we have different styles and personalities and we are really open with our staff about that," she says. "We try and even up the time so it's not always the same person speaking to the same member of the leadership team, and we ask everyone to give us feedback. People in the main are really good at doing that."

Regarding handover day, Green explains that she and Dean do all of that outside of office hours. "We have a Sunday night phone call. We use it as a way of assimilating our own thoughts, and of making key

decisions together." She describes this Sunday night call as "pretty critical", adding that there is sometimes another handover call during the week, as well as written notes for one another. "You shouldn't go in with your eyes shut on that," she says, referring to it as "our own personal overhead".

Surely that's a big ask? Isn't that almost as bad as a traditional part-time role, trying to fit five days' work into three? Green is clear that for her, job-sharing is infinitely preferable. "You have complete confidence that while you're not there, things are getting pushed forward and there's not going to be a big build-up for when you get back," she says. "I think there are benefits to the organisation of resilience and two brains, but the hidden benefit on a personal level is support – both in the formality of decision-making and a second ear – but also really strong friendship. I know Sophie would say the same."

DCMS's Hannant also describes a lot of time spent handing over outside of office hours, at the weekend and again on a Thursday morning. "We have a handover document that we keep updated all the time. We want people to assume that if you have told one of us something you have told both of us, and we will make it happen." And she concurs that despite this infringement on her personal time, it is preferable to part-time working outside of a job-share.

"Maybe one of them is performing better than the other and we can pick that up in the appraisal without harming the job-share. It's not an omelette, we have two separate eggs here" *Sir Martin Donnelly, former perm sec*

Senior roles can be lonely, Hannant says, and job-sharing mitigates that. "You learn from each other," she adds. "When you see someone else tackle a set of issues in a different way to you, it helps you develop professionally. You might worry that your line manager would judge you if you went to them and said, 'I'm really struggling.' But your job-share partner would never do that."

Evidently there is a trick to making a job-share work, and the successful ones are underpinned by a level of mutual support that justifies the "personal overhead". But how much of it comes down to the alchemy of two people who hit it off? Can any pairing be successful, or are some doomed to fail?

"You can build a chemistry and rapport," Hannant says, "as long as you are both committed to making it work. Polly and I are both quite control-freaky – I did wonder at the outset, will I be able to cede that control to another person? It turned out I could, but that might be because we both knew the other person was going to be on it."

Green echoes this point. "Sophie and I have always had a personal chemistry, but I've seen job-shares where that isn't the case, and they work. It makes it fun and enjoyable, but it's not essential."

Issues around weaker partners within a job-share can be managed, according to Marting Donnelly. "We worked very hard on this at BIS. You don't treat them as a job-share for appraisal purposes, you treat them as individuals with different developmental needs. Maybe one of them is doing better than the other and we can pick that up in the appraisal without harming the job-share. It's not an omelette, we have two separate eggs here."

Even the cost issue is manageable, according to Evans. "There is a slight pay bill implication, because two people are working an overlapping day. But frankly that comes out in the wash when you're in an organisational unit of above 12 or 13 people; that's not dissimilar to variations within pay scales."

Despite the success of the job-sharing phenomenon, one senior source makes the cautionary point that "on this issue of having a culture of inclusion – the civil service is still rolling the boulder up the hill. If you stop pushing it's likely to roll back again."

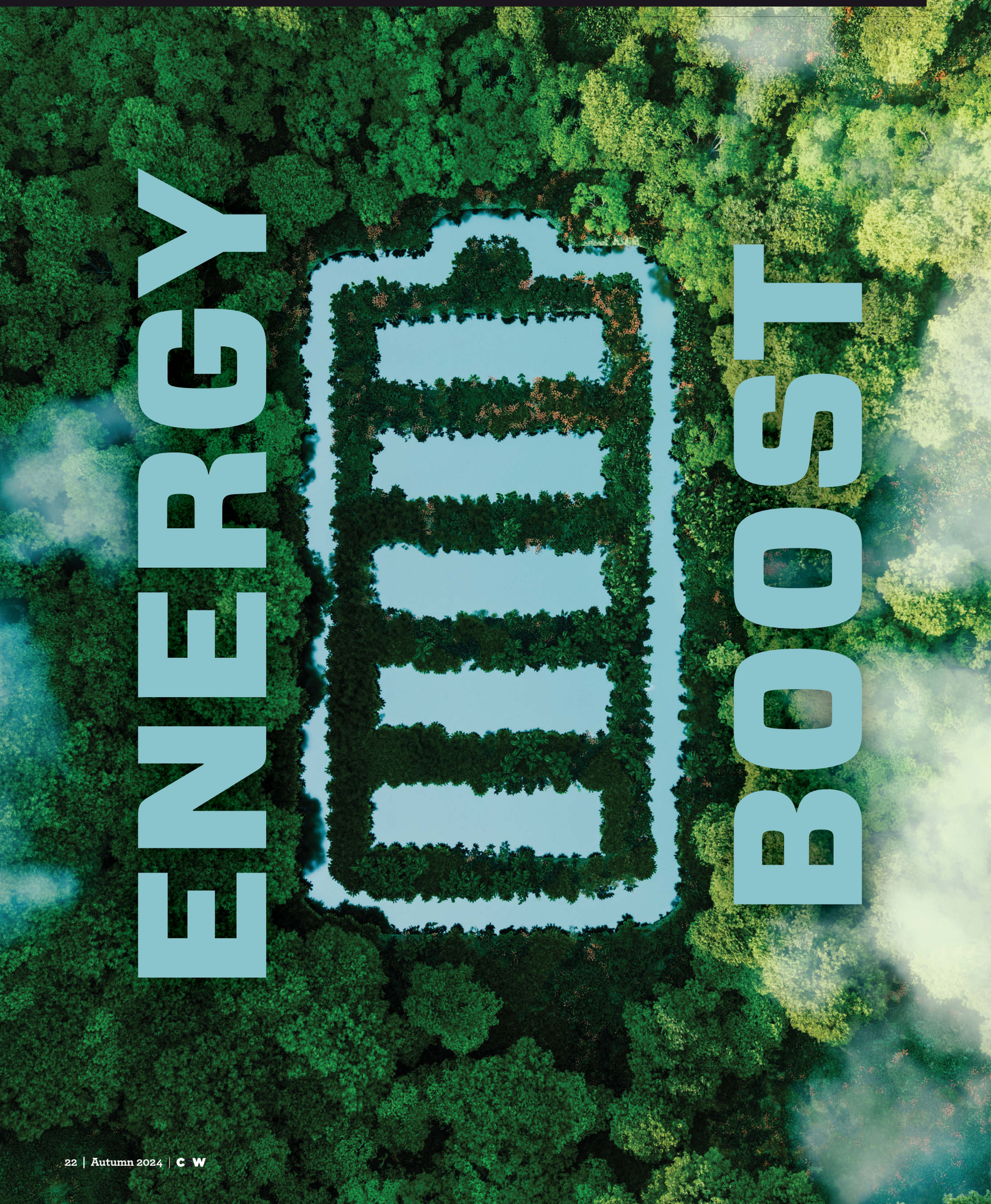
"I do wonder if we could be more deliberate about our recruitment practices so they are more job-share friendly," Hannant says, referring to the need for a relentless focus on diversity. "The rules for external candidates aren't easy, you need to know who you are going to job-share with when you apply. And there is no common approach in terms of how we interview job-share applicants. We need to make that less ad-hoc."

Green notes that the job-share matching website set up by civil service HR has closed, meaning that people seeking a job-share tend to find them through their own networks. "I've helped loads of job-shares find each other," she says. "Any decent manager, if they've got part-time people, will be thinking about it... it's in our consciousness now in a way that it wasn't before."

Reflecting on progress since those early days in the FCO, Rawlings points out that the continued buy-in of ministers and other leaders is crucial. "You need ministers to accept that it won't always be the same face at the table, and to encourage and support diverse approaches to what 'good' can look like," she says. "We've come a long way, but we've got further to go. I look forward to seeing job-sharers as permanent secretaries in the future, and I think there are still too few senior leadership roles that role model diverse working patterns."

Being a role model for change is a true privilege, says Hannant, thinking back over her career and the change she's seen since her job-sharing venture began. "People have told us how empowering seeing me and Polly was for them. If they wanted to try a job-share, they were able to say: 'If they can do it, why can't I?'" ■

ENERGY BOOST



GB Energy is a key plank of the new government's green agenda. **Mark Rowe** takes a look at what we know about the publicly owned energy company and how it might operate

Two months on from the general election, details are slowly being announced to give form to one of the new administration's signature projects, part of its mission to make Britain a clean energy superpower by 2030. GB Energy will, declared Ed Miliband, the new secretary of state for energy security and net zero, "turbocharge energy independence and unleash billions of investment in clean power".

Over the course of this parliament, the government intends to invest £8.3bn into this publicly owned green power company and establish it as a key driver of broader decarbonisation aims. GB Energy will be funded by an increased windfall tax on oil and gas companies (from 75% to 78%, an estimated £1.2bn over the course of the parliament); and by what is described as "responsible borrowing".

The idea is remarkably popular: polling shows that 75% of voters support GB Energy, with its connotations of energy independence from Russia and the Gulf States and cleaner renewables driving the economy. As is invariably the case, it falls to the civil service to ensure the mechanics and hidden plumbing of the company deliver on the political ambitions.

Operation: uncertain

Exactly how GB Energy will operate remains unclear. Policy work was done quickly ahead of the King's Speech and accordingly the legislative detail is short. Unresolved questions centre on whether the company will be a public financing vehicle for private investment; or if it will directly invest in, own and operate clean energy assets.

The statement of principles released by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and other departmental guidance seems to indicate that GB Energy won't supply electricity directly to households; that it will not be an energy generator competing for bids against other renewable developers. At the same time, its founding statements declare GB Energy "is not simply an investment vehicle – it is a publicly owned energy company that will take stakes in the projects it owns, manages and operates", which suggest it will be a vehicle for driving investment and de-risking new technologies.

Business groups such as the CBI have expressed hopes that GB Energy will enable new infrastructure or grid connections to be built. In a response to the creation of the new organisation, Rain Newton-Smith, chief executive of the CBI, called for the government to swiftly "clarify the institutional scaffolding intended to connect GB Energy's role within the market" and said it should "act as a catalyst for investment in new green technologies" and give business a clear signal that it is "focused on private sector investment".

"It's still contested and to be resolved what GB Energy will look like," says Adam Khan of the think tank Common Wealth, who until this spring was a civil servant at DESNZ and previously at the now-defunct BEIS. Khan does, however, expect it to be an energy company able to own and operate energy-generation assets.

"It should be a transformational institution with genuine public ownership," he says. "It should be owning entire assets. In any partnership with the private sector, it should have meaningful control of policy and decisions. It will be an enabler – but of what? Of transition or of private sector projects that would probably happen anyway? That is still unclear."

Making connections

While GB Energy will be a standalone company, sitting outside of government (and located in Scotland – at the time of going to press it was rumoured but not confirmed that it would be headquartered in Aberdeen) it will inevitably operate within a lattice of ministerial and arm's-length departments and entities.

Khan expects GB Energy to have a direct relationship with DESNZ, while the Department for Business and Trade will be involved with competition law. The Treasury will deliver oversight and capitalise the project and rules around how money can be spent and timelines. Ofgem and the Environment Agency are also expected to have roles, as will civil servants from the Scottish Government, given the organisation will be located in Scotland. The Cabinet Office will also have some involvement in relation to the wider mission of 2030 targets.

Then there is the new Mission Control, situated within DESNZ and headed by Chris Stark, former chief executive of the Climate Change Committee. On its creation, the unit was described by the department as a means to "troubleshoot, negotiate and clear the way for energy projects".

All this could take up to a year to crystallise, according to Khan.

The demands on the civil service to knit all these threads together will be considerable, Khan says, though he believes the skills exist within and outside government. GB Energy will likely sit outside the traditional civil service pay boundaries and, says Khan, will have to do so in order to recruit from the private sector. He believes the impetus that a new government can bring may foster the necessary cross-cutting relationships. The political U-turns around climate change and clean energy under the previous government showed how "changing positions can significantly complicate people's work," Khan says. "But where there is general agreement, the mechanics can work quite well."

He adds that working with the private sector in this way is often a "new experience for the civil service", with new modes of thinking required and the need to strike a balance between the sector's »

Investing £1.8bn in the UK's clean energy mission

Professor Dame Julia King, Baroness Brown of Cambridge and Senior Adviser at Holtec Britain, sets out the US nuclear company's investment and job creation commitment to the UK

Professor Dame Julia King
Baroness Brown of Cambridge
DBE FREng FRS FMed Sci
and Senior Adviser to Holtec Britain

This summer's latest oil and gas price surge amidst rising geopolitical tensions, along with the wildfires and extreme heat warnings we are seeing across Europe, should serve as a reminder that the road to net zero, stabilising the climate and to UK energy security, is one that we all must take.

As someone who has dedicated much of my career to clean energy and a sustainable planet, I welcome the Government's commitment to driving the decarbonisation of our energy system and to accelerating the deployment of UK Small Modular Reactors (SMRs).

Holtec and its project partners stand ready to play a leading role. As project lead, we entered into partnership agreements with Hyundai E&C (the major South Korean construction company with a reputation for delivering 18 nuclear plants to time and cost in South Korea), Balfour Beatty, Mott Macdonald, and Mitsubishi Electric. This brings together best practices from the UK, the US, and South Korea — and builds on the Clean Energy Partnership the previous government signed with the Korean government late last year, and the agreement with the US on civil nuclear energy last summer.

Whilst Holtec is not yet a household name in the UK, it has over 30 years of nuclear delivery experience, working with EDF reactors in Hinkley and Sellafield.

As the US' largest exporter of nuclear components and largest commercial decommissioning company, Holtec employs 2,000 people, and 145 nuclear plants around the world rely on Holtec for spent fuel storage and transport. This captures over 60% of the US market and 40% of the international market.

Our world-class expertise has helped us to make substantial progress to develop new UK SMRs.

In December last year, Holtec was awarded £30m from the UK's Future Nuclear Enabling Fund to progress our Pressurised Water Reactor SMR design through the UK's 'Generic Design Assessment' process. Last month, we received confirmation that 'Step 1' of the GDA process was completed in record time.

Holtec is serious about cementing its UK footprint and leaving a legacy. To support the UK's clean energy and growth missions, Holtec has committed to invest £1.8bn. This includes building a £1.5bn UK SMR factory.

Four potential factory sites have been shortlisted in the West Midlands, South Yorkshire, Cumbria and Tees Valley. Wherever it is located, our UK SMR factory will be transformative. Analysis from Bradshaw Advisory estimates Holtec's overall investment and UK SMR factory will generate[1]:

- £1.5billion in gross value added (GVA) to the economy of the chosen location
- 3,000 engineering jobs over the next 20 years
- 16,300 well-paid UK jobs in Holtec Britain's SMR programme
- £30bn export opportunity over the next 10 years
- £50m in UK skills and training

Holtec has a transformational industrial offering for the UK, both domestically and exporting from the country. These are highly skilled engineering and manufacturing jobs — not just assembly. We are preparing to sign Memoranda of Understanding with industrial leaders across the supply chain and with the High Value Manufacturing Catapults.

When it was elected in July, the Prime Minister described his new government as "a government of service". Holtec, too, stands ready to serve and to deliver the clean energy and growth the UK urgently needs, both nationally and regionally. By supporting the UK to lead the world in SMR deployment, Holtec can help ensure that energy price shocks become a thing of the past, whilst also stabilising our climate. Because while we can't make the worrying impacts of climate change that we are seeing today go away, we can reduce emissions to help ensure they don't get worse still.

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1. https://holtecbritain.com/factory/

Farm fresh Keir Starmer and Welsh first minister Eluned Morgan visit Brechfa Forest West Wind Farm in Wales

different approaches and attitudes.

Civil servants may find some support in striking this balance by talking to colleagues at the Crown Estate – the independent business owned by the Monarch which owns all of Britain's seabeds and which will be creating a new division to work with GB Energy on developing offshore wind farms. The partnership between these two publicly minded companies has the potential to leverage up to £60bn of private investment into energy projects, according to DESNZ.

Supporting growth

The types of projects that will be deployed and supported by GB Energy are still to be decided. There have been indications that it will work with the private sector to co-invest in emerging energy technologies and make them competitive with more mature technologies, including green hydrogen created by water electrolysis, floating offshore windfarms and tidal power.

The government also intends to scale investment in existing mature technologies, such as solar power, nuclear and onshore wind, and in community energy organisations to expand small and medium renewable energy projects in solar, wind and hydroelectricity. GB Energy will directly or indirectly create 600,000 skilled jobs, according to the government, but it has not elaborated on the nature of this work.

Official documents also state that the organisational capability of GB Energy and its expertise "will reduce delays and give certainty to costs", reduce the strain on the grid, and ensure local people benefit directly from the energy their area produces. This in turn feeds into a wider remit of the government's Green Prosperity Plan to create 650,000 new jobs in all parts of the UK through local energy generation and major projects such as carbon capture and storage and green hydrogen in Wales, and offshore wind in the northeast of England.

"When people think they are involved in something exciting and new, it can go well. Where it starts to get difficult is towards mid-term where the novelty starts to wear off" ***Adam Khan, former DESNZ official***

GB Energy is expected to partner with local communities to develop renewable energy projects producing up to eight gigawatts of energy through these projects, which will get a total of £3.3bn over the course of the current parliament. Some of the profits from these local energy projects will go back to the community, for example through discounts on local energy bills.

For those looking for existing models to understand how this could work, the GB Energy website points to Fintry Development Trust in Scotland. A portion of the Fintry wind farm is owned by the community, so some of the wind farm's profits come back to the people. In 2023, this profit took the form of £1,000 grants for households to install energy-efficient upgrades.

While briefings suggest GB Energy's portfolio will be relatively wide, Khan cautions against a focus on first-of-a-kind technologies, such as blue hydrogen. "They matter but they are not going to be the ones that deliver the political ambitions," he says.

Instead, it looks as though offshore wind – already a relative success (*see box, over*) – floating offshore wind, solar and battery storage will be key focuses, along with nuclear power, and an emphasis on decentralised energy production, such as local power plants and rooftop solar.

Khan also warns against giving GB Energy too many objectives because of the risk that "they can become

confused" and he wonders if a lack of capital may become an issue in the second half of the electoral cycle.

Another issue may be that the renewables growth has happened despite, rather than because of, government policy of recent years; and because the UK benefits from serendipitous geography and climate – it enjoys a combination of shallow seas, making it easy to attach wind farms to the seabed, and windy conditions.

The renewable picture has also been far from uniformly rosy. In a government auction in 2023, there were no bids by developers for new offshore wind farms, with firms citing high overheads and deeming the price set by government too low for the contracts. This year's auction – completed in September – offered higher prices per hour and fared much better, securing nine contracts, including an agreement with Denmark's Ørsted to build Europe's largest and second-largest offshore windfarms.

Just 0.03% of the UK's offshore wind capacity is owned by UK public entities. Instead, foreign public entities such as Ørsted and Norway's Equinor dominate in UK offshore waters. This could be an opportunity for GB Energy, suggests Esin Serin, policy fellow at the London School of Economics and Political Science, as many nations with deeper waters will require floating turbines. Briefings suggest GB Energy aims to drive the manufacture and export of these (although this means building ports large enough to house the enormous related components).

"To maximise certainty, individual policies need to be woven into an overall growth strategy that can outlive political cycles" ***Esin Serin, LSE***

Those foreign entities could also offer templates for how to implement and knit together policy and department priorities, Khan suggests, highlighting not just Ørsted – which was originally an oil and gas entity but has transitioned towards wind – but the Tennessee Valley Authority in the US, which was set up back in 1933 as part of Roosevelt's New Deal. The TVA still operates as a federally owned electric utility and regional economic development agency, and has managed to broadly retain bipartisan support.

Unlike the US, EU and many other states and regional bodies, the UK does not have a formal green industrial strategy but Serin believes such a framework would help the implementation of GB Energy and the wider decarbonisation of the UK energy sector from incumbent technologies to low carbon. "You have to incentivise, kickstart the latter, so that when companies have a choice, they go for the cheaper option," she says.

"The failure to write a strategy down on paper," Serin continues, "is leaving the UK behind when the US and EU are racing ahead. A robust industrial strategy that recognises and builds on the country's abundant green strengths should be adopted urgently to maximise economic opportunities on the way."

This approach would make life easier for the civil service, she suggests, as it would help ensure clean technology was politics-proof. "To maximise certainty, individual policies need to be woven into an overall growth strategy that can outlive political cycles," she says.

Serin points to levers at the government's disposal, including tax incentives for net-zero aligned investments, R&D grants, risk sharing, public infrastructure investment, skills programmes and removing policy barriers to investment such as planning restrictions.

Implemented judiciously and with competence, GB Energy could represent a step-change for clean energy in the UK, suggests Khan, but its sheer size and capacity for drawing in a range of competing departmental interests appear almost as daunting as tackling climate change itself. "There's a risk of putting a lot of political ambition into this and it not being set up in a way to really deliver on it," he says, "but I'm optimistic that it can be really transformational. Whether that will happen is still up for grabs." ■

WINDS OF CHANGE

One factor in GB Energy's favour is that its creation comes at a time when, contrary to the popular narrative, renewable energy generation in the UK is on the up and increasing faster than expected.

Since 2000, when renewables accounted for just 2.8% of all electricity in the UK, their contribution has increased substantially. Electricity generation from wind power increased by 715% between 2009 and 2020. In 2022, a record 40% of electricity came from renewables, and wind (26.8%) was the second-largest source of electricity after gas.

Offshore wind is a particular success story: in the year to April 2023, renewable electricity generation capacity grew by 6%, with offshore wind growing by 9%, and solar by 8%, the highest rate of quarter-on-quarter growth since 2017. On 15 May 2023, the UK produced its trillionth kilowatt-hour of electricity generated from renewable sources – enough to power UK homes for 12 years based on average consumption. While it took 50 years to reach this milestone, based on current projections it will take just over five years to reach the next trillionth kWh. Total oil and gas production remain 25% below pre-pandemic levels.

"The UK has down well at decarbonising the electricity system, that has been a remarkable story," says Esin Serin, policy fellow at LSE. She is also impressed "by how rapidly the UK has phased out coal".

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SLOW GOING

Reporting against civil service green commitments is woefully behind. Is government failing at its own game? **Mark Rowe** reports

Do as we do, not just as we say. The mantra that government must lead by example when it comes to mitigating climate change – by continually improving its own sustainability record – became a driver of practical measures under the coalition government back in 2010. A series of targets were set out, known as the Greening Government Commitments (GGCs), requiring 22 government departments and their arm's length bodies to reduce environmental impacts from water consumption, landfill waste and business flights. The measures also required an increase in carbon-cutting measures across the civil es-

tate, from offices to warehouses and prisons.

With more than 500,000 staff across the UK, the civil service produces almost 2m tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO_2) a year: a carbon footprint similar to that of Sheffield. In the wider public sector, NHS emissions alone make up 4% of England's total carbon footprint. Trimming the carbon fat from these operations is not just politically symbolic; it is also impactful.

Defra has responsibility for the GGC framework, which includes overall and departmental targets. Current progress, though, is uncertain. Reporting – due for each financial year – is now three years in arrears. The most recent GGC data, for 2020-21, was published in spring 2023. Despite a demand that the 2021-22 data – let alone the 2022-23 and 2023-24 figures – be published early this year, there is no sign of them. Defra is unable to give even the vaguest commitment as to when we might learn how the civil service is doing.

Last year, the government was excoriated for its tardiness by the then-chair of the Environmental Audit Committee, Philip Dunne, who said his committee had lost patience over the issue, that Covid-19 was no longer an excuse for feet-dragging and that he expected to see the 2021-22 figures published "well before April 2024".

