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# public service magazine

WINTER 2018

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McNeil talks to PSM

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managing the civil  
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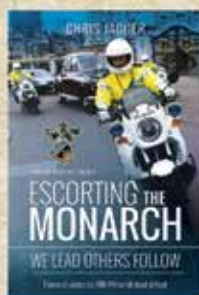


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# In this issue

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## Welcome

### Craig Ryan, Editor



I remember the tense final night of talks on the Good Friday agreement very well because I was up all night – ears glued to the radio – putting the finishing touches to the first-ever issue of *PSM*. We got over the finishing line just before the politicians. In the morning we had a brand new magazine, and Northern Ireland had the prospect of lasting peace for the first time in my lifetime.

Twenty years later, *PSM* and the Good Friday agreement are still with us. But as Matt Foster reports on page 19, the skill and dedication of the small band of public servants in the Northern Ireland Civil Service are being tested like never before as the country enters its eleventh month without a political executive. We should never forget that democracy isn't just about the doings of politicians; it also depends on the hard work of thousands of men and women who keep the machinery of government in good working order – and make sure the lights stay on, no matter how dark it gets.

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## News

4

FDA warns MPs – don't expect the impossible on Brexit; HMRC needs 5,000 more staff for Brexit; FDA calls for end to attacks on civil servants; NHS managers plan more active and engaged union; Fight for fair pay continues after Budget let down; Civil service to track careers of under-represented staff  
Plus: our round-up of the latest civil service starters, movers and leavers.

## Organising

12

Alan Bailey on the FDA's plans to step up its campaign for fair pay for civil servants.  
Plus: Neil Rider explains how FDA Learn masterclasses can boost your skills and your career.

## Meet the FDA

12

Introducing Assistant General Secretary Naomi Cooke and Communications Officer Matt Foster.

## On your case

12

How the union helped get one member's retirement plans back on track.

## Opinion

14

Sue Owen warns the civil service isn't immune to prejudice.  
Plus: Dave Penman on the failure of political leadership on Brexit



## Features

### First People Person 16

Civil service Chief People Officer Rupert McNeil talks to *PSM*.

### Keeping the lights on 19

We speak to Northern Ireland's top officials about governing without politicians.

### Smart moves? 22

The move to government hubs demands skilful management, investment and training.

### Whitehall's stress test 24

Jo Clift urges civil service managers to pay attention to their mental health – and that of their teams.

## Books

26

Yanis Varoufakis on how the EU killed Greece to save itself.  
Gordon Brown's enigmatic memoir.  
Plus: our selection of the season's best other reads.

## Members' small ads

28

## Crossword

29

## Truth to power

30

A service delivery expert from the Government Digital Service warns that Whitehall's digital transformation is heading for the rocks.

# News

Share your news with us at [psm@fda.org.uk](mailto:psm@fda.org.uk)

## Brexit

### FDA to MPs: Don't "expect the impossible" on Brexit

Ministers must provide "urgent clarity" on the UK's post-Brexit immigration system to avoid placing "unrealistic expectations" on already-stretched staff, the FDA has warned MPs.

Appearing before the Home Affairs Select Committee in November, FDA National Officer Helen Kenny – who represents senior staff in the Home Office – highlighted significant pressures in a department which has cut its headcount by more than 1,000 since 2010.

Pointing to the FDA's latest working hours survey, carried out earlier in 2017, Kenny said almost three-quarters of the union's Home Office members believed working excessive hours is already a problem in their organisation.

She added: "Over 60% say that they've worked while on sick or annual leave,



**"Members' biggest concern is not knowing what things will look like the day after we leave the European Union"**  
Helen Kenny

and most feel that that's not going to change, that nothing is being done about the workload. So the issue isn't necessarily vacancies. It's – having cut the workforce – the amount of additional pressure on people who have remained."

A key issue facing Home Office staff in the months ahead will be the registration of the three million EU nationals currently in Britain, Kenny said. But while work on the registration system

was already well underway, she said it could not be finalised until the outcome of Brexit negotiations is clear.

Kenny told the Committee that there was a "frustration" among FDA members in the Home Office at the length of time taken to fill vacancies, and warned that their "biggest concern" is "not knowing what things will look like the day after we leave the European Union".

"The closer we get to that date the more likely it is that Home Office will not have the time or the resources or the ability to put the relevant processes in place," she added. "There's a real concern that the Government will expect the impossible. That unrealistic expectation of how quickly a system can be put in place is causing real concern for our members."

### Up to 5,000 extra HMRC staff needed to cope with Brexit

The government has admitted that HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) will need to hire between 3,000 and 5,000 extra staff to be "ready for all scenarios" following Britain's exit from the European Union.

The FDA has been calling on the government to invest in HMRC's capacity and capability since the vote to leave the EU, and General Secretary Dave Penman welcomed the government's "long overdue" move to "finally face up to the realities of Brexit".

"As we have been warning since the referendum result last year, if the civil service is to deliver the best outcome for the UK, the government needs to provide it

with the capacity and capability to deliver," Penman said. But he warned that "the devil will be in the detail" and called for the government to provide more clarity on how the new jobs would be funded.

In addition to announcing plans for new Brexit staff, HMRC Permanent Secretary Jon Thompson appeared before the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) on 20 November and revealed that he is still waiting to be awarded funding to upgrade the Customs Handling of Import and Export Freight (CHIEF) system to ensure the UK is prepared to handle the expected increase in customs declarations after Brexit.

In a strong challenge to the Treasury,

Thompson told the committee: "Just to be really clear, it is going to happen and I am going to spend the money, whether I get the funding or not."







## Impartiality

# "Ill-informed" civil service attacks must stop, says FDA

The FDA has stepped up its work to defend the impartiality of the civil service by taking its case directly to Parliament.

The FDA's General Secretary, Dave Penman, and its President, Gareth Hills, gave evidence in November to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC), which is part-way through an inquiry into the effectiveness of the civil service.

Penman told the committee that the civil service had "responded incredibly" following a decade of cuts to its resources and – despite real pressure in some departments – was "delivering efficiencies whilst maintaining public services".

But he warned of "a clear disconnect between what is expected from the civil service and the resources it is given", a situation he said had only got worse as the UK prepares to leave the European Union.

Both the General Secretary and President hit back at recent negative briefings against senior civil servants, with Penman saying that the Brexit vote posed a "real danger" for the civil service as politicians and commentators looked to "point the finger" at officials.

He added: "It's been one of the most polarising political issues that we have faced as a country and we are increasingly seeing finger-pointing – we're seeing civil servants singled out by either politicians, those around

politicians, or commentators that are looking to make accusations.

"I think the nature of that sort of debate has been rather unedifying, both in the run-up to the referendum and since then."

Hills – who is a long-serving tax inspector at HM Revenue and Customs as well as President of the FDA – said it was vital for politicians and media commentators to remember that FDA members were not simply nameless officials, but real people working hard to deliver public services.

"I'm somebody who, for 30 years, has gone into work every day to strive to deliver for the nation," he said.

"I describe myself often as a builder, although I'm a tax inspector, because the money that I bring in builds schools, hospitals, nurseries, libraries and playgrounds. And every time I see the work of not just HMRC members but FDA members criticised in the press, I know that it hurts those people as the individuals they are rather than faceless bureaucrats."

**"Brexit poses a real danger for the civil service, as politicians and commentators look to point the finger at officials... I think the nature of that debate has been rather unedifying"**

Dave Penman

## The cutting list

## FDA in the media

### November

FDA Assistant General Secretary Naomi Cooke criticised Chancellor Phillip Hammond's "short-sighted" decision not to relieve long-running pressure on public sector pay in the Autumn Budget.

This view was echoed by ARC President Vicky Johnson who accused Hammond of hypocrisy for taking credit for extra tax revenue collected by HMRC while failing to "properly acknowledge" those who made it possible.

[Hammond pledges to fund nursing pay rise - but quiet on rest of public sector](#)

**CIVIL SERVICE WORLD**

[Budget 2017: Union fumes at lack of recognition for HMRC staff](#)

**CIVIL SERVICE WORLD**

[Unions attack Budget for lack of action on pay cap](#)

**PUBLIC FINANCE**

FDA General Secretary Dave Penman accused Boris Johnson of seeking to "shift the blame" for the diplomatic crisis over jailed British-Iranian national Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, after allies of the Foreign Secretary told the press that officials in his department may be responsible.

His comments were followed up by a live interview on Sky News, which was subsequently covered by the Sky News website and LBC Radio.

[Boris Johnson under renewed fire over Iran comments](#)

**SKY NEWS**

Following revelations of abuse and harassment in Westminster, Penman warned in a blog for Huffington Post that the current system for addressing staff complaints in Parliament is not fit for purpose.

[Until The Imbalance Between MPs And Staff In Westminster Is Tackled, Parliament Will Remain A 19th Century Workplace](#)

**HUFFINGTON POST**

## Harassment

# Survey flags “real concern” over workplace harassment and bullying

The FDA has urged the civil service to do “more than just talk about being an excellent employer”, after a union survey revealed widespread concerns about how the civil service deals with allegations of bullying and harassment at work.

The FDA launched the confidential survey of members in the wake of high-profile complaints of harassment in several industries, including politics and the media. 45% of respondents to the FDA survey revealed that they had personally experienced harassment by a colleague.

While just under two-thirds of respondents said they had reported the incident either formally or informally, only 19% of those individuals said they were satisfied with how their report was handled.

Only one-third of respondents told the FDA that they felt confident a harassment complaint against a colleague would be properly investigated, while 40% said that they either had a ‘low’ or ‘very low’ level of confidence in the complaints process.

The survey also sought members’ workplace experiences with people not employed by their organisation, such as MPs, ministers, special advisers and contractors, an area where there is currently little or no complaints process for large swathes of the civil service.

One in seven (14%) respondents said they had been personally harassed by an individual from outside their organisation – but 34% said that they had not reported the incident. Of those who did, 73% said they were unhappy with the outcome.

While fewer than one in seven of those took part in the survey (17%) said they had been personally accused of harassment or bullying by a fellow employee, a majority (58%) of those who had been told the FDA that they were not satisfied with the way the accusation was handled.

Respondents raised particular concerns over the length of time taken to investigate complaints, and the lasting

**45%** of respondents to the FDA survey revealed that they had personally experienced harassment by a colleague



Only **one-third** of respondents told the FDA that they felt confident a harassment complaint against a colleague would be properly investigated



**One in seven** (14%) respondents said they had been personally harassed by an individual from outside their organisation – but 34% said that they had not reported the incident. Of those who did, 73% said they were unhappy with the outcome



reputational damage they could suffer even when complaints were later shown to be unfounded.

The FDA also used the survey to gauge confidence in its own support services. While 60% of respondents expressed confidence that the FDA would support them if they brought a case to the union’s attention, 11% of those who took part reported either a ‘low’ or ‘very low’ level of confidence in the union’s support.

