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MANAGERS AND
PROFESSIONALS



public service magazine

AUTUMN 2017

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In this issue

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Welcome

Craig Ryan, Editor



At the root of the many problems public servants face – underfunding, pay restraint, staff shortages, overstretch – is one fundamental question. Do ministers value public service at all?

Do they value expert, independent advice and people who work for no other purpose than to benefit the community as a whole? And do they see the limitations on what private companies, with their short-term focus on shareholder value, can do?

As Matt Foster reports on page 19, the Grenfell Towers tragedy is a stark reminder of what can happen when the state loses the capacity to protect its most vulnerable citizens. If ministers do value public service (and we're heading for a very dark place if they don't) they need to put aside outdated ideological prejudices and start rebuilding the capacity of the state. And that begins with fair rewards and reasonable workloads for all public servants. If public service is worth doing, it's worth doing well.

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News

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Redundancy

Compensation Scheme changes “a backwards step”

New Cabinet Office proposals for changes to the Civil Service Compensation Scheme (CSCS) are a “major backwards step” which will remove hard-won protections negotiated by unions last year, the FDA says.

The Cabinet Office published a consultation paper in September on fresh changes to the scheme – which determines redundancy pay and terms for all civil servants – after a legal challenge led by the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) resulted in the 2016 scheme being overturned in the High Court.

Although highly critical of the Government’s decision to revisit the Compensation Scheme in 2016, the FDA and seven other unions had secured a range of concessions from the Cabinet Office on its original proposals. FDA

members voted 89% in favour of accepting the final offer in a ballot late last year.

Rather than appeal against the High Court decision, the Cabinet Office is now seeking to reintroduce its original proposals, including capping voluntary exit and voluntary redundancy payments at 15 months’ salary, rather than the 18 months’ agreed last year. The consultation proposals also align compensation for exit on efficiency grounds to compulsory redundancy terms, meaning these payments are capped at nine months’ salary with no early access to pension.

The Cabinet Office has meanwhile made clear that the costs of delay to current exit schemes – as well as the costs of recalculation – will have to be found from existing departmental

budgets.

“This is a major backwards step. This new consultation proposes worse terms than those negotiated by the FDA and seven other unions last year, and removes a series of hard-won protections,” said FDA Assistant General Secretary Naomi Cooke.

“The FDA chose to take part in the 2016 negotiations to avoid the imposition of more stringent terms by the Government, securing a series of concessions in the final round of negotiations which have all now been dropped from these latest proposals.

“We are adamant that the new CSCS should be no worse than the reformed scheme which was agreed in good faith and was backed by 89% of our members in a ballot last year. We will be making robust representations to the Cabinet Office to honour the 2016 agreement.”

The FDA will keep members kept up-to-date with developments on the CSCS by email. If you are not receiving these updates, let us know by emailing info@fda.org.uk.

Patel’s allies “peddling myths” on civil service pay, says FDA

The FDA has accused allies of International Development Secretary Priti Patel of “peddling myths” on civil service pay after a report in the *Daily Telegraph* claimed she believed salaries were “too high” and needed to be “restrained”.

The *Telegraph* said “sources close to” Patel had described senior civil service salaries as “crazy” and claimed they were “way out of line with public opinion”.

FDA General Secretary Dave Penman condemned allies of Patel for taking the “easy option of briefing against those who can’t answer back” and defended members who, due to their “sense of public duty”, will



continue to do their best to serve the public despite such attacks.

Penman said: “This latest misrepresentation of public sector pay from ‘sources close to’ the International

Development Secretary demonstrates a blatant disregard for the Government’s own research.

“The source peddles tired myths about public sector perks and claims that pay is ‘out of step with many other comparable external roles’ – despite the Government’s figures showing that Directors General earn 62% less than their private sector counterparts.”

The FDA General Secretary said he took particular exception to the “dismissive” claim that civil servants would accept pay cuts because they are not going to “walk into better paid jobs in the real world”.

“The Government’s own analysis shows that many of them are now choosing to do just that,” Penman added. “More than half of all Senior Civil Servants who quit last year cited pay as a significant reason for their exit.”



Reform

Maude “undermining legacy” with Whitehall attacks

The FDA has hit back at renewed attacks on the civil service by former Cabinet Office Minister Lord Maude, warning his “disingenuous” remarks risked undermining his legacy as a reformer.

In a Westminster speech, the Conservative peer – who left government in 2015 after five years at the Cabinet Office – accused senior civil servants of frequently misleading ministers, and argued that “too often promotions are made on the basis of personal patronage and time-serving rather than on merit and talent” – a practice he dubbed “turkey farming”.

He also claimed that reforms introduced on his watch – including the launch of the Government Digital Service – were now being pared back by senior officials, who remained resistant to change.

Responding to Lord Maude’s speech, FDA General Secretary Dave Penman pointed out that “reform in the civil service started long before Lord Maude arrived at the Cabinet Office and has continued after his departure”.

He added: “Lord Maude describes a civil service that I, civil servants, and I’m sure many ministers, will simply not

recognise. The civil service, like all large organisations, has institutional failings and frustrating bureaucracies, but to paint a picture of these as commonplace and routine is disingenuous, and perhaps reflects more on Lord Maude’s own fraught relationship with individuals.