A spokesperson for Defra responded: "April 2024 was not a date we committed to. The publication of 2021-22 data was delayed by the pre-election period and a new government being elected." Asked if a rough timeframe could be given for when any data would be published, and whether the 2024 general election was an acceptable reason for the delay (since the election was not called until two months after the April deadline had passed), the spokesperson said only: "The data will be published in due course."

Defra has issued quarterly updates on its own progress towards sustainability commitments. Its latest update, published in April 2024 (covering October – December 2021) was limited in scope but showed it had moved forward with plans for installation of wind-turbines, solar water heaters and ground source heat pumps into several of its sites, and was "committing to low carbon technology replacements when required".

The actual numbers in the report raised questions over how meaningful these steps had been, however. Defra fell short of its direct emissions reduction target of 15% (against a 2017-18 baseline), cutting it only by 13%. Efforts to cut overall emissions (including transport and grid emissions) fell even shorter, amounting to a 27% cut against the target of a 50% reduction in emissions.

Philip Dunne (left), former chair of the Environmental Audit Committee

The National Audit Office continues to shine a light on various departments and how they implement GGCs. In its June 2023 report, *Department for Education: sustainability overview,* the NAO identified education as the public sector's largest emitter of carbon from buildings, amounting to 37% of public sector emissions. This comprises 13% from state primary schools, 11% from state secondary schools and 13% from universities. The NAO found that DfE had set up internal structures and processes to enable it "to manage, monitor and deliver a range of initiatives" but that the department was "still developing governance and accountability measures, and raising awareness of its aims both within DfE and the sector more generally".

"Covid was an issue but there is no excuse for not publishing every year" ***Phillip Dunne, former Environmental Audit Committee chair***

More detail emerged on GGCs in the *State of the Estate* report for 2022-23, which was published via the Cabinet Office in December 2023. By the end of 2022-23 the government's overall greenhouse gas emissions had reduced by 38% against the 2017-18 baseline – an improvement on the 35% reduction achieved in 2021-22. Direct emissions from government buildings were reduced by 12% against the 2017-18 baseline, an improvement on the 9% reduction achieved in 2021-22, despite more departmental staff returning to their place of work following the Covid-19 pandemic. Reductions in overall energy consumption saved the government an estimated £163m when compared with the 2017-18 baseline.

Overall, government reduced total waste by 16% from the 2017-18 baseline, the report found, exceeding the 15% target. On an individual basis, the 15% target was met or exceeded by 15 out of the 20 departments that reported. In total, 5% of departmental waste was sent to landfill which met the 5% maximum target. Yet only 51% of government waste was recycled, falling short of the 70% target.

The government's water consumption reduced by 5% in 2022-23 compared to the baseline, missing the 8% reduction target that was previously met in 2021-22 (where water consumption reduced by 9%). However, 16 out of 20 departments reported they had met or exceeded the target to reduce water consumption by 8% compared to the baseline. Reductions in water consumption saved the government an estimated £3m.

Departments are now working towards new goals outlined in the 2021-2025 GGC Framework (published in December 2022), which recalibrated the baseline to 2017-18 and set out the overarching aim of "mitigating climate change and working towards net zero by 2050". Emissions reduction targets for 2024-25 in relation to the 2017-18 baseline include DfT (62%), DHSC (44%), HMT (69%), HMRC (60%) and MoD (30%).

Dunne assumes civil servants will already have briefed ministers about the GGC reporting requirements. Speaking to *CSW,* he said: "Covid was an issue, and some departments have large carbon footprints because they are based in historic buildings – but there is no excuse for not publishing GGCs every year," he says. "The GGCs matter. The new administration has set very high expectations for how they are going to treat the environment. Governments like to legislate for other elements of society to change behaviour, but when they do, it's always more credible if they apply that to their own aspects of environmental policy."

During his time chairing the EAC, Dunne recalls how reviews of GGC progress at the MoD, DfE and DHSC, undertaken with the NAO, found "varying degrees of compliance and capacity to comply" but that the audits "sharpened pencils", and departments "found it useful to have an external force encouraging them to comply. The pace at which compliance can happen is often dictated by funding priorities, so all eyes will be on the budget to see the extent to which the in-house greening agenda is supported". ■

NEW ENVIRONMENT, NEW ENVIRONMENTAL DAWN?

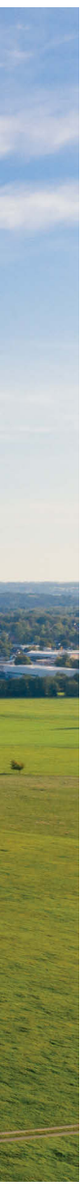
What impact will the change of government have on environmental protection? **Ruth Chambers** of Green Alliance shares her reflections

The first few weeks of a new government often feels like a whirlwind as ministers seek to bring their manifesto to life and etch a compelling public narrative. This time is no different, but summer recess provides a brief pause to reflect on what we have observed and can expect in the coming months.

The new government is committed to governing more responsibly than its predecessor by ending what it terms "sticking-plaster politics". This would be welcome, as there's no doubt that an approach that put headline grabbing ahead of policymaking for the public good had environmental casualties. Policies that protect city dwellers from air pollution; the longstanding cross-party consensus on net-zero ambition; nature protections; and even household recycling have suffered setbacks.

To achieve real change, the new government will have to turn ambitious rhetoric and plans into reality, working with focus and at pace, while grappling with diminished public finances and growing global conflict. This will not be easy, and the civil service will be integral to delivering progress in this challenging context.

Success depends on strong foundations. The four interconnected pillars below will



shore up action to tackle environmental crises, while also helping to restore faith in politics and government.

Delivery-focused government

We are in a decade of delivery, with crucial 2030 goals on net zero and halting nature's decline fast approaching. In January, the Office for Environmental Protection found that the government remains largely off track to meets its environmental ambitions and must speed up and scale up its efforts if it is to achieve them.

The new environment secretary, Steve Reed, has announced a rapid review of the government's Environmental Improvement Plan. This is welcome and reflects our advice for a sharp and focused review. However, it must not get lost in policy weeds. The flaws of the plan are not in its content, but in the absence of coherent and visible delivery plans and pathways. Civil society and business partners stand ready to put their shoulder to the delivery wheel – but their efforts risk being misguided if not built into a coherent plan.

Delivery must become the watchword of government; while some legislating will be needed on the environment, this must be purposeful, not performative.

A collaborative mindset must endure

The previous government had a strong disinclination to involve stakeholders in its work. Policies and plans were often produced without meaningful consultation and even its arm's-length bodies were treated with a degree of contempt. Meeting attendees were vetted by special advisers to an unreasonable degree and civil servants were banned from engaging with Greenpeace, a farcical approach which has already been overturned. More positive shoots are now growing, thankfully – for example, in the government's attitude toward the Office for Environmental Protection, established to hold it to account on its environment commitments. The environment secretary has promised to work "hand in glove" with businesses, local authorities and civil society to develop new plans for nature.

A reception in July brought Defra ministers, advisers, civil servants and stakeholders together. The room was brimming with confidence in the ministerial team, who have developed experience through shadowing their new briefs – or, in the case of nature minister Mary Creagh, through her forensic scrutiny of government during her tenure as chair of the Environmental Audit Committee.

This spirit of goodwill and a collaborative mindset must endure, even when there are disagreements, and we have every reason to be hopeful that it will.

Scrutiny and transparency are friends of good governance

Labour has promised a new independent Ethics and Integrity Commission to oversee and enforce ethical standards in government (although questions remain on its remit). The leader of the House of Commons, Lucy Powell, is setting up a Modernisation Committee to consider reforms to House of Commons procedures, standards, and working practices.

Successive governments have put a preference for seeking unfettered powers and capitalising on political opportunities above the primary purpose of lawmaking for the effective functioning of society, to protect citizens and the environment, and to provide clear rules for government, businesses and the public.

"The flaws of the Environmental Improvement Plan are not in its content, but in the absence of coherent and visible delivery pathways"

The dawn of a new government offers an opportunity to reset how laws are made and implemented, including on environmental protection, and to restore a healthier role for parliament. Green Alliance has proposed ten priorities for a new approach, which include meaningful public consultation, re-invigorating pre and post-legislative scrutiny and improving parliamentary oversight of delegated legislation.

Mission-based government must unite departments and bust silos

The new government has promised a mission-driven approach to provide clarity of purpose and drive unity. Missions set bold visions for change and are meant to inspire collaboration across government to achieve common goals.

The natural environment is absent from the mission headlines, but this explainer is clear that protecting nature is an integral part of the clean energy mission. Pledges to expand nature-rich habitats and reduce waste by moving to a circular economy are reflected in Defra's five new core priorities. Net zero secretary Ed Miliband has promised a voice for nature in the new clean power control centre, although it isn't clear if this is a person, process or both.

Meanwhile, the chancellor is seeking to plug holes in public finances through efficiencies across Whitehall, with departments asked to find £3.2bn savings. This is potentially ominous for unprotected departments like Defra. Reports suggest the Cabinet Office, which has traditionally played a central coordinating role, may be drastically slimmed down.

New energy DESNZ secretary Ed Miliband

The Institute for Government think tank and the innovation agency Nesta have made recommendations on how government could effectively organise itself to deliver missions but there is as yet no clarity from the government on how its mission-based delivery will be orchestrated. The government has a difficult economic inheritance, but it will need money if it is to fulfil its good intentions. Short-term savings will make long-term delivery impossible. ■

Ruth Chambers is senior fellow at the environmental think tank Green Alliance

PROFESSIONS PRIMER

In this series, *CSW* provides a guide to professions and functions across the civil service. Each briefing looks at a different group, offering a glimpse at what they do and how they work with other parts of government

COUNTER FRAUD

Who are they? The counter fraud function brings together around 13,000 officials who work to find and tackle the estimated £33bn that is lost to fraud, bribery, corruption and wider economic crime across the public sector. It aims to enable collaboration within – and across – organisations so they can share best practice and ensure efficient and effective working.

The counter fraud profession has more than 7,000 members across 70 organisations in the civil service and its ultimate goal is to develop a common approach for those working in counter fraud. Members gain recognition and credibility for their specialist skill set, but also have access to the standards, guidance and products to help them develop their career. Both the function and the profession are run by the Public Sector Fraud Authority, which was launched in 2022 as the government's centre of expertise for the management of fraud against the public sector.

What do they do? Currently, the majority of officials working in counter fraud are investigators. However, since the launch of the profession in 2018, new pathways have been developed, supported by learning and development programmes, in areas such as assessment, measurement and leadership.

Where can they be found? Some 84% of officials in the counter fraud function work for the Department for Work and Pensions or HM Revenue and Customs. Many are in dedicated investigation units and specialist teams, such as HMRC's Fraud Investigation Service and the Serious Fraud Office.

What is a typical career path like? Before the launch of the profession, there was a sense that people "fell into counter fraud" from other professions such as audit or policing, says function head Mark Cheeseman, who also heads up the PSFA. Through the introduction of an apprenticeship in investigation, as well as training and development in risk measurement and leadership, officials can choose a career path with greater control over their direction of travel, Cheeseman says. Another key feature of a career in counter fraud is that it spans sectors – across public service, policing, financial, retail and so on.

Which professions do they work most closely with? Pretty much all of them. "The policy profession when designing new policy, the commercial profession if it's a contract or done through commercial grants, the security profession for internal threats," says Cheeseman. The counter fraud profession is "pretty interlocked" with most professions, "depending on their position within the process or where they need help," he adds.

What are they most likely to say? According to Cheeseman, go-to phrases include "fraud is a hidden crime" and "problem, not product". On the latter, he says: "The temptation can be: 'What I'd really like is something to solve fraud, a product to solve fraud.' We'd all want the same, wouldn't we? A thing we can put on our phone that would stop fraud on our phone. The reality of dealing with fraud and economic crime is you need to understand the problem." Another mantra is not seeing finding fraud as a failure. "You've found it, and you can sort it. That's great. The challenge with fraud is if it's not found, it could carry on without being seen," says Cheeseman.

Linda Hamilton, head of organised crime at HMRC's Fraud Investigation Service, says a phrase often on the lips of colleagues is: "No one is beyond our reach."

"The tax system applies to everybody and we try to take an approach [whereby] it doesn't matter how rich you are or where you're based or how sophisticated you are, if you're committing tax fraud in the UK, we'll put our resources towards it," she says. She adds that jargon is a no-no, and that fraud investigators tend to be "quite direct communicators".

How are the function and profession being developed? They are fairly young, having been set up in 2018. The UK was in fact the first country in the world to have a counter fraud profession and the first to have a professional standard for fraud prevention. A key focus of the profession since its creation has been building up standards and guidance in newer areas such as risk prevention and the use of data analytics, building on the established capabilities in investigation work. This required creating the first ever government standards for fraud risk assessments and fraud leadership. "That was quite a challenge," Cheeseman says. "Because everyone's worked in their own organisations in

OPERATIONAL VIEW

LINDA HAMILTON
HEAD OF ORGANISED CRIME AT THE FRAUD INVESTIGATION SERVICE, HMRC

Linda Hamilton heads up the organised crime division of the Fraud Investigation Service, a division of HMRC that investigates the most serious fraud cases. FIS makes up a significant chunk of the counter fraud profession – around 3,000 of its 5,000 officials are members.

Hamilton started her career as a commercial litigator but says she felt she was "making rich people richer and so I left and joined the civil service". She held roles in both the Scottish Government and the Northern Ireland Civil Service, mostly focused on tackling economic crime and dismantling organised crime groups, before moving to HMRC in 2021.

She initially led an FIS team investigating offshore, corporate and wealthy taxpayers, before returning to organised crime investigation in her current role. Hamilton says one of the big recent wins for the organised crime unit – which, with 1,500 criminal and civil investigators, is the largest function in FIS – was its £615m deferred prosecution agreement with FTSE 100 company Entain PLC, which owns Ladbrokes.

Hamilton says the key capabilities needed to do her job are leadership skills, resilience and having a real interest and experience in fraud. "I absolutely love it," she says.

Listening is another key skill, "because it is absolutely a team effort to disrupt and dismantle organised crime". She says FIS is looking for people to join from a range of backgrounds, and that civil service or law enforcement experience is not necessarily essential. "What I'm always looking for is a really good strong attitude and... real potential," she says. "We will work with them and buddy them up with more experienced people as they go through their career journey to really flourish and to have as big an impact on the problem as they possibly can," she adds.

"This work is difficult, there's no doubt about it, but it's also hugely rewarding."

VIEW FROM THE TOP

MARK CHEESEMAN
HEAD OF THE COUNTER FRAUD PROFESSION AND FUNCTION AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR FRAUD AUTHORITY

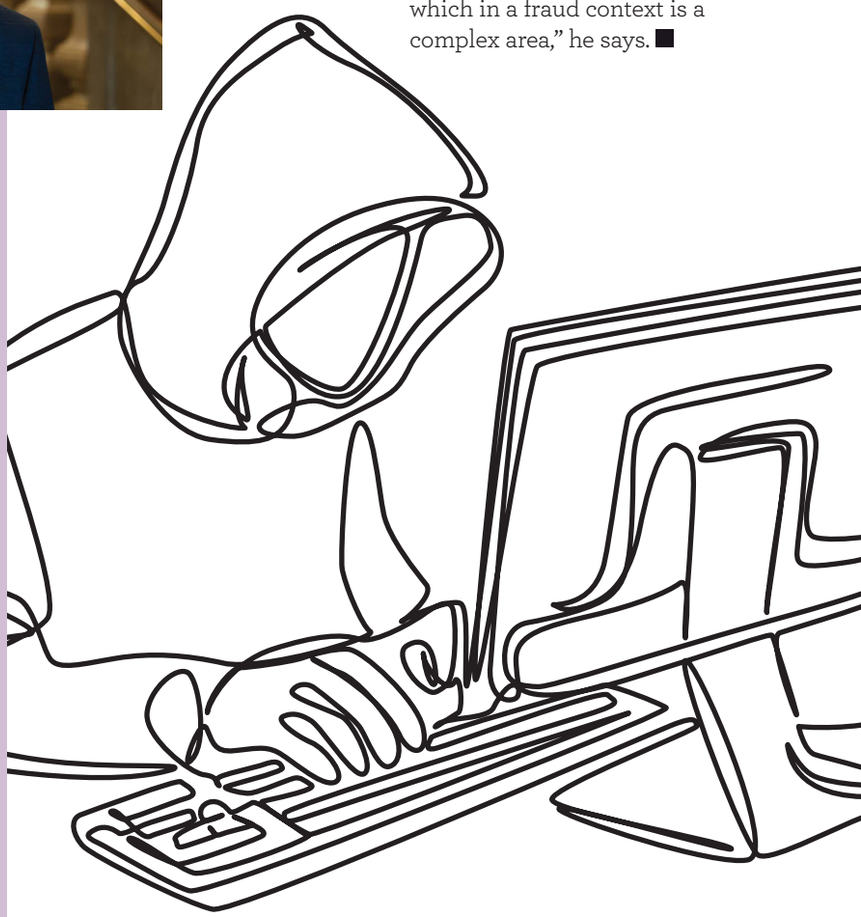
A stalwart at the Cabinet Office for the last decade, Mark Cheeseman started his career at the Legal Services Commission (now the Legal Aid Agency), working his way up from an admin role to head of counter fraud and investigations. At the Cabinet Office, he has gone on to build the counter fraud function and profession, and more recently built the Public Sector Fraud Authority, which he now runs alongside the profession and function. Cheeseman says the key skills needed to do his job are having fraud expertise, knowing your limitations, and having an understanding of how to work across government, bringing different organisations together to collaborate. He says you also need to understand that fraud is a fast, evolving area and always be thinking about where it is going next.

One of the big challenges facing the profession is moving it towards doing more preventative work. Currently, the vast majority of the profession are investigators. "That shift in bringing out that other side is a huge challenge," he says. "Not encouraging the finding of fraud, but celebrating the finding of fraud, because as fraud professionals, where we find it, we can then make a difference. We can put in that preventative control so that next time, it doesn't happen. Whereas if you don't find it, you can't. That is a huge challenge. Because how do you make that a good thing while not saying, 'Oh, it's all right just for it to happen again and again'?" Cheeseman says his method for tackling challenges like this is to "analyse them, meet them head on and work with people to get through them". "And that's one of the great strengths of the civil service," he adds. "You identify the challenge and there's so many people with so many different experiences in the system that together you can generally work your way through it." Cheeseman has plenty of career highlights to choose between, but says his standout moment came after launching the profession, when an official who had had a 37-year career in fraud wrote in the profession's journal that they had gone to court in their role as a fraud investigator and been asked to state their standing and experience. "And they said they'd been able to say 'I'm a member of the government counter fraud profession', and they felt like after 37 years, they really had a place and they belonged to this bigger effort," says Cheeseman. His tips for those thinking of working in counter fraud? "Come with passion and that I-can-make-a-difference mentality."

thinking about these things, you all have a slightly different lens. And I think it's one of the brilliant things about the civil service that you get that collaborative combined desire to come together to agree that. But it takes time to work it through."

Cheeseman says he is very proud of how the profession has been developed so far, but adds that there is still more to do, including introducing counter fraud qualifications for risk assessment, prevention and measurement, building up a leadership cadre, making the profession as diverse and inclusive as possible, and bringing in a strong new generation of counter fraud professionals in a field where "quite a lot of colleagues are coming up to retirement".

What are their priorities at the moment? The main focus for the profession is fraud control, Cheeseman says. "We've built structures for investigation and they will need time to bring in other investigators. The focus for the profession is building that counter fraud side so you've got something equal there which will help us in that shift, that more proactive element," he says. The focus for the function is "a bit different", he says, with outcomes the key. Cheeseman says the function has made "huge progress" in responding to concerns from the National Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee that not many departments had financial outcomes for their fraud work. "Most departments now have financial outcomes, but [the next step is]: how do you build around that and then embed that? So the function are really looking at the impact they're having and the outcomes they're delivering, which in a fraud context is a complex area," he says. ■



TAMARA FINKELSTEIN POLICY IS THE BEST, HONESTLY

WHY THE POLICY PROFESSION'S ANNUAL FESTIVAL LATER THIS MONTH IS A MUST-ATTEND EVENT FOR GOVERNMENT POLICYMAKERS

From 30 September to 4 October, policymakers across the UK will converge, in person and virtually, to explore the political and policy environment. Policy Festival 2024 offers a great opportunity to connect, share and innovate – something that is crucial in challenging times for our economy and our security. The theme, "connected people, connected policy", explores how we collaborate to deliver better outcomes for UK citizens.

We are in an era when the complexity of issues demands a more connected approach to policymaking – one that transcends departmental silos, regional boundaries and disciplinary differences. By fostering a collaborative environment, the Policy Festival improves the way we work together across our profession and with other professions across the civil service. It is not a festival solely for those in the policy profession, but anyone involved in or interested in policymaking. Policymaking is a team sport and requires many skills and professional experts.

One of the most exciting aspects of this year's festival is the emphasis on place-based policymaking. Featuring insights from the Darlington Economic Campus, Sheffield Policy Hub, the South West Policy Network, the Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Civil Service, these sessions will delve into regional and national policymaking strategies. This focus not only acknowledges the diversity of challenges across different parts of the UK, but also highlights the importance of tailoring policies to meet the unique needs of local communities. Such discussions are vital, as they encourage us to think more creatively about how we can leverage localised strengths and address regional disparities.

Equally significant are the People in Policy sessions, which will delve into policy creation with, for and about citizens. By focusing on topics such as civil society (a diverse sector that includes volunteers, charitable and social enterprise organisations) and disability, this segment will help us reimagine how policies can be more inclusive and responsive to the needs of all citizens.

Another noteworthy component is The World View, where the focus shifts to climate and environmental issues. As we grapple with the urgent need to address environmental challenges, sessions on the Air Quality Act and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' environmental principles duty will provide critical insights into how we can craft policies that are not only effective, but also sustainable for future generations.

For those looking to expand their skillset and knowledge base, the Broadening Horizons segment offers a treasure trove of learning opportunities. There will be innovative discussions on the Chilcot Checklist – with lessons from the inquiry into the Iraq War, including the importance of avoiding groupthink – and the latest insights on the Procurement Act 2023, and how new flexibility in the way we procure goods and services gives greater control in designing and achieving outcomes for policymaking. These sessions promise to equip attendees with the tools they need to excel in an ever-evolving policy environment. I am particularly looking forward to the fireside chat with Martin Stanley, whose work on *Understanding the Civil Service* has proved invaluable to many.

The festival will kick off with a keynote session from me as head of the policy profession in conversation with cabinet secretary Simon Case and conclude with the celebratory annual awards ceremony. Looking forward to the awards, I am reminded of the collective achievements we have made as a community. There will be five categories this year, with the introduction of the Excellence in Policy award and the return of the Unsung Policy Hero and Rising Policy Star categories by popular demand.

I encourage all policymakers to seize this opportunity to connect with peers, gain new insights and celebrate our shared achievements. Policy Festival 2024 is not just an event – it's a vibrant community of policymakers committed to driving innovation and collaboration. I look forward to seeing many of you there. ■

"Policy Festival 2024 is not just an event – it's a vibrant community of policymakers committed to driving innovation and collaboration"

Tamara Finkelstein is permanent secretary of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and head of the policy profession

Preventing fraud in government: The critical role of AI and analytics

With the rise of online activities, identity fraud now accounts for 66% of reported cases. Only by leveraging advanced analytics and AI, government agencies can enhance their defences

Colin Gray
Principal Consultant
SAS

Fraud poses a significant challenge across various sectors of government, draining resources and undermining public trust. It also means there is less much needed money to spend on vital resources like schools and hospitals.

Common types of fraud include benefits fraud, tax evasion and procurement fraud, with fraudsters constantly seeking new ways to exploit systems. As more activities move online, identity fraud has become more common, accounting for a staggering 66% of cases recorded to the National Fraud Database in the first half of 2024.

Government agencies must stay one step ahead of fraudsters, by employing robust solutions to detect and prevent fraud, leveraging advanced analytics and artificial intelligence (AI).