Responding to the survey, FDA Assistant General Secretary Naomi Cooke said: “Firstly, I want to thank all those

who took the time to fill in our survey. Some of the issues raised are clearly very recent and very raw, whereas others occurred many years ago but have left a lasting impact.

“What is abundantly clear is that there are real concerns about how bullying and harassment are addressed, with neither those bringing complaints nor those who are accused feeling subject to a fair process. For too long the civil service has responded to many of these issues by moving people around departments. This has prioritised short-term problem avoidance over natural justice and long-term issue resolution.

“The FDA will be working with CSEP, departments and others to ensure the civil service does more than just talk about being an excellent employer and takes the necessary steps to give its staff real confidence in this objective.”

**“Some of the issues raised are clearly very recent and very raw, whereas others occurred many years ago but have left a lasting impact”** Naomi Cooke



### Managers in Partnership

## NHS managers plan more active and engaged union

NHS England Chief Executive Simon Stevens and former NHS Employers leader Dean Royles were among the senior NHS figures to lead discussions at the first Summit for members of Managers in Partnership (MiP), the FDA and Unison joint-venture representing senior NHS managers.

The new-look conference, held in London on 31 October, was part of MiP's plans for a more active and engaged union, and gave members the chance to shape the union's priorities for the coming year, explained MiP Chief Executive Jon Restell.

"We know it's going to be tough, we know the economy's going to get worse, we know the demands are growing," he said. "But we should be doing everything we can to make those workplaces safe, positive and productive."

Speaking three weeks before the Budget announcement of a conditional end to the seven-year cap on NHS pay, Stevens warned ministers against forcing NHS organisations to fund pay rises out of existing budgets. "That would be an own-goal of the first magnitude," he told delegates.

Stevens also backed MiP's call for an increase in the share of UK national

resources devoted to the NHS, pointing out that raising healthcare spending to the same levels as France and Germany would give the NHS an extra £23bn to spend.

In a rousing and often funny speech, Royles, now director of HR at Leeds Teaching Hospitals, told delegates to stop being apologetic about their jobs and make the positive case for NHS management. "I think there are four things people want from work and, as managers and as a trade union, we have the ability – indeed the duty – to provide all four: meaning, belonging, growth and hope," he said.

The 200 delegates from across the UK also met in regional sessions to discuss local NHS developments and plan MiP's response, and held a series of workshops to debate workplace issues such as equality, partnership working with employers, staff wellbeing, improving line management and combatting hostile attitudes towards NHS managers.

The Summit was followed by a reception in the House of Commons, where delegates lobbied MPs and heard from speakers including health minister Philip Dunne and Bristol West MP and MiP member Karyn Smyth.

## FDA in the media

Penman's criticisms of the handling of sexual abuse complaints were featured in an exclusive story by Political Editor Paul Waugh.

'House Of Cards-style' Sex Abuse Can Only Be Stopped By Independent Complaints System - Civil Service Union Chief

**HUFFINGTON POST**

This was followed by an exclusive article for The Guardian, in which Penman argued that the resignation of Priti Patel as well as the ongoing abuse and harassment claims demonstrate the failure of politicians to police their own behaviour.

A pirates' code governs Westminster. The solution is independent scrutiny

**THE GUARDIAN**

### October

The FDA accused Boris Johnson of showing an "astonishing lack of judgement", after he allowed a new hard Brexit think tank to be launched in his own department.

Boris Johnson accused of breaching ministerial code over think tank launch

**THE GUARDIAN**

Heywood asked to investigate claim Boris Johnson breached ministerial code over FCO think tank launch

**CIVIL SERVICE WORLD**

The FDA warned the new consultation on the Civil Service Compensation Scheme represents a "backwards step" and risks undermining key concessions secured by unions last year.

Civil Service Compensation Scheme: new terms propose cut to redundancy payments

**CIVIL SERVICE WORLD**

New Civil Service exit pay plans 'remove hard-won protections'

**PUBLIC SECTOR EXECUTIVE**

Cabinet proposes cuts to civil service redundancy payments

**PUBLIC FINANCE**

UK government tables deeper redundancy payment cuts after court defeat

**GLOBAL GOVERNMENT FORUM**



## Pay

# Fight for fair pay continues after Budget let down

The FDA has vowed to continue its drive for a fair and fully-funded pay rise right across the public sector, after Philip Hammond's Budget failed to offer any substantive action on pay.

As part of its ongoing pay campaign, the union has launched a dedicated website – [FDAFairPay.co.uk](http://FDAFairPay.co.uk) – which allows members to enter their current salary and find how they have been affected by the public sector pay freeze and subsequent below-inflation pay cap since 2010.

The site then connects users with their local elected representative, with the FDA encouraging its members to write to them directly to make the case for properly-resourced pay increases.

Despite speculation that years of public sector pay restraint would be eased in the Budget on 22 November, Hammond's statement confirmed only that he was lifting the formal 1% cap on pay rises, which has been in force since 2011.

But with no additional funding for pay outside the NHS, the Treasury has made clear that any increases will have to come from existing departmental budgets.

Responding to the Budget for the FDA, Assistant General Secretary Naomi Cooke welcomed the additional £3bn in funding to help Whitehall prepare for Brexit, but she said that the Government's "lack of



investment in the talent and hard work of civil servants" was "telling".

"The civil service needs to be able to recruit and retain the best people to deliver the best possible Brexit, so the complete absence of any statement on pay for the 98% of civil servants not covered by Review Bodies beggars belief," Cooke added.

"The NHS rightly gets an indication of funding for negotiated pay reform at a time of immense pressure, so why not the same for a civil service facing unprecedented challenges?"

Her view was echoed by the Association of Revenue and Customs (ARC) – which represents senior staff in HM Revenue and Customs – with ARC President Vicky Johnson accusing Mr

Hammond of hypocrisy for praising the work done by HMRC officials in his statement while failing to take action on pay.

"The Chancellor rightly used his Budget statement to shout about the extra £160bn in tax revenue that HM Revenue and Customs staff have managed to bring in for the nation since 2010 – yet he's completely missed the chance to back the people who've made that possible," she said.

Johnson added: "While ARC welcomes the Budget's £155m of investment in HMRC's capabilities and its inclusion of a raft of new measures to tackle avoidance, the Chancellor cannot simply rely on the goodwill of public servants to deliver these plans in the face of ever-greater pressure on their terms and conditions."

As well as the [FDAFairPay.co.uk](http://FDAFairPay.co.uk) site, the union's post-Budget pay campaign continues with the launch of the FDA's annual Senior Civil Service (SCS) Pay Survey.

The anonymous survey will form the central part of the FDA's submission to the Senior Salaries Review Body (SSRB) for its 2018-19 pay review, and the union is urging all SCS members to take part to help ensure that the voice of senior staff is heard as ministers consider the future of civil service pay.

## Civil service to track careers of "under-represented" staff

The FDA has welcomed the civil service's new Diversity and Inclusion Strategy but warned there is still "much more to do" to support under-represented staff.

The strategy, published in October, aims to make the civil service "the UK's most inclusive employer" and sets two key priorities: "to continue to increase the representation of currently under-represented groups at all levels across the Civil Service" and "to build our culture and reputation as a place that attracts,

develops, retains and fully engages all the diverse talent across our organisation".

Responding to the strategy, FDA Equality and Diversity Officer Zohra Francis commended the "innovative move" to chart the progress of BAME and disabled civil servants throughout their careers, and stressed that "all departments should heed the plan's commitment to identifying and supporting talented staff, regardless of their background".

But Francis warned that significant barriers still exist for under-represented staff, such as the "divisive performance management systems which can stifle the very talent that the public sector should be nurturing". The FDA "stands ready to work

with departments to identify and tackle" these, she said.

Writing in this issue of PSM (see p14), Sue Owen, the civil service Diversity and Inclusion Champion, admits that while the civil service's inclusion and fair treatment scores are at their highest since 2009, "it would be disingenuous to infer that the civil service would be immune to any cognitive dissonance that exists in wider society".

As a result, Owen says she is uncompromising in her determination to ensure that the civil service "remains steadfast" in its commitment to inclusion in order "tackle the pockets of prejudicial behaviours where they exist".



## Revolving Door

### Civil service starters, movers and leavers



**David Chrimes**, a member of the FDA's Executive Committee and a Crown Advocate at the Crown Prosecution Service, has been

appointed to the Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC). The SSAC is an independent body which advises the Department for Work and Pensions on the impact of social security legislation. Chrimes will serve as the committee's workers' representative, and will serve for a fixed, five-year term from February 2018. **Philip Jones**, Director of Prince's Trust Cymru, has meanwhile been appointed as the committee's employers' representative, while Centrepont Chief Executive **Seyi Obakin** has been reappointed as the representative for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Groups.



**Jim Harra** has been named as the new Second Permanent Secretary at HM Revenue and Customs. Harra joined the Inland

Revenue in 1984, and was appointed its Director of Corporation Tax and VAT in 2009. Since 2016, he has served as both Director General for Customer Strategy and Tax Design, and as HMRC's Tax Assurance Commissioner. He succeeds Edward Troup, who is retiring after 13 years at the Treasury and HMRC.



**Karen Pierce** has been appointed as the UK's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, making her the UK's first female

UN ambassador. Pierce has previously held a number of high-profile jobs at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), including Director General – Political, Chief Operating Officer, and the UK's Ambassador to Afghanistan. She succeeds Matthew Rycroft, who is leaving the UN to take over as the new Permanent Secretary at the Department for International Development.

**Gary Aitkenhead** is to take the reins as Chief Executive of the Defence

Science and Technology Laboratory, an executive agency of the Ministry of Defence, which is run along commercial lines. Aitkenhead joins the DSTL from the private sector, having previously held senior jobs at Sepura and Motorola Solutions. He succeeds Acting Chief Executive David Marsh, who stepped into the post when previous Chief Executive Jonathan Lyle left DSTL in September 2017.

**Ian Dalton** has started work as the new Chief Executive of NHS Improvement, the public body which oversees foundation trusts, NHS trusts, and private providers offering NHS-funded care. Dalton previously served as Chief Executive of Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, and his career includes stints as Chief Operating Officer and Deputy CEO at NHS England, and as Chief Executive of NHS North Of England.

**Ruth McKernan** is to step down as the Chief Executive of Innovate UK, an executive agency of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. McKernan has led Innovate UK, which works with industry to support innovation, since May 2015. BEIS said it would be launching a recruitment campaign shortly to find a successor in time for Innovate UK's relaunch as UK Research and Innovation in April 2018.



**Mike Parsons** has moved from the Home Office to become Director General of the Government Property Unit, the Cabinet Office

team that works with departments to reduce the cost of the government estate. Parsons joined the civil service from local government, and has served as Director General for Capabilities and Resources at the Home Office since 2013. Parsons will lead the government's estate strategy, and his appointment comes ahead of the expected launch of the new Government Property Agency in the new year.