“The civil service continues to deliver more for less and is blessed with a talented and committed cadre of public servants,” Penman explained. “It’s those civil servants who actually delivered the £50bn of efficiencies Lord Maude is keen to talk about – all while maintaining the quality of vital public services.

Penman added: “As a minister with a strong reputation for reform, Lord Maude’s increasingly personal attacks on the senior civil service only serve to undermine his legacy and cannot be excused by adding in a throwaway caveat about not attacking individuals.”

“The civil service continues to deliver more for less and is blessed with a talented and committed cadre of public servants”

Dave Penman

The cutting list

FDA in the media

July

The FDA wrote to three cabinet ministers who had expressed sympathy with the idea of ending the public sector pay cap, challenging them to take immediate action to raise the pay of staff in their own departments.

Put your money where your mouth is on public sector pay, union tells ministers

MAIL ONLINE

Johnson and Gove must give more than ‘warm words’ to Whitehall staff needing a pay rise, say senior civil servants

THE INDEPENDENT

Jeremy Corbyn says government ‘floundering’ on pay cap

BBC NEWS

FDA union urges ministers to ‘put money where their mouth is’ to end Whitehall pay cap

CIVIL SERVICE WORLD

The FDA’s response to the Senior Salaries Review Body’s latest report was covered by a broad range of outlets, with Assistant General Secretary Naomi Cooke saying reform of SCS pay “needs to be fully funded and it needs to happen soon”.

Tory government’s own pay experts blast 1% cap and warn it’s becoming difficult to do their job

THE MIRROR

Public sector pay: Judges and top civil servants get 1% rise

BBC NEWS

Public sector pay cap: Government attacked by its own experts over 1% limit

THE INDEPENDENT

Public sector pay cap near breaking point, ministers are warned

THE TIMES

Public sector pay: Senior civil servants and judges get below-inflation one per cent rise

THE EXPRESS



Tribunal fees scrapped in landmark court ruling

The Government has been forced to scrap employment tribunal fees following a landmark legal victory for Unison.

The fees, introduced by the coalition Government in 2013, meant that workers who had been treated unfairly or illegally were forced to pay up to £1,200 to take their employers to court.

Unison took the case to the Supreme Court, with lawyers arguing that the fees had been a huge expense for many low-paid employees and prevented people from gaining justice in the workplace – as evidenced by the 79% drop in cases being brought forward after the fees were introduced.

The UK's highest court ruled in favour of the union, stating that the fees were "inconsistent with access to justice" and in conflict with the Equality Act 2010 because they disproportionately affected women.

As a result of the victory, the Government is set to refund more than £27m to claimants in what Unison General Secretary Dave Prentis has described as "a major victory for employees everywhere".

Commenting on the ruling, FDA General Secretary Dave Penman said: "I'd like to congratulate Unison for leading on this issue and ultimately winning this important victory for workers across the country.

"When the fees were introduced, the FDA took the decision to pay all tribunal costs on behalf of members, but not everybody has access to this kind of support.

"Unison's hard work in pursuing this issue means many more people can now get access to the justice they deserve."

Parliament

MPs to probe Whitehall's Brexit capability

A cross-party group of MPs has relaunched its wide-ranging inquiry into the civil service, promising to focus heavily on Whitehall's preparations for Brexit.

The Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) was forced to close its previous inquiry into the effectiveness of the civil service – launched in the last parliament – after Prime Minister Theresa May called a snap election.

But an interim report published just before the election said that the extra work required to manage Britain's exit from the European Union meant it was "all the more important that the civil service is clear about its mission and role", and called for an in-depth review of the relationship between ministers and officials.

The committee also commissioned a separate report by Professor Andrew Kakabadse of Henley Business School, who warned ministers against overloading departments. "Too many projects, programmes of activity, [and] policy delivery commitments are being pursued simultaneously with little chance of successful fruition," Kakabadse said.

Professor Kakabadse also urged politicians to halt "public criticism of civil servants", arguing that the practice had damaged the "morale, motivation, performance, contribution and quality of advice" given by officials.

With select committees now back up and running following the election, a fresh inquiry has been opened by PACAC.

The committee is promising to draw on "extensive interviews with serving and former ministers, special advisers and civil servants" and says it will look specifically at the civil service's "capability and capacity to cope with leaving the EU".

Committee chairman Bernard Jenkin said: "We can be very proud of Whitehall as a whole, and of our civil and diplomatic services, but the challenges of Brexit are helping to expose where understandings are weak and where



"The challenges of Brexit are helping to expose where understandings are weak and relationships are strained"

Bernard Jenkin

relationships are strained.

"A common purpose, trust and understanding, as well as technical expertise and experience, are so crucial for the civil service to perform efficiently and effectively. Both the capability of the civil service as a whole, and the individual relationships between ministers and officials, will impact on this effectiveness and the ability of the civil service to meet its present and future challenges," Jenkin added.

Other key questions the committee is set to consider include whether civil servants are being given the right skills and development opportunities, and whether a new "National School for Public Service" should be set up to provide more focused training for staff.