Benefits fraud

From individuals failing to report a change in their circumstances, to organised crime gangs who exploit vulnerabilities in the system, benefits fraud is prevalent and can take on many shapes and sizes.

Someone who is receiving state benefits may fail to report that someone has moved in with them permanently. This may lead to them continuing to claim benefits to which they are no longer entitled, for example.

Larger groups may use false identities or set up fake households to fraudulently claim benefits on a much greater scale. However, analytics can significantly enhance the detection and prevention of this type of fraud, by combing through vast amounts of data to uncover unusual patterns and suspicious activities.

Tax evasion and VAT carousel fraud

His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) faces an ongoing battle against tax evasion, including the sophisticated schemes of VAT carousel fraud. This is where fraudsters repeatedly reclaim VAT on the same goods as they are passed between legitimate and fake companies across Europe, only paying the tax at the end of the chain.

These schemes are complex — even more so now that the UK has left the European Union. Here, once again, is where advanced analytics can help. With the technology, organisations are able to scrutinise vast amounts of financial data to identify anomalies.

Whether it's through self-assessment discrepancies, money laundering via shell companies, or individuals underreporting their earnings, AI-powered analytics can help catch these fraudsters before they cause significant harm.

Procurement fraud

Procurement fraud is another area where government agencies are particularly vulnerable. Several companies might collude to artificially inflate the price of a tender, and by coordinating their bids, they create the illusion of fair competition while driving up costs. In other cases, fraudsters may set up fake companies to win contracts, only to disappear once payment is made.

Large-scale infrastructure projects, such as High Speed 2, may be susceptible given the large-scale volumes of spend. The NHS has also been affected, notably during the Covid-19 pandemic, when the scramble to secure personal protective equipment (PPE) saw numerous cases of inflated prices and questionable contracts, with some suppliers delivering substandard goods at premium prices.

Cloud-based analytics platforms can help detect such irregularities by identifying unusual patterns of spending or discrepancies in bidding processes. For example, if multiple bids come in at strikingly similar prices, or if a supplier's bank account is linked to another vendor, these could be signs of fraud.

Human oversight will always remain crucial, but AI can further refine this process by recognising patterns that humans might miss — expediting the efficiency of the process.

The need for a robust platform

While it's impossible to predict the next big trend in fraud, having the right platform in place is crucial to detect modern fraud schemes. As fraud becomes increasingly sophisticated, it's more important than ever for governments to embrace advanced analytics.

By using an intelligence platform that can enhance your current capabilities to join the dots in an investigation, government departments can identify and explore complex organised crimes across multiple data sources and over different time periods. This will help to accelerate investigations, reduce workload, protect society and reduce criminal activity.

By sharing data across departments and utilising AI, agencies can better detect anomalies, prevent fraud, and protect public funds. Fraudsters will continue to innovate, exploiting any weaknesses they can find, but with the right tools and a proactive approach, government agencies can stay one step ahead.

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or scan the QR code

PLACE TO BELONG

David Wood is the head of one of government's youngest professions. He tells us about the geography profession's journey so far, and the importance of place and space

How long have you been in this role?
Just over six years, since the profession was formed. It now has just over 2,000 members.

How does your day job sit alongside your head of profession role?
I'm the deputy director for environmental science and analysis in Defra. There's a strong geographic component to my job, and when you look at the Environment Agency, Natural England and some of our other ALBs, Defra has about a third of the overall geography profession membership.

But I've learned there's no bit of government where a consideration of space and place is not important. That's been the golden thread in my career: from working on school funding to local economic development and regeneration, neighbourhood renewal, the Regional Growth Fund, and the allocation of teacher-training places across the country.

Is it challenging balancing your day job and head of profession job?
Of course. I'm supported by our geography profession manager and a huge number of passionate and supportive volunteers from across the profession. We're very lucky that there's a very mature geo landscape, so we do a lot of work with other geo organisations like the Royal Geographical Society, the Association For Geographic Information, GeoPlace and the British Cartographic Society, as well as our departmental sponsor the Geospatial Commission. Our strength is when we work together.

How would you explain what the profession does to people outside government?
We exist to do a number of things. One is to support professional geographers in government, ensuring they have access to training, advice, guidance and networking opportunities. Secondly, to make the case for why taking a geographic approach – considering the impact of place and space – in the design and delivery of government policies matters. Thirdly, to ensure that the geographers in government represent the societies we serve through outreach activity to engage the next generation of geographers.

Do you think people are more aware of the importance of considering place and space now there's a recognised geography profession?
I think so, but we're at the beginning of our journey. Most other professions in government have been around for 60 or 70 years, so we're playing catch up. Our annual awards are a great opportunity to showcase our work – our overall award is presented at the Royal Geographical Society's an-

nual awards and medal ceremony, which raises the profile and visibility of the work of geographers in the public sector. And we've started to see geographers win some of the government analysis function awards.

I also sit on groups with other heads of professions that can influence the work of the other professions. Other professions have their sets of standards and ultimately, I'd love us to have our own, but that will take time to develop. In the meantime, we've worked with other professions to make sure that the importance of place is recognised within their guidance. Under the statistics code of practice, for example, there is supplementary guidance on geographic statistics, and the economists' green book talks about needing to consider the impact on different places as part of distributional impacts.

What are your priorities for the profession at the moment?

My main priority is ensuring that we can continue to deliver the things we already do for our members – our annual conference, monthly webinars, annual awards, outreach material and a really good members' website, which enables our members to connect with each other across the public sector.

My next priority, following the publication of our 2023-26 strategy, is moving into a new, sustainable leadership structure with a quarterly board and organisational heads of profession who represent our members within their organisations. They will work to grow and develop the profession within their organisations, sitting on their organisational or head-of-profession networks to do the things locally that I'm trying to do across government.

Beyond that, it's seeing where there are opportunities to make inroads on the three pillars in our strategy: creating the environment for geographers to have maximum impact, professionalising and progressing the use and applications of geography, and growing a diverse and inclusive community of geographers, all within government and the public sector.

How is the implementation of the strategy going?

The big thing so far has been the new leadership structure. The board has met a couple of times now and we are starting to look across all of the organisations to make sure that we've got the right representation. We had a number of organisations that naturally fitted into that structure, and we're now looking to grow and develop across some of the other organisations in the public sector where we don't have that. That's going well. It's really important to me to make sure that we're hearing the voices of all of our members.

When we bring out our first piece of guidance, that will be a big step towards where we want to take the profession in terms of setting standards across the public sector.


David Wood

Are there any common challenges facing your colleagues in the profession across government?

It was a cross-cutting geographers' group that first made the case for the profession. We've taken the challenges they raised into our work and our strategy.

One of the challenges, especially in smaller organisations, is you may have felt quite isolated as a geographer – but now you're part of a 2,000-strong profession and you can connect with others on our directory. Part of that is understanding your career pathways and what other geographers have done in your organisation to inform you as to how you might develop in your own career journey. Another challenge was the lack of professional recognition.

Sometimes the challenge is that people that you're working with may not understand the importance of place and space in the design and delivery of public policy. So colleagues may have felt like they were banging their heads against the wall at times, whereas now we can make the case more broadly and give them material that shows where taking this approach has really helped.

What has your experience of working with other government professions been like?

I'm an economic geographer. When I joined the civil service as a fresh-faced graduate in 1999, there was no clear route into government as a geographer. I wanted to enter government as a professional analyst who could use evidence to inform the design and delivery of public policy, so I joined as a member of the Government Economic Service. I benefited hugely in my early career from the support the GES provided and I'm still a badged member.

Now I lead truly multidisciplinary teams. In my team now I have natural scientists working on environmental monitoring schemes and designing robust scientific indicators to measure how the environment is changing; statisticians who publish data on the whole range of the environment; economists doing impact assessments and business cases; social researchers who are evaluating that policy; data scientists and geographers who do spatial modelling and spatial data science. I'm seeing how they have each benefited from the support of their profession.

Do you have any tips for how colleagues in those professions can work most effectively with people in the geography profession?

There's the old adage that everything happens somewhere. Drawing on the professional geographers who can collect local data, tell you when it's robust, understand its appropriate use and visualisation as part of that multidisciplinary offer is really important.

It's like the question of causation versus correlation. Statisticians will tell you that if you look at ice cream sales and drownings on graphs next to each other, they move exactly the same. So you could conclude that ice cream sales cause drowning – but it's not that one causes the other. They're correlated because they're both caused by sunny days.

The same is true with geography. I've seen really bad examples where people put two maps up against two things that are correlated, and they go, 'These look exactly the same. Therefore, A must be causing B,' without understanding that there's an underlying cause, C. Maps are a really useful visual technique, but just like other forms of data visualisation and statistics, if they're not interpreted properly, you can draw the wrong conclusions. That's why the profession is really important.

Anything else to add?

We have the best logo out of any of the government professions! We had a competition of our members and this was what came back. ■

Suzannah Brecknell meets the chair of the Institute of Regulation – and former boss of a couple of high profile regulators – **Marcial Boo** to hear about his mission to professionalise the regulatory sector and why those in his line of work sometimes need a very thick skin...

When *CSW* asks long-serving civil servants about the biggest changes they've seen across their careers, two themes often crop up. Technological change – from typing pools to a never-ending stream of emails – and the increasing focus on professional skills across government.

Neither of these advances have been straightforward or uniform in the progress they bring. Government has struggled to keep up with both the potential offered and harms threatened by technology and, while it has done much to improve certain skills across the civil service, there are still areas which would benefit from more professionalisation. One such area – according to a recent government white paper – is regulation.

In May, the *Smarter Regulation* white paper set out 23 reforms aimed at improving how regulation works in the UK, including a commitment to launch "a task and finish group with regulators and industry experts, to design and implement a 'regulator profession'". This profession would, in common with others, "concentrate on developing the core skills

and capabilities that are central to working in and across regulatory bodies".

There are some 120 regulatory bodies in the UK – ranging from household names like Ofsted, with over 1,200 employees, to the less well-known Phone-paid Services Authority, which has under 100 members of staff. Each has a unique remit and, often, a dramatic origin story.

"Most regulators in the UK have been set up in the last 30 years in response to scandals," explains Marcial Boo, chair of the Institute of Regulation and former chief executive of one such scandal-born regulator, the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority.

Boo, who until January was boss of another high-profile regulator, the Equality and Human Rights Commission, set up the IoR in 2021 because he, too, sees the benefits of professionalising and building capability across the regulatory sector.

"Lots of regulators know their own sectors very well, but they can sometimes understand regulation less," he says. There are "common skills, common cultures" across the sector, such as "how to balance conflicting needs, how to look at a system as a whole, how to work with ministers, how to report to parliament, how to defend decisions".

So, with others, he established the IoR to act as a professional body for regulators and help strengthen these common skills and cultures. Around a third of UK regulators are now paid-up members of the IoR, which offers training, events, a podcast and "a space for regulators to talk to each other about issues that they care about".

Running through the list of skills, it's clear that regulators also share many of the attributes expected of civil servants. Both roles often require an understanding of the law and politics as well as general management skills like working in teams, managing money, and what Boo calls "presentational aspects – especially at senior level, politics is always there".

But while both professions focus on evidence-based decisions, the key difference is who makes those decisions. In a government department, famously, advisers advise and ministers decide; whereas a regulatory body has usually been set up specifically to remove decisions from a minister. This means it's the senior team – chief executive, chair and non-execs – who decide not only whether rules have been followed by those in their sector but usually how to make that judgement in the first place, and what sanctions if any to apply.

"In the civil service, the advice that's given to ministers is more protected from disclosure; you are more exposed in a regulatory environment, and you do have to personally defend your decisions," Boo says. "That increases the pressure. Your name is in the public domain in a way that is not if you're a DG, so you do need to be really rigorous. You have to be more resilient. There are extremely demanding jobs in the civil service, but you're exposed in a regulatory world in a way that you're not in a government department. I had two death threats when I was at EHRC; I had social media abuse at IPSA when I increased MPs' pay – a decision no politician wants to take. You do need to be thick-skinned, because you're a referee. And people tend not to like referees."

"You're exposed as a regulator in a way that you're not in a government department. I had two death threats when I was at EHRC, and social media abuse at IPSA when I increased MPs' pay"

Given the similarities between civil service and regulatory roles, it's not surprising that many people move between the two professions. Boo himself started his career as a civil servant, moving into the Audit Commission as part of a mid-2000s drive for civil servants to gain experience of local delivery. There he found he enjoyed working on complex, challenging policy issues, but "just a step removed from the pure political world that it is necessary to live in as a civil servant".

Despite the crossovers, *CSW* often hears complaints from regulators that those in government don't understand what their job involves. What common misunderstandings does Boo encounter? One, he says, is that civil servants sometimes think regulation is "just secondary legislation", confusing it with regulations often laid before parliament to set out details of new legislation once an act has been passed.

"My understanding of regulation... is of a range of tools used to ensure compliance, fairness, protections where protections are needed, and freedom where protections are not needed. So it's not just about a set of things that are set out in law, it's about a range of tools to ensure you get the outcome that you want," he says.

Another common misunderstanding is when "civil servants think regulators are delivery organisations".

"Obviously regulators support the delivery of government objectives," he clarifies. But he adds that "it isn't always straightforward to implement a ministerial directive as a regulator".

He points to the Growth Duty, which requires regulators to "have regard to economic growth" when making decisions, or directives to promote sustainability.

"Those are great objectives," he says, before pointing out that regulators also need to consider how these factors fit with their core purpose. "It would be good if civil servants could understand that regulation isn't just about delivery, it's about managing systems. That is partly about achieving government objectives, but partly about making sure that there's a fair, level playing field for companies to compete on, or for the provision of public services, or to give assurance to the public in a specific area."

Boo is advocating for a "more sophisticated understanding" of regulators' roles, and says "honest, respectful conversations" are needed about

A REGULATOR'S TOOLBOX

Through the IoR, Boo is keen to help regulators understand that they have a number of tools at their disposal. These range from legal action and fines, through stopping individuals from practising or firms from trading, to softer interventions such as publishing information in league tables or good practice guides. Even the simple act of making a phone call can be a regulatory tool, he says, recalling a time at IPSA when an MP's expense claim for the cost of a gazebo raised concerns among IPSA staff. One call to the parliamentarian was enough to clarify that the gazebo was indeed for parliamentary use – it kept him and his trestle table dry at constituency events on rainy days – and was therefore a legitimate expense, although the MP concerned decided not to claim for it in the end.

"That was a regulatory intervention in the sense that I was ensuring compliance with the rules. I needed a bit more information, so I just talked to the regulated person," Boo says.

"And it's important that regulators understand they're not just constrained by what they happen to have set out on their statute. They can be more flexible and, if they find more efficient ways of ensuring compliance, they can reduce the burdens on business or on public services. It's about giving people options to regulate better."

Marcial Boo

how to balance these objectives.

"We all know that sometimes it's helpful, politically, to say: 'Something needs to be done and I've told the regulator to do it.' That's part of the political game. But then it becomes the responsibility of the regulator to take that instruction and to say to the sponsor team: the minister wants us to do X, Y, and Z. Let's just work out, in practice, how we can do that, while also delivering our statutory obligations, and without any more money."

He also notes that misunderstandings run both ways and regulators could do more to understand the world of policymaking. "Sometimes regulators are staffed by people who really understand the sector very well, but they haven't got the civil service background, and it's important that they understand the political environment as well," he says.

Just as they share some skills, regulators and civil servants also share some similar challenges. Operating with increasingly constrained budgets for example, or the need to recruit and retain technical experts in a competitive marketplace. Then there's the challenge of legislation – one which civil servants will likely understand even if they don't face it in the same way that regulators do.

The challenge for regulators, Boo says, is that many of them are working under increasingly old – and dated – acts of parliament. "The vet regulator is working off legislation that is nearly 60 years old," he notes.

"Obviously regulators support the delivery of government objectives... But it isn't always straightforward to implement a ministerial directive as a regulator"

"The Civil Aviation Authority doesn't have the legislative cover, as far as I understand, to regulate drones and pilotless aircraft. So, what do they do? If drones exist, you can't pretend that they don't; you've got to find a way to make them safe for everybody."

To manage this, he says, regulators need to be very clear with civil servants in their sponsor teams about "the emerging gap between the statute and the social change that has happened since then, whether it be 10, 20 or 50 years ago."

One option to close these gaps would be to change the legislation – whether with a totally new bill or an amendment to the existing one. "That's really hard too, because changing some regulatory legislation is never going to be top of the political agenda, never ever," Boo says.

So regulators can be given cover to adapt to changing circumstances in other ways. He suggests "an explicit exchange of letters which gives [regulators] some assurance that if they are challenged on a particular issue, they haven't gone out on a limb without any protection".

Departmental officials can look to their regulators, he suggests, to understand just how big a challenge this is in their own policy area.

"Some sectors are moving really, really fast at the moment – because of AI, particularly, but other reasons too. Other sectors, a little bit less so, but all regulators

will know where the legislative difficulties are, and also how they can exploit the modern tools of technology to do a better job. So there's responsibility on regulators to raise their game, and there is also a need for the civil service to understand regulation in a more sophisticated way."

He urges civil servants working on new or updated legislation for regulators to take this sophisticated approach. "It would be lovely to think that when legislative opportunities arise, regulators can be created in such a way as to give them some flexibility to adapt their regulatory approach as circumstances change."

This means having "the confidence not to be too constraining, in the specifics [of the legislation]" he continues, so that regulators "have a really clear steer politically about the outcomes they need to achieve, but not so much constraint on the specifics to achieve that outcome, to allow for change".

Asked what drew him to the regulatory profession, and particularly working at the more political end of it, regulating MPs' pay and equality, Boo says he "can't say that [he] dreamed of being a regulator". It's perhaps an unsurprising statement even for someone who now champions them so strongly. "Most careers happen by accident," he continues, but it was while working at the Audit Commission and then the NAO that he realised he enjoyed roles which "in different ways, cared about standards, consistency, fairness, applying the rules".

This was in part because of his family's experience of a society where rules weren't clearly and fairly applied. "My family's from Argentina and I used to visit them during a military dictatorship there," he says. "When democracy was restored in 1982, it was a really beautiful thing – that's not too strong a word."

It's easy, he suggests, to forget how "precious" the UK's democracy is if you spend your working life absorbed in its nuts and bolts. "All of us who are involved in this world, we look at individual issues, and we complain about this or that because we see how the sausages are made, it all looks a bit grubby," he says. "But stepping back and looking at what we've managed to achieve as a country: to have that peaceful transition of power [in July] and that, when people get fed up with one lot, they vote in another lot – that's something that lots of people in the world don't have. We ought to treasure it."

As a regulator – and a champion of regulation – Boo values "applying rules that have been democratically set, making sure that they're complied with, that people who don't play by the rules are sanctioned in some way."

As a new profession of regulators is developed, Boo will certainly be on hand to champion the common skills and cultures that keep this important but often misunderstood part of our democracy turning. ■

WATCHING OVER THE WATCHDOGS

In February, a House of Lords committee called for the creation of a parliamentary body similar to the NAO to "advise and support parliament and its committees in holding regulators to account". Asked for his thoughts on this, Boo agrees that greater scrutiny should be part of the overall drive to help UK regulators "raise their game" but says it's not obvious how that scrutiny should be performed. "Is that a parliamentary committee? Is that a team in the Cabinet Office? Is that a new body created to oversee regulators? There are pros and cons all ways."

He adds that before an effective watchdog for regulators could be set up, we need to ask what good regulation looks like. "How do you know whether regulators are doing their job well? The people who are regulated will inevitably take issue with the regulator at some time, and similarly ministers won't like a particular decision the regulator took. That's not necessarily a reason, on its own, for criticising the regulator. But if we look outside the decisions, there are legitimate questions such as: Can they improve efficiency? Can they improve their use of data? Are they consistent? Are they fair? Do they explain themselves? Are they transparent?

"These are questions I think all of us need to work through so that we can find ways to help regulators to improve," he says.

MPs' 2.7% pay rise sparks angry response from trade unions

Above-inflation hike to £77,468 is almost double 1.5% increase given to parliamentary staff

MPs will see their basic annual salary rise from £77,379 to £79,468, a 2.7% increase. Photograph: Tim Ireland/PA

Workers' representatives have expressed anger over the decision to award MPs a pay rise above inflation and almost double that offered to parliamentary staff.

The 2.7% pay hike for MPs, taking their basic annual salary from £77,379 to £79,468, is well above the 1.5% received by those serving them in the Commons and the 1% offered to many civil servants.

The £2,089 increase to their income announced on Thursday by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (Ipsa), effective from 1 April, far outstrips the current inflation rate of 1.8% on the main CPI measure.

IN WITH THE *new*

As the Labour government makes its mark on Whitehall and the country, new ministers are finding their feet. In this extended report, *CSW* has teamed up with consultants from Dods Political Intelligence to profile the main departments' cast of ministerial characters, and take a look at what's in their in-trays

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Feels like home Keir Starmer and his wife Victoria arrive at No.10

NO.10

New prime minister **Sir Keir Starmer** is tasked with running the country, but the Office of the Prime Minister, No.10 Downing Street, is not officially a department in its own right. Instead, it is part of the Cabinet Office – although the prime minister's ministerial salary is paid by the Treasury.

No.10 is the base for a mix of civil servants and politically appointed staff, with the PM's chief of staff – former Cabinet Office insider **Sue Gray** – and principal private secretary Elizabeth Perelman at the top of the political and official trees respectively. Other key players include head of political strategy **Morgan McSweeney**, who previously acted as director of campaigns for the Labour Party, and director of communications **Matthew Doyle**, who previously worked for Labour under Tony Blair.

Working alongside Starmer is deputy PM **Angela Rayner**, who is also secretary of state in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government *(see p.49)*.

Starmer went to great efforts to ram home his voter-friendly personal history in this summer's general election campaign. So now the nation will never be able to forget he's the son of a nurse and a toolmaker who grew up in a Surrey semi, and that cash was sometimes in short supply.

Less well known is that Starmer attended Reigate Grammar School with Norman Cook, better known as musician, DJ and producer Fatboy Slim. Music was a big part of Starmer's youth, in which he played the flute, piano and violin. However, Cook told Starmer's biographer, Tom Baldwin, that the new PM is "a way better politician than he was a violinist".

Another former schoolmate, the writer Andrew Sullivan, remembers Starmer as a "near-Bolshevik bruiser".

Labour politics remained a thread in Starmer's life through his early 20s. After graduating with a degree in law from the University of Leeds, he studied for a postgraduate degree in civil law at Oxford – while serving as an editor for hard-left magazine *Socialist Alternatives*.

Starmer was called to the bar in 1987 and practised in human rights, international law, judicial review, extradition, criminal law, police law and media law. He was a founding member of Doughty Street Chambers in 1990.

The future PM acted in some of Doughty Street's most important cases during his time at the chambers: defending the legal aid system, overturning death sentences in Commonwealth countries, and upholding freedom of speech and human rights.

He also gave free assistance to Greenpeace activists Helen Steel and David Morris in their high-profile libel battle with fast-food chain McDonald's, which was the subject of the Ken Loach documentary McLibel.

Starmer was human rights adviser to the Policing Board in Northern Ireland between 2003 and 2008. In 2007, he became head of Doughty Street Chambers but left the following year on his appointment as director of public prosecutions and head of the CPS.

He gained a reputation for success in reforming the service. One of the biggest changes he made was digitising paper files, telling *CSW* in 2013 that it was "one of the defining moments in the history of the criminal justice system". Starmer also changed guidelines for sexual abuse cases, telling prosecutors they should begin with believing the victim.

The coalition government tasked Starmer with cutting 27% from the CPS budget in three years. He provided the required savings in 18 months. Dominic Grieve, who was attorney general at the time, said Starmer had delivered "an austere service which was functional" ahead of schedule and without any "pushback".

Starmer would later tell *Channel 4 News* that overseeing the CPS cuts had given him "first-hand experience of what it means to inflict austerity on a public service" and that the experience had left him "determined that we'll never do it again".