### My alternative career



#### Robert Marshall

Robert Marshall, head of policy for anti-extremism, hate crime and counter-terrorism in the Scottish Government.

Had I not been a civil servant I would probably have remained in music professionally. Having trained as a singer and as a conductor, I spent the first 15 years of my civil service career combining both. In 1996, I worked as a Procurator Fiscal prosecuting criminals in a busy Glasgow Court by day, and performed the role of the defendant in Gilbert & Sullivan's Trial by Jury on the Edinburgh King's Theatre stage by night. I have sung in a number of Cathedral choirs and founded both the Edinburgh University Chamber Orchestra and the Glasgow Chamber Choir. One highlight has been working as Chorus Master of the Edinburgh Royal Choral Union, conducting their annual New Year Usher Hall Handel Messiah (see picture). In this ever-pressured world of work, a foil is essential – mine has always been, and remains, music. My current pet project is working to secure a room in the Scottish Government offices with a piano for use by staff to practise or learn.

# Organising

YOUR  
UNION

## Organising across departments throughout the UK



**The Budget had nothing to offer on pay but that doesn't mean the FDA's campaign for a fair deal for civil servants is over. Far from it, explains FDA Organiser Alan Bailey.**

The campaign for fair pay in the civil service continues. Philip Hammond's Budget on 22 November made no commitments to additional funding for civil service pay, and the Chancellor actually said very little on public sector pay other than to agree to fund a pay rise for NHS staff, provided a deal can be reached on pay restructuring with the health service unions. The Budget might not have been what many in the public sector hoped for, but there is still room for manoeuvre and there remains a strong sense of solidarity between unions across the public sector.

Before the Budget announcement, the FDA was active in making the case for fair pay in the civil service. We joined unions from across the public sector at the TUC rally in October outside Parliament (pictured right). Many of you have used our fair pay calculator which enables you to figure out how much you are worse off due to the pay cap, and written to your MPs to let them know how the pay cap is affecting you.

We have been raising awareness of the value of civil servants' work through members' stories. No one needs to have it explained to them why a nurse's job is important, but the work that civil servants do isn't as well known or appreciated – which is why we need to raise awareness and change the public dialogue around civil service pay. We have already promoted the work of a range of FDA members – from



**PUBLIC  
SERVICES  
→ NEED  
FAIR PAY**

### Campaigning for equal pay

The Association of Revenue and Customs (ARC), the FDA section representing members in HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), is pursuing a series of equal pay claims against the department. ARC calculates that women in Grades 6 and 7 are being paid up to £8,000 less than their male colleagues.

Most members in HMRC occupy jobs that have, historically, been male-dominated, such as tax professionals, accountants, lawyers, statisticians and policy advisers. While more women have entered these professions over the past decade, this period coincides with the end of earned pay progression in the department, which has severely curtailed their opportunities for a pay rise.

As a result, many women are now stuck at the bottom of their pay range with no way of moving up, while men doing similar work – who had already reached the top end of their range – enjoy higher pay. ARC believes that this represents indirect discrimination, and the case is currently before the Employment Appeals Tribunal, with a hearing set for early 2018.

"It cannot be right that, in 2017, women are still being discriminated against and undervalued, earning 15% less than their male counterparts and, in some cases, even managing men who are paid more than them," said FDA Equality and Diversity Officer Zohra Francis.

"Women in the public sector face a double whammy of the gender pay gap and the ongoing squeeze on public sector pay that only serves to prolong the wait for parity," she added. *Tommy Newell*

CPS barristers, who help to protect our communities by prosecuting serious criminal cases, to the staff in the National Archives who preserve and share the most important documents in Britain's history.

We need to continue to showcase stories about the work that you do in your roles every day. We believe it's vital to combat the negative stereotypes about civil servants by showing to the public, in easily understood terms, the vital, difficult and highly skilled work that our members do every day. These stories are not about criticising the government or its policies; they're about highlighting the work that you do and why it matters to the country. The FDA can make the connection between your job and the need for you to be paid fairly for that vital work – you don't need to do that yourself! If you would like to tell your story – about the work that you do and why it matters to life in the UK – we would love to hear from you.

The Budget announcement doesn't mean the FDA's pay campaign is over – far from it. The focus of the campaign will now shift to departments. Promoting member stories will help us to win wider support at national level while we apply pressure locally. Your local branches will be running campaign activities, but remember that branches are only as strong as the active support they have from their members. Support the campaign and your local branch by getting involved; look out for more information on what your branch is planning on fair pay, or talk to your local rep.

If you want to share your story or to get involved with the pay campaign in your department please get in touch with FDA Organiser Alan Bailey:  
alan.bailey@fda.org.uk



## Mastering new skills



**With the new Civil Service Competency Framework just around the corner, Neil Rider sets out plans to build on FDA Learn's success.**

Our members' demands are changing all the time and, with the Civil Service Competency Framework set for a major refresh in 2018, we're trying to get ahead of the curve with a new approach to our FDA Learn programme.

FDA Learn has already helped hundreds of our members to make real progress in their careers, but we can't stand still. That's why we've taken their feedback on board – looking honestly at what's working well and what isn't – as we shape our new learning services for the year ahead.

A key part of the new programme will be more focused, targeted masterclasses with senior leaders, an approach we've already tried with great success in Scotland with our "Leaders Developing New Leaders" scheme. These masterclasses have given our members the chance to experience mentoring with senior colleagues in smaller, more focused classes, giving them the chance to gain valuable tips, experience and insight on the road ahead – from people who've already travelled it.

But these sessions are not just about senior leaders handing down wisdom from on high. In fact, one of the most valuable aspects of these sessions has been the benefit that members get from the contributions of their fellow attendees from right across government. One recent masterclass was, for example, led by Christine Hewitt, the Director of

People, Capability and Change at the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Christine has had a long and varied career in top government roles, with lots to say about successful leadership at organisations as varied as the Treasury and the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory. But she was keen to hear the experiences of members attending the masterclass too – all of whom came from totally different government departments, meaning they were able to bring their own unique insights to the session.

These masterclasses are complemented by some one-to-one mentoring with senior colleagues,

**Our masterclasses with senior leaders give you the tips, experience and insight you need for the road ahead - from people who've already travelled it**

as well as a round of structured 'action learning sets', in which the attendees meet regularly to offer each other support and guidance. We then make sure that these sessions are guided by some light-touch oversight from senior

colleagues, helping both senior staff and the people learning to meet their professional development goals – a win-win situation.

Members who have taken part in our broader, competency-based FDA Learn events over the years need not fear: we will still be teaming up with employers across the country to run these larger classes, where appropriate. But the benefits of the masterclass approach are clear to see: they offer our members a more focused, sharing experience, and allow them the time and attention to really focus on their career goals. Indeed, some of those who attended our recent events in Scotland have already gone on to gain a promotion, passing on their thanks to FDA Learn for the part we played!

Neil Rider is head of FDA Learn and Keyskills





# Meet the FDA

Two people working for the FDA tell us something about themselves and what they do for members.

## Naomi Cooke

### Assistant General Secretary



Naomi Cooke started working in the trade union movement straight out of university, initially for the Communications Workers Union (CWU) as a

Research Assistant, before moving to GMB as National Pensions Officer. She joined the FDA as Assistant General Secretary in January 2013.

According to Naomi, this isn't how she thought her career would turn out. Following her bachelor's degree in politics and a master's degree in political philosophy, Naomi expected her second

master's in IT to pave the way for her future career. She even signed a contract for a graduate training scheme with an IT company, because she "never thought I'd get the job" with the CWU.

When the unexpected call came through, it was an easy decision to make – regardless of the salary on offer from the IT company – because politics was "much more interesting" than a career as a software engineer, she says.

After 10 years with the general workers union GMB, during which time she also completed a graduate diploma in law, Naomi was looking for a new challenge when she saw the job of FDA Assistant

General Secretary job advertised.

A key factor in the move was Naomi's experience working with FDA's Dave Penman and Rob O'Neill on the 2010 renegotiation of the Civil Service Compensation Scheme. Naomi says she "liked the way the FDA did things" and the way that they were "trying to find a deal that worked for the members, not for any individual self-interest or ideological straight jacket".

Since taking up her post, Naomi feels it's the little, incremental wins that keep her motivated and really make a difference to members – whether it's getting the right result in a personal case, or convincing the SSRB to make recommendations as a result of FDA evidence.

Looking towards the future, Naomi is excited to see what opportunities the FDA's move to its new Borough High Street head office will present.

*Tommy Newell*

**“I liked the way the FDA did things... finding a deal that worked for members”**

## Matt Foster

### Communications Officer



"I sort-of wanted to be a journalist since I was about 15," says Matt Foster, who joined the FDA staff as Communications Officer last spring. "So I got involved with in the

newspapers at school and college, and I really enjoyed it. I loved writing, learning about things and talking to people."

After a history degree and an MA in political journalism at London's City University, Matt joined the online news service PoliticsHome as Assistant News Editor in 2012. "I had a lobby pass and did the day-to-day political reporting,

which was really great fun," he recalls. "But it was all about speed, really, and sometimes quite scary."

Feeling ready for a change, Matt took the job of Deputy Editor at *Civil Service World* - like PoliticsHome, it was owned by Dods Group, but the culture was "totally different", he says. "It's a different beat really. It's not high politics, but I was always really interested in the workforce side of it, in pay and conditions, recruitment and retention, and all the stuff that people have to deal with on the ground every day."

After two years, Matt says he came to a "natural break point" and successfully applied to join the FDA as Communications Officer. "I'd spent the last two years talking to the FDA, and been really impressed by them. I felt like they were grown-ups," he explains.

As well as contributing regularly to

PSM, Matt and his colleague Tommy Newell handle the FDA's relations with the media and its communications with members. He also has a big role in developing the union's new website, set to be launched early next year.

Away from the office, Matt recently took up running, but admits to spending a lot of time "sitting around - watching TV and films, talking with friends and listening to electronic bands no one's ever heard of".

And what are his first impressions on moving from a media company to a trade union? "It's easy to be motivated here. I'm surrounded by people who know why they get up in the morning," he replies. "The FDA is one of the only voices sticking up for an impartial civil service... It's amazing being part of a team that's helping to shout about it when no one else really is."

*Craig Ryan*

# On your case

## A Classic clanger

Paying into a pension scheme should give you peace of mind and security in retirement – but it's easy to fall foul of confusing pension rules if your plans change. **Tommy Newell** talks to Chris Cadman about how the union helped to get his retirement plans back on track.

Chris Cadman had worked in the civil service for over 30 years when he took voluntary exit from his full-time Grade 6 job in 2016. Throughout his career, Cadman had paid into the Classic final salary pension scheme. On leaving, he chose not to preserve his pension – currently worth roughly £29,000 a year with a lump sum of £87,000 – and to draw it once he reached the age of 60.

The following year, Cadman returned to work after accepting a short-term contract with the Home Office – at a lower grade – to provide seasonal cover.

