

CIVIL SERVICE REFORM EVENT – 24 FEBRUARY

Opening remarks by Sir Andrew Turnbull

This is an event about Civil Service reform, but I would like to extend a particularly warm welcome to our colleagues from other parts of the public sector, and to others from the private or voluntary sectors who help us deliver services to the public. This mixture of backgrounds is itself a key part of the reform process and I will come back to it in a minute. A welcome also to representatives from the Civil Service Unions.

It is just over 150 years ago that the Northcote-Trevelyan report was completed, setting out the basis of the Civil Service as we know it today. Interestingly, it took 15 years to implement it fully, but we do things much more quickly these days. To mark the occasion we are publishing a document called *Civil Service Reform – Delivery and Values*. You have probably already found it in your packs. The fundamental reforms set out in the mid nineteenth century created an organisation which has served the country well. The Civil Service is also an organisation that has adapted over the years. One of its strengths is that it is an organisation that not just accepts change, but sees it as achievable, beneficial and continuing.

In preparing the document, and in working on the reforms it sets out, I have been faced with a paradox. Week by week, in my meetings with the Prime Minister I am challenged, quite rightly, to deliver a more effective Civil Service, one that is capable of delivering the Government's ambitions for better public services. The Prime Minister is himself engaged directly through his work with the major departments and through delivery stocktakes in pushing the agenda forward.

Yet when I return to my office in the Cabinet Office, I meet a steady stream of visitors from around the globe, Australia, New Zealand, France and the Netherlands, Nigeria and Afghanistan.

They come here because they want to learn more from what they have been told is one of the finest civil services in the world, finest both in terms of its values and standards, and in terms of what it is capable of achieving. So if our civil service is so good, why the constant pressure to change it?

The answer is that change is needed, not because we are an unsuccessful organisation, but because we are a national asset with huge power to improve the competitive strength of the economy and to raise the quality of life in society. And because the demands upon us and the expectations of us are rising, and the pressure to perform better comes from all across the world. The higher we show we can jump, the higher the bar is set.

This document has not been prepared in the manner of a classic White Paper,

identify a problem and set out proposals for the future. This implies that what is there at present is failing, and that the action needed all lies in the future. Neither of these propositions is true.

The document has been produced to do three things:

First, to remind ourselves of the strengths of the Civil Service.

Take a look at the World Bank tables of comparative Government effectiveness in chapter one. The UK comes out best in the table of top ten GDP countries world wide. That is an unambiguous success story and most countries in the world have a great deal to envy us for. That is what you achieve, by the quality of your work, day in, day out.

Secondly, the document recognises how much we have changed – particularly in recent years – and how much we have already achieved. We are not starting a new reform programme today. We have made major changes in the last few years:

Over a million tax returns annually now reach the Inland Revenue electronically.

Services for children and families, previously managed across four government departments, have now been brought together in the DfES.

Jobcentre Plus now offers a wholly different sort of support to the unemployed, combining the payment of benefit with help in finding work – and doing it in a civilised environment.

The National Programme for IT in the NHS will link patient needs across the whole system and transform the way it works.

I am sure that every one of you here, looking across your own Department, can name plenty more examples.

But the third aim of the document is to identify the work going forward for the future and to put it all in context. And there is a lot happening. We are working on three levels: the people, Departments, and the role of the centre.

Taking the **people** element first, this is about:

Developing leadership;

Rethinking the presumptions about careers;

Improving training and development;

More effective performance management; and

Raising professionalism across all specialisms.

Taken together these will lead successively to a more effective Civil Service, more effective public services generally, and ultimately to the goal of better satisfied customers.

We are talking about a more flexible, but more effective and professional

career pattern. No one any more expects a right to a job for life, just because they successfully negotiated an entry process when they were twenty two. What matters is performance in a changing world. The deal now is that we will manage performance much more effectively – both for good and for poor performers. But we will also make sure people get the development they need.

Those whose performance can match our changing needs will be valued. Those who can't will ultimately need to rethink their careers. But the choice is no longer just work today, retirement tomorrow. There will always be people with impressive skills, but who no longer match the needs we have. And there are plenty of potential employers who rightly respect and value the skills that civil servants can bring to their business. One of the most important things we will be doing is to improve vastly the outplacement support we provide.

Let me turn now to **departments**. We need to remember that the Civil Service is not a unitary organisation. Ministers have a direct accountability to Parliament. Permanent secretaries and their senior officials have taken responsibility for the delivery of individual targets. Therefore, departments need to have a clear understanding of their strategic purpose and of their priority objectives; and need to ensure they are fit for purpose, given their structure and their skills.

Departments also need to look in at their relationship with the front line, moving to smaller, more strategic, headquarters, looking at the number of NDPBs and inspectors and regulators that have grown up around them. They also need to recognise that many services are not delivered by the Civil Service alone but in partnership with the wider public sector and the private and voluntary sectors. The boundary between us needs to soften so that people can freely move between sectors.

At the **centre**, we need to be a resource for you. To ensure that you have access to the best tools to tackle your business, whether in strategy, in financial management, in HR, in project management, in IT and so on. We should be in a position to provide the support you need in delivering your business as effectively as possible. So we are developing centres of excellence to provide a driving force for these essential professional disciplines and to be a source of help for. We are working up Performance Partnership Agreements linked to the Spending Review 04 which will draw together departments' strategies and change programmes with the contribution the centre is making.

Let me conclude with two points.

First, the Efficiency Review is now entering a key phase, where departments have been asked to work up the changes they need to make from the options which the Review has identified. It is a sign of a top class organisation that it is constantly searching to improve its performance. Secondly, and this is the

message I will leave you with – is to remind ourselves why we are doing all this.

It is not because we want to polish up the Civil Service as an organisation.

It is not just because we want to service Ministers better, although that is obviously important.

But fundamentally it is because we want the people of this country to get the best standards of service we can give them.

That is probably what brought most of us into the public sector in the first place. And the reforms we are setting out today are designed to help us do it better.