Dame Alison Saunders, who worked alongside Starmer as chief crown prosecutor for London before succeeding him as DPP, recalled the future PM using the forced austerity drive to make positive changes to CPS operations, "rather than just doing salami slice-type cuts".

She told *CSW* earlier this year that Starmer "appreciated you couldn't just keep saying to people, 'We need you to take 5% off your budget, or 10% off your budget,' and then come back the next year and say the same".

"I think from that perspective, he will be very aware of the impact of budget cuts on departments and how you might best deal with it," she said.

Nazir Afzal, who was Starmer's chief crown prosecutor for North West England, said the future PM "regularly talked about wanting to rename the CPS the Public Prosecution Service".

Starmer left the CPS in November 2013 and was awarded his knighthood – for services to law and criminal justice – in 2014's New Year Honours list.

Selected for the safe Labour seat of Holborn and St Pancras, Starmer was elected as an MP in 2015 and became shadow minister for immigration. In June 2016, he resigned in protest at Jeremy Corbyn's leadership in the wake of the UK's decision to leave the EU. He returned as shadow secretary of state for exiting the European Union a little over three months later.

Gray area Keir Starmer's chief of staff Sue Gray

"All views are valid and welcome, but once a path has been decided on, Starmer will be ruthlessly focused on delivery"
Patrick Stevens, former international director, CPS

He became the leader of the Labour Party in 2020 and his progressive politics began to move more into the centre-ground. Starmer's ideological shift has resulted in criticism that he has no qualms about turning his back on political promises, and the *Politico* website claimed in February this year that he had made 27 U-turns "and counting", although several examples fell short of being policy commitments. In May, the *Daily Mail* added Starmer's decision to resume eating fish after being a vegetarian for 30 years as a further "flip flop".

Starmer's wife of 17 years, Victoria, remains vegetarian. The couple's

two teenage children were raised as vegetarians but given the option of eating meat from the age of 10.

Josh Simons, former director of the Labour Together think tank, now MP for Makerfield, credits the Party's revived fortunes to Starmer's "capacity to improve outcomes by reforming institutions". Some on the left view his reforms as ruthless.

Patrick Stevens was head of the CPS's international section during Starmer's five-year tenure. He described his former boss as "an incredible leader who inspires people who work for him to be the very best they can". Stevens told *CSW* Starmer has very little ego, is very strong and willing to take challenge, and believes in consultation, openness and transparency. But he does acknowledge a steely focus on the part of the new PM.

"All views are valid and welcome, but once a path has been decided on and he's confident that there's the evidence base and that it's a priority, then he will be ruthlessly focused on delivery," he said. "He doesn't do anything that isn't going to make a difference."

To paraphrase the title of Fatboy Slim's breakthrough album, Starmer's come a long way, baby. But he's only weeks into his toughest job yet. ■

JW, JD

CABINET OFFICE

In, out, shake it all about. When a new administration comes along, the Cabinet Office often gets new responsibilities and loses others. This time around was no different.

Since Labour came to power, the Cabinet Office has lost responsibility for the Government Digital Service, Central Digital and Data Office and Incubator for AI (all moving to the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology) and the Office for Veterans' Affairs (moving to the Ministry of Defence).

Peaky minder Pat McFadden

On the other hand, it has regained responsibility for the UK's relationship with the European Union (previously held by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office); taken over the Government Car Service (previously at the transport department); and become home to a new a child poverty unit.

The prime minister is, in theory, the most senior minister in the Cabinet Office, but in practice, it is led by the chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. **Pat McFadden**, who has bundles of government experience, was appointed to this role.

McFadden spent more than a decade working for Tony Blair, first as an adviser – from 1994 to 2002 – and then as the prime minister's political secretary. After becoming an MP in 2005, he was appointed as a Cabinet Office junior minister in 2006. The following year he became a minister in the business department, where he stayed until Labour was ousted from power in 2010. He has since held a series of shadow frontbench roles, including most recently shadowing the Duchy of Lancaster role.

McFadden is responsible for missions; oversight of all Cabinet Office policy; national security, resilience and civil contingencies; propriety and ethics; public appointments; and major events policy.

A few days into his job, McFadden used a speech at a conference run by the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change to set out how ministers' relations with civil servants would change under Labour. He accused the previous government of "going around beating the civil service up" and said being a civil servant would become "a richer, more rewarding experience, rather than being blamed for the failures of ministers".

McFadden has also since promised trade unions that "the days of government ministers waging culture wars on civil servants are over".

In mid-July, McFadden announced a review of national resilience in the wake of the Covid Inquiry's first report. He will chair a cabinet committee on resilience to oversee the review and will work with devolved governments, regional mayors and local leaders to develop it.

Also in the department's team are minister for the Cabinet Office **Nick Thomas-Symonds**, who is responsible for the returned EU relations brief, and **Ellie Reeves**, who is minister without portfolio and attends cabinet.

Thomas-Symonds has been a continuous opposition frontbencher since being elected in 2015, serving under the leadership of both Jeremy Corbyn and Starmer.

Alongside his EU assignment, Thomas-Symonds is the paymaster general and is responsible for the constitution and House of Lords reform; legislation; inquiries policy and the government response to the Infected Blood Inquiry.

"McFadden promised civil servants 'a richer, more rewarding experience, rather than being blamed for the failures of ministers'"

Reeves, who is the sister of chancellor Rachel Reeves and the wife of former Labour MP John Cryer, is responsible for missions and the GREAT campaign. She is also the new chair of the Labour Party.

They are joined by junior ministers **Georgia Gould** and **Abena Oppong-Asare**.

Gould is responsible for public sector reform; oversight of government functions; Cabinet Office business planning and performance; public bodies policy; and Cabinet Office arm's-length body sponsorship.

A former leader of Camden Council, Gould has been nicknamed the Red

Princess – her father was a strategy and polling consultant to the Labour party for five elections, while her mother has been a Labour peer since 2014, and Gould made her first media appearance as a baby being held aloft by Neil Kinnock on the cover of *Private Eye*.

As well as this political pedigree, Gould brings experience of mission-driven government to the department: at Camden Council, she introduced four missions and a new cross-departmental way of working in 2022, working closely with UCL professor and maven of missions Mariana Mazzucato.

Oppong-Asare, also a former Labour councillor as well as a former member of the London Assembly, has responsibility for national security, resilience, and civil contingencies; transparency policy, correspondence policy and Freedom of Information; and supporting the minister for the Cabinet Office on inquiries policy and constitution.

During her time as an assembly member, Oppong-Asare led the community engagement work for the mayor in the aftermath of the Grenfell fire. She is also chair of Labour Women's Network and co-author of *Stand up and be Counted*, a book offering practical advice for women from diverse backgrounds to stand for council.

The Cabinet Office was busy in the weeks following the election finalising pay deals for the civil service after the previous Conservative government had delayed making a decision.

Green shoots Keir Starmer with Georgia Gould, then leader of Camden Council

Ministers published the delegated pay remit for 2024-25 for non-senior officials and guidance on pay for the senior civil service, which both gave officials a 5% pay increase, the day before parliament broke up for summer recess.

On flexible working, another key issue that the department is responsible for, ministers are taking things more slowly. Gould said in early August that ministers were "yet to review" home-working guidance, adding that the government was "committed to supporting individuals and businesses to work in ways that best suit their particular circumstances". ■

TM

HM TREASURY

Corridors of power Rachel Reeves walks through HMT ahead of one of her first speeches as chancellor

Rachel Reeves was front and centre of the Labour Party's general-election campaign, and the new chancellor of the exchequer has remained in the spotlight since its victory on 4 July.

Almost immediately, Reeves instructed Treasury officials to produce an assessment of the state of public finances. The document was presented to the Commons on 29 July, with the chancellor claiming to have inherited £22bn of departmental overspend from the Tories. Labour has used the funding "black hole" assessment to justify several major spending cuts, including a controversial cut to millions of pensioners' winter fuel payments.

With manifesto commitments to fund, and with the remainder of the £22bn gap to bridge, the nation's first female chancellor is expected to announce a stream of tax changes at her first Budget, scheduled for 30 October. Some – including applying VAT to private school fees and abolishing non-dom tax status – were trailed long before the election. But speculation has been rife that more tax rises are on the horizon. Labour has pledged not to raise taxes on working people, but changes to capital gains tax and inheritance tax could be compliant with that assurance.

"Speculation has been rife that more tax rises are on the horizon"

As well as immediate funding concerns, the new Treasury team has set to work on their manifesto commitments to create a National Wealth Fund to invest in growth and jobs, and to strengthen the Office for Budget Responsibility. The budget responsibility bill – which will give the OBR new powers and a wider remit – had its first reading in the Commons just two weeks after polling day.

The other pieces of HMT-sponsored legislation set out in the King's Speech are the National Wealth Fund bill, to put the wealth fund on a permanent statutory footing, the bank resolution (recapitalisation) bill and the Crown Estate bill.

Reeves is a former Bank of England economist, including a secondment to the British Embassy in Washington DC where she met her now-husband, senior civil servant and former private secretary to Gordon Brown, Nick Joicey.

Joicey is currently second permanent secretary and chief operating officer at the Department for Environment and Rural Affairs. The couple have two young children.

Reeves was born in south London in 1979. As a schoolgirl she was a junior »

chess champion and excelled at maths. Ellie Reeves – now minister without portfolio in the Cabinet Office – took part in chess tournaments alongside her elder sister.

Reeves joined the Labour Party aged 17, and has said she knew she would be a Labour supporter from the age of eight. She entered parliament as MP for Leeds West in 2010 – the same year she and Joicey wed. She had two previous attempts to become an MP, both in the Conservative stronghold of Bromley and Chislehurst.

In 2010, then-Labour Party leader Ed Miliband was quick to appoint Reeves to his shadow cabinet, first as shadow work and pensions minister and then as shadow chief secretary to the Treasury in October 2011. She subsequently served as shadow work and pensions secretary. Reeves did not hold a frontbench position during Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party.

She was made shadow minister for the Cabinet Office by Keir Starmer in April 2020, and then shadow chancellor in May 2021. A fellow shadow minister told the BBC earlier this year that Reeves "chews through calls and briefings… I have never, ever, ever, seen her unprepared."

Reeves has recently championed an approach to governing which she calls "securonomics". She said this involves prioritising economic strength and resilience in the face of an uncertain future and securing the finances of working people.

A prolific writer, Reeves often pens journal articles and is the author of several books. Last year she admitted she "should have done better" after it emerged that her book, *Women Who Made Modern Economics*, had entire sentences and paragraphs reproduced from other sources without reference.

Darren Jones is Reeves's chief secretary to the Treasury and is often found defending the government during media rounds. In opposition, he chaired parliament's Business and Trade Committee from 2020 to 2023. During the general-election campaign, he wrote to Treasury perm sec James Bowler complaining about then-PM Rishi Sunak's claim that "independent Treasury officials" had calculated that Labour policies would result in a £2,000 tax hike for every household.

Lord Spencer Livermore is financial secretary to the Treasury. He previously served as a special adviser to the Treasury under Gordon Brown and joined Brown in No.10 in 2007 as director of strategy but left the next year. He was made a peer in 2015.

James Murray is exchequer secretary to the Treasury, with responsibility for the UK tax system. A former Islington councillor, he was London's deputy mayor for housing from 2016 to 2019, before becoming an MP.

The economic secretary to the Treasury and City minister is **Tulip Siddiq**. Last year, Siddiq announced a major review of Labour's financial services policy, which was published in February.

Emma Reynolds holds a dual role as minister for pensions across both the Treasury and the Department for Work and Pensions. The decision to make the post a dual appointment is an indication of how seriously Labour intends to take private sector pensions reform, with a pension schemes bill announced in the King's Speech. DWP is the sponsor department for that legislation. ■

JS, JD

MINISTRY OF HOUSING, COMMUNITIES & LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The recently re-renamed MHCLG describes itself as "central to the mission-driven government, from fixing the foundations of an affordable home to handing power back to communities and rebuilding local governments".

To say the department has got its work cut out would be an understatement. One of the Starmer administration's key targets is to build 1.5 million new homes as part of its mantra of "getting Britain building again". Before getting into government, Labour set out its "golden rules" for house building, creating a new "grey belt" classification, which inevitably stirred up the YIMBY-vs-NIMBY debate again.

And housing is just one part of the department's remit, which also includes communities and local government. The government has so far committed to five MHCLG-related bills, including the renters' rights bill and the Holocaust memorial bill, which made parliamentary progress under the Conservatives. The redrafted bills will likely see the inclusion of amendments Labour proposed while in opposition.

A culture change is taking place within the department. On her first day in government, housing secretary and deputy prime minister **Angela Rayner** scrapped the previous "levelling up" moniker and told officials that the department would revert to its previous name. She told MHCLG staff that there would be "no more gimmicks, no more slogans," and that "our department should do what it says on the tin".

Given the magnitude of the new homes target, not to mention the forces of NIMBYism and planning bureaucracy that stand in the way, Rayner seems well matched to the role. In less than a decade, she has gone from becoming the first-ever woman MP in her Ashton-under-Lyne constituency to DPM – building a fearsome reputation for being outspoken along the way. Rayner has previously condemned her Conservative opponents as "scum" and described herself as "John Prescott in a skirt".

Being one of the most powerful women in British politics is a world away from her upbringing in Stockport, where she grew up in poverty, left school without qualifications and became a single mother in her teens. A former supporter of Jeremy Corbyn, the Labour firebrand is widely regarded as a future Labour prime minister in waiting. She has not tried to hide her ambition, stating in 2021: "Put Keir in as PM and me as deputy, then see how good I am. I reckon I will be good at it. If people are happy, then maybe I'll have a go after him."

In 2024, Rayner was the focus of a news story regarding capital gains tax following the sale of her council home. Labour said in its manifesto that it would be reviewing the increased right-to-buy discounts introduced in 2012 to preserve current social housing stock. Rayner has benefited from the right-to-buy scheme herself, and the party maintains that it supports the scheme.

Rayner heads up a ministerial team that is on a steep learning curve, with none having previously served in government. They include ministers of state **Matthew Pennycook**, who has been shadow housing minister since late 2021, and **Jim McMahon**, who held the local government portfolio while in opposition.

Pennycook has been consistent in calling for increased tenants' rights and reforms to the leasehold system. In July, he said social housing providers "need certainty and stability" after years of "constant change and churn" under the Conservative government – which had 16 housing ministers altogether.

McMahon became leader of Oldham Council at age 35, later becoming the Labour leader of the Local Government Association before being elected as an MP in 2015. McMahon has previously likened his views on austerity to those of Jeremy Corbyn, writing in the *New Statesman*: "I think our public services are buckling under the cuts."

Alex Norris and **Rushanara Ali** are the department's parliamentary undersecretaries of state, along with **Baroness Sharon Taylor** and **Lord Wajid Khan**.

Each has some familiarity with the brief: Ali sat on the Communities and Local Government Committee from 2016 to 2017; Khan, a former opposition whip in the House of Lords who has said he was motivated to develop community cohesion projects by the 2001 Burnley race riots, has been shadow spokesperson for levelling up, housing, communities, and local government since 2021; and Norris became shadow levelling up minister the same year. Norris is, however, perhaps best known for his viral moment in 2020 when he was caught placing his head in his hands during a speech to the House of Commons by then-health secretary Matt Hancock on issues surrounding Covid test-and-trace capabilities.

Straight talking Angela Rayner

Taylor has enjoyed an esteemed career in local government, having been first elected to Stevenage Borough Council in 1997, going on to become deputy leader and then leader before leaving the council in 2022. She is against cutting funding to local councils and was a champion for those in the private rented sector during debates on the renters reform bill in the last parliamentary session. ■

FQ, JO, BS

DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS & TRADE

The Department for Business and Trade – like its predecessor organisations – has always had an important role in aiding the nation's prosperity. However, new prime minister Keir Starmer's pledge to make growing the economy the first of his five core missions in government elevates DBT's position considerably.

DBT was created by the Sunak administration in February last year in a machinery of government change that brought together the rump of the former Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy with the entirety of the Department for International Trade.

Its work includes supporting businesses both domestically and internationally, helping overseas businesses locate in the UK, and capitalising on post-Brexit freedoms – including through reaching new trade agreements with non-EU nations.

DBT oversees a range of regulatory functions, including delivering a "pro-enterprise" regulatory system. It is also responsible for the Post Office, and therefore the lead department for dealing with fallout from the Horizon scandal.

In 2023-24, the department had a budget of £4.9bn. As of March, its headcount excluding agencies was 5,485. Adding on the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, Companies House and the Insolvency Service takes staff numbers up to 9,610.

Jonathan Reynolds, MP for the Greater Manchester seat of Stalybridge and Hyde, was appointed business secretary – and president of the Board of Trade – on 5 July. Unlike his colleague **Douglas Alexander**, who was a cabinet member in the Blair/Brown era and is now one of DBT's ministers of state, this is Reynolds's first government role. However, he was previously a political assistant to his own constituency's former MP James Purnell, so the cut and thrust of ministerial life won't be totally unfamiliar.

"Unlike his colleague Douglas Alexander, who was a cabinet member in the Blair/Brown era, this is Reynolds's first government role"

Although born in Sunderland, Reynolds's identification with Manchester runs deep. In May 2017 he had a bee – the Victorian symbol of the city – tattooed on his wrist to show solidarity for the victims of the Manchester bombing. He is married to Claire Johnston and has four children, one of whom is autistic. He is also a member of the USDAW and Unite unions, and his hobbies are football, history and music.

Addressing staff at DBT's Old Admiralty Building headquarters following his appointment to the cabinet, Reynolds said the department could "deliver more for the UK than it has ever had the chance to do before" under the new Labour government.

"No government can deliver for working people unless we are creating high-quality jobs that fit with people's lives," he said. "And that means growing the economy, and ensuring the benefits of that are shared widely."

Working alongside Reynolds and Alexander will be minister of state for industry (and former civil servant) **Sarah Jones** and junior ministers **Justin Madders**, **Gareth Thomas** and **Baroness Maggie Jones,** whose briefs include employment rights, services and legislation.

DBT is responsible for three bills set out in July's King's Speech. The employment rights bill targets banning exploitative zero-hours contracts, ending "fire-and-rehire" practices and repealing legislation introduced under the last government that was designed to guarantee minimum service levels in public services during strike action. The bill will also create a single enforcement body to help ensure that workplace rights are delivered in practice.

First timer Jonathan Reynolds

The product safety and metrology bill is designed to ensure that the UK is better placed to address modern-day safety issues – such as fire risks associated with e-bikes and lithium-ion batteries, and to level the playing field between high street and online marketplaces. The bill will also enable the nation to choose between mirroring updated European Union safety rules or diverging from them.

Finally, the draft audit reform and corporate governance bill aims to deliver more "robust and rigorous scrutiny" of large companies' finances. It is framed as a reaction to corporate failures including the collapse of BHS and outsourcing giant Carillion, and measures will include replacing the Financial Reporting Council with new regulator the Audit, Reporting and Governance Authority – with bolstered powers to "tackle bad financial reporting". ■

JD

DEPARTMENT FOR CULTURE, MEDIA & SPORT

Lisa Nandy made it clear upon her appointment that her primary interest is in real culture rather than phoney culture wars – using her initial address to staff to declare that the "era of culture wars" was "over".

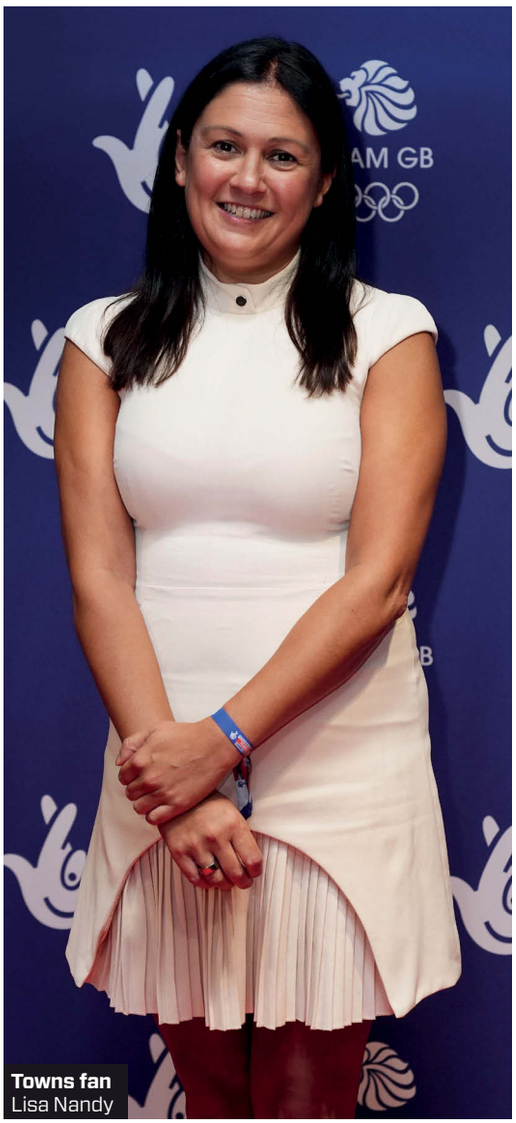
"In recent years, we've found multiple ways to divide ourselves from one another and lost that sense of a self-confident, outward-looking country which values its own people in every part of the UK," she said. "Changing that is the mission of this department."

Nandy, whose love of talking about towns became a meme, told DCMS staff that her intention was for the department to serve the nation by "celebrating and championing the diversity and rich inheritance of our communities and the people in them".

"Governments don't make this country what we are – people do," she said. "And whether it's through investing in grassroots sport, a visible symbol of what our young people mean to us in every community, or enabling brilliant working-class kids to succeed in drama, dance or journalism – we will be a government that walks alongside them as they create that country I've believed in all of my life, but never quite yet seen."

She also cautioned staff she would be asking more of them than they had ever been asked before. She added: "But I promise you that if you give it your all, I will always have your back."

Nandy comes in fresh to the brief, being one of the only cabinet picks by Starmer that did not hold the equivalent shadow role in opposition.



Towns fan
Lisa Nandy

She took on the culture brief after ex-shadow secretary Thangam Debbonaire was not re-elected in Bristol Central.

Keir Starmer is joined by ex-Lioness Fara Williams (right) and sports minister Stephanie Peacock (left) for a school visit in London

Like Nandy, parliamentary under-secretary of state **Baroness Fiona Twycross** is new to the DCMS remit, taking on the gambling brief. Although her professional background lies in politics, having been a member of the London Assembly and deputy mayor of London, Twycross has a PhD in Scandinavian literature, exhibiting her interest in the wider DCMS policy area.

By contrast, minister of state **Sir Chris Bryant** and under-secretary of state **Stephanie Peacock** both served as members of the shadow DCMS team.

Peacock has passed the gambling aspect of her brief to Twycross, but retains both sport and media, as well as gaining civil society and youth.

Bryant will be kept busy, working in two departments – as minister for creative industries, arts and tourism at DCMS; and minister for data protection and telecoms at the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology. This is an expanded iteration of Bryant's shadow brief: creative industries and digital. Bryant is the only minister in the department with experience in government, having been a minister in the Foreign Office and deputy leader of the House of Commons under Gordon Brown.

"Stephanie Peacock was one of five MPs who were told off for celebrating the creation of a women's parliamentary football team with a kickabout in the House of Commons"

The main piece of legislation the department will be working on is the return of the football governance bill, which fell with the dissolution of the last parliament. The bill seeks to establish an independent football regulator to ensure greater sustainability in the game and strengthen protections for fans.

It is perhaps useful then that the ministerial team has a couple of football fans in it.

Peacock is a keen footballer – she was one of five MPs who were told off for celebrating the creation of a women's parliamentary football team with a kickabout in the House of Commons.

And Twycross is an Oxford United fan – with a refereeing niece – who recently spoke about not being allowed to play football in school. ■

DB-R, TM

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION

Labour made bold pledges to be active in the education sector prior to the general election, setting out goals to recruit 6,500 new teachers, transform the apprenticeships levy to a growth and skills levy, end VAT exemptions for private schools, and remove single-word Ofsted ratings – to name just a few.