Cadman opted to join the Alpha pension scheme, as it was the only option he was offered as a new starter. Conscious of the preserved benefits he had accrued throughout his career, he asked his new employer what he thought was a simple question: “Will the preserved benefits that I’ve built up at a much higher grade continue, or will they be affected by my new lower salary?”

Unfortunately, nobody at the Home Office could answer that question. Cadman then contacted MyCSP, but they answered a completely different question, telling him that the Home Office had put him in the wrong pension scheme: he shouldn't be in Alpha, he should have gone back into Classic.

It was at this point that Cadman started to panic. The advice he had been given by MyCSP meant that his previously accrued pension could be slashed by over £25,000 a year.

“The Classic pension is based on the best of your last three years” Cadman explained “and if I’m still in Classic then the best of my last three years, if I do this seasonal work for the next two or three years, would give me a pension of a



couple of thousand a year – if I’m lucky.”

This was the “nightmare scenario”, Cadman says, as it would have left him “absolutely skint” and thrown all his future plans out of the window. At this point he came to the FDA for help.

Cadman had been a member of the FDA while in full-time employment and became an associate member when he took his voluntary exit. The FDA quickly took this case directly to the Cabinet Office, hoping for a clear answer. Their initial response suggested that Cadman should be in the Premium scheme – not Classic or Alpha.

Despite Cadman’s situation becoming increasingly common for civil servants, there didn’t appear to be clear guidelines for what should happen in these circumstances. The FDA went back to the Cabinet Office to ask them to double-check the advice they had given, and provide Cadman with full written confirmation.

After a lot of to-ing and fro-ing, the Cabinet Office finally confirmed that, actually, Cadman should be in Nuvos – completing the full sweep of all four civil service pension schemes. The final confirmation secured by the FDA meant that Cadman’s preserved benefits from Classic were just that – preserved – and any new service would be under Nuvos and would not affect his entitlements under the Classic scheme.

After a number of “sleepless nights”, Cadman finally had it in black and white from the Cabinet Office and could confidently return to work knowing his retirement plans were safe.

On Your Case gives FDA and Keystone members the chance to share their experiences of problems at work and talk about how the union can help to resolve them. If you’d like to share your story, drop us a line at [psm@fda.org.uk](mailto:psm@fda.org.uk). If requested, anonymity is guaranteed.

# Opinion

Got an opinion? Let's hear it at [psm@fda.org.uk](mailto:psm@fda.org.uk)

## We're not immune from prejudice - yet



**The civil service has made great strides towards being an inclusive employer, but too many colleagues still find their sexual**

**orientation or gender identity a barrier to success at work, writes Sue Owen.**

In 2015, the civil service commissioned Ben Summerskill to write a report, Don't Ask, Don't Tell, on ways the civil service could be more inclusive. His report, which included real-life case studies, made clear that the civil service was ahead of the curve on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGB&TI) inclusion some years ago, but had since moved towards a median position. We needed to take action to ensure that our policies and working

environment remained relevant to diverse staff and inclusive to diverse LGB&TI communities. In the spirit of transparency, the civil service published the report. We needed and wanted to make a positive change. I wanted to play a key role in making that change happen.

It was the opportunity to make a difference in tackling negative workplace behaviours that attracted me to the role of LGB&TI champion. The opportunity to ensure that someone's sexual orientation or gender identity was not a barrier to being recognised for their skills, talent, and expertise, and to demonstrate the kind of leadership and behaviours that enable people to choose to come out at work in the knowledge they will continue to be treated with respect and valued as colleagues.

As LGB&TI Champion, I proactively

promote work that makes the civil service more LGB&TI inclusive. The civil service is making better use of data to monitor the extent that learning and career opportunities are accessible to LGB&TI colleagues. We are confident that the selection processes for activities such as accelerated career development schemes are fair and deliver transparent outcomes for all our staff, including our LGB employees. For example, our Future Leaders Scheme – a programme that identifies colleagues with the potential to progress to roles within the Senior Civil Service – has LGB representation that is consistent with the proportion of staff at that grade. We have also taken steps to embed inclusive practices within recruitment.

The civil service encourages participation in LGB&TI staff networks, including the Civil Service Rainbow Alliance and the cross-government network for transgender, intersex and non-binary staff known as 'a:gender'. These highly effective networks regularly contribute to strategic activities and raise the profile of LGB&TI role models. For example, the staff networks and a number of other stakeholders have played an integral role in trialling gender

“ There may be a societal shift towards more liberal values but prejudice persists in many areas ”



identity questions within the Civil Service People Survey and coordinating the civil service presence at PRIDE.

We may have made some progress but we cannot be complacent. The 2017 British Social Attitudes Survey says that there may be a 'societal shift' towards more liberal attitudes but prejudice persists in many areas. For example, the vast majority of people answering their survey (82%) describe themselves as "not prejudiced at all" to transgender people. However, less than half of respondents say suitably qualified transgender people should definitely be employed as police officers or primary school teachers (43% and 41% respectively).

The civil service values are clear; we continue to work towards ensuring our policies are even more inclusive but it would be disingenuous to infer that the civil service would be immune to any cognitive dissonance that exists in wider society, particularly when the majority of our colleagues work in customer-facing roles. We must therefore remain steadfast in our commitment to LGB&TI inclusion so that we can tackle the pockets of prejudicial behaviours where they exist.

In October 2017, we published a Civil Service Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. It comes at a point when our inclusion and fair treatment scores have increased and are the highest that they have ever been since we began measuring them in 2009. The strategy focuses on our twin priorities of increasing representation – becoming an organisation where the diversity of the UK communities we serve is reflected at every level – and creating a working environment where people feel respected and valued for their talent and contributions. These twin priorities are supported by focusing on driving greater accountability and assurance.

As Permanent Secretary Civil Service Diversity Champions, my colleagues and I are unapologetically ambitious for the civil service. Any achievements will be a result of collective action at every level. We have made a number of strategic commitments that will accelerate our progress even further and achieve our ambition of becoming the most inclusive UK employer.

Sue Owen is Permanent Secretary at the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, and civil service LGB&TI Champion.



## Picking up the pieces



**The failure of Britain's political leadership over Brexit has left civil servants exposed to insults and scapegoating, says**

**FDA General Secretary Dave Penman.**

As the realities of trying to deliver Brexit start to bite, laying bare the incoherent and contradictory positions of both government and opposition, the scapegoating of the civil service has begun in earnest. Perhaps it was always going to be thus, but it's no less disappointing for its predictability.

Through the inevitable cycle of crisis then breakthrough, played out too often to be a Machiavellian strategy, each episode was either the fault of wily Sir Humphreys manipulating the poor Jim Hackers, or a failure of the civil service to abandon its impartiality and deliver us from the evils of Brexit.

Disentangling the UK from 40 years of EU membership was always going to be a Herculean task for the civil service. To stand any chance, it needed greater resources, new areas of capability and,

crucially, clear political leadership. While the FDA has been banging on about the resources and capability gaps, the truth is the greatest risk to a successful Brexit is the failure of political leadership. A minority government weakened by a series of self-inflicted wounds – that cannot agree with itself never mind the party it relies on for its survival – is no recipe for the clear and strong leadership needed.

While the party in government is tearing itself apart, HM's loyal Opposition is equally divided, even if it is better at hiding that fact as it smells blood in the water. Post-election talk of a cross-party commission to oversee the Brexit process, and build a broad consensus at a time of deep division, has foundered on the rock of partisan political ambition.

The Brextremists and Remoaners have developed into opposing cults, lambasting those that do not support their one true belief. Following the soap opera of Priti Patel's resignation, the main qualification for her replacement appeared to be which cult they were a disciple of, demonstrating once again the ability of Brexit to suffocate the broader agenda of government.

Amid all of this chaos, the civil service has been getting on with its job, working quickly to establish two new departments and coordinating people and policy in a way many had assumed it was not capable of.

Contrary to populist belief, civil servants have relished the challenge, regardless of their own political preference, because that is what being a civil servant is all about. Underpaid and under-resourced, they continue to work tirelessly to deliver the best possible outcome for the UK.

Maybe we shouldn't expect those who cannot conceive of that kind of non-tribal commitment to understand. Their world is dominated by trenches from where they lob their cynical, vindictive insults blindly at any perceived enemy. Trench warfare is not about making progress, it's not about finding solutions – it's warfare for the sake of it.

So, whilst insults are hurled and individuals who are unable to respond are publicly vilified, civil servants will be concentrating on trying to solve the latest crisis created by the country's political leadership. Because that's what being a civil servant is all about.

# Skills, thrills and Brexit headaches

**When Rupert McNeil left the private sector to lead civil service HR two years ago, he hadn't banked on Brexit. But he's determined that it won't halt progress on skills, performance management, industrial relations and diversity. Matt Ross meets him.**

**"V**ictory!" he cries. And Rupert McNeil, the civil service's Chief People

Officer, clenches his fist in celebration.

When I last interviewed McNeil in June 2016, he made clear his hostility to the civil service's 'forced distribution' performance management system – under which managers had to put 10% of their staff into the 'must improve' box. Criticising performance management that focuses "too much attention on the process and the mechanics, and not enough on the critically-important human interaction," he argued against annual reporting and identified a "strong appetite at every level" for reform.

Eighteen months on, that system has been swept away. McNeil is careful not to claim credit for the change: "It was a privilege to watch that decision being taken by the leadership of the civil service," he says now. "The meeting where it was decided was as good an example as I've seen, in any context, of a thorough discussion of a strategically important issue." But he did play an important role, and got closely involved in the Valuation Office Agency's pilot of its replacement system.

The VOA's quarterly moderation meetings were, he says, "very rational, clinical but very compassionate discussions about individuals. I thought: this is what we want." And under its new approach, he points out, about 8% of staff fall into the "'must improve' equivalent." The requirement to identify 10% as failing, he comments, led to enormous amounts of "energy being expended, when actually you could trust the system to come up with 8%."

The next decision, he adds, is whether to expand the new system to the Senior Civil Service (SCS): "That discussion hasn't happened yet, but it doesn't take a lot to see what my views would be on that."

These reforms represent a significant change to the way civil servants are managed. But McNeil is also taking a more active role than his predecessors in addressing some of the big policy challenges facing the civil service – and the biggest of all, of course, is Brexit.

As chair of the European Capability and Capacity Board, created to

## Rupert McNeil: the making of Whitehall's HR chief



**1988** Completes one-year internship in the office of US Senator Paul Simon (Democrat, Illinois)

**1989** Graduates from St Catherine's College, Oxford, with BA in Politics and Philosophy

**1994** After five years working on pay and employment markets for the CBI, joins management consultancy firm Arthur Andersen

**2002** Joins Deloitte as a partner working on executive compensation

**2005** Moves to Barclays bank as HR group executive director, becoming HR director for global retail and commercial banking two years later

**2010** Appointed HR director of Aviva UK

**2012** Moves to Lloyds Banking Group as group HR director

**2016** Joins Cabinet Office as civil service Chief People Officer

build relevant skills in government, McNeil helped staff up the two Brexit departments and the Cabinet Office team. And reshaping government around the unprecedented challenges of Brexit has, he says, provided "a really fantastic pretext to put into practice some things which we wanted to do as part of the workforce plan".