For further details visit: bit.ly/psm17-pacac. The deadline for submitting evidence to the inquiry is Friday 1 December 2017.

Senior pay

Review body calls for a
“full overhaul” of SCS pay

“It’s little wonder that more than half those leaving the SCS last year blamed pay for their exit”

Naomi Cooke

The Government has agreed to conduct a formal review of Senior Civil Service (SCS) pay, after the Senior Salary Review Body (SSRB) called for a “full overhaul” of the current system.

The SSRB’s 2017 report recommended the maximum 1% rise for the SCS but warned that the current system has “serious flaws”.

While acknowledging that there was “no evidence of widespread recruitment and retention problems” the review body stressed this “should not be grounds for complacency” as there was a risk that the situation could “deteriorate quickly”.

The report also warned that conversations with senior civil servants had highlighted a “widespread and very deep lack of confidence in the pay system”, and raised concerns that this could demotivate staff and reduce SCS effectiveness.

The FDA’s own survey results, submitted to the SSRB, reflected this widespread dissatisfaction: 92% of SCS members said they weren’t satisfied with current pay arrangements and only 5.6% believed the current reward framework is fit for purpose.

The report criticised the 1% pay cap, saying it made it difficult for the SSRB to “operate effectively”. The review body said its proposal for a formal review of the pay system was its “most important recommendation for the SCS this year” as it believed it “can add more value through advising on a full overhaul of

the current system rather than tinkering with the annual distribution of a largely delegated 1% of the pay bill”.

FDA Assistant General Secretary Naomi Cooke welcomed the Government’s “belated acceptance” of the need to review SCS pay but said it should be “abundantly clear” that this could not be achieved within a “1% straightjacket”.

Government figures show that deputy directors in the civil service earn 46% less than their private sector counterparts – a figure which rises to a staggering 71% at director level. Cooke said it was “little wonder” that more than half of those leaving the Senior Civil Service last year blamed pay for their exit.

She explained: “Our members have delivered billions of pounds of savings over the past seven years and now face the most complicated political challenge since the Second World War in the form of Brexit. Yet they’ve been rewarded with rapidly escalating pension costs, ever-greater workloads, and ministerial pressure to deliver with the smallest workforce since 1939.”

Cooke added: “If ministers really want the ‘brightest and best’ staff for the challenges ahead, they must tackle fundamental issues with Senior Civil Service pay. They could start by ditching the 1% cap, ending the divisive practice of paying internal promotes less than the advertised salary, and properly engaging with staff at a time when their expertise will be needed more than ever.”

The cutting list

FDA in
the media

August

The FDA hit back amid briefings from allies of International Development Secretary Priti Patel about pay levels in the Senior Civil Service.

FDA accuses Priti Patel’s allies of ‘peddling myths’ on civil service pay

CIVIL SERVICE WORLD

FDA challenges “too high” civil service pay allegations

PUBLIC FINANCE

September

The FDA renewed its call for an end to the public sector pay cap and urged the start of meaningful dialogue on the future of civil service pay, amid reports that ministers were considering scrapping the policy.

Public sector pay cap: May ‘recognises sacrifices of workers’

THE GUARDIAN

Plan to end pay cap must apply across entire civil service, Whitehall unions tell May

CIVIL SERVICE WORLD

‘Concrete action’ better than unnamed promises over public sector pay lift

PUBLIC SECTOR EXECUTIVE

FDA General Secretary Dave Penman spoke to HuffPost UK’s politics team about the leaking of sensitive government information, explaining that while civil servants often get the blame, the majority of leaks come from ministers.

Leaking: How Does It Happen And Why Does It Matter?

HUFFPOST UK

Penman also took former Cabinet Office Minister Lord Maude to task for his renewed criticism of the civil service, telling Civil Service World that the Tory grandee had painted a gloomy picture that many ministers and officials “will simply not recognise”.

Heywood and Manzonei defend civil service from attack by Francis Maude

CIVIL SERVICE WORLD



TUC Congress 2017

Unions back FDA call for new civil service settlement

Ministers must wake up and recognise the “crisis of resourcing” facing Britain’s civil service, the FDA has warned, as unions representing workers right across the UK backed two FDA motions at TUC Congress 2017 in Brighton.

The civil service is now at its smallest size since the second world war, having lost tens of thousands of staff since 2010. Yet despite the ongoing squeeze on resources, the demands on civil servants continue to grow, and the extra challenges posed by Britain’s vote to leave the European Union have so far not been matched by any increase in resources for the vast majority of government departments.

An FDA motion carried unanimously by the TUC Congress in September calls for a new settlement for the civil service, stressing the need for Britain to have a “properly resourced, properly rewarded, impartial civil service” at this crucial time for the country.

Moving the motion, FDA President Gareth Hills told Congress: “It’s civil servants who’ve been tasked with

preparing the Great Repeal Bill. It’s civil servants who are at the heart of negotiating new trade relationships. It’s civil servants who will be expected to transpose EU laws into British ones and to overhaul immigration, customs and agricultural policies currently handled by the EU.