Since assuming power, the party has already increased wages for teachers, scrapped one-word ratings, and committed to two education and children-specific bills. The children's wellbeing bill combines a massive variety of pledges on, among other things, teacher recruitment, school breakfasts, uniforms, and a national curriculum; while the Skills England bill covers the national supply of skills necessary for economic growth.

As well as being the new education secretary, **Bridget Phillipson** has also become minister for women and equalities.

Phillipson grew up in a single-mother household in a council house, going on to join the Labour Party at the age of 15 and later work for Sunderland City Council and Wearside Women in Need, a charity founded by Phillipson's mother dedicated to giving refuge to women affected by domestic violence.

Upon her appointment as secretary of state, she told DfE officials that the new government would be "focused relentlessly" on improving the life chances of the nation's children.

"I am determined that we will drive change together," she said. "Together across government. Together with staff across education, together, where we can, with the trade unions who represent the education workforce, and above all, and most importantly, together with every one of you."

Phillipson said she wanted DfE to be a place where all staff were proud to come to work every day, and where their contribution was valued from the permanent secretary down.

She added: "I am so deeply proud that I will be working with all of you. I know that in the civil service you are bright, committed people who put public service first, you chose to work here, on the greatest of our causes, our children, their education, shaping Britain's future."

Phillipson is joined by **Anneliese Dodds**, who has also been appointed as minister for women and equalities. As both hold the same ministerial title, it is understood that Phillipson will be in charge of the bigger-picture elements of women and equalities vis-a-vis the education sector, while Dodds will be in charge of the day-to-day operations. Dodds had been shadow secretary of state for women and equalities since September 2020, which will stand her in good stead for the role.

The ministerial team also includes **Baroness Jacqui Smith**, minister of state for skills, and **Catherine McKinnell**, who is minister of state for school standards.

Smith had several high-profile jobs in Tony Blair and Gordon Brown's governments, including as Britain's first female home secretary from 2007 to 2009. Her experience also includes a DfE role as schools minister from 2005 to 2006.

McKinnell, who had been shadow minister for schools since September, will be responsible for key issues such as ensuring Ofsted inspections are completed fairly, and teacher pay and retention.

The ministerial team is completed by **Stephen Morgan** and **Janet Daby**, who have taken on the early education; and children and families briefs respectively. ■

BT, TM

Relentless focus Bridget Phillipson

"I know that in the civil service you are bright, committed people who put public service first" *Bridget Phillipson*

DEPARTMENT FOR ENERGY SECURITY & NET ZERO

Led by **Ed Miliband**, the former Labour leader of bacon-butty-eating, brother-defeating and "Ed Stone"-preaching fame, the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero is responsible for one of Labour's five "missions to rebuild Britain" – to make the country a clean energy superpower, with a fully decarbonised power system by 2030.

In the first three weeks of Keir Starmer's government, Miliband launched Great British Energy, a publicly owned energy company; agreed a partnership between GB Energy and the Crown Estate to kickstart green power projects; and appointed climate expert Chris Stark to lead a new clean energy mission control centre to put a "laser-like focus" on delivery. He has also lifted a ban on onshore wind farms; approved three giant solar farms; and jointly launched a new National Wealth Fund, which will aim to attract billions of pounds in private investment into new, green and growing industries.

Miliband was also swiftly met with words of warning from the Climate Change Committee – the government's independent climate advisers, previously led by the aforementioned Stark. In a report published just a fortnight after Labour came to power, the CCC warned that the government must urgently undo the "damage" to net-zero progress from Rishi Sunak's autumn 2023 policy reversals or risk not being able to "make up lost ground" on meeting the country's net-zero commitments.

"The civil service is one of Britain's great institutions and I look forward to working with you to change our country for the better" ***Ed Miliband***

In his first message to DESNZ officials as energy secretary, Miliband said he was "inspired" and "excited" to take on the role as it "speaks directly to the twin passions that continue to motivate me" – resolving economic inequality and tackling the climate crisis.

On a mission
Ed Miliband

Having been energy and climate change secretary from 2008 to 2010 under the last Labour government, Miliband said arriving at DESNZ felt "like coming home".

"Back then, I saw first-hand the brilliant work that civil servants do and I know how hard you have worked on behalf of the country in the years since," he added. "The civil service is one of Britain's great institutions and I look forward to working with you to change our country for the better."

Miliband, who was shadow energy secretary for the department since its creation in February 2023 and a mainstay in energy and climate change frontbench positions since Starmer became Labour leader in 2020, pledged that DESNZ would be a "mission-driven department" on his watch, "mobilising citizens, businesses, trade unions, civil society and local government in a national effort".

His team of two senior ministers and three junior ministers includes two former civil servants.

Sarah Jones is minister of state for industry, a senior role which sits in both DESNZ and the Department for Business and Trade. Before becoming an MP, she was part of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport team delivering the 2012 London Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The other senior role in the department is held by **Lord Philip Hunt**, minister of state for energy security and net zero. Lord Hunt's previous experience in government includes a spell as minister of state for sustainable development, climate change adaptation and air quality under Gordon Brown and Tony Blair.

The ministerial team also includes energy consumers minister **Miatta Fahnbulleh**, another ex-civil servant who worked in the PM's Strategy Unit under Gordon Brown and led the coalition government's Cities Policy Unit. She was later a policy adviser to Miliband while he was leader of the opposition and was most recently chief executive of left-wing think tank the New Economics Foundation.

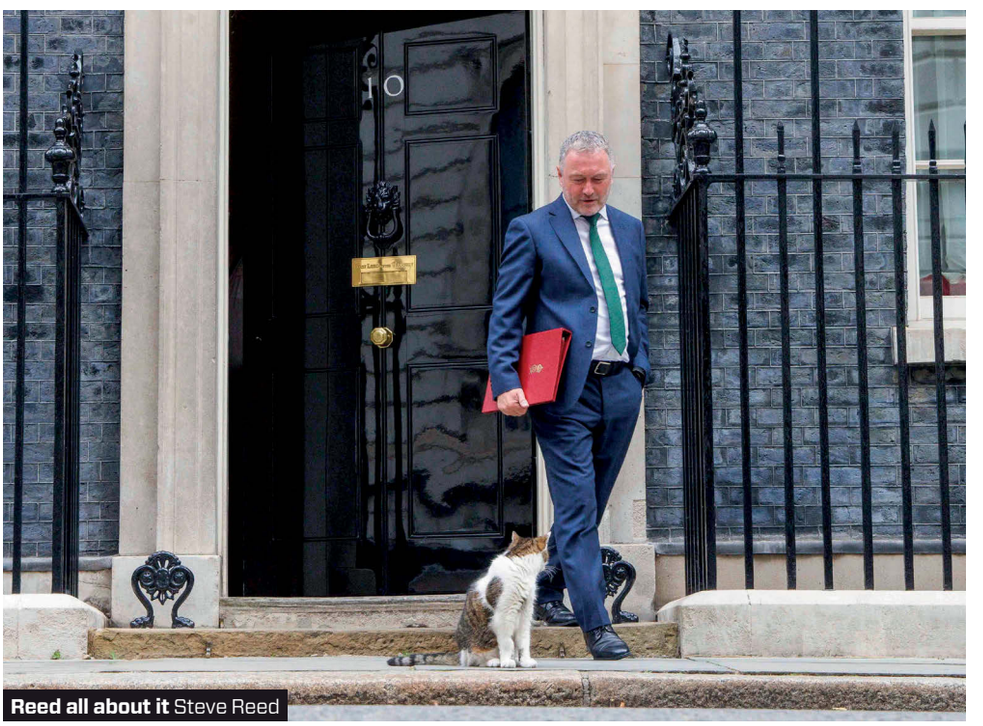
Climate minister **Kerry McCarthy** and energy minister **Michael Shanks** make up the rest of the ministerial team. ■

TM

DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD & RURAL AFFAIRS

One could be forgiven for thinking the environment department is not going to receive much attention in this parliamentary session with a solitary bill to its name: the water special measures bill. But the bill – which was tabled in September and proposes immediate fines and even jail for water company bosses in a bid to tackle pollution – is bound to be a high-profile one. And if you look beyond primary legislation there's a rich range of issues for Defra to engage with, such as the development of environmental land management schemes, the implementation of the deposit-return scheme and meeting the legal commitment to halt biodiversity decline by 2030.

New secretary of state **Steve Reed** held the shadow environment brief from 2023, having previously served as shadow justice secretary and communities secretary respectively. He has called for a land management scheme that supports moves towards regenerative farming, nature recovery and food production and also supports planning reform to help farmers diversify and plug their clean energy into the national grid. Reed's hinterland includes being the son of a professional footballer, a graduate of English literature and a stint as leader of Lambeth Council from 2006 to 2012. Reed – who married his social-worker partner in 2022 – is patron of LGBT Labour and was listed as number 37 in the *Independent on Sunday*'s 2010 'Pink List'.



Reed all about it Steve Reed

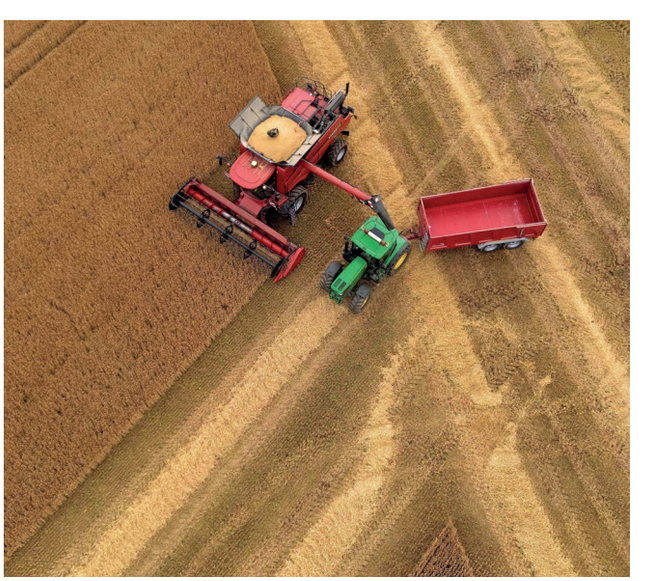
"Reed's hinterland includes being the son of a professional footballer, a stint as leader of Lambeth Council, and ranking 37 on the *Independent on Sunday*'s 'Pink List' in 2010"

New minister of state for food security and rural affairs **Daniel Zeichner** will also be familiar with his beat, having served as a shadow Defra minister since 2020. In that role, he expressed support for a national action plan on pesticides and called for government to use its purchasing power to ensure that more food in hospitals and prisons is locally produced.

Emma Hardy, former PPS to Keir Starmer when he was shadow Brexit secretary, became shadow minister for flooding, oceans and coastal communities in 2023 and is now junior minister for water and flooding. Serving alongside her as junior minister for nature is **Mary Creagh**, who returned to parliament in 2024 after having lost her seat in the 2019 general election. Creagh burnished her environmental credentials with a long stint serving as then-Labour leader Ed Miliband's shadow environment secretary and later, from 2016 to 2019, as chair of parliament's Environmental Audit Committee.

Rounding out the team is Lords minister **Baroness Sue Hayman**, who has served as opposition spokesperson for environment, food and rural affairs in the upper chamber since 2020. She played a key role in holding the previous government to account during the passing of the Environment Act, the Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Act and various pieces of animal welfare legislation. ■

JW, JB



DEPARTMENT FOR SCIENCE, INNOVATION & TECHNOLOGY

DSIT was one of the new departments created as part of Rishi Sunak's February 2023 machinery of government reforms. But Keir Starmer has immediately put his own footprints on the department.

In one of his first machinery of government tweaks, Starmer moved the Government Digital Service, Central Digital and Data Office and Incubator for AI from the Cabinet Office to the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, turning DSIT into the digital centre of government.

The MOG change had been hinted at before the election, in a speech made by **Peter Kyle**, now the science, innovation and technology secretary, at London Tech Week.

Kyle, who started his first job on his 13th birthday collecting battery eggs from a chicken farm, is a 2015 intake MP. Before becoming an MP, he worked as an aid worker in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, where he supported young people who had been affected by war. This included setting up an orphanage in Romania, which is still active today. He later set up a film production company, before becoming a special adviser to Hilary Armstrong, the then-Cabinet Office secretary.

Kyle suffered a series of tragedies in 2012, with his partner, mother and closest female friend all dying within a few weeks.

Whilst Kyle – who held the shadow science and tech brief since late 2023 – retained his position on the Labour front bench, the remainder of his shadow team – Chi Onwurah, Chris Evans, and Matt Rodda – did not receive ministerial appointments.

DSIT's most striking appointment is new science, research and innovation minister **Lord Patrick Vallance**, the former government chief scientific adviser.

Vallance, who was the CSA between 2018 and 2023 and became a household name during the Covid-19 pandemic, boasts considerable expertise in his portfolio, having enjoyed a lengthy career teaching at medical schools before moving to GSK where he eventually became head of research and development.

Digital dynamo Peter Kyle

"One of Bryant's calling cards during debates on the media bill was ensuring every speech was complete with at least one Taylor Swift reference"

Another well-known name is **Sir Chris Bryant**, who has joined the department as minister for data protection and telecoms alongside another ministerial position in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Bryant is best known for debates in the House of Commons. His contributions can be characterised by pithy remarks, unpredictable off-hand comments, and frequent injections of humour. One of his calling cards during debates on the media bill was ensuring every speech was complete with at least one Taylor Swift reference.

Completing the team are **Feryal Clark**, holding a particularly topical brief as minister for AI and digital government, and **Baroness Maggie Jones** as minister for the future digital economy and online safety.

Jones is well acquainted with the brief, having been shadow spokesperson for science, innovation and technology for the duration of the last parliament. Clark is also well versed in science and technology: before becoming an MP, she worked in pathology and completed a degree in bioinformatics.

The department will be working on two key pieces of legislation during this parliament, the digital information and smart data bill and the cyber security and resilience bill. ■

DB-R, TM

DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT

New transport secretary **Louise Haigh** has a simple philosophy that she wants everyone in the Department for Transport to follow: "Move fast and fix things".

Haigh said this would be the department's "new motto" and "purpose" in her first speech to officials on the Monday morning following the election.

She also promised that DfT would "think about infrastructure and services together at every turn" and "focus relentlessly" on improving performance on the railways and introducing "much-needed rail reform".

In line with the motto, Haigh has been busy since her appointment: she has agreed a deal with ASLEF to prevent strike action, publicly warned train operator CrossCountry about the inadequacies of its rail service, and met combined authority mayors to discuss bus franchising.

Flying Haigh Transport secretary Louise Haigh

"Growth, net zero, opportunity, women and girls' safety, health – none of these can be realised without transport as a key enabler" ***Louise Haigh***

The department also has a significant amount of legislation to be getting on with – it had five bills in the King's Speech, with the return of the railway services to public ownership the big-ticket item. Other key pieces of legislation include creating Great British Railways and giving new powers to local politicians to franchise bus services.

Haigh said the department's efforts will be "central" to achieving the government's five missions. "Growth, net zero, opportunity, women and girls' safety, health – none of these can be realised without transport as a key enabler," Haigh said.

While studying at university, Haigh worked for several MPs, including Lisa Nandy, who is now culture secretary. She later worked as a trade union rep and for insurance firm Aviva. First elected as an MP in 2015, Haigh found herself on the opposition frontbenches just four months later as minister for the civil service and digital reform.

"That was very daunting and you have to learn very quickly," she told *CSW* in 2016. "There are good things about being thrown in at the deep end. It makes you take responsibility straight away. Perhaps I would have liked a little bit of a longer lead-in time, because learning to be a new MP while learning to be a shadow minister is quite a tall order. But we are where we are – and I love it."

She became shadow transport secretary in 2021, retaining the brief until this year's general election.

Haigh has said her favourite book is John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, a story described by the National Theatre as one of "wrong turns and broken dreams, but also a hymn to human kindness and a tribute to the endurance of the human spirit". She will be hoping for more of the latter than the former during her time as transport secretary.

Coming along with her for the journey, she has a team packed with transport experience.

She is joined by future of roads minister **Lilian Greenwood**, who is a fellow former shadow transport secretary and was chair of the House of Commons' Transport Committee from 2018 to 2020.

And in rail minister **Lord Peter Hendy**, she has a colleague with a near-50-year career in public transport.

Lord Hendy departed his role as chair of Network Rail, which he had held since 2015, to join the ministerial team. He began his extensive career in public transport in 1975 as a London Transport graduate trainee and went on to hold roles including commissioner of Transport for London and chair of the London 2012 Games Transport Board. Along with Patrick Vallance and James Timpson, Hendy represents a new wave of government ministers who have been appointed based on their substantial expertise and relevant policy knowledge.

Local transport minister **Simon Lightwood** and **Mike Kane**, who is minister for aviation, maritime and security, make up the rest of the team.

Kane was shadow minister for aviation and maritime throughout Keir Starmer's spell as leader of the opposition, while Lightwood had been shadow local transport minister for around 10 months. ■

JW, TM

Peter Hendy as London transport commissioner

DEPARTMENT FOR WORK & PENSIONS

The Labour government has swiftly set its sights on transforming the Department for Work and Pensions, rebranding it as the "department for work" with a clear emphasis on employment rather than welfare. This shift aligns with prime minister Keir Starmer's broader agenda on skills and jobs, spearheaded by the newly appointed work and pensions secretary, **Liz Kendall**. Her ambitious target? Raising the employment rate to 80%, a significant leap from the current 74.4%, echoing the aspirations of Tony Blair's government, which fell short of this goal.

Kendall, like her namesake in *Succession*, is a hip-hop fan and she has said she listens to Public Enemy before speaking in debates in the House of Commons.

She succeeded Jonathan Ashworth as shadow work and pensions secretary last year, and brings nearly a decade of frontbench experience from her time on the shadow health team. Despite her credentials, she has faced criticism from the left wing of her party for her stance on welfare. During her 2015 Labour leadership bid, she notably supported the Conservative government's welfare reforms, refusing to oppose cuts unless a clear alternative could be funded, and endorsing the benefit cap.

Getting to work Liz Kendall

Supporting Kendall at the DWP is **Stephen Timms**, the new minister for social security and disability. Timms, as the former chair of the Work and Pensions Select Committee, was a persistent critic of the Conservative government's welfare policies, particularly in relation to benefit sanctions and the treatment of disabled people.

Timms consistently called for the abolition of the benefits sanctions regime, highlighting its detrimental impact on vulnerable claimants. He was also vocal about the failures of the Work-Related Activity Group – the DWP's name for claimants who are required to show they are completing work-related activity such as training or job interviews to receive benefits – especially concerning its inclusion of people with severe conditions like multiple sclerosis. Timms argued that such policies exacerbated hardships for those already struggling, and he pushed for significant changes to ensure that the welfare system offered genuine support rather than punitive measures.

Alison McGovern, the new minister for employment, complements Timms with her focus on fixing the social security system by achieving full employment. Known for her unconventional style – she was once cautioned for playing football in the House of Commons – McGovern has long argued that full employment is essential to a fair and effective welfare system, an ambition that aligns closely with Kendall's goals.

Emma Reynolds is minister for pensions in the DWP alongside her Treasury role. Her swift appointment following her re-election to Parliament in July after a four-and-a-half-year absence echoes her promotion to the frontbench when she was first elected in 2010.

Andrew Western, as the new minister for transformation, faces the significant challenge of overseeing ongoing digital projects within the DWP. Despite being relatively unknown, Western made headlines recently when he spoke out against the abuse of MPs after an incident at his home.

"Kendall's ambitious target? Raising the employment rate to 80%, a significant leap from the current 74.4%"

In the House of Lords, the DWP will be represented by parliamentary under-secretary of state **Baroness Maeve Sherlock**. As a former chief executive of the Refugee Council and an ex-member of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, her appointment adds a strong voice for equality and human rights within the department. ■

DS, TM

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE

The new health secretary has quite the back story. **Wes Streeting**'s grandfather was an armed robber who rubbed shoulders with the Kray Twins, while his grandmother also ended up in jail where she met Christine Keeler, of Profumo Affair notoriety. Growing up in Stepney on a council estate, Streeting has said he felt financial security for the first time when he became an MP aged 32. Fittingly, Streeting's first frontbench role was as shadow minister for child poverty, before taking on the health portfolio in 2021.

Prioritising pay
Health secretary Wes Streeting

Pay was the immediate priority for the Illford North MP when he was appointed health secretary, after strikes under the previous government led to tens of thousands of appointments being cancelled.

Indeed, industrial action by different NHS workers since December 2022 has led to 1.5 million appointments, procedures and operations being postponed at an estimated cost of more than £3bn.

One of Streeting's first major actions was to address these issues by meeting with various professional bodies and members of the NHS workforce itself.

The outcome was an acceptance of the recommendations made from the NHS Pay Review Body, the Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration, and the Senior Salaries Review Body, which resulted in a pay rise of 5.5% for 1.5 million-plus NHS staff in England. Streeting also agreed a 22% rise for junior doctors.

The new health secretary said it is his intention to restore public sector pay after "years of neglect" so further reforms can be expected. DHSC is also likely to work in conjunction with departments such as DSIT to invest in greater use of technology and AI, in line with Labour's pledge to harness tech as a way of fixing a broken NHS system and cutting waiting lists.

"The new health secretary said it is his intention to restore public sector pay after 'years of neglect' so further reforms can be expected"

In his introductory address to staff, Streeting said it will "be the mission of my department, every member of this government, and the 1.4 million people who work in the NHS to turn our health service around".

"When we were last in office, we worked hand in hand with NHS staff to deliver the shortest waits and highest patient satisfaction in history," Streeting added. "We did it before, and together we will do it again."

Streeting also quickly commissioned a "warts and all" report into the NHS, appointing surgeon and former-health minister Lord Ara Darzi, who served under Gordon Brown for two years, to steer it. The review, set to be published in September, will inform a new 10-year plan to make the NHS "fit for the future".

From a legislation perspective, the King's Speech revealed that the department will be spearheading two bills during the next parliamentary session: the mental health bill and the tobacco and vapes bill. The mental health bill will reform the Mental Health Act which Labour described as "woefully out of date." The tobacco and vapes bill will be picked up from the last government, ensuring that anyone born after 1 January 2009 will never be able to legally buy a cigarette and banning the deliberate advertising of vapes to children. The new government is taking the agenda a step further, by considering whether to introduce tougher rules on outdoor smoking.

Streeting, who has said in the past that he would "maybe one day" like to lead the Labour Party, began his career as president of the National Union of Students, and then worked in several charities before becoming an MP in 2015.

As shadow health secretary, he argued for fundamental reform of the health service rather than pouring more money into a "leaky bucket". He also championed using the private sector to support the NHS. Health commitments in Labour's manifesto included cutting NHS waiting times with 40,000 more appointments every week, doubling the number of cancer scanners, dentistry reform, the return of the family doctor, and 8,500 additional mental staff.

Streeting is joined by **Stephen Kinnock** – the son of former Labour Party leader Neil Kinnock – who is minister of state for care; **Karin Smyth**, who is minister of state for health (secondary care); and junior ministers **Andrew Gwynne** and **Baroness Gillian Merron**.

Gwynne is responsible for public health and prevention, while Merron's portfolio is patient safety, women's health and mental health.

Merron, who was an MP between 1997 and 2010 before joining the House of Lords, was minister of state for public health in the Department of Health between 2009-10. ■

JO, TM

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH & DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

Shortly after being appointed as foreign secretary, **David Lammy** told a gathering of Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office staff that he wanted to use his cabinet position to "deliver progress", not just hold office. He said the task facing the FCDO was to "recapture Britain's restless energy" and reconnect the nation to the world.

"I am a progressive realist. I believe in change and I believe in our power to reshape international institutions," Lammy said. "But I am not naive about the limits of power."

Lammy grew up in Tottenham, north London. His childhood talent as a chorister saw him awarded a scholarship to attend King's School in Peterborough, where he became the school's first black head boy. He has law degrees from both the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies and Harvard, and practised as a litigation lawyer in California before becoming MP for Tottenham in 2000 at the age of 27.