In particular, he's taken the opportunity to improve the civil service's approach to recruiting and deploying talent across government. The Fast Stream was a crucial source of staff for DEXEU and DIT, he explains, and about 500 jobs went to Fast Stream applicants who'd scored well in testing but not quite made it into the programme.

Meanwhile, McNeil is in talks with

the policy profession to create pools of policy specialists who can be deployed across government to address emerging challenges. "We're building on 'surge' techniques that have been used in the operational area," he says, "setting up what we're calling a 'policy reserve'."

Effective management of Brexit issues demands collaboration across departmental boundaries. And here, McNeil argues that the civil service is starting from a good place: "The culture is actually very naturally collaborative – although it may not always appear like that to people when they're in it!" he says, smiling. It's also, he says, good at learning rapidly how to deal with new challenges. But he does identify one important weak spot: "Sometimes the problem isn't one of intellect or of challenge; it's about whether the right technical skills are in the room."

McNeil – himself a technical specialist, recruited from outside government after a career in HR – believes that "the job of the professional – the HR, the commercial, the policy professional – is to protect amateurs from the counter-intuitive." In other words, solutions that sound like common sense to the generalist can produce bad outcomes when applied in the complex worlds of specialist and technical delivery.

"If you look at the West Coast Mainline, the right technical skills weren't there; you could argue that's also true of what Chilcot found," he argues. "We need to teach people to know what they don't know, so they can bring in the right skills."

Indeed, skills seem to dominate McNeil's in-tray. He proudly reports that all online Civil Service Learning courses are to be provided without charge, removing "a source of friction that was deterring people". And he says officials will soon have access to a "line management fundamentals package, accompanied by a self-assessment tool".

Meanwhile, the civil service professions are becoming more involved in training; this, he says, is a "really fantastic thing that's happened over the last 12 months". And as well as developing their own specialist skills, McNeil adds, civil servants "need to be able to manage people with different technical backgrounds from theirs – whether it's me coming in and having to work with policy people or parliamentary



counsel for the first time, or vice versa.”

So one of the new Civil Service Leadership Academy’s three learning strands, he explains, will examine “how you lead in a multi-disciplinary context”. The academy has already run training in parliamentary procedures, and other professions such as commercial and digital are developing courses: “It’s the job of a profession to say what it thinks other people need to know about that profession,” he adds.

A second strand, Basecamp, helps new SCS staff to become “good organisational leaders”. The programme runs for a year, and is being rolled out for directors and director-generals. And the third strand involves dissecting case studies of civil service delivery.

Here, explains McNeil, programme leaders haven’t been afraid to examine the civil service’s failures as well as its successes – with West Coast Mainline and Chilcot on the agenda as well as the Scottish fiscal framework and the response to Ebola. The first two, he says, “go in the ‘blunders of our government’ category,” with the Iraq course “building on work that’s been done with the Ministry of Defence on lessons from Chilcot, particularly on challenge.”

That seems particularly appropriate now, I suggest – for Brexit has both sharpened the need for civil servants to speak truth to power, and fostered public attacks on officials suspected of questioning the Brexit project. Will the Academy give civil servants the skills and confidence to offer appropriate challenge? “I think, in a sense that’s the most important thing that gets delivered through this,” he replies. “And I think it’s also what makes very senior people – permanent secretaries – want to be involved and to share their thinking.”

As the civil service develops its specialist professional skills, it will have to pay just as much attention to retaining them – for, as McNeil’s own career demonstrates, many of these skills are valued in both the public and private sectors. Yet many civil service packages are no longer competitive, and the Budget crushed hopes that the Whitehall pay cap might be relaxed.

Quite a lot can be achieved without lifting the pay cap, McNeil believes. “We’ve got tools that we didn’t have before, particularly with the professions,” he notes, pointing to the

digital functions’ establishment of a cross-government system of job families and capability levels. Below SCS levels, this enables departments to improve pay parity across the civil service by adjusting allowances. In this case, he adds, the changes are being funded by replacing expensive contractors (see Truth to Power, p30) with permanent staff.

“That type of intelligent thinking about interdepartmental comparisons and how you structure pay needs to happen across all the professions,” says McNeil. “And it becomes particularly important with hubs, where you’ve got people from different departments sitting alongside each other doing similar jobs.”

This approach is harder with SCS jobs, he accepts – but here, the challenges are



### “The current SCS arrangements encourage people to move too rapidly”

also different. “The problem is that the current arrangements encourage people to move too rapidly,” he argues. “We want to look at ways in which people can be recognised in pay terms for staying in one role and acquiring more skills.” This goal will feed into his response to the Senior Salaries Review Board, which has “been very good and challenging of us, saying: ‘What does the SCS of the future look like? What are you trying to hit in terms of your approach to pay?’”

These sensitive pay issues are, McNeil acknowledges, much more easily addressed within a functioning industrial relations framework – and he agrees the current arrangements aren’t up to scratch. His new Executive Director for Employee Relations, Mervyn Thomas, has been tasked with “building the architecture for really effective industrial relations, because somewhere along the

line we’ve lost that a bit – and with it, lost a really effective set of channels.”

The civil service collaborated effectively with the unions on pensions, he argues, recruiting them onto a Pension Scheme Advisory Board. “That’s working really well as a technical advisory group,” he says. “Imagine that happening on estates and locations; training; diversity and equality; pay and productivity. These are all conversations we should be having with union partners.”

It certainly helped in refashioning performance management, he adds: “We had really, really good conversations with the unions, and that’s made the product much better.”

Besides performance management, there’s one other topic that McNeil plainly feels truly passionate about: diversity. “There are lots of things I want to do whilst I’m privileged to be doing this role, but I will be very disappointed if we haven’t moved on two things by 2020,” he says. “One is to make a real dent in the representation of [minority] groups. And the other is being able to say that we are the UK’s most inclusive employer. I feel that accountability very strongly.”

The Civil Service Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, published in October, promises targets for the representation of ethnic minority and disabled staff within the SCS by 2020. Departmental goals, McNeil explains, will be published by next April and incorporated into permanent secretaries’ performance objectives.

To create the system change required for departments to hit those targets, a task force has been established – chaired by civil service Chief Executive John Manzoni, and supported by a dedicated team. “We’ve seen real traction on disability and workplace adjustment by taking that approach, and we’re going to be looking forensically at how we can support individuals into the SCS,” he says. “We want to demonstrate to the best ethnic minority talent in the UK that the civil service is the place to work.”

On this topic, McNeil’s passion is clear. And now that performance management has been reformed, he’s bringing the big guns to bear on the civil service’s rejuvenated diversity agenda. For a shift this complex and wide-ranging, ambitious diversity targets would present a tight deadline. But whatever goals are set, I, for one, wouldn’t bet against him crying “Victory!” on diversity in 2020.

Northern Ireland has been without a government for almost a year. But, while politicians try to clear a path back to power-sharing, the demands on public services don't go away. **Matt Foster** speaks to three FDA members who are senior officials in the Northern Ireland Civil Service about how they're keeping the show on the road.

# The show must go on

**N**ick Perry has led Northern Ireland's Department of Justice (DoJ) since it was set up in 2010 – so this experienced public servant has certainly been around the block. But, as the unprecedented political impasse at Stormont continues, the DoJ's Permanent Secretary tells *Public Service Magazine* that he's never

seen anything quite like it. "It's the first time, not only in the ten years or so since devolution, but really in my 36 years in the civil service, where we've been in a position of having no direct political authority."

For almost a year now, there has been no functioning executive in Northern Ireland. A bitter row over the handling of the region's controversial Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) scheme led to



a collapse in the power-sharing deal between the assembly's two largest parties – Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party – back in January 2017. Despite fresh elections to the Stormont Assembly in March, and an intensive round of talks aimed at finding common ground, that deadlock continues, while a major inquiry into the RHI scheme itself is now underway.

If that wasn't enough, the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) must also, in the absence of ministers, get to grips with the manifold complexities of preparing for the UK's exit from the European Union, a decision with major implications for the region – not least because of its geographical proximity to another EU member state.

As well as this hefty policy workload, the 23,000 officials in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) must keep the region's public services running as they await the return of ministers – to ensure, as far as possible, that it's business as usual in Northern Ireland.

Claire Archbold, the interim head of Northern Ireland's Departmental Solicitor's Office (DSO), tells *PSM* that managing what remains "a very young set of institutions" in the region means that adaptability in complex times is very much in the NICS's blood. "Everything is uncharted territory. I think one of the skills that the Northern Ireland Civil Service has, in my experience, is of being able to step up to the mark and continue to deliver – no matter what the circumstances."

With no ministers to direct them, senior officials across the NICS have to use their judgement to try to ensure continuity. The 2016-2021 Draft Programme for Government, drawn up before the administration fell, has given them a sense of direction, while Archbold and her colleagues have been on hand to help departments navigate some of the tricky constitutional questions thrown up by the current situation. "In a sense our role hasn't really changed, because we're there to provide legal counsel and support to departments as well as ministers," she explains.

Archbold acknowledges that the DSO has been "very, very busy" of late, not just with providing that ongoing support to departments, but also advising them on the legal implications of their Brexit-focused projects – "a really big, chunky



**“We decided to spend money we didn't have at the time – you have to take proportionate action”**  
**Peter May**

area of work” – and on their participation in the RHI inquiry. Meanwhile, she says, the day-to-day business of running a major public sector organisation has to continue. Indeed, on the day *PSM* spoke to Archbold, the Government Legal Service has just published an extensive review of legal grading to make sure the support DSO provides is “absolutely optimum for whenever the institutions are fully up and running again”.

In some areas, pressing ahead with the previous administration's priorities has proven relatively straightforward, as Peter May, the Permanent Secretary at the Department for Infrastructure (DfI), explains. “The starting point is that we look at what the outgoing executive and our outgoing minister had set us as policy directions, and we try to continue to implement those,” he tells *PSM*. May, whose organisation's broad remit covers everything from roads and rail to major planning applications, points out that the “long-term game” of managing big infrastructure projects has been to his department's advantage at a time of political uncertainty.

“Prior to the executive falling, they had identified four ‘flagship projects’ which our department was responsible for. The importance of having those flagship projects is that it guarantees multi-annual funding for the programme. We've been working on a succession of one-year budgets, which creates challenges. If we know that, in principle, come what may, these projects will be prioritised, that allows us to get on and go after them even in the absence of ministers. There's a clear direction of travel.”