“And Congress, as we know all too well, it’s civil servants who’ve borne the brunt of austerity: resources ravaged, close to a decade of pay restraint, cuts to pensions and a raft of other conditions.”

Hills told Congress that a new settlement for the civil service must include an end to the arbitrary 1% cap on pay rises, saying it was vital that departments were “able to have grown-up conversations about pay without the 1% straitjacket”.

“It’s civil servants who’ve borne the brunt of austerity: resources ravaged, a decade of pay restraint and cuts to pensions” Gareth Hills

Although Downing Street has signalled that there will be “flexibility” on the 1% public sector pay cap from next year, it has suggested any increases in pay will be funded from existing departmental budgets, rather than through additional funding.

The FDA’s motion called for “an immediate end to planned cuts” and “full consultation” with trade unions on the additional resources that will be needed to prepare departments for the challenges ahead.

Vicky Johnson (pictured) – President of the Association of Revenue and Customs (ARC), which represents FDA members in HM Revenue and Customs – told Congress that the Government could not “cherry-pick” when ending the pay cap, which she said had left many FDA members 20% worse off in real terms than they were in 2010.

Johnson also called for action to “put right the flaws” in the current civil service pay system, and she urged the Government to “put its own house in order before it lectures others” on the gender pay gap.

The ARC President explained how the FDA had recently taken HMRC to the Employment Tribunal to challenge a system in which “women doing the exact same work as men earn sometimes thousands of pounds less”. She added: “If the pay cap continues, the same issue will manifest itself on an age basis and will need challenging.”

Meanwhile, the TUC Congress also backed a separate FDA motion calling on ministers to prove their commitment to boardroom reform was genuine by appointing staff to the boards of all public sector organisations.

FDA General Secretary Dave Penman told Congress that the move could “help put a brake on the constant change for change’s sake” seen too often in the public sector, and said the move would prompt “better decision making” by giving public servants at all levels “an opportunity to influence the services they deliver”.

He added: “Whilst the battle for corporate boardroom reform continues, this motion calls on the Government, without the distraction of vested interests getting in the way, to immediately reform the thousands of decision-making boards across the public sector to include worker representation.”

Revolving Door

Civil service starters, movers and leavers



Philip Rycroft is stepping up to become Permanent Secretary of the Department for Exiting the European Union, taking over from

Ollie Robbins (pictured). Robbins – who has led the department since it was set up last year – moves to the Cabinet Office to become the Prime Minister's EU adviser, but will continue to lead the UK team in Brexit negotiations. Rycroft has been promoted from DExEU's Second Permanent Secretary, a post he has held since earlier this year following a two-year stint as head of Cabinet Office's UK Governance Group.

Edward Troup is retiring from his joint role as HM Revenue and Customs' Executive Chair and Permanent Secretary. Troup, who originally joined the Treasury in 2004, has led HMRC's strategic and policy work since April 2016, working alongside fellow Permanent Secretary and Chief Executive Jon Thompson.

John Aston has been appointed as the Home Office's new Chief Scientific Adviser, tasked with ensuring that the department's policies take account of scientific evidence. He joins the Home Office from the University of Cambridge, where he specialised in applied statistics. Aston replaces Bernard Silverman, who has retired after seven years in the job.

The Home Office has also named **Hugh Ind** as Director General of Immigration Enforcement on a permanent basis, after a 10-month stint as interim DG. Ind has extensive Home Office experience, having served as Immigration Enforcement's Director for Casework and Returns, and as Director for Crime and Enforcement. He also worked at the now-abolished UK Border Agency, as Regional Director for London and the South East.

Rob Powell has been promoted to Chief Executive of the Legal Ombudsman, which works with the Ministry of Justice to deal with

complaints about lawyers. Powell – who was previously the ombudsman's Director of Corporate Services and has also worked at water regulator Ofwat – replaces Nick Hawkins in the job.

In November, **Eileen Milner** will step up to become the chief executive of the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), the newly-formed executive agency of the Department for Education responsible for funding education and training in England.

Milner, currently the Executive Director of Customer and Corporate Services at healthcare regulator the Care Quality Commission, will succeed Peter Lauener, who has led ESFA and its predecessor organisations since 2010.



Sarah Wilkinson (pictured) has taken the reins at NHS Digital, replacing Andy Williams as Chief Executive of the arm's-length Department

of Health body which provides IT and communications support to the NHS. Wilkinson has been the Home Office's Chief Digital, Data and Technology Officer since 2015, before which she worked in technology roles for a series of financial institutions.

Companies House has named **Louise Smyth** as its new Chief Executive. Smyth moves from the Intellectual Property Office (IPO), where she has worked as Director of IT, Director of Corporate Services and Chief Operating Officer. Companies House, a Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy executive agency, was previously led by **Tim Moss** – who is himself heading to the IPO to serve as its new chief exec.

The Office of the Advocate General (OAG) for Scotland, which advises the UK government on Scottish law, has a new Director. **Neil Taylor** was formerly the Legal Secretary to the Advocate General for Scotland, and has also served as Head of the Advisory and Legislation Division at the OAG. He succeeds Michael Chalmers.