From 2002 to 2010, Lammy held a succession of ministerial posts in the governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, latterly serving as a minister of state in the then-department for Business, Innovation and Skills. Labour leader Keir Starmer made him shadow foreign secretary in September 2021.

A vocal opponent of Brexit, Lammy described the outcome of 2016's referendum as a "swindle" and "a fraud" that was "fundamentally won on false premises and lies with Russian interference". Lammy rebelled against a three-line whip and opposed the triggering of Article 50 in 2017.

Lammy nominated Jeremy Corbyn for the Labour Party leadership in 2015, even though he did not plan to support Corbyn's bid. He later apologised for the decision.

Progressive realist David Lammy

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Lammy is a supporter of Tottenham Hotspur FC.

The new government has pledged increased focus on fostering positive diplomatic relations with Europe. It also made manifesto commitments to strengthen the role of development work in the department, specifically supporting economic transformation, tackling unsustainable debt, empowering women and girls, supporting conflict prevention and unlocking climate finance.

Labour has a stated aim of returning to spending 0.7% of gross national income on international development work – a commitment dumped by the Johnson administration in 2021. Labour has not set a timescale for its ambition. It says international development spending will be stepped up "as soon as fiscal circumstances allow".

Lammy's ministerial team at the FCDO includes minister of state **Anneliese Dodds**, whose brief includes development and climate change as well as education, gender and equality – a neat tie-in with her other role as minister for women and equalities in the education department.

Another minister of state, **Stephen Doughty,** holds the Europe, North America and Overseas Territories brief.

A quartet of parliamentary undersecretaries of state complete the team: **Catherine West**, (who covers the Indo-Pacific), **Lord Ray Collins** (Africa) **Baroness Jennifer Chapman** (Latin America and the Caribbean) and **Hamish Falconer** (Middle East, Afghanistan and Pakistan).

Falconer is a former civil servant and son of New Labour justice secretary Lord Charlie Falconer. First elected as an MP in July, he previously led the Foreign Office's Terrorism Response Team and UK efforts to start a peace process in Afghanistan. ■

"I believe in change and I believe in our power to reshape international institutions" ***David Lammy***

AK, JD

HOME OFFICE

The Home Office sprang into action following the election, launching a new border security command within days of Labour coming to power. This was one of the six "first steps for change" Labour promised in its election manifesto.

The government also wasted no time in scrapping the Rwanda scheme, with Keir Starmer doing this on his first full day as prime minister and home secretary **Yvette Cooper** ordering an audit of the scheme in the hope of clawing back some of the cash spent on it. And the Home Office quickly announced it would scrap the controversial Bibby Stockholm asylum barge.

Labour also reaffirmed its commitment to tackling issues related to crime and policing by announcing four bills in the King's Speech. These included the terrorism (protection of premises bill) also known as Martyn's Law, which was promised but not delivered by the Conservative government.

Cooper and Starmer were also forced to take swift action when violent far-right riots swept the nation following the stabbings of children in Southport. They announced a new 'National Violent Disorder Programme' to clamp down on the unrest.

The Home Office ministerial team is packed with frontbench and home affairs experience. Cooper was shadow home secretary from 2011-2015 and 2021-2024 – and chair of the Home Affairs Select Committee in the period in-between. She also has a wealth of experience across government, including being work and pensions secretary and chief secretary to the Treasury in Gordon Brown's government, as well as several junior ministerial offices beforehand. Under Brown, she and her husband Ed Balls were the first couple to sit in the cabinet together. Before becoming an MP in 1997, Cooper's jobs included working for Bill Clinton on his presidential campaign and being chief economics correspondent for *The Independent*.

"The team also includes Angela Eagle, who is the second longest-serving female Labour MP"

Cooper pledged ahead of July's election that she would run a "hands-on Home Office" as home secretary.

She is joined by **Dame Diana Johnson**, another leading voice in the home affairs policy space. Johnson, who is the department's minister for policing, fire and crime prevention, had been chair of the Home Affairs Select Committee since 2021, having previously been shadow minister for crime and security between 2011-2015.

Wealth of experience Yvette Cooper

The team also includes Labour veteran **Dame Angela Eagle**, who is the second longest-serving female Labour MP sitting in the House of Commons and has a long list of government and shadow positions. Eagle is minister for border security and asylum, her first Home Office brief since 2002, when she was a junior minister in the department.

Lords minister **Lord George Hanson** also has plenty of government experience. Elected as an MP in 1992, he secured a myriad of government roles, including a year as minister for security, counter-terrorism, crime and policing under Brown from 2009-10. Hanson, who lost his seat as an MP in 2019, was appointed to the House of Lords by Starmer after July's election.

Dan Jarvis keeps hold of the senior minister for security brief, having held the shadow version of the role for the last year. Jarvis has a military background, serving for 15 years in the Parachute Regiment.

The team is also not short of 'star factor' – **Jess Phillips**, one of parliament's highest-profile MPs, makes a return to the Labour frontbench and home affairs brief as minister for safeguarding and violence against women and girls. Phillips served as shadow minister for domestic violence and safeguarding from 2020 until she resigned after voting against the party whip to support a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war in November 2023. She has an extensive background in domestic abuse services, having worked at Women's Aid Federation for a number of years before being elected as an MP.

Seema Malhotra, whose first shadow brief, in 2015, was in a Home Office role focused on tackling violence against women and girls, completes the team as minister for migration and citizenship. ■

MTSH, TM

Argy-bargy The controversial Bibby Stockholm barge has been scrapped by Labour and will cease to house asylum seekers from January 2025

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Reviews are the news at the Ministry of Defence. The Labour Party was clear in its manifesto that its priority for the department in its first year back in government would be a strategic defence review. Keir Starmer followed through on this quickly. Within a few days of coming to power, the new prime minister had ordered the review and, around a week later, announced it would be overseen by defence secretary **John Healey** and headed by George Robertson, a Labour peer and former NATO secretary general.

Strategic defence reviews have become increasingly frequent in recent years as the world has grown more volatile and amid changes of government. Back in 2010, the coalition government committed to five-yearly reviews. Labour's review will be the third in five years, following 2021's Integrated Review and the 2023 IR refresh. Upon the publication of the 2023 refresh, Healey – who has been shadow defence secretary since 2020 – said it was "not a good enough response to war in Europe".

Healey, like a number of his fellow cabinet members, was a minister in both Tony Blair and Gordon Brown's administrations. Elected to parliament in 1997, his ministerial career began in 2001, holding roles at the Department for Education, Treasury and the-then Department for Communities and Local Government.

The defence secretary began his career in 1983 as deputy editor at *CSW* sister publication *The House*, only staying there for a year. He then worked as a campaigner and lobbyist for several disability charities, before working in unions. His last job before becoming an MP was as campaign director for the TUC.

"Back in 2010, the coalition government committed to five-yearly reviews. Labour's review will be the third in five years"

As shadow defence secretary, Healey has argued that the principal security threats the UK faces are in Europe and so British ambitions in the Indo-Pacific should be realistic from a military budget perspective. He has also carried on the Corbyn-era policy of prioritising British companies for defence contracts. Healey has also been a strong advocate for Ukraine, often calling urgent questions and pressing the government on providing aid to the country.

Labour has committed to raising spending on defence to 2.5% of GDP. However, it has not yet set a target date, instead leaving it to the strategic review to set out the roadmap. Defence spending currently accounts for 2.3% of GDP.

Lots on his plate John Healey

Healey comes in to lead the department at a tricky time. As well as the increasingly volatile global situation, and pressure to find more money for the department, the MoD has been rocked by internal accusations of sexual misconduct. Last November, 60 female senior civil servants wrote to permanent secretary David Williams complaining of a "hostile" and "toxic" culture in the department. The letter included anonymised accounts from female MoD staff of being "propositioned", "groped" and "touched repeatedly" by male colleagues.

In March, then-shadow procurement minister **Maria Eagle** said there had been a lack of "grip" by the political leadership at the MoD, which was led by Ben Wallace from 2019 to 2023 and more recently Grant Shapps. Eagle, who also served as a minister under Blair and Brown – has taken on the same role in government.

She is one of two ministers of state in the department, alongside **Lord Vernon Coaker**, whose responsibilities include international relations and defence diplomacy; professional military education; security; and arms control and counter-proliferation.

They are joined by two junior colleagues: veterans and people minister **Alistair Carns** – who is also a former Royal Marine – and armed forces minister **Luke Pollard**.

Starmer moved the Office for Veterans' Affairs from the Cabinet Office to the MoD in one of his first machinery of government changes.

Carns, one of Labour's big 2024 intake of MPs, served and led during four tours in Afghanistan and was awarded the Military Cross in 2011 "in recognition of gallant and distinguished services in Afghanistan" from 2010 to 2011.

Since 2017, he has served as an adviser to three UK defence secretaries. Recently he served as chief of staff to the Commander UK Strike Force, where he was responsible for coordinating aircraft carriers and commando forces. He was given an OBE for exceptional operational service in the 2022 Queen's Birthday Honours.

Pollard, who became an MP in 2017, had been shadow minister for the armed forces since 2022. Before that, he was shadow environment secretary, a more senior frontbench role. Pollard's father was a submariner in the Royal Navy. ■

TM

MINISTRY OF JUSTICE

Ready to get stuck in Shabana Mahmood

With all its constituent parts, the Ministry of Justice has the biggest headcount of any government department according to the most recent civil service statistics. Prison overcrowding and growing backlogs in the judicial system – core parts of the department's work – will have provided an immediate headache for incoming justice secretary **Shabana Mahmood**.

Mahmood did not play down the magnitude of the issues faced by the department in her first town hall with civil servants, saying to staff watching virtually from across the country: "I know we have huge challenges in this department, but I look forward to getting stuck in. And I want to work with everybody in a spirit of collaboration and cooperation. I know that if we work together, we can get the job done."

One week into the job, Mahmood announced plans to temporarily reduce the proportion of some categories of sentence served in prison from 50% to 40% and the cancellation of the previous government's End of Custody Supervised Licence scheme. She said prisons were "on the point of collapse". Her overcrowding solution was in line with measures proposed by the Prison Governors' Association in the days before the general election.

"I want to work with everybody in a spirit of collaboration and cooperation" *Shabana Mahmood*

Less than three weeks later, the country witnessed the outbreak of far-right fuelled riots following the fatal stabbing attack in Southport that left three young girls dead. The courts' ability to bring perpetrators to justice again placed the MoJ in the national spotlight.

Mahmood is a qualified barrister – she has said her childhood ambition was to become Kavanagh QC, the 90s TV barrister played by John Thaw. She became an MP in 2010, representing Birmingham's Ladywood constituency, and held several shadow ministerial posts in the following five years but returned to the backbenches due to disagreements with Jeremy Corbyn. Keir Starmer made Mahmood shadow justice secretary in September 2023.

In 2014, she faced criticism for taking part in an anti-Israel protest in opposition to the Labour Party's stance against Israel-related boycotts. Last year, Mahmood criticised Starmer's response to the Gaza crisis, declaring that Labour's response had "lost the trust" of Muslim voters.

Mahmood's ministerial team at the MoJ includes **Lord James Timpson,** who was given a peerage to take up the role of minister for prisons. Timpson was chief executive of the Timpson Group from 2002 to July 2024. The firm, which includes the Timpson shoe-repair and key cutting business as well as other high-street names, is well-known for its efforts to provide jobs for ex-prisoners, who make up more than 10% of its workforce.

Heidi Alexander – whose political experience started with a six month placement in the office of Cherie Blair in 1998 – is minister for courts. She served as an MP from 2010 to 2018, before resigning her seat to become deputy mayor of London for transport. She also served as deputy chair of Transport for London and, during the Covid-19 pandemic, led several rounds of government bailout negotiations. She returned to parliament as MP for Swindon South in this summer's election.

The department's parliamentary under-secretaries of state are **Alex Davies-Jones**, whose responsibilities include strategy on violence against women and girls; the victims' commissioner; and Hillsborough, and **Sir Nic Dakin**, who has responsibility for sentencing and youth justice.

Lord Frederick Ponsonby serves as a junior minister with responsibility for all MoJ business in the House of Lords with the exception of prisons. ■

DS, JD

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

With just 185 staff, according to the latest civil service statistics, the Northern Ireland Office is undeniably one of the smallest government departments – dwarfed by many an executive agency. Nevertheless, the profile of its work has been disproportionately large in recent years, evidenced by the fact it retains a permanent secretary as its most senior official, rather than the director-general level posts which top the Welsh and Scottish offices.

The entwined challenges of Northern Ireland's unique position in relation to the European Union following Brexit and the absence of a Northern Ireland Executive have been high on the NIO's issue list of late. However, power-sharing resumed at Stormont in February following an agreement between ministers and the Democratic Unionist Party, which was designed to address concerns about the Windsor Framework. The deal also tabled a new financial package.

"When Hilary Benn was appointed secretary of state by Keir Starmer on 5 July, it was his third cabinet post in his 25 years as an MP"

When **Hilary Benn** was appointed secretary of state by Keir Starmer on 5 July, it was his third cabinet post in his 25 years as an MP. He was international development secretary under Tony Blair from October 2003 to June 2007, and then environment secretary for Gordon Brown's three-year term as PM.

Son of stalwart left-wing Labour MP Tony Benn, Hilary worked for the MSF union – one of the organisations that eventually became Unite – for 22 years. He was also deputy leader of Ealing Council in the 1980s and unsuccessfully stood to be member of parliament for Ealing North twice. He was finally elected to parliament as MP for Leeds Central in 1999. Benn now represents Leeds South after the seat was re-established following boundary changes that took effect at the last election.

Benn held numerous shadow cabinet roles in the Labour Party's most recent period of opposition, initially serving as shadow environment secretary. In 2016, then-leader Jeremy Corbyn sacked Benn for allegedly spearheading a coup against him in the wake of the UK's referendum on EU membership. Benn returned to the front benches as shadow Northern Ireland secretary in September 2023.

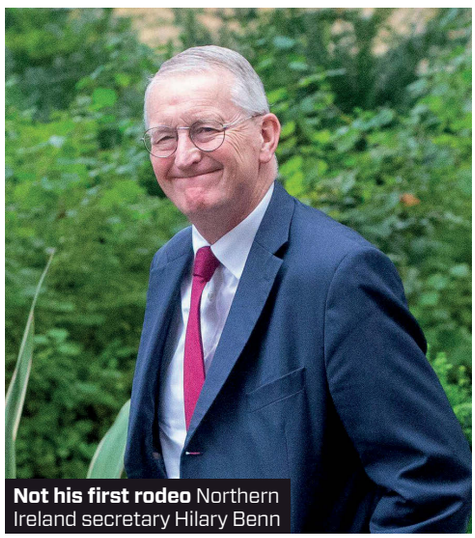
The NIO only has one other minister: Putney MP **Fleur Anderson**, who had also served as a shadow in the brief since last September. Prior to that she was shadow paymaster general. Before starting her political career as a councillor in the London Borough of Wandsworth, Anderson worked in international development and environmental advocacy – starting her career working for the charity Christian Aid (where she worked as country head in the Bosnia office in the aftermath of the Bosnian war) and most recently acting as head of global campaigns for WaterAid.

Anderson was elected MP for Putney in the 2019 election, succeeding retiring MP Justine Greening. Her seat represented the only Labour gain in the election.

High on the NIO's agenda in the coming months and years will be ways that the department can contribute to the government's five cross-cutting missions – particularly delivering economic growth and stability.

Following the King's Speech in July, Benn affirmed the government's commitment to working "collaboratively and effectively" with the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly to generate growth and improve public services.

He added that ministers would also work "with all parties and communities" to uphold the Good Friday Agreement and ensure the stability of devolved government.



Not his first rodeo Northern Ireland secretary Hilary Benn

On the legislative agenda, the NIO is due to bring forward measures that will repeal and replace the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023.

Benn said in July that victims and survivors of the Troubles had "felt ignored" by the previous government's approach to legacy issues, with the act's conditional immunity provisions "opposed by all of the Northern Ireland political parties and by many victims and survivors". The provisions have also been found to be unlawful by the Northern Ireland Court of Appeal. ■

JD

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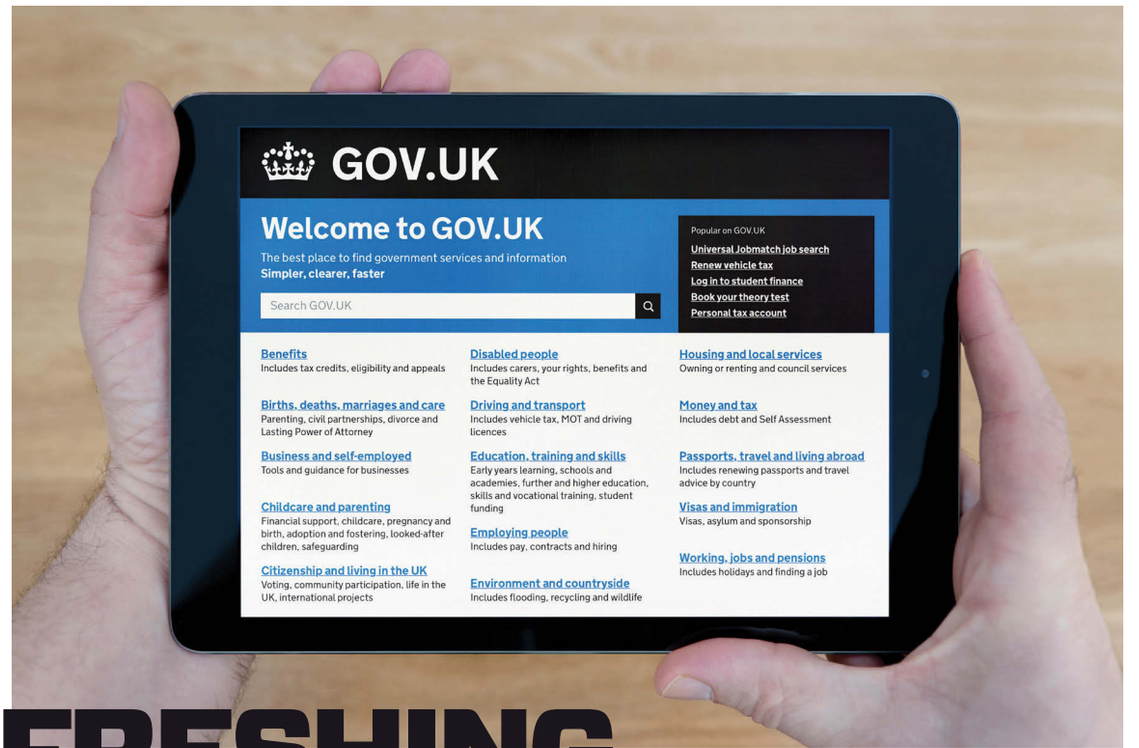

REFRESHING THE HOMEPAGE

As government's core digital units relocate from their long-standing base in the Cabinet Office to the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, **Sam Trendall** talks to sector experts to assess the impact of the move

When the Government Digital Service was formally unveiled in late 2011, its founding leader Mike Bracken declared that government "now has a digital home, and it's from here we can help drive a new generation of digital public services".

Some 13 years have elapsed since then – a period of time that represents just under a generation in human terms, but several generations in the fast-moving world of technology.

It seems fitting, then, that the dawn of the next generation brings with it a new "home" for all things digital across government. GDS – as well as its sister agency, the Central Digital and Data Office, and the Incubator for Artificial Intelligence created last year – have all now taken up residence in the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology.

Under plans announced by the new Labour administration just a few days after the general election, the trio of tech units have moved from their former location of the Cabinet Office.

In doing so, they are replicating the journey made six years ago by two small, but significant functions. In March 2018, the government announced that responsibility for data policy, governance, and sharing was being shifted from GDS to the then-Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. Just a few months later, policymakers in the area of digital identity made the same move.

The two moves prompted concern about the impact of separating key parts of the digital agenda, as well as the implications for the cross-government influence of GDS. There was speculation about whether the digital unit might be instructed to make a wholesale switch to DCMS – particularly as the department was, at the time, overseen by prominent tech advocate Matt Hancock.

The modern-day DSIT is also helmed by a minister known as a digital enthusiast, in the shape of secretary of state Peter Kyle. In a statement with striking similarities to Bracken's comments trailing the 2011 unveiling of GDS, Kyle said that, following the departmental shake-up, "DSIT is to become the centre for digital expertise and delivery in government, improving how the government and public services interact with citizens".

As the formalities of the moves were completed, prime minister Keir Starmer added that the principal benefit of the rejjg will be to "embed the delivery of digital services and levers to drive public and private sector innovation within a single department".

While these upsides appear obvious, they are surely accompanied by questions and doubts that are equally clear – in particular concerning the ability of GDS and CDDO to drive reform, as well as enforce standards and controls, without the cross-department reach of being in the centre of government.

CSW put some of these questions to a selection of independent experts. Here are their responses.

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Gavin Freeguard

Associate at the Institute for Government and Connected by Data, and special adviser at the Open Data Institute

This could be a very good thing if they get it right. I think the crucial question is: can a relatively new department that is not a traditional department of the centre do the coordination across government that it's going to need to do? On the one hand – and on the positive side – you've got a secretary of state, in Peter Kyle, who seems to be pretty close to the prime minister and seems to have good relationships with the Cabinet Office and Treasury. And I think there's also quite a clear political vision around using DSIT to serve citizens, which is perhaps not rhetoric that we've heard coming from politicians for quite some time. So, I think there is an opportunity in bringing all of those things together to actually make that happen, while also aligning that with DSIT's existing brief for thinking about digital across the wider economy and society. If those things can get aligned, I think that could be really powerful.

"I think there is a risk – given that there's a lot of tech utopianism at the moment – that the economic focus could actually distract from serving the public"

On the other hand again: will DSIT have the cross-departmental clout? And will the personalities continue to work together – especially if we get reshuffles in the future? I know that Keir Starmer has said that he's intending not to do that so much – and that's very welcome. But, if we do end up with those personnel changing, will it have the same cohesion across government and the same power?

I think there is also a risk – given that there's a lot of tech utopianism at the moment – that the economic focus could actually distract from serving the public.

So I think those are the opportunities – and the potential pitfalls.

Something that we really, really need to do is learn from what's gone before. There's quite a lot in what's being said which sounds familiar to anyone who remembers the creation of GDS. If you look at Labour's proposed National Data Library, there are so many antecedents to that – depending on what you think it's going to end up looking like. Can we benefit from the experience of the people and the projects that have gone before? What worked, what didn't and – crucially – why?

Joe Hill

Policy director, Reform

There are always trade-offs involved in where you locate different kinds of capabilities in central government. And, to some extent, it's not the be all and end all of whether these things succeed or not. But I think there's a good argument for trying to bring together government expertise in technology policy and development in one place.

I also think that the Cabinet Office seems to have grown a huge amount over the last decade or so, and taken on lots of different responsibilities. I think it probably has too many very varied responsibilities, and struggles to do a good job of all of them at the same time. So I think moving this out and aligning it with the wider technology unit is probably a pretty good fit.

Some people who are more critical of the merger would say, when CDDO, GDS and i.AI need other departments to do things, will that come with the same level of authority if it comes from DSIT, rather than from the Cabinet Office? Which I think is a fair argument.

But I think, equally, if the Cabinet Office is so overwhelmed with the many different kinds of things it is trying to coordinate across government, then the value of that central role seems less.

An obvious win is that, if government is trying to make the case for much greater datacentre investment in Britain by big technology companies, then it may well want some of that capacity to go into the public sector. Now they can do that in one place and, hopefully, also get better outcomes, and attract more investment and better funding.

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Heather Cover-Kus

Head of central government programme, techUK

My initial take was that this does not sound like a great idea – the departments do very different things and have very different styles. And moving things out of Cabinet Office could take away that convening power to pull different teams and different departments together. And there are questions about whether they'd still be able to do that as, essentially, another equal department to the likes of DWP or HMRC.