DoJ's Nick Perry says his department has been fortunate in having had two previous ministers – David Ford and Claire Sugden – who set out clear justice policy priorities before leaving post. He also points out that large parts of the justice system benefit from a degree of separation from politics that allows them to continue to run without ministers. “One of the features of the justice system, as opposed to some other parts of government, is we have major constitutionally independent players which continue to perform their functions,” he says. “The chief constable, the Lord Chief Justice, the Director of Public Prosecutions, and to an extent, prisons and the Youth Justice Agency carry out their statutory functions in a normal way.”

In other areas, the ongoing lack of political direction has required officials to make some tough calls. At the end of August 2017, for example, the north-west of Northern Ireland was hit by major flooding, leaving bridges, roads and flood defences badly damaged as nearly two-thirds of the average rainfall for August poured down in just nine hours.

“We took the decision here that we needed to start to spend money that we didn't have at that time to try and repair those roads, bridges and flood defences, and then to put the necessary budget in place with support from colleagues in the Department of Finance thereafter,” he says DfI chief Peter May. “Normally resource allocation would be something that ministers would very much take the lead on in our system. But when you're faced with circumstances that are unforeseeable, I think you have to take proportionate action.”

May is clear that, had any minister been in post during the floods, they





**“Everything is uncharted territory - the NICS has the skills to step up to the mark”**  
**Claire Archbold**

“would have wanted to fix that damage immediately – that’s the basis on which I took our decisions here”. But he acknowledges that he and his colleagues are now in “constitutionally uncharted territory”, as they make careful judgements on the kind of matters that would usually be the job of elected politicians. “All of our careers are spent preparing and supporting ministers in their activity,” he says. “So to go without ministers for this period is really very strange indeed, and it gives rise to all sorts of challenges.”

Speaking in late 2017, Northern Ireland Secretary James Brokenshire paid tribute to the region’s civil servants, saying they had shown the “utmost professionalism in protecting and preserving public services throughout these difficult times”. The comments came as Brokenshire took the extraordinary step of setting a budget for the Northern Ireland from Westminster, although he was keen to stress it reflected the “departmental allocations and ambitions that have been recommended by the Northern Ireland Civil Service” and did

not represent a return to what would be politically-contentious direct rule from London.

“Without further action, by the end of November there are manifest risks that the NICS would simply begin to run out of resources,” Brokenshire told MPs. “That would mean no funding available for public services, with all of the negative impacts that would accompany such a cliff edge. No government could simply stand by and allow that to happen.”

The move to impose a budget means that those running Northern Ireland’s departments can now operate with a greater degree of financial certainty while political talks on resolving the impasse at Stormont continue. But in some cases, the political vacuum continues to have consequences: choosing who to appoint to run key public sector organisations, for example, is a job for elected politicians; without them, some key organisations are now being led by interims.

In the DoJ’s area of work, meanwhile, the Policing Board – which scrutinises the work of the Northern Ireland Police Service – requires political members to function and so cannot operate without the Executive and Assembly in place.

Permanent secretary Nick Perry is clear-eyed about the challenges that the continued suspension of power-sharing is likely to present to the NICS. “It’s not a matter of either willingness or competence. It is a matter of the authority and legitimacy to take strategic decisions and set budgets for next year and succeeding years. We’re reaching the point where those sorts of decisions are going to have to be made because people have to be able to plan.”

It remains to be seen how the crisis in Northern Ireland’s politics will unfold and, while the immediate focus is on restoring power-sharing, it’s clear that the return of an Executive will not magic away the major challenges facing the NICS in the years ahead – whether that’s Brexit, the RHI inquiry or the continued drive to deliver high quality public services in an era of tightly constrained resources.

But, whatever 2018 holds for the service, all three leaders we spoke to are clear that their organisations stand ready to serve. “The people I have the good fortune to work with are really committed and professional,” says Perry. “That’s the same both within this department, in the



**“We’re reaching the point where strategic decisions have to be made - people must be able to plan”**  
**Nick Perry**

wider civil service, and also in the police, the judiciary and elsewhere. And so it’s a pleasure to come to work; it’s a privilege to come to work, really.”

May tells PSM he has received “a lot of support from colleagues within the department, from my peers and from the head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, David Sterling”. He adds: “You know, there’s a strong public service spirit that sustains us all through this.” For Claire Archbold at the DSO, meanwhile, the last few months have provided a sharp reminder of just why, amid the intense focus on Northern Ireland’s “high politics”, her colleagues’ commitment to their work is so important for the region.

“A lot of us in Northern Ireland, when we were thinking about where we were going to have our career, had the choice to go to England or somewhere else,” she says. “And we didn’t – we stayed. For a lot of people, I think that’s because we wanted to be part of the solution in this place. For me, that’s what the business of government is about – continuing to deliver public services for people here.”

# Location, relocation and dislocation

The creation of government hubs will trigger the biggest civil service office moves since the Second World War - demanding skilful management, honest communications and serious investment in training and technology.

**Tommy Newell** reports.

**T**he government hubs programme is well and truly underway, with the first 'hub', located in Croydon, opening its doors this past summer.

The government's ambitious estates strategy aims to shrink the number of government buildings from 800 to 200 by 2023, consolidating the workforce into large shared buildings or campuses across the UK, which will eventually house multiple government departments.

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) is currently leading this process and will see its 170 regional offices consolidated into 13 hubs by 2021. At the time of writing, leases had already been signed for hubs in Croydon, Belfast, Edinburgh, Birmingham, Liverpool, Leeds, Bristol, Newcastle and Cardiff, with deals for offices in Glasgow, Nottingham, Manchester and Stratford in East London yet to be finalised.

Speaking candidly to the Public Accounts Committee on 6 November, HMRC Permanent Secretary Jon Thompson acknowledged that HMRC needs to do "further work with staff to recognise the benefits of the regionalisation programme".

For Jeremy Carr-Smith, founder of Help Moving Office, a specialist online



resource for office relocation planning, good communication is "absolutely critical" to any successful office move, no matter how large or small. He claims this is especially true for the government hubs programme, as "it's out there in the public domain".

Carr-Smith believes that people are often more concerned about "the prospect of change rather than the reality of change" and the best way to overcome this is to regularly communicate with consistent, positive messages. He also stresses that this should be done at every managerial level, not just from the top down.

This view is echoed by Kevin White, former Director General of HR in the Home Office, who says: "Any programme of change is going to be more effective if the people who are being changed feel they understand it and, even if they may not like it, feel like they have a chance to express their views."

According to White, managers often underestimate the extent to which they need to keep communicating with people on difficult change projects.

"I think it's quite helpful to have a reminder that regular and engaged communication is really important, particularly if you're dealing with uncertainties," he says. "It can't just be put down on paper and sent out; it

actually needs to be delivered through leaders talking, managers talking to staff, listening to staff and helping them to learn in a process of discussion rather than through reading bulletins.”

But White admits that there are sometimes limits to how open managers can be. “You can’t always give people the information they would like to have,” he explains. “Sometimes it’s known but can’t be presented for commercial or other sorts of reasons. Sometimes you don’t know... But that’s not a reason for not communicating as much as you can, and telling people what you don’t know, why you don’t know it and when you’re likely to know.”

One of the key benefits of the hubs programme to government is, of course, saving money. But civil service Chief Executive John Manzoni has emphasised that the programme must also provide benefits for workers, and allow the civil service to take advantage of advances in technology to allow greater collaboration and give civil servants “more power over how and when they work” – something he has described as an “integral part” of the strategy.

The Association of Revenue and Customs (ARC), the FDA section representing senior HMRC staff, has for the last two years been actively involved in supporting members who will be affected.

ARC President Vicky Johnson, who has some first-hand experience of the new Croydon hub, says: “The whole thrust of the regional centres is getting people away from thinking they’ve got to have a desk to do the work that they’re doing. You’re supposed to decide what your work is that day, and if you need a desk to do it you need to find one. If you don’t need a desk then you will be encouraged to use the other available facilities.

“There are collaboration zones, quiet zones where there are no phones, and rooms for telephone calls,” she adds. “In some places, these changes are not landing well but they are fundamental to the success of the relocation strategy.”

The HMRC programme is supposed to fit in with wider changes in civil service working practices that focus on ‘smart working’, and the new hubs are being built from the ground up with this in mind. According to Carr-Smith, “an office move is always a great trigger for management to incorporate

## HMRC’s proposed hubs



**“Office moves can be a great trigger for changing working practices, but have to be accompanied by training”**

change in working practices”, but this “has to be accompanied with a training programme”.

“The worst-case scenario is moving into an office where nothing works,” he says; but even when new systems are up and running, if staff aren’t comfortable with them, this can be “just as bad”. In order to fully reap the productivity gains of a new office environment, Carr-Smith advocates focused training programmes for even the smallest changes, such as how to use new audio-visual and phone equipment. This “induction process”, as Carr-Smith describes it, should start well before the move-in date to limit any further obstructions or delays to people’s day-to-day work.

Johnson agrees that open communication, and a focus on proactive support and training, is essential to putting people “at the heart” of a relocation strategy. However, the inevitable fall-out from any big programme is that some people will not be able to move to the new locations. HMRC’s office moves alone will affect 38,000 of its 58,600 staff, resulting in 5,000 redundancies, and Johnson is concerned that the department has lost thousands of years of experience in just one round of office closures.

ARC has worked tirelessly to win some concessions to ensure members get the support they need to relocate – such as more freedom to work from home where possible and changes to the method of calculating Daily Travel Assistance (DTA). However, this allowance is taxable and will only last for three years for most staff. If the current approach to civil service pay progression doesn’t change, Johnson is concerned people simply “won’t be able to afford” the commute when the assistance ends.

If not properly managed, the escalation of commuting costs and times could store up retention issues in the future, but Kevin White believes that hubs can also work to unlock greater opportunities for career progression in the longer term.

“One of the things that’s best for people in the hubs is that... the more you bring together organisations, and the more senior roles, regional roles and local roles in organisations together, the more you create a viable career structure for people who want to make progress but can’t afford to move,” he argues.

But White suggests this will be much harder to achieve without increased transparency and common terms and conditions across departments.

“You need to look at each of these hubs as a common employment area and do what you ought to be doing in order to give people opportunities to move around it,” he says. “One of the things that will make that easier to manage is reducing differences in terms and conditions and pay... the people leading these hubs should take whatever opportunities they can to reduce the divergence.”

Tommy Newell is FDA Communications Officer and a staff writer for PSM.





# WHITEHALL'S STRESS TEST

“Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold”. Many readers will be familiar with this line from W B Yeats’s poem *Second Coming*, which hints at possible anarchy followed by seismic change in the world. In this era of Donald Trump, tension with North Korea and uncertainty over what a post-Brexit UK will be like, it can feel as though things really are falling apart. From a Whitehall perspective, there are few signs of an end to austerity, and the political situation is unstable. So how are our public institutions faring and – more importantly – how are our public servants holding up under the strain?