The Foreign Office has appointed **Lindsay Croisdale-Appleby** to a key Brexit-related job. Croisdale-Appleby, who has been with the FCO since 1996 and was previously Europe Director, will now serve as the department's Director General for European Union Exit. Lindsay previously did a two-year stint as the British Ambassador to Columbia, and has served as First Secretary of the UK's permanent representation to the EU.

My alternative career Angela M Westington



Senior HM Inspector of Schools, West Midlands

If I had not become a civil servant I would

have loved to have been an archaeologist or historian. My abiding love for history and archaeology stems from my primary school days when my teacher handed out R J Unstead's Looking at History text books. I adored these books.

In the late sixties and early seventies, I pestered my mother to let me hang around the open dig at Deansgate in Manchester. I watched, mesmerised, as archaeologists scraped back the Roman history of my town.

That fascination with the past has never left me. One of the unexpected joys of my role, which requires extensive travel, is that sometimes I find myself driving through areas completely new to me and picturing what they must have been like in a previous age.

I'm close to the end of my career and keep threatening my horrified loved ones that when I eventually retire I am going to treat myself to a metal detector and go off searching for buried treasures.

My working life

Working for a reason

A Grade 7 FDA member working in a major Government department tells *PSM* why she came back to the civil service – and what she finds most frustrating at work.



I first joined the civil service when I was only 19 and left after about five years to go travelling. After around a year travelling and six more working in the 'real world' of marketing, I found myself back in the civil service again.

It was many years ago now, but I still remember the MD of our company giving us a supposedly rousing motivational speech and thinking, I don't care about how much money you're making for Walkers or Cadburys or anyone else. I just felt utterly pointless in the role I was doing.

I never had that feeling working in the civil service; there was always a reason for what I was doing, even the more mundane admin jobs. My first role involved making up files and running pieces of paper around the building, but I did it for a reason and I never questioned that those tasks needed to be done. Then suddenly I was in this corporate world where somebody would make a comment on what my jacket looked like or whether I was wearing the right colour lipstick, while I was doing a pointless job – and I knew it wasn't going to be for life for me.

I eventually found my way back to the civil service and, in aggregate, I now have about 18 years' experience. Since returning I've grown into my current role quite organically. I've applied for jobs when they've come up and where I've ended up has as much to do with

"In the short term, you're desperate to demonstrate where you've cut costs without looking at how that impacts on wider decision making."

departmental change as deliberate decision making.

Now I find myself in a management role, my biggest frustration is dealing with staffing and HR issues. I do, unfortunately, have some very complicated staffing matters at the moment. I would say in the last six months I've spent nearly 80% of my time working on HR matters and I've watched my other tasks falling apart because I haven't got the time to spend on them.

All of our policies follow due process and allow people the benefit of the doubt, which is great, but there is a reluctance to make robust decisions and the impact this has on the remaining staff can be devastating. I think that is one thing the private sector does better than the public sector; there is more freedom to make robust decisions to do the right thing for the department, even if that might mean paying someone off to get them out of the business.

We're scared to make those kinds of financial decisions and I think that's gotten worse in these times of austerity

where we all feel terribly guilty at the idea of spending money. In the short term, you're desperate to demonstrate where you've cut costs without looking at how that impacts on wider decision making. A while ago I drew up a business plan for how I'd like to structure my team and re-graded a lot of the posts, which meant we would have spent the exact same amount of money but had one extra staff member. I was told it couldn't be done because I wasn't allowed to increase the headcount, even if it would cost less!

I could build a more proficient, fit for purpose workforce but arbitrary targets prevent this kind of long-term strategic planning. I know it's not just limited to my department, this is happening across the civil service and it just makes you want to scream with frustration.

What's your story?

My Working Life allows FDA and Keystone members to talk frankly about their jobs and experiences at work. If you'd like to work with one of our reporters on your own story, drop us a line to psm@fda.org.uk. Anonymity is guaranteed.



Learning from the best



Neil Rider explains how FDA Learn is helping members forge their own path to the Senior Civil Service - and looks ahead to the new Competency Framework

Here on the FDA Learn team we want to equip as many members as possible with the skills and training they need to get the most from their working lives, so we're always on the lookout for new opportunities to reach people. Following the successful 'Unlocking the Senior Civil Service' event in London in June, we've recently launched a fresh programme of masterclasses and mentoring opportunities on the theme of leadership.

We managed to secure a number of the speakers from the SCS event for these new sessions, with senior departmental figures sharing their insights on what it takes to get to the top. Vitally, we chose these speakers specifically because their career paths could be considered 'non-traditional', and we wanted to help show members that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to career development.

Speakers at the seven sessions – which took place in London and Leeds – included Debra Lang, HR Director at the

Department for Culture, Media and Sport; Joanna West, the Director of Immigration Enforcement for London and the South; Peter Loosley, the Head of Strategy Design on the Department for Work and Pensions' Universal Credit programme; and a 'joint ticket' consisting of Yvette Bosworth and Suzie Daykin, who are job-sharing as Deputy Director for Animal Public Health and Traceability at DEFRA.