On reflection, however, I feel a bit more optimistic, especially after talking to some people within GDS, who were very excited by the move. There might be some gains to be had in having the policy and delivery aspects of digital government together in one place. There could be some efficiencies to be made, and particularly when put in the context of the five mission boards of the new government.

From what I understand, the plan is for tech and data to really play a supporting role, and an enabling role, in all of those different missions. And they will have a presence on each of the boards. But it's still early days, and we'll have to see how it plays out and whether this new consolidated look and feel has been effective in being that enabler for all of the other missions.

"An initial concern was for the Incubator for AI – because that came right out of No.10, and was a project driven by Rishi Sunak"

Another of my initial concerns was, in particular, for the Incubator for AI – because that came right out of No.10, and was a project that was driven by Rishi Sunak. And they have leveraged the power that came with that to really drive the things that they wanted to do. So, to move that away from No.10 was a risk. I was most concerned about i.AI and how that would be absorbed into DSIT, and whether they would be as effective under that new arrangement. However, even then, there could be benefits to having i.AI and the AI Safety Institute in the same department. There is the potential for more effective deployment.

Ben Welby

Former lead product manager at GDS; ex-policy analyst, digital government and open data at OECD

I joined GDS in 2012, and was there for six inspiring years that left me pretty confident that the UK was in the vanguard of digital government – because there was very good PR and storytelling around what we were doing. I left to join the OECD where one of the things I worked on was the Digital Government Index and, while the UK performed really well, I realised we were really scratching the surface of what some other countries are doing. It was shocking, actually, the reality of where the UK was on certain fundamental things, and some of the public discourse that we're not able to have in a grown-up and sensible way – especially about data and digital identity.

Despite a lot of good work in difficult circumstances, these were challenges during my time at GDS, and I'd say they continue to be barriers to transformational ambitions. And I don't think it has helped in either case to separate the focus on the digital economy from a focus on the public sector. Because, on the one hand, the question is: "how do we unlock public value?" – where that value is measured in terms of GDP. And, on the other, you're asking: "how do we protect public value?" – in terms of the benefits you can give to citizens in meeting their needs, by not only overcoming the obstacles they face, but also doing it in a way that safeguards, builds, and restores trust. Because trust in this country is in an abyss, and having the two worlds sort of fighting over it has been very unhelpful. I think it's fed into what I would perceive as a competing focus.

There is so much time and energy and money that's being lost to a seemingly permanently unresolvable discussion about "fixing the plumbing" of data and digital identity. When most of the rest of the OECD world – as well as several from beyond those "most developed economies" – have met these needs and put a ubiquitous tool in the pocket of their citizens.

My personal view is that you can't fix data without fixing identity, and you can't fix identity without fixing data. And having them under one roof might allow someone to take that step back and ask "how do we actually stop spinning our wheels on this topic, and make the progress we need to?" Not just to protect the public and unlock economic value, but to really make it possible for government to do all the things that everyone thinks government should be able to do in the 21st century. ■

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CSW CIVIL SERVICE WORLD

THE BEST MEDICINE: HOW THE MHRA IS USING AI TO SUPPORT SCIENTISTS AND THWART THREATS

After tech helped the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency play a starring role in government's coronavirus response, digital chief **Claire Harrison** tells **Sam Trendall** where the watchdog's story went next

During its 21 years in existence – and notwithstanding all its incredibly important work during that time – the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency has rarely been among the most high-profile parts of government.

That all changed during the latter half of 2020. By 2 December, the MHRA was ready to issue its first approval for a Covid-19 vaccine and, within a week, the first jab had been administered and the UK had become the first country in the world to start a mass programme of immunisation.

The efforts of the medical regulator were a crucial part of the delivery of a vaccine rollout that was widely praised for its effectiveness and efficiency. But the initiative also brought more negative attention.

In July 2020, ministers and security authorities accused Kremlin-backed cybercriminals of launching "despicable" attacks on various organisations involved in the development and delivery of vaccines.

It seems they were far from the only ones.

Claire Harrison, chief digital and technology officer at the MHRA, tells *PublicTechnology* that "around the time of the vaccine rollout, MHRA was regularly in the top five or even top three targets" in the country for cyberattackers.

Even in an ordinary month, the organisation – like many government agencies – frequently attracts the attention of hostile actors, facing an average of 25,000 cyber alerts.

It is no surprise then that cyber is one of three "strategic themes" running through the watchdog's digital and technology work. It sits alongside tackling legacy tech and pursuing innovation and, according to Harrison, the three areas work symbiotically.

"You can have all the AI and cutting-edge technology you want – and we're doing lots of great work in that space – but cyber then needs to not only keep up with it, but needs to be in front of emerging tech to be able to protect the organisation," she says.

To this end – and with hostile actors deploying automation to industrialise their attacks – the MHRA is experimenting with using AI to help it stay one step ahead.

The regulator is currently engaged in exploring about 20 use cases for AI technology, around one in three of which relate to boosting cyber defences.

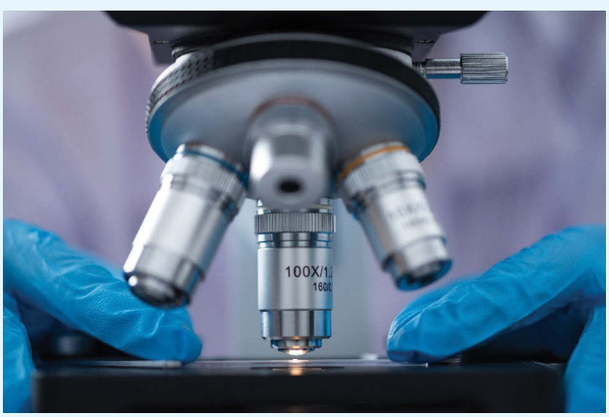
"It's around identifying threats really, really quickly, and finding our vulnerabilities really quickly as well, because we're trying to counteract the way that AI is used [against] us," Harrison says.

Risks and rewards

Across all of the MHRA's investigations of AI, the digital chief says there is a "spectrum of risk" for potential use cases, broadly split into three categories: productivity; decision-support; and decision-making.

The first of these largely comprises generic uses that could be applied to the back-office functions and other processes of any organisations, in any sector.

At the opposite end of the spectrum



are entirely autonomous decision-making use cases, which the MHRA is not currently exploring. Harrison describes this kind of use as "the scary stuff" that the vast majority of organisations – and not just those in the necessarily risk-averse world of regulators – would currently steer clear of.

Produced in association with *CSW*'s sister title *PublicTechnology*

PT Public Technology.net

"But in the middle we have decision support," she adds. "That is about teaching machines to make decisions and using different types of AI and other technologies to enable that – but all the time, or at regular points, there's human interaction. And then the human makes the final decision – but based on the evidence that's been gathered and assimilated with the help of AI."

An example of such a potential use case currently being explored would be in the MHRA's enforcement operations to crack down on counterfeit medicines or products, where automated technology could help detect those operating across the vast online marketplace.

Harrison says: "We work with the National Crime Agency and local authorities, but we're forever trying to find and then shut down dodgy websites – that's quite an arduous task, especially manually, when it's just humans who are looking and reporting and dealing with it."

Another possible deployment under examination is in the watchdog's work to assess the approximately 1,000 applications that it receives in a typical year to conduct clinical trials for new medical products.

The MHRA is exploring how AI could be used to scour historic applications and detect common factors in those that were not approved – known as a grounds for non-acceptance (GNA) decision. This intelligence could then be provided onto assessors to support their decision – particularly in cases where there is a clear and simple reason to issue a GNA ruling.

"A human would decide, ultimately, but a lot of the work that's been done to that point [can be performed by] machines," Harrison says. "The benefits there are not only the time it saves, but the consistency as well."

She adds: "It's not going to make anyone redundant, but it could help staff by enabling them to focus on the really difficult cases that are extremely complex and do require a lot more human intervention."

Legacy and learning

The other of the regulator's three key digital themes – tackling legacy – goes beyond ripping out and replacing the systems, according to Harrison.

"Whenever we've got legacy tech, legacy ways of working, legacy commercial agreements, all of those are blockers," she says. "It's a continuous programme, because what we need to do as well is make sure that we're not creating the legacy tech of the future. So, we are really careful with our tech strategies and our tech selection and who selects our tech, but also the way that it's maintained and the budget for it, and the interoperability aspects."

"You can have all the AI and cutting-edge technology you want – but cyber then needs to not only keep up with it, but be in front of emerging tech"

To support all of its technology objectives, the MHRA – and Harrison herself – have focused in recent years on engaging with other government agencies, as well as counterparts overseas.

Among those with which the regulator has joined forces is Swissmedic – Switzerland's equivalent to the MHRA. The two parties are engaged in a "continuous collaboration", including a joint hackathon exercise taking place with regulators from around the globe a few days after *PublicTechnology* talks to Harrison, and in which "our teams will be sitting down together and coding together".

The two organisations have made comparative progress in differing areas – for example Swissmedic is advanced in its use of AI to tackle counterfeit products, while the MHRA has made gains in using tech to help assess planned clinical trials – meaning it is "expediting learning for each of us", according to Harrison.

The digital and tech chief sits at the head of a workforce of about 120 people – and she hopes to make the case to grow this figure.

Any new recruits will join a team led by someone whose career experience as a "really hands-on techie" continues to manifest both in her professional life and beyond.

She says: "I still love technology and I still do it in my spare time for my friends – I fix their laptops and I create websites for them, for example: I start with a blank notepad and type all my coding – I'm old school: I don't use WordPress or anything! I continue to be fascinated by the art of the possible – which can be terrifying, but exhilarating as well. It's still massively interesting, and it's still the place to be." ■

2 December 2020

Date on which the MHRA approved the first Covid-19 vaccine for UK use – making it one of the first regulators in the world to do so

1,000

Approximate number of applications for clinical trials the organisation receives in a typical year, equating to about three every day that require assessment

120

Size of MHRA's digital, data and technology workforce – about one in 10 of the watchdog's overall headcount

MAKING THE WEATHER

Today's Met Office has capabilities Admiral Fitzroy could never have imagined when he proposed the idea of a Meteorological Department in 1854. **Professor Penny Endersby** explains

When Admiral Fitzroy proposed the concept of a Meteorological Department in 1854, he was driven by the belief that it was possible to save lives, in particular at sea. This belief was built on his long understanding of the dangers of severe weather in the maritime environment, and the latest technology of the day – instruments including barometers, which enabled current weather to be measured, and the telegraph system, which meant that the observations could be transmitted faster than the weather could move. He even coined the term "forecast" to describe what he believed was achievable.

Some 170 years on and there are many parallels, in the Met Office's purpose, "Helping you make better decisions to stay safe and thrive"; in our use of cutting-edge science and technology to achieve the most accurate predictions possible; and in the expertise of our staff and their passion for the value of what we do.

Today's Met Office, though, has a range of capabilities and responsibilities which Fitzroy could never have imagined. We still start from observations – 200 billion of them every day – from satellites, surface stations, radiosondes and ocean buoys. From those, we generate 3,000 forecasts daily, from our advanced atmospheric model and a supercomputer which can perform 14,000 trillion calculations per second, or 1.8 million calculations per second for every person on the planet.

All of you probably use those forecasts in your daily lives, whether you are one of the 6.3 million people who get your forecasts directly from us through the Met Office App, or the 2.4 million who follow us on social media, or whether you like to learn about the day's weather from another source, because our public forecast data is available to others to make use of too. On an extreme weather day, our public website and mobile apps see 20.6 million page views and 2.1 terabytes of data downloaded.

But what the Met Office does goes far beyond those forecasts used directly by the citizen.

We help keep the skies safe. We are one of two world area forecast centres

Admiral Fitzroy

"We hold half an exabyte of data as part of our climate record – that's five with 17 noughts after it"

that route all the air traffic around the globe. So if a flight is 10 minutes early out of New York because it has been routed out of the jet stream and around the turbulence, that information will have come from the Met Office. And closer to home, we have meteorologists based at Heathrow, working with National Air Traffic Services to help make critical decisions about fog, ice or thunderstorms.

Our forecasting has supported British and allied defence operations worldwide for more than 100 years. Captain James Stagg's D-Day forecast was one of the most important in history and today, our Mobile Met Unit of RAF reservists continue to support the armed forces wherever they are in the world. We have operational meteorologists working permanently at 21 UK military stations and five overseas, using their superior meteorological, oceanographic and climate science understanding to help make informed decisions in operations and in peacetime.

For 15 years, we've also worked in partnership with the Environment Agency, providing flood forecasting services for government and Category 1 and 2 responders through the Flood Forecasting Centre.

We also keep our air safe, providing advice on the dispersion of contaminants since the first world war. We're one of nine Volcanic Ash Advisory Centres, with responsibility for the volcanoes in Iceland and the north-eastern corner of the North Atlantic which are most likely to affect our air space. Our teams also monitor things like nuclear accidents, chemical spills and airborne animal diseases, as well as providing routine air-quality and pollen forecasts.

We are advancing global understanding of our changing climate through groundbreaking research, which underpins critical services vital for UK resilience. Through the work of the Hadley Centre Climate Programme and our UK Climate Projections analysis tool, we provide authoritative scientific advice to government and customers on climate. The Met Office has contributed to all six IPCC assessment reports and through our consultancy services, our experts help integrate our information to decision makers across the globe, helping them find resilient routes to net zero and giving them valuable adaption advice. In the energy sector, for example, we advise on the impact of both weather and climate on aspects such as usage and infrastructure, helping inform decisions in all aspects of the sector, including generation, storage and distribution.


Penny Endersby

Sometimes, our work really is out of this world. Our Space Weather Operations Centre monitors solar activity 24/7. Although most people associate this with pretty aurora pictures, there's actually a very serious side. The Met Office owns four of the UK government's national risks, one of which is space weather, which can impact satellites, aviation, power and communication systems. Our team therefore monitors solar activity, providing warnings to the various industries which may be affected.

We don't just work in the UK, either. The Met Office has a true global impact. We are part of a huge international collaborative endeavour through the World Meteorological Organisation to share observations and forecast data worldwide. Through our international collaborative programmes, we're advancing global understanding of our changing climate through vital research, such as AmazonFACE, researching how the rainforest will respond to increasing carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

And this work is all built on a centre of science and technology excellence. Behind everything we do is a team of excellent people, working to deliver extraordinary impact. We employ more than 500 scientists, who have had over 6,000 peer-reviewed papers published. Meteorological training is carried out in-house at the Met Office College, and we currently employ almost 400 operational meteorologists.

We are a vast data enterprise, with some of the biggest data in the world. We hold half an exabyte of data as part of our climate record. That's five with 17 noughts after it!

So what about the next 170 years?

Our new supercomputer is now being tested and will be six times more powerful than the current machine. Provided by Microsoft, it will give earlier, more accurate warnings of severe weather, and it will have the capability to take forward groundbreaking new climate change modelling. All this whilst running on 100% renewable energy.

AI is also opening up new ways to forecast better. Our experimental AI weather model FastNet, in partnership with the Alan Turing Institute, is now giving results comparable to our global model. This is just the tip of the iceberg of how we see ourselves using this transformative technology in the future, in our production, our products and our services. Plus, that vast and expanding dataset has huge potential to generate benefit across the business as a training set for AI in many related areas such as transport, health and agriculture.

It is the most enormous privilege to follow in Fitzroy's footsteps leading this fantastic organisation, with its cohort of 2,000 brilliant civil servants and all their diverse skills. I am proud every day of the difference we make to the lives of people in the UK and across the globe, as well as the contribution we make to ensuring that the challenges from a changing climate are understood, and the world is as prepared as possible to limit warming and adapt to the changes which are already inevitable. I've been a scientific civil servant all my working life, and it's turning that scientific knowledge into something that makes a positive difference that has motivated me every day. ■

Professor Penny Endersby is chief executive of the Met Office


Met Office building, Exeter

Maeve Walsh, a 'civil servant in the wild', talks to **Jess Bowie** about keeping disparate interests onside through her years-long journey helping steer the Online Safety Bill through parliament

SAFETY NET

Writing profiles of powerful people "you've never heard of" is like catnip to journalists. The Secretive Publishing Mogul Who Can Make and Break Literary Careers; The Ten People Who Actually Run New York City and so on.

It turns out *CSW* isn't immune to the format either. When ex-permanent secretary and regular *CSW* columnist Una O'Brien emailed to suggest we interview someone called Maeve Walsh, we were intrigued.

Walsh may not be a household name, O'Brien said, but her influence on one of the key policies of the last decade – and her tireless, behind-the-scenes efforts to ensure that policy's passage into legislation – cannot be understated.

Indeed, the Online Safety Act 2023, which puts a range of new duties on social media companies and search engines, might not have become law at all if it weren't for Walsh. A former civil servant who has worked in the Cabinet Office, as well as the health and culture departments, Walsh's ability to build coalitions and resolve disagreements played a pivotal role in keeping disparate interests onside as the beleaguered bill made its lengthy journey through parliament *(see box)*, and earnt her appreciative name-checks in the Lords during its final stages.

Although Walsh has not worked in government since 2017, she is a fascinating example of how an ex-senior civil servant can deploy their skills to assist the policy and legislative process. For her own part, Walsh refers to herself as "a civil servant in the wild".

Rather surprisingly, her professional life actually began with a PhD in contemporary Irish theatre. *CSW* is keen to understand her journey from pondering the dramaturgy of the Emerald Isle to bashing stakeholder heads together in the battle to prevent online harms. Is there a through-line, or did each move take her that bit further from where she started out?

Walsh explains that alongside her PhD, she worked as a journalist and part-time theatre reviewer on the arts desk of *The Independent* – a job that led to a role in the Government Communication Service and then a variety of other government departments. "I think the through-line can be traced back to that newspaper job," she says. "The common theme has been an interest in research, in information and communication, and in trying to best distil often quite complex arguments into forms that are accessible."

"Myself and Lorna can pretty much name you the Hansard column where something was said in a debate. It's niche, but it can be quite important"

Walsh became involved in the online safety bill in 2018 through a former civil service colleague, William Perrin. He was a trustee at the wellbeing charity Carnegie UK, where he was exploring how to apply the breakthrough idea by Essex University's Professor Lorna Woods of using a statutory "duty of care" – drawn from health and safety legislation – to regulate tech platforms.

Even though Walsh teamed up with Per-

March 2022 Protestors show their opposition to the bill

A TORTUOUS PASSAGE

The progress of the bill through the UK parliament was long and complex – a result of both the bill's content and the political context. Here is a summary of key events:

2017 Under Theresa May's premiership, the government publishes the internet safety strategy green paper, proposing measures to protect children online.

2018 Culture secretary Matt Hancock responds to the green paper, signalling an intent to regulate online platforms for the first time.

2019 New culture secretary Jeremy Wright publishes the online harms white paper, outlining a detailed regulatory framework.

2019-2020 A period of significant political and societal upheaval begins as Boris Johnson replaces May as PM and the onset of the pandemic and other challenges deflect from the policy focus in Whitehall. Meanwhile, ideological splits emerge within the Conservative government about how – or whether it is even right – to regulate the internet in the way proposed by the bill.

2021-2022 Pre-legislative scrutiny of the bill occurs in the second half of 2021, to refine it before its Commons stages, but another Conservative leadership contest in 2022 stops it in its tracks before its Commons passage is completed. Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak both promise to revisit the bill's content after fellow leadership contender Kemi Badenoch describes it as "legislating for hurt feelings".

2022 In the autumn, under Rishi Sunak's premiership, a large chunk of the bill relating to adult online harms is removed. These provisions had aimed to address toxic and hateful online environments for adults – particularly those from minoritised groups – and hold platforms to account for the measures they were taking.

2023 The revised bill, focusing on child protection, progresses to the House of Lords, where it receives cross-party support. Significant concessions include requiring Ofcom to produce guidance on online violence against women and girls.

End of 2023 The bill receives royal assent, granting Ofcom powers to implement it.

October, 2022 The charity Refuge urges the government to tackle violence against women and girls in the Online Safety Bill

rin and Woods after their work had already begun, Perrin credits her role in inspiring their initial discussions on online safety.

"William often says he started thinking about all this after he came along to a meeting that I'd convened in a previous role at a charity," Walsh says. "We had a number of children's charities in the room, and we were talking about internet safety and trust and data and so forth. And the general consensus was that it wasn't possible to regulate the internet."

Perrin and Woods's initial plans were "to just write a few blogs and put some bits of thought leadership out there on what a statutory duty of care approach would look like," Walsh says. But given there were stirrings of new policy development on online safety in government, the pair decided to boost their advocacy efforts, and, in autumn 2018, asked Walsh to work with them. And so – after taking a role as an associate with Carnegie herself – Walsh began doing "civil service-type work" to try to influence parliamentary thinking.

This work – including "putting thousands of words into multiple parliamentary inquiries" and maintaining regular contact with Whitehall officials – had a significant impact, contributing to the regulatory proposals at the heart of a 2019 government white paper on online safety. Feeling a responsibility to help Whitehall policymakers as they tried to develop the legislation, Walsh's role alongside Woods's and Perrin's ongoing policy development evolved. Her new focus became building an informal network of "fellow traveller" organisations, all of whom were campaigning for better online safety. This included children's charities like the NSPCC, but also organisations geared towards tackling abuse, extremism, disinformation and fraud – in essence, anyone who could see how the duty of care approach might deliver their own specific objectives in mitigating online harms.

Almost all of the meetings were virtual, not least because the network's work intensified after the onset of the pandemic as political debate around the legislation grew. "Large virtual meetings had become quite commonplace, but it was also just a time-efficient way for people to keep in touch: an hour or so every couple of weeks just to jump on a call," Walsh says. The meetings became a focal point for organisations to share research findings or Westminster intel, identify opportunities for collaboration or seek support for campaigns. Spin-off coalitions formed, focusing on fraud and scams and on violence against women and girls, to take forward specific advocacy campaigns based on the analysis provided by the Carnegie UK team.

As the bill slowly made its way through parliament, Woods, Perrin and Walsh continued to publish detailed analyses of the government's proposals, as well as their own policy and regulatory suggestions to fill gaps in the regime – many of which were picked up by other more campaign-focused organisations. The trio increasingly found themselves working on a cross-party basis with MPs and peers to provide advice on amendments or briefing for debates.

These online meetings have carried on even since the act passed last October. Along with Woods, Walsh has continued to facilitate gatherings for the same campaigners, charities and civil society organisations in her new guise as director of the Online Safety Act Network, which helps campaigners navigate the implementation phase of the legislation. After all, "many of these groups had fought long and hard for the provisions that were in the bill, and lots of the concessions that the government made too," she says. "So they had a huge interest in ensuring that Ofcom picked up the act's implementa-

WALSH'S APPROACH TO ONLINE SAFETY AS A PARENT

"Our daughter is 13 and our son is 11. I'd say we probably don't do it any better than lots of parents. My kids know what I do. They've heard about it enough, and they roll their eyes enough when I mention online safety. But I think, as a result, they also respect the fact that if I say, 'You can't do that', or 'I'd rather you didn't have that particular app', it's coming from a place of concern for their safety and wellbeing, rather than just me being a mum who's saying no.

"They have certainly been subjected to more restrictions than lots of their peers, and got access to various bits of tech later than some of their friends. But I don't subscribe to the view that they shouldn't have any access to devices at all. So much of the things that they enjoy in life – whether it's films or streaming TV or games, or whatever else – are on devices. My daughter's homework is increasingly managed by the school through her device.

"The idea that we can take the devices off them and somehow flick a switch and we'll be back in the pre-smartphone world isn't realistic at all. So I'm just doing my best to navigate it, and trying to allow the good while also trying to avoid the bad – or at least avoid it for as long as possible until they're older and more resilient.