Frontline public services in the UK are creaking under the strain of increasing demand and fewer resources – a situation archly depicted by the ‘More of Less’ strategy imposed on hapless managers in the BBC mockumentary *W1A*. There are daily media reports of prison staff, police officers, firefighters and paramedics finding that they cannot cope with the pressures and expectations of the job. It is easy to see

**Civil servants are under more pressure than ever before, and stresses and strains at home can make thing worse. Jo Clift urges managers to pay attention to their own mental health – and that of their teams.**

why a doctor or nurse might be suffering from work-related stress, and it is surely a sign of progress that firefighters and NHS staff feel they can talk about the difficulties they face – but what about the people who work directly for the government?

My observation is that Whitehall civil servants are under increasing strain – partly because of the challenges of the job, but also because many civil servants find it hard to be open about the pressures they are experiencing, especially if those pressures originate at home.

My professional life was interrupted by an injury followed by illness, and part of the stress of the situation came from the responsibility I felt to return to work as soon as possible. One evening on the train home from work I had found myself texting a work colleague with blood-stained fingers. The text read: ‘I don’t think I will be able to make the meeting with the SpAd tomorrow... will keep you posted’. The blood was from a head injury I had just sustained; I was still shaking and feeling faint from being knocked over by a cyclist whilst crossing the road near St Paul’s, but had somehow managed to get myself via taxi to Liverpool Street station. Once I reached Walthamstow, my husband took me to A&E, where the staff were shocked that I had been using public transport in my condition.

I didn’t make the meeting the following day; in fact, it was a year before I was fully recovered and back at work full-time. I was suffering from post-concussion syndrome, which causes debilitating fatigue and a lack of mental energy. After four months, I started working a few hours a week, and built up my hours gradually.

I found my own journey back to health and work tough because I sometimes felt I had lost my confidence. The experience made me more aware of how closely our emotional wellbeing at work and at home are intertwined. As I shared my story with others, I started to see how many colleagues were balancing difficult challenges at home and at work. Of course, this is not news for any parent. But just within my own team I had people who were caring for parents with long-term illnesses, parents of children with special needs, people who had been bereaved, and colleagues going through difficult divorces. Many of us like to think of ourselves as resilient, but dealing with continuous pressure at home and at work can be intolerable.

Since the EU referendum, many departments have seen a significant increase in workload. I hear Whitehall leaders expressing concern about the enormous strain that they and their teams are under. I know civil service managers who feel close to breaking point because it is impossible to manage the workload within the timescales and expectations set by ministers.

A recent survey by MIND found that 15% of public sector workers said their mental health was poor, compared with 9% in the private sector. And in a worrying trend towards presenteeism, Civil Service World has reported that civil servants who were unwell were tending to take holiday rather than sick leave, or just carrying on working regardless.

Does the culture in Whitehall allow individuals to get support when they feel they cannot cope? Are managers just paying lip service to the problem when, in reality, most people still feel they need to put on a brave face and show willing, rather than putting their own health first?

In the last year, more and more people in the public eye have been willing to be open about their own mental health problems. One of the first within Westminster was the deputy editor of the Spectator, Isabel Hardman, who chose to share her struggle to recover her mental health, rather than hide away.

This is all to the good. Whitehall leaders from the Cabinet Secretary downwards have been encouraging all civil servants – particularly those in leadership positions – to discuss stress, pressure and mental health issues.

## Jo Clift's tips for staying resilient and coping with workplace pressures

### 1) Being under pressure is the 'new normal'.

Tackle stress head on, rather than pretending you can cope.

### 2) Everyone has their own stress barometer.

Knowing where your 'tipping point' will help you to choose roles that suit you and in which you can be most productive.

### 3) You are not alone.

Sharing what you are dealing with is a fantastic way to help you cope and creates a support network too.

### 4) Be up front with your teams and managers.

It will give your team permission to be up front with you, and your manager and employer the information they need to meet their duty of care towards you.

### 5) Beware of diversionary activities.

Food, alcohol, social media, TV or even sleep may blot things out for a few weeks or months, but won't help you tackle the underlying challenges.

### 6) Talk to your GP.

My GP was fantastically supportive and made a big difference, particularly when I was panicking about not recovering fast enough.

### 7) Develop your own resilience toolkit.

Unique to each person, these generally include you have a balance between work and home life, time for things you enjoy, and tools for de-stressing.

**Read more advice from Jo Clift at [www.jocliffconsulting.com](http://www.jocliffconsulting.com)**

Again, this is a welcome development, although it seems to have been prompted by the rather selfish concern that if staff are not supported, they are likely to burn out or leave, making it even harder to deliver Brexit and the other business of government.

However, I have also heard from civil servants that they are spending so much time on engagement activities – including 'wellbeing' responsibilities – that their ability to do their 'day job' is suffering. It is important that the wellbeing agenda does not become yet another pressure that puts civil servants under even more strain.

We cannot take our own mental health, or that of our colleagues, for granted. No one would expect us to come to work with a broken back; we would be expected to 'convalesce' (a word, incidentally, that seems to be disappearing from our vocabulary). We all know that mental health is the poor relation within NHS, but we are often guilty of treating it as a second-order issue in the office too.

How many of your team would feel that they could spontaneously work from home for a day, and be honest that they

were doing it for emotional or mental health reasons?

How many of your team have taken annual leave when they were feeling unwell, or had a medical appointment they felt they couldn't be open about? As a manager, are you open with your team about the pressures that you are facing yourself, and are you sharing your strategies for dealing with them?

If the answer to any of those questions is 'no' or 'don't know', then you may be finding it hard to negotiate the pressures of the office yourself, and you will inevitably struggle to look after others. It may be that this reflects the culture in the wider department that you work in.

So to return to Yeats, can the centre hold? Or will things fall apart? It seems to me that the truth lies somewhere in the middle. Government will continue to function, and probably function pretty well. But the question is how much individual civil servants will have suffered in the process.

Jo Clift is a former senior civil servant who now works as an independent consultant and trainer in personal resilience.

# Books

## Our look at the latest books on work, politics and public service

### Adults in the room: my battle with Europe's deep establishment

By Yanis Varoufakis

The Bodley Head, 485pp, £20



Until Brexit, the biggest single shock experienced by the EU was the Greek financial crisis, and at its heart lay fraught, time-pressed negotiations between EU officials and a member state. You'd have thought the UK might have lessons to learn from the Greek experience.

Yet nobody here makes much noise about it – and this book by Yanis Varoufakis, Greece's former finance minister, reveals why. For in his story of how the EU killed Greece to save itself, the union has an ugly look – and its negotiating partner an even uglier fate.

An academic economist, Varoufakis began challenging the handling of Greece's financial crisis in 2010. By dispensing bail-out cash tied to austerity policies, the 'troika' – the European Commission, European Central Bank and IMF – were treating the Greek problem as a liquidity issue. But Varoufakis saw the state as bankrupt: with GDP down by nearly 20%, it simply couldn't pay its way. In his view, imposing tax rises and spending cuts was rendering its swelling debts ever more insoluble, and locking its people into a "Dickensian debtors' prison".

The troika, Varoufakis argues, was also being fundamentally dishonest about its goals. German and French banks had lent heavily to southern Europe and faced huge losses, but the ECB was barred from buying up bad debts. So, instead it gave Greece a €110bn bail-out, then channelled the money straight back to the banks. The troika didn't actually want their loans repaid; their only goal was to prevent a Greek default or restructuring



**In this story about how the EU killed Greece to save itself, the union has an ugly look – and Greece an even uglier fate**

that could have triggered capital flight from the other southern economies – threatening German and French banks and, ultimately, the euro itself.

When Varoufakis became finance minister in the radical Syriza government in January 2015, he tried to convince the troika that Greece would prefer a painful exit from the Eurozone to endless austerity within it; if they believed that, he hoped, they'd accept his plan for debt restructuring, economic stimulus and a clampdown on tax evasion. As leverage, he threatened a "haircut" on ECB bonds and, to make his position credible, made preparations for a new drachma. But the troika, wholly focused on preventing contagion, played hardball.

While undermining Varoufakis within the finance ministry, the troika began gradually closing down Greece's banks. Varoufakis recounts in detail how his plan was slowly derailed and eventually killed when Greek PM Alexis Tsipras was

drawn into direct but dead-end talks with Angela Merkel, culminating in a new bail-out and yet more austerity. Today, Greek national debt is over 180% of GDP and unemployment 22%, whilst household disposable income and public spending continue to fall.

This is not a comfortable read for EU fans. But Greece's brutal treatment illustrates what happens when a member state threatens a central pillar of the EU project – and the Single Market is more central even than the euro. The EU's leaders will sacrifice anything – bail-out cash, the Greeks or UK trade – to preserve the EU's integrity.

Negotiating with the EU on issues that threaten its integrity from a position of weakness is, in Varoufakis's experience, not a good plan. And he's clear that the one thing more difficult than securing EU reform from the inside, is getting a good deal from the outside. In the end, he concludes, a "policy of constructive disobedience within the EU, of being both in and against this illiberal and anti-democratic Europe, is the only practical alternative to the dystopia unfolding as Europe disintegrates."

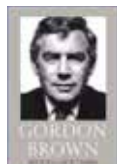
Reviewed by Matt Ross



## My Life, Our Times

by Gordon Brown

The Bodley Head, 500pp, £25



As Churchill said of Russia, Gordon Brown became “a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma”: a cerebral politician obsessed with political calculation

and media manipulation; a big ideas man who got bogged down in minutiae and squabbling; someone who fought ferociously for so long to get the top job, but then didn’t seem to know what he wanted to do with it. Although admirable in many ways, these memoirs don’t provide the key to the conundrum.

As you’d expect, Brown is very good on the Treasury, and his explanations of how he rolled back the obsessive neo-liberalism of the Thatcher/Major years and intervened decisively to rescue the British economy during the banking crisis – avoiding “a second Great Depression”, as he puts it – are

lucid, compelling and surprisingly easy to follow. And despite insisting that he doesn’t do “touchy-freely” stuff, Brown writes very movingly about the death of his 10-day-old daughter Jennifer in 2002, describing how, among other things, he couldn’t listen to music for a year afterwards.

But he never really tackles the elephant-shaped question in the room: frankly, why did he screw up? The answer, if there is one, falls out of the pages inadvertently – Brown’s lack of self-awareness and his reluctance to face up to personal and political failures.

Just one example. Brown complains

**“Brown fought so ferociously to get the top job, but then didn’t seem to know what to do with it”**

repeatedly about the 24/7 news cycle forcing politicians to work at a speed that “almost defies belief”. He has a point, but he knew all about that when he took the job. So why did he still choose to work in an open-plan office surrounded by TV screens and Twittering aides, desperately trying to micromanage events? Tellingly, David Cameron saw no need to replicate Brown’s frenetic working arrangements.

Brown writes powerfully about how, when he came into politics, the big issue was managing Britain’s decline, while now it’s Britain’s survival. That urgency and clarity of thinking sets him apart from those who have carelessly tossed much of his legacy away. Brown’s tragedy is that he had all the right ideas, but just ended up in the wrong job.