Former Health Secretary Andrew Lansley (above) and Debra Lang, HR Director at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (top), were two of the speakers at the FDA's Unlocking the SCS event in June.

The model for the sessions is the very successful leadership project we ran earlier this year in Scotland, working with the Scottish Union Learning Fund and the Scottish Government. Those who attended also benefited from some 'light touch' mentoring after the sessions, to help to increase their confidence and turn the lessons of the day into skills that can be used in the workplace. If you're interested in getting involved in more of these events, please drop me a line at neil@fda.org.uk.

Meanwhile, we're also working to prepare for changes to the Civil Service Competency Framework, which are due to take effect next year. We're engaging with Civil Service Resourcing on the shape of the new framework, which is expected to include the use of new psychometric sift tools and assessor training. While we welcome a refresh of the framework, we're keen to make sure that nothing is done which puts progress on diversity in peril. As ever, our FDA Learn courses will be geared around the new framework, ensuring that the training and development opportunities that we offer are directly relevant to you and your job.

Neil Rider is head of FDA Learn and Keyskills

Organising

YOUR
UNION

Organising across departments throughout the UK



FDA Organiser Alan Bailey urges members to help raise the FDA's visibility in workplaces across the UK, and looks back on another

successful year at Civil Service Live.

Since the last issue of *PSM* we have been talking to staff and recruiting members at the seven Civil Service Live events which took place across the UK. Fresh from Civil Service Live, we are now going into departments to chat to staff about how they find their workplace and what FDA can offer – both to better represent them in their departments, and to help put money back in their pockets through member benefits.

We go into departments to chat to staff on the ground because we know there are many common issues that appear in workplaces across the UK, such as excessive workloads, working extra hours, poor performance management and high levels of stress.

We want to resolve these issues, and the more members we have in a department the stronger our voice will be and the better chance we will have of resolving them in the way members want. The key to gaining members in any location is visibility. There are many ways to make sure we are visible in a department or building, from simple posters and branded items to organising major events. Branded items can be fun and help to advertise the FDA's presence, but one of the best ways to become more visible is to organise events or set up stalls where staff can

learn out about the union, chat about their workplace concerns, and find out what we can do to help resolve them.

We are planning FDA events and stalls in a number of departments this autumn. We will be meeting people joining the civil service at Fast Stream induction events, speaking to members in HM Revenue and Customs working at the new Croydon Hub, and getting out of London to speak to members in Sheffield, Nottingham and Leeds. We will also be holding our Women into Leadership and BME into Leadership events, as well as an event in the Houses of Parliament to mark Black History Month.

If you see one of our stalls in your workplace, please come over to say hello and let us know what's going well – and not so well – in your department. If you can bring a colleague who isn't a

member over to talk to us about what the FDA can do for them, even better!

We want to hold those conversations in many more locations in the next year, but one major barrier we often encounter is access to workplaces. Heightened security levels mean that the FDA can't always hold an event or set up a recruitment stall in a departmental building – and this is where members can help. Workplace contacts and members who are willing to escort us around their buildings are going to be crucial to us in raising the FDA's visibility.

If you have an issue in your department, think about how you can help grow the union's visibility and membership strength in your workplace. When we can get into workplaces we can raise the profile of the FDA, talk to staff about their concerns and explain how we can support members in resolving them. So if you can help us to gain access to your building to set up a stall or run an event, please email me at organiser@fda.org.uk.

Civil Service Live 2017

The FDA had a presence at every Civil Service Live event this year, which resulted in a mini tour of the UK as we attended events in Belfast, Manchester, Gateshead, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Birmingham and London. Civil Service Live continues to be as popular as ever, with 16,000 delegates attending in total – 6,000 in the two-day London event alone. At each event we recruited new members for both Keystone and the FDA. Our new stand drew lots of attention and our stalls were always very busy with people finding out more about what we do, taking information and grabbing our desktop mobile phone holders, which were hugely popular!

At each event we ran a bitesize version of our Keyskills/FDA course 'Courageous Conversations'. Those that have been on this course will know that it ditches the classic PowerPoint approach and gets participants on their feet and actively involved. We received great feedback from participants, who found the course enjoyable and insightful. Remember that non-members can also attend our FDA Learn courses. So if you have a colleague who is thinking of joining, encourage them to try out a course. If they like it, remind them that members get one



course free and the rest at a discounted price.

We had lots of good conversations with people and recruited lots of new members at Civil Service Live, but not everyone wants to join on the day. Understandably, some people want to go away and think about it before making a decision. You can help follow up our success at these events by chatting to colleagues to find out if they visited our stall and have any remaining questions or concerns about joining.

Although this year's Civil Service Live has only just wrapped up, we're already planning for next year, looking at how to develop an interactive stand and maximise the opportunities to speak to civil service managers and professionals about their experiences and priorities in the workplace.

Civil Service Live 2017: the FDA ran a bitesize version of the FDA Learn 'Courageous Conversations' course at every CSL event this year.

If you are interested in becoming more active in your branch, please contact your local branch officer (you will find their details on the My FDA page on the FDA website), or email organiser@fda.org.uk for more information.



Opinion

Got an opinion? Let's hear it at psm@fda.org.uk

How do we build a stronger civil service?