"Like a lot of people, my own screen time isn't ideal. I get all my news on my phone; all my admin is on my phone; I'm easily distracted by WhatsApp messages. So it's very difficult for parents to lead by example, telling your kids not to do something that you're actually doing yourself. I've got huge admiration for families who can do that, and who do shared digital detoxes and so on. But that's not really us. I think it's much more about having those conversations and being open and honest and hoping that if something does go wrong, my kids feel that they can come and talk to me about it."

tion in a way that ensured that it was as effective as possible and delivered the outcomes that they had campaigned for."

And, while Walsh still engages with government officials and parliamentarians, most of her work is now focused on Ofcom. "We've built up a very collaborative and constructive relationship with Ofcom and the teams there – both in our own right and also on behalf of some of the organisations we work with," she says.

Walsh explains how she and others in the network who have been around since the early stages of the policy and legislative process feel an obligation to provide a "kind of continuity" via their shared memory and collective history. "Myself and Lorna can pretty much name you the Hansard column where something was said in a debate. It's niche, but it can be quite important."

Talking of Hansard, if you search its transcripts for that closing debate in the Lords – just before the bill became an act last autumn – you not only find peers thanking Walsh, Woods and Perrin for their sterling work, but also ample evidence of how collaborative the effort was in the upper chamber to get it passed.

However, you also find remarks like this, from the Conservative peer Lord Moylan: "I am very sad to say that I think that, at first contact with reality, a large part of this is going to collapse, and with it a lot of good will be lost."

What did Walsh think when she heard that comment – and what kind of personality is needed to work on Sisyphean tasks like regulating the internet? Does one need to be terrier-like, and simultaneously an eternal optimist?

"Obviously there was opposition to the act," she says. "And there were a number of people in the Lords, Lord Moylan included, who were very much against it, per se. There were then a number of peers who would probably be more in the middle ground, wanting it to have gone further in some areas, or thinking that actually some of the issues weren't practical enough. But the general consensus in the Lords, certainly when it was passed, was that this was a very good first step."

Not that the bill is perfect "by any means", Walsh says. It is overcomplicated in places and too long, and "it certainly could have been a more manageable legislative beast".

At the risk of introducing another classical allusion so soon after Sisyphus, would she say the bill is something of a multi-headed hydra?

"Possibly..." she laughs. "But the heart of it is quite simple: it asks regulated companies to take responsibility for the way their services, systems and processes operate. It asks them to risk-assess, and to mitigate the risks of any harms that they identify. So I think that that fundamental underpinning is still a very strong place to start."

Without wanting to drag her into party politics, there is the obvious fact that the Labour Party doesn't traditionally get as frightened about state intervention as the Conservatives – nor does it have such a strong civil liberties wing. Is Walsh therefore hopeful that this legislation will get a sympathetic hearing with a Labour government?

She is optimistic, she says – not least because there are commitments in the Labour manifesto to look at the act's foundations and see where it needs to go further. She also notes that, while in opposition, Labour placed a lot of emphasis on prevention and support for victims, particularly women and girls, and the victims of abuse, radicalisation and extremism.

"Many of these groups fought long and hard for the provisions that were in the bill... so they had a huge interest in ensuring that Ofcom picked up the act's implementation in a way that ensured that it was as effective as possible"

"So I think from that perspective, and also looking at some of their more cross-cutting policy objectives, the online dimension to it all is going to be really important. I think there will be things in the act that either will be reopened or added on."

However, she also says that Labour should be more assertive in regulating AI. Of course there is always a rush for innovation and, at the moment, a particularly pressing need for economic growth. But without regulatory frameworks and a focus on safety by design, she warns, the battle against online emerging harms is quickly lost – with women, girls and ethnic minorities most at risk. So while there is reason to be hopeful about what she terms "old-style" online safety, it will be crucial to balance emerging technologies with regulatory safeguards that are built in from the very start.

And will she herself be there for the foreseeable future, helping to keep the major players honest? After all, who else is going to cite the relevant passage of Hansard and provide some much-needed corporate memory?

"As long as somebody's going to fund me to do it," Walsh replies with a smile. "I do think there is work to be done for the long haul here. And there are certainly lots of organisations who are also in it for the long haul. So I'd say yes, it would be nice to be able to see it through until wherever the endpoint is."

Maeve Walsh may not be a household name, but households around the country – particularly those with children – may unwittingly come to thank her in years to come if and when the online world becomes a safer place to be. ■

October 2021 Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen giving evidence to the joint committee for the Draft Online Safety Bill

LUNCH WITH... DAME SUE OWEN

The former DCMS perm sec breaks bread with **Suzannah Brecknell**. Photography by Elio Zhang

Who?

Dame Sue Owen was permanent secretary at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport from 2013 to 2019. Her 30-year career in government included over a decade at HM Treasury, a posting to the British Embassy in Washington, time in the No.10 Policy Unit and a stint as director general in the Department for International Development. Before joining DCMS she spent four years in the Department for Work and Pensions, first as director for welfare and wellbeing, and then heading up a newly created strategy directorate from 2011.

Alongside these roles, Owen also led a cross-government working group looking at the progression of women in the civil service and in 2015 she was named the civil service's diversity champion.

Currently, she is a specialist partner at the consultancy Flint Global and holds a number of non-executive posts including acting as non-executive chair of the Debt Management Office Advisory Board.

We discussed

Championing diversity in the civil service

The biggest success was getting across the argument that diversity wasn't just the right thing to do, it was actually a driver of performance. So the realisation that there is a business case for diversity: if people feel included at work, they're going to perform better and, equally importantly in the civil service, if you've got a range of people from different backgrounds and fields, you're going to make better policies.

There have been examples of things where we probably didn't have a sufficient range of people. Think of something like Grenfell. Did we have policymakers at the top of the civil service who'd ever lived in a tower block like that? It was that realisation that really helped change things.

Missed job opportunities

I haven't always got jobs that I applied for. In many cases, I got promoted at the second or third attempt. Looking back, I'm glad I didn't get some of those jobs, because I wouldn't have been able to do the much better jobs that came along. It was characteristic of the jobs I'm pleased I didn't get that I probably applied for them for the wrong reasons. For example, when I was in Washington, I applied to be the UK director at the IMF and World Bank. Tom Scholar got that job. I know I could have done it well, but I realised I was applying in order that we could stay living in the US, which would have been much better for my husband, and also good for my son. Or, I applied to be the permanent secretary in Wales – I was doing that because my mother lived in Wales. When you're applying for jobs, your heart's got to be in the subject matter of the role, rather than all the other things that come with it.

"I often say to women, it doesn't matter if you're not a permanent secretary by the time you're 40... there's plenty of time, and careers that can develop at different paces"

What she wishes she could have done more on

In the four years I was diversity champion we made progress on things like ethnic diversity. I think we were probably better on social background than many people might think, but there's a long way to go on ethnic background and heritage. And also on disability and mental health. These aren't things you can change overnight, you just have to persist.

It's very important that you have a cabinet secretary who's really championing it and an experienced permanent secretary who is also keeping on top of it because you can't afford to take your foot off the accelerator.

Different career trajectories

I was unusual in some ways in that I didn't join the civil service till my early 30s. I spent my 20s drifting around being an academic. When I got to the Treasury I absolutely loved it, but I was already older than a lot of people doing the same sorts of jobs. I didn't get a director role until my mid-40s. But then I had a lucky break – being promoted to DG at DfID when I'd only done one director role. That was because [then-perm sec] Suma Chakrabarti put his faith in me. I'm very grateful, particularly as I was by then nearly 50. But I turned out to be quite good at leadership so he did the right thing. I think people should do that kind of thing a bit more often.

I often say to women, it doesn't matter if you're not a permanent secretary by the time you're 40. Because then what are you going to do at 50? There's plenty of time, and careers that can develop at different paces. I don't think there's a set formula that you need to be absolutely hooked on.

Working well with partners

DCMS has a very connected business-model – a tiny centre and about 45 arm's length bodies. The ALBs are the experts, and it's really important that we know them well and use their expertise. My approach was to talk a lot to the chairs and the chief execs of ALBs – I had a lot of breakfasts, and coffees. If you understand each other, it's much easier to deal with any crisis or shared project, even if you don't agree on things. But if you only engage with people when there's a prob-

lem, it's never going to work.

Of course it is more difficult when you've got the kind of revolving door of ministers that we've had in the last several years. As civil servants, you can build up these good relationships with arm's length bodies. But you ideally need a minister to build them up as well. On the other hand, sometimes you get a minister like John Whittingdale: when he came into the department, he'd been chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee for 10 years. So he already had relationships built up.

How to make mission-based government work

One thing is not to have too many priorities. That will mean, within individual departments, you can't do nearly so much. Then the second thing is, you've got to have ministers who are prepared not to compete with each other. There have to be incentives for them to collaborate and get the joint outcome. So often in politics, ministers want to make their mark, and you can understand that, but you're not going to solve all these problems unless they work together. So that's going to require quite a lot of discipline from the centre to make that work. In terms of the mission-boards [proposed by Labour], I think it would be a good idea to have private sector representatives – that would make good use of the skills and experience they can bring. Finally, you've got to be clear that any money allocated is for that priority and can't be appropriated by any department.

What makes a good minister?

A good minister really cares about the issues, listens to different points of view, and then may triangulate those views. But then you need a minister who will actually make a decision. A lot of people find that quite hard, certainly if they've been in opposition a long time.

More generally, it helps to have a minister who treats the civil service as assets.

A fantastic minister is one who already knows a lot about the subject, but we very rarely get that, and understandably so. I've mentioned someone like John Whittingdale, who already knew the landscape. Another example is Iain Duncan Smith: he was completely passionate about reforming the welfare system, which had always been in the 'too-difficult' box.

IDS's early days at DWP

Iain Duncan Smith wasn't the shadow work and pensions secretary, so before the election we had no indication of the changes to come. The shadow had been Theresa May: we'd had access talks and there were one or two organisational things she wanted to do, but it wasn't a wholesale reform of the welfare state. Thankfully when James Purnell was work and pensions secretary he had been looking at whether you could merge all the housing benefits and out of work benefits with the in work benefits, so we had done some work on it. When Iain came in, we were able to really quickly look at proposals from the Centre for Social Justice and come up with some plans.

The problem was that it hadn't been in the manifesto, it wasn't all in the Treasury's costings. Cameron was quite supportive but the Treasury was trying to cut spending quite drastically. So those weren't the greatest circumstances, but it was quite an »

exciting time to be there.

And it was also really interesting to have input from the private sector through our non-executive board. One of the non-execs – Ian Cheshire, who was the chief executive of B&Q at the time – said this is a 10-12 year programme and, in the private sector, if we were doing this, we wouldn't be trying to do several other things at the same time. But of course, IDS was so focused that he was in a hurry, so the implementation was too quick, initially. It was thought of as a failing project at some points but now, more than ten years on, it is implemented. So that's another problem – the political cycle which ministers must work to isn't long enough to see results on these really important things.

Changing civil service skills

When I joined the Treasury it was – or was felt to be – all about being really clever. But even then the Treasury knew it needed more economists and people who could do numbers, not just people who'd done Greek and Latin. Since then I think the civil service has become much better at knowing that you need emotional intelligence as well, and you need good leaders: people who can lead a department in a way that gets the best out of everyone.

Another positive change is the growth of the professions. We always had, happily, properly trained lawyers. Economists were starting to come in when I joined, and it's been really good to see the functions grow more recently. To have proper training, and only hiring qualified people to do finance, procurement, commercial, project management and so on – all of that has saved the taxpayer a lot of money.

Having said that, I think we are only just about getting to where we need to be with digital skills, and the area where we're not making any progress at all – bizarrely something on which I agree with Dominic Cummings – is that the civil service needs more scientists.

I think a lot of scientists fail at those first, online recruitment tests – they get filtered out far too soon so we need to revamp that system. And even when they get in, departments don't know how to use them properly.

Improving the centre of government

You need No.10 and No.11 on the same page and not competing with each other, and you need a very strong cabinet secretary who is going to bring the departments along with

them. The centre should have its key priorities and be really focused on them, rather than trying to micromanage everything. For example, for the centre to try and micromanage every appointment is ridiculous – let the ministers make their own choices and get on with it.

Her first civil service job

It was January 1989. Before joining I'd been in for a practice day and Gus O'Donnell – who was my deputy director, or Grade 5, as we called it then – had shown me round. I had seen a whole variety of jobs and said: "Well I'm happy to do any of them apart from being on the forecast."

So, he put me on the forecast team. In those days the Treasury did the economic modelling that is now done by the OBR. I was forecasting North Sea oil with about 20 others covering all the other areas. You didn't have the sort of tech we've got nowadays, so the model would run overnight. You'd come back in the morning to all these sheets of output, and then you'd have a meeting to look at it.

Very soon after I joined there was an accident in the North Sea and we had to brief Nigel Lawson on the economic impact and then we had to work with the policy thinkers who were in charge of North Sea oil as well. So it was really exciting to suddenly see on the front of the *FT* something you were actually working on. You had messengers who brought you files, you had in-trays and out-trays and if you wanted something typed you sent it to the typing pool. There was a definite team feel across the department so you really felt part of something. I completely loved it from day one.

Hardest day

There's been quite a few hard days but it has to be the day after the Brexit vote: 24 June 2016. My husband and son have their birthday on 24 June, and I'd had all my senior staff over the night before for a summer party. My plan had been that I would have Friday off and there would be lots of lovely leftovers from the night before. A couple of my staff stayed the night, and of course we woke at 7am to find the vote hadn't gone as expected so there was nothing for it but to go straight in to work.

That was a very difficult day because it had not been government policy to leave the European Union and we genuinely hadn't done any work on it. In fact John Whittingdale, who was a Brexiteer, had asked me earlier in the week if it was true that the government hadn't done any work on it and I said: "Yes, because it's not government policy." But on Friday morning, it was government policy.

There were a lot of people in the office who were very shocked, who just hadn't expected it, there were some who were upset. The minister asked if he should come in. I dissuaded him from doing that, but by mid-morning I felt we needed to kind of get a grip on this and so we had a town hall meeting where I said: "However you personally voted on this, it is now government policy and we have to now help the government do this."

It was also tough because the following Friday was the centenary of the Battle of the Somme. On the risk register for that event we had very low probability, very high impact risk that the UK votes to leave the EU. We did a lot of work to establish whether our plans could still go ahead: would the EU president still come? Would the royals still come? Of course the answer was everything did go according to plan, the only issue was that nobody wanted to be seen with David Cameron on the day, so we had to handle that.

"The civil service has become much better at knowing that you need good leaders: people who can lead a department in a way that gets the best out of everyone"

Her proudest achievements

I worked on the Five Tests which were developed in 1997 to assess whether the UK should join the Euro. It was just an amazing piece of incredibly thorough analysis that I don't think we've seen a lot of since. It showed the power of having all the facts and analysis at your fingertips to enable ministers to make decisions really well.

I'm also proud of the diversity work, which again showed the importance of having all the numbers to back up what you want to do. Then there's also the work we did at DCMS, turning that from the department that had the lowest morale and staff service into being one of the ones that had one of the highest People Survey scores. I'm proud about that because it meant we were then able to kind of punch above our weight because everybody came to work feeling really motivated and supported to do a great job. ■

PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR

As a new set of ministers get used to government, their private secretaries will be crucial in helping them find their feet. **Suzannah Brecknell** meets historian and former senior official **Alun Evans** to discuss the changing role of private offices

She was famous for her ability to cope on just four hours sleep a night, but even Margaret Thatcher sometimes needed a catnap. Often she dozed in the back of her ministerial car – prompting officials to commission a special headrest to protect her from injury while asleep. But on one unfortunate occasion, after a particularly long meeting of European Community leaders, she fell asleep during a bilateral meeting with Irish prime minister Garret FitzGerald. Thankfully, her private secretary was on hand.

FitzGerald looked at Thatcher's long-serving private secretary for foreign affairs Charles Powell, wondering how to proceed. Powell suggested that the taoiseach carry on, making all the points which he intended to make, which Powell would dutifully write down. They would then simply wake the prime minister up to make a joint press statement.

Powell worked in No.10 from 1984 to 1991, becoming in that time "one of the most powerful officials in Britain" according to *The Intimacy of Power,* a newly-released book exploring the history of private offices in the last five decades.

The story of Thatcher's catnap "shows how much she trusted Powell, but also how much he knew exactly her mind," says Alun Evans, former senior civil servant and author of the book. "That's very rare – it explains why he stayed [in Thatcher's office] seven years and also why, bizarrely, she threatened to resign rather than lose him."

The bond between Thatcher and Powell was rare in its nature – he notoriously became an influential and even a semi-political adviser, rather than a traditional private secretary – but it is far from the only example of how the relationship between a minister and their private office reflects and elucidates the workings of government.

Evans is well qualified to discuss the nature of these relationships. Not only did he complete his doctorate on the history of private offices (his PhD forms the basis of his new book) but he also worked as principal private secretary for three secretaries of state over the course of his career.

Alongside this, he has spent time working in the Cabinet Office where he observed closely "the most consequential private office" – namely that of No.10 – and he has, over the last decade or so, interviewed dozens of officials and the politicians they served to better understand what he terms the "unseen junction boxes" of government which connect ministers to their departments, and each other.

Wide awake Margaret Thatcher signs the Anglo-Irish Agreement with Garret Fitzgerald in 1985

"I'm all for special advisers – they bring in a great amount of expertise, but you've got to get the relationship right"

Through these interviews and archive research, Evans describes the general tasks of a private office – from diary management to organising red boxes and minuting decisions; explores the sort of people who have filled the top posts; and chronicles how these roles and structures have changed since the time of Churchill.

Along the way Evans has reflected on the qualities that make for a good private secretary (the ability to "work equally well for ministers of completely different political complexions" is key, he tells *CSW*) and what makes a successful private office. But he doesn't see his examination of private offices as strictly prescriptive. For one thing, it is the flexibility of private office structures which has allowed them to adapt to things like the arrival of special advisers in the 1960s, or the informal working style of the New Labour team in the 1990s.

"We can't go back to the 1950s when the civil service was dominant," Evans says, "but it is still quite useful to see how things used to operate when the civil service was totally in charge, and to understand the benefits and disadvantages."

Despite this caveat, it's clear that Evans sees plenty to lament in the most recent developments that he writes about. The chapter covering 2010-2022 is titled "An Institution in Decline" and in the book's introduction he writes of Martin Reynolds, Boris Johnson's PPS and organiser of the notorious bring-your-own-bottle party in Downing Street: "How was it that, during Partygate, the most senior civil servant in No.10, responsible for maintaining standards and the integrity of the office of the prime minister, ended up proposing a social event that would drive a coach and horses through the national guidance then applying to the activities of every citizen in the country?"

Given the recurring importance of individuals and their relationships in shaping how government works, *CSW* wonders how Evans views the balance of people and structures in Partygate. Was it just a case of the wrong people in the wrong place? Could things have been different if there were strong structures around those people?

"You have to be careful of saying structures can sort it out," he replies, though he's »

"instinctively sympathetic" to the argument. He goes on to say that he sees three factors which have led to the recent decline of the private office in No.10. Firstly, the fact that the last three prime ministers have each brought in their principal private secretary from a previous job, rather than retaining the existing No.10 PPS for a period.

"That, in my view, is totally wrong," he says. "Not because they aren't good people, and there may be something good in ministers showing loyalty to officials rather than blaming them, but if you quickly pick someone who's your mate, to paraphrase, you will not get candid advice. You will not have someone, to take an extreme example, who will say: 'These parties are verging on the illegal, you cannot do them, and they will look so bad if they get in the media'."


Charles Powell

As *CSW* goes to press, reports are emerging that new PM Keir Starmer is already seeking to replace Elizabeth Perelman, the first female PPS in No.10, who was appointed by Sunak in 2022.

A second, related shortcoming is the recent degree of churn among private office staff, so "you don't have the weight and knowledge that people will bring in if they have been in a job for five years". Finally, he points to the growing number of special advisers in No.10, noting that the most recent Cabinet Office report on special advisers listed 41 under the prime minister. "This is not me saying the civil service is wonderful," he adds. "I'm all for special advisers – they bring in a great amount of expertise, and ensure that the private office and civil service don't become political. But you've got to get the relationship right, and if you have 41 spads in No.10 and, say, 10 or 15 people in the private office, the balance is gone."

He also notes the growth in spads in certain ministerial offices is largely happening in an informal way – the official rule is still that there should be just two per cabinet minister. "But if you look at that Cabinet Office report, some ministers have four or five," he says. "If you're going to grow the numbers, that's fine – some departments need more than two. But do it formally and openly."

Has his decade of research and writing changed Evans' view on his own time in private office? "I think I could have, should have, involved myself more in some of the policy issues. I believe it's quite important for the private office to be more than just a post box: you do want a sort of challenge to policy officials, as long as you don't end up with the private office making policy – the risk that you will end up with two sources of policy within a department is why I'm opposed to the idea of extended ministerial offices."

He strikes a similar note when asked what he hopes those in government will take from his book. "I hope a minister might think 'Am I using my private office to its maximum extent? Am I getting the balance of my private office, my official, senior officials, etc, and my special advisors working as creatively as possible?'" he replies, "and then I would hope that a civil servant, either one who was in the private office or thinking of going into it, would ask 'What can I add to make it a more useful experience, both for me and for the minister?'"

"If you quickly pick someone who's your mate, to paraphrase, you will not get candid advice"

Despite the final chapter's gloomy reference to a "declining institution", Evans ends his book with an optimistic note. Private offices have always attracted the best civil servants "and will continue to do so", he writes. Staffed by these talented people, the private office has adapted to many political contexts and been "for the most part" a benefit to the British constitution. "With flexibility, change and a recognition of the nature of today's politics, it can remain so for many years to come."

Speaking to *CSW* a few weeks after the election, Evans is more specific about the big challenge for private offices at the moment: how well can they adapt to the new government?

"I think because Starmer was a civil servant and Sue Gray knows what's going on, it should be easier than it has been under some transitions," he reflects, but "the thing that private offices need to be wary about is trying to please ministers. You want to show you're supportive, but ministers still want challenge, and it's the duty of private secretaries to provide that."

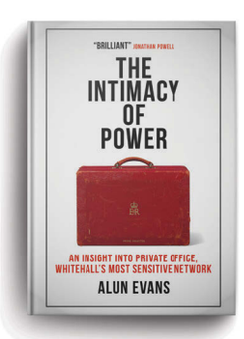
As well as documenting the history of the private office, Evans explores the role of private office experience in a high-flying civil service career (in 2020, 56% of departmental perm secs had private office experience) and analyses the backgrounds of No.10 PPSs since 1945. Unsurprisingly, the post-holders have been mostly men, mostly white, mostly Oxbridge graduates and mostly came from the same home departments of Treasury and the Foreign Office. Most have already had private office experience, or worked in No.10 in a different role.

One notable exception was Ken Stowe, who acted as PPS for three prime ministers in the 1970s, starting with Harold Wilson. Stowe was a working-class, grammar school boy who was a senior official in the health and social security department when Wilson chose him to join No.10. During his interview, Stowe protested to Wilson that he'd never been a private secretary, and had never worked in the Treasury. "The more he said that, the more Wilson wanted him," explains Evans. "Wilson didn't trust the Treasury, so he picked someone with, on the face of it, no relevant experience. It turned out to be a brilliant pick."

This wasn't the only time a prime minister's distrust of different departments shaped his private office. In 1972, Edward Heath empowered his principal private secretary Robert Armstrong to negotiate with European officials during original talks to join the Common Market, for reasons Evans discovered while interviewing Amrstrong for the book.

"I knew that he had been involved," Evans says, "but it was only when I [interviewed] him that he said: 'Heath didn't trust the Foreign Office, so he asked me to do the negotiation.' That's quite something, actually, for a PM to say, so I went down to the archives and found a whole file, in which Armstrong noted 'The Prime Minister asked me to negotiate personally with Pompidou officials and not to let the Foreign Office know'."

"Nowadays," Evans notes somewhat wryly, "that instruction might be on a WhatsApp message, rather than actually filed at Kew." ■



The Intimacy of Power: An insight into private office, Whitehall's most sensitive network, *is published by CSW's sister company Biteback*

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