Reviewed by Craig Ryan

## Off the shelf Other recent reads

### When they go low, we go high: speeches that shaped the world - and why we need them by Philip Collins

Harper Collins, 432pp, £16.99



In this dissection of “25 of the most notable speeches in history”, Philip Collins makes a compelling argument that “rhetoric and democracy run together”. After all, from

Pericles’s Funeral Oration to Barack Obama’s second-term victory address, the speech has been the one constant in politics over the last 2,500 years.

Collins argues that speeches can be a force for good and a tool for progress, as well as dangerous in the hands of demagogic leaders like Hitler. Collins may inevitably fall short of his ambition to restore to politics the “respect, veneration and hope first expressed by Pericles”, but drawing on his experience as Tony Blair’s speech writer, he offers an interesting insight into how the persistent power of language has shaped the history of democracy.

### Exceeding My Brief: Memoirs of a Disobedient Civil Servant by Barbara Hosking

Biteback, 306pp, £25



Civil servants tend to keep their cards close to their chests in their memoirs – but not 91-year-old Barbara Hosking. As she charts a career that took

her to top PR jobs in the heart of Harold Wilson and Ted Heath’s Downing Street, Hosking’s is a warm, witty voice offering a “worm’s eye view” of a crucial time in Britain’s history, warts and all. Whether she’s covering up Heath’s face on a foreign trip with a hat that’s too big, recalling the “uproar among the mandarins” when *The Times* had the audacity to appoint a dedicated Whitehall correspondent, or accidentally booking a bunch of thirsty lobby journalists into a temperance hotel, these memoirs give the sense of a life well-lived and packed full of surprises.

### Betting the House: The Inside Story of the 2017 Election by Tim Ross and Tom McTague

Biteback, 457pp, £14.99



In this meticulously-researched and pacy book, political journalists Tim Ross and Tom McTague chart how Theresa May went from being “every bit as politically invincible as the Iron Lady” to losing her Parliamentary majority in such spectacular fashion. With insider accounts from key figures such as Tory strategist Lynton Crosby, former May adviser Nick Timothy and Labour’s election coordinator Ian Lavery, the pair deftly avoid being hoodwinked amid the various scores still being settled. Instead, they offer an even-handed look at how the election came about, how it unfolded, and what the result now means for a country grappling with Brexit.

Reviews by Matt Foster and Tommy Newell.

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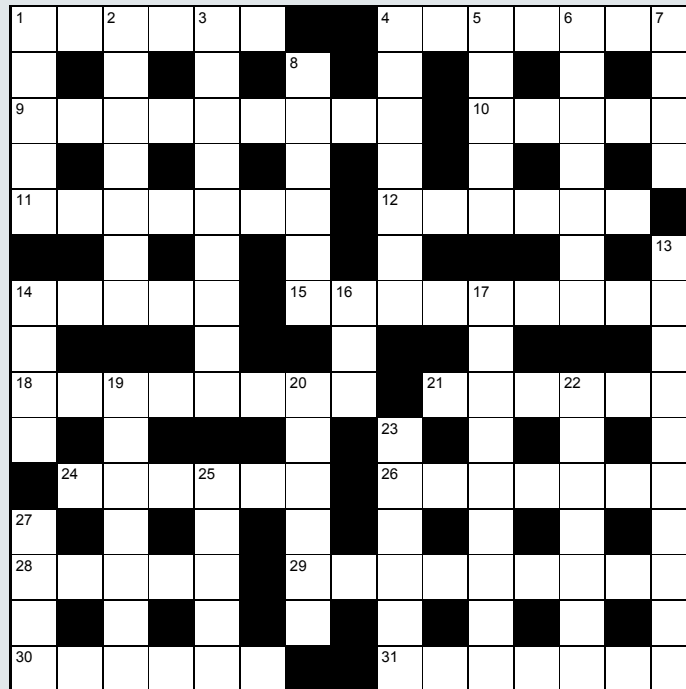
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# Crossword

## Tinmen? by Schadenfreude

Answers to nine clues lacking definitions are members of an unbroken sequence of twelve.

Solvers must highlight three normally clued entries which are anagrams of the other three.



### ACROSS

- 1 Liberal in the morning not dressed (6)
- 4 African-American performer roughly sober and acceptable (7)
- 9 Alto follows contralto in erratic baroque musical composition (9)
- 10 Junior associate member consuming ordinary large drink (5)
- 11 Acting goddess not so much like Peter Pan? (7)
- 12 Porter taking part in country dance (6)
- 14 Hard border guard (5)
- 15 He disregards information about cannibal (9)
- 18 Unlicensed pilot maybe out of hospital overwhelmed by wife's angry outbursts (8)
- 21 Scattered newts swimming across river (6)
- 24 King nursed by Franciscan nun (6)
- 26 Wild sheep shown in high definition (7)
- 28 Knight east of hilltop (5)
- 29 Bones encountered on a sailor's island (9)
- 30 Black bear runs up the creek (6)
- 31 Fattening land girl doesn't finish working (7)

### DOWN

- 1 The Spanish artist capturing very immature creature (5)

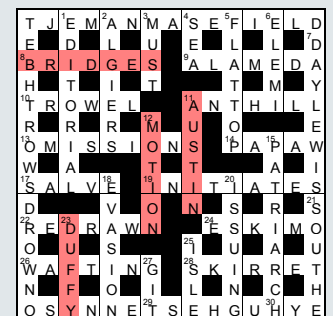
- 2 Twin crystal and old diamonds (7)
- 3 Impulse transmitter never out of order on Virginia's mobile (9, 2 words)
- 4 Reckless driver had moneyless groom worried (7, two words)
- 5 Horse from the south eating Japanese millet (5)
- 6 Old wind instrument Elizabeth found in shed (7)
- 7 Family mother upset in Nebraska (4)
- 8 Lecturer was out getting drunk (6)
- 13 Queen wearing ornate gown preparing an illegal act (10)
- 14 Doctor Who and the end of time (4)
- 16 Nurse initially scores at least twelve points (3)
- 17 He does rough calculations at times affected by operational research (9)
- 19 Former PM almost blunt in favour of keeping united (7)
- 20 French city borders blocked by high explosive (6)
- 22 Nancy's frivolous pleasure trip covered by editor missing second half (7)
- 23 Charlie shot about fifty deer (6)
- 25 Storm restricting navy order (5)
- 27 Sailor with ego meets baron once a month in Tel Aviv (4)

## Win and learn!

There will be a prize of a free FDA Learn/Keyskills course or workshop, worth around £150, for the first correct entry drawn after the closing date. Find out more about the courses on offer at: [www.fda.org.uk/professionaldevelopment/FDA\\_Workshops.aspx](http://www.fda.org.uk/professionaldevelopment/FDA_Workshops.aspx) or [www.wearekeystone.org.uk/keyskills-courses](http://www.wearekeystone.org.uk/keyskills-courses). Solution in next issue.

## Solution and winner

### Post Holders by Schadenfreude



The perimeter and highlighted entries are the names of the poets laureates from Southey to Duffy.

**Winner:** Debra Carter from the Welsh Government.

### How to enter

Crossword entries should be sent by Friday 23 February 2018 to: Public Service Magazine crossword, FDA, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London SE1 7NQ or by email (with 'PSM crossword' as the subject) to [psm@fda.org.uk](mailto:psm@fda.org.uk). Please provide an email address so we can tell the winner how to claim their prize.



# Truth to Power

## Our digital transformation is heading for the rocks

"I joined GDS to help transform government's approach to service design. But our approach was flawed – and now Brexit threatens to undo all our work."



I've always been motivated by working in public service and for the benefit of others, and some years ago I joined the Government Digital Service (GDS). I'm a technologist with a background in programming and engineering digital services, and I like the principles behind GDS's work: it's on a mission to help departments build broad-based project teams, rethink the planning and management of services, and improve procurement and delivery.

I advise departments on how to understand and address the challenges they're facing. Our leverage is rooted in the Treasury's 'spend controls': departments need our sign-off to commit cash to digital projects, and we ensure they're following GDS standards and guidelines.

This creates an opportunity to effect positive change. But in reality, spend controls form a single gateway shortly before the department wants to start spending – so their plans are well advanced and there's little time to unpick them. What's more, GDS has withdrawn its own teams from departments, so most lack the resources or skills – particularly service design and technical knowledge – to run delivery in accordance with GDS principles.

The result has been lots of friction between GDS and departments. GDS wants everything to change now, and we're holding people up against an ideal. But we're doing that through hurdles rather than support: we mark departments' homework without helping them to get a better grade. In reality, departments simply cannot meet our goals in the time available.

Transformation is hard. To really help departments, we'd need lots of people providing hands-on support, and a more collaborative approach – helping them to build capability, rather than holding a

hoop for them to jump through on individual projects.

Yet progress also demands more commitment from departments. We created a 'transformation support' team to help departments strengthen essential skills and adopt new approaches. But only a few asked for help, and some requests appeared to be essentially for presentational purposes. It seems that many departments and agencies won't address the need to change unless they're forced to – but forcing them creates more heat than light: it's Catch 22.

**GDS has spent seven years improving service design and IT procurement across government, and now we're going to stand back as that progress is undone**

Meanwhile, GDS itself has been drifting. Lots of good people have left, and our new leaders don't have the experience or drive to pursue some of GDS's goals. And some GDS interventions have had very mixed results: our contractor frameworks, for example, have made it easier to bring in skills but weakened our ability to hire permanent staff.

And now we've hit Brexit, which demands a vast amount of transformation to tight deadlines. As yet, we're struggling to define the basics of those changes. In discussions with departments, it sometimes seems that ministers are asking for changes simply to show that we're 'taking back control'.

For us, Brexit creates two big problems: departments don't have the time or resources to deliver essential projects within GDS guidelines, and retaining our spend controls gateway would create impossible bottlenecks. So GDS is developing plans to pull the teeth of spend controls, replacing them with audits of

departments' own project governance. In exchange, departments will have to apply GDS principles in all their digital work, rather than just the big projects.

Softening spend controls will remove one of the challenges facing departments as they build the systems demanded by Brexit. But if you look closely at the new process, it merely pays lip service to the pursuit of GDS principles – in reality it's a straightforward retreat.

The truth is that departments don't have the skills or capacity to address Brexit-related digital projects in the ways we've been trying to promote. Delivering a few flagship GDS-compliant services has taken several years: how could department run a huge swathe of massive projects, simultaneously and to short deadlines, whilst observing GDS standards? They're going to have to buy these solutions from the major IT firms, and even that will require lots of support from consultancies.

GDS has spent seven years improving service design and IT procurement across government, and now we're going to stand back as that progress is undone. For departments, it'll be all hands on deck to deliver projects in any way they can, holding them together with sticky tape and string. And in five years, GDS or its successor will have to address a whole new set of problems that have become woven into the fabric of government.

GDS has tried hard to transform government's approach to service design. But I can't help thinking that we've reached the end of the road – at least for now.

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