A new index of civil service performance places the UK fourth in the world but shows there is still plenty of room for improvement if we're willing to learn from others, says Calum Miller.

"Britain needs a strong civil service." At a time of political and policy turbulence, when public services are under scrutiny and stress, few could object to the FDA's rallying cry. But it's worth looking a little deeper into what exactly we mean by a strong civil service.

What distinguishes a strong from a weak civil service? Who do we compare ourselves to? Do we know where we are stronger or weaker? Is our measurement a snapshot, or can it change over time? What do we need to do to become stronger? How do we map that path?

These are the questions that drive the International Civil Service Effectiveness (InCiSE) Index. Launched this summer, the InCiSE Index is a collaboration between Oxford University's Blavatnik School of Government and the Institute for Government, with support from the UK Civil Service and funding from the Open Society Foundations. It brings together for the first time a composite assessment of the strength of 31 national civil services.

Understandably, the immediate reactions focused on the headline results. Canada basked in its position at the top of the rankings, prompting one seasoned Ottawa official to note ruefully that it was the first time the *Ottawa Citizen* had found anything positive to write about



the city's many civil servants. The UK gritted its teeth at finishing fourth behind sister-bureaucracies in Canada, New Zealand and Australia, and pointed out its top place in a few specific areas.

There is value in focusing on the headline figures. For too many people, the civil service is anonymous. Bound by a code of political neutrality, the civil service is generally – and rightly – in the shadow of the ministers it serves. An index like this can grab public attention and provide a focus for conversations and communication about the role of the civil service.

There is a richer prize in the InCiSE. Looking in detail at the 12 domains and 76 underlying metrics gives the most comprehensive picture to date of how a civil service is performing against its international comparators. And that's a valuable opportunity to learn how we can make the UK civil service stronger.

Looking at the UK's performance in

detail, a few things stand out. The UK topped the rankings in three areas and was second in two more, but had some notably weaker areas: it came 23rd in digital services, 17th in integrity, and 16th in crisis and risk management. So, while the UK ended up with a global ranking of fourth (sixth if results are adjusted for the GDP per capita of the country), that masks a high variance.

This level of deviation from the UK's mean performance is good news: it highlights the areas where focus is most likely to lead to improvement, while the cross-country comparison also highlights from whom the UK can learn.

Some might be shocked that the UK civil service, buttressed by values set out more than 160 years ago by Northcote and Trevelyan, could be in the second division for integrity. But that highlights InCiSE Index's potential to illuminate.

The integrity measure is based on 16 separate scores, drawn from four data sources. Of these, the UK is substantially below the average in only two: the degree of protection for whistleblowers, and the degree to which the policy process is protected from lobbyists. Looking at the league leaders, New Zealand scores top on protecting whistleblowers, while Sweden leads the way on protecting policymaking from lobbyists. Dig deeper,

“It may be shocking to some that the UK civil service is in the second division for integrity”

and we can learn about the regimes that each of these countries has put in place and why the OECD and Quality of Government Index rate them so highly.

The beauty of this kind of benchmarking is that it is a two-way process. Every country in the index has strengths and weaknesses. For example, while Portugal might learn from the UK about openness and policy-making, it could teach us something about digital services. Or Turkey could share its approach to crisis and risk management with the UK in return for some pointers on regulation.

In September, the Blavatnik School of Government hosted civil service leaders from several countries, together with public administration experts and some of the organisations that contributed data to the InCiSE Index. The most pressing question was how civil servants can use the data to improve performance. We came up with a few key steps.

First, celebrate successes. Every country in the index has clear strengths. Acknowledge them, and congratulate those who have contributed to them.

Second, be honest. With all evaluations, it's tempting to challenge the measurement. The InCiSE team welcome this and want to improve the index. But we hope civil service leaders will also take less good results on the chin, and look to improve them.

Third, learn from others. Governments tend to be the monopoly provider of many key services, so civil services need to look to other countries for ideas that work. InCiSE points the way.

Fourth, compete. The index works partly because there is a healthy competition between countries. Take pride in making relative improvements.

Fifth, communicate. InCiSE provides a great opportunity to talk with staff, ministers, stakeholders and the public about how the civil service works.

If the UK needs a stronger civil service, some things have to change. There will be many views on what that change should look like. Hopefully, the InCiSE Index can start to show us where to look for the path to a stronger future. We look forward to sharing the journey.

Calum Miller is the Chief Operating Officer of Blavatnik School of Government. Full details of The Index are available at bit.ly/psm17-incise.

A window of opportunity



As cracks widen in the government's public sector pay policy, FPU General Secretary Dave Penman warns against missing the chance to reform civil service pay for the longer-term.

One of the less expected outcomes from the general election has been the government's inconsistent messages about the public sector pay cap. In the immediate aftermath, we saw a clutch of ministers breaking ranks and making sympathetic noises. Whether it was genuine concern or just part of the civil war that inevitably follows a bad election, those noises have continued. Now we have an announcement on prison officers' and police pay, and an unusual pre-Budget promise of "flexibility" next year for the rest of the public sector.

“It's clear we won't see a wholesale scrapping of pay restraint, however justified that might be”

The timing and manner of the announcement owed more to opposition tactics in parliament than strategic decision making. It also came on the day when RPI, still for me the real measure of inflation, rose to 3.9%, with the Government's preferred measure, CPI, rising to 2.9%. Even the beneficiaries complained it was too little, never mind too late. Not so much a removal of the cap, more a doffing.

What will this announcement mean for FDA members? It's frustrating that there is precious little engagement with those representing public sector workers, but it's clear we won't see a wholesale scrapping of pay restraint, however justified such a move might be.

The public sector has a myriad of different pay arrangements and

problems, with review bodies covering many areas, including the Senior Civil Service. Some areas have retained guaranteed progression, so newer recruits are still moving up a pay spine. Many areas have recruitment and retention problems and there is a widespread need for workforce reform, which often needs to be properly supported by changes to reward structures.

In the civil service, there has been little opportunity to genuinely reform pay structures for either the SCS or delegated grades for over a decade. The Treasury remit process has not been seriously looked at since the mid-90s. A policy that was meant to allow departments to shape their pay structures to support their objectives has turned into a mechanism for Treasury control – and that was before the current period of restraint.

An opportunity was missed in 2009 to meaningfully reform SCS pay following the Normington review. As a result, most of the problems he highlighted remain unsolved a decade later.

So, what of the future? We will, of course, continue to argue for a more meaningful lifting of the cap, reflecting the genuine hardship members feel – pay has fallen by around 20% in real terms since 2010. But whatever flexibility is coming our way next year, it's in the interest of members, the government and taxpayers for reward systems to be reformed over the longer term.

That means ministers, Treasury and the Cabinet Office need to develop a framework that gives the civil service some certainty over reward for the medium to longer term. It also means engaging with the unions, which have a wealth of knowledge and experience on reward, not simply imposing changes from on high. There's a lot of frustration and anger about pay stagnation; if that is not to erupt into discontent and, crucially, if reform is to have any chance of buy-in from the workforce, then it has to involve genuine dialogue and shared solutions.

That's not going to be easy for either side, and may partly depend how far the purse strings are loosened. But it is an opportunity to move on from the longest period of pay restraint in living memory. Let's hope it's not an opportunity lost.

Maths, Mum and Dad

Matt Ross talks to Jonathan Slater, the reforming permanent secretary at the Department for Education, about positivity, the power of data - and running 7,000 schools.

When I ask people why they joined the civil service, many reply that they were inspired by parents who worked in public services. Jonathan Slater, who became Permanent Secretary at the Department for Education (DfE) in May 2016, is one of them: "My mother was a social worker and my father was a teacher, and I thought they were wonderful at what they did – helping the kids to achieve their best," he recalls.

But here his story diverges from the commonplace; Slater was stronger in the sciences than the humanities. "I wanted to work in public service, but I knew I couldn't do either of my parents' jobs," he says. "So I ended up doing maths at university, simply because that was what I was best at. I remember looking at a book called: 'What do mathematicians do?', and you could become an accountant or an auditor or an actuary.



There were lots of jobs that started with 'A', that sounded boring and weren't to do with public services – and then there was something called operational research."

This, he learned, means "using maths to solve complex problems" in business processes and organisational structures. "Here was a way of combining what I was good at with something that was useful in the public sphere," he explains. So Slater did an MSc, joined British Rail and embarked on a career in public sector change management. "I don't think it was by design," he adds. Nonetheless, Slater had found his vocation.

He worked for London councils, becoming director of education and deputy chief executive at Islington; then joined government as a director in the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit. Six years at the National Offender Management Service and the Ministry of Justice followed; and when his MoJ colleague Ursula Brennan became Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Defence, she brought Slater in to enact Lord Levene's report on defence reform.

"I wasn't expert in justice policy or defence policy," he recalls. "But change – improving the way an organisation works – is also an expert's task."

Thirty years after Slater took his first public sector change job, what's he learned about making reforms stick? In answer, he recalls a 2016 visit to a special needs school in Darlington.

"I watched the head teacher give an absolutely inspiring assembly," he says. "All the kids there had behavioural problems such that they couldn't be in mainstream schools, but they were totally quiet and well-behaved; it was wonderful. So, I said to her afterwards: 'How do you do that?' And she said: 'Relentless positivity'."

"I took that message back to the department, and there are lessons in that for us – both within the department, and in the way we engage with the system more generally," he says. In practical terms, that means treating staff as if they're part of the solution, not the problem: "In my experience, people want to do the right thing and are looking for help. So you're trying to capture that energy and create a sense of belief that things could be better." Slater, for example, asks staff what the organisation does well, leaving those areas untouched. Then he asks them

Jonathan Slater: the making of England's schools chief

1984

Graduates from University of York with a BSc in Mathematics

1986

Completes an MSc in Operational Research at the University of Sussex, and joins British Rail

1998

Made deputy chief executive and director of education at Islington Council

2001

Joins Cabinet Office as a director in the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit, leading on health reform

2005

Becomes director of performance and improvement, National Offender Management Service

2006

Promoted to chief executive, Office of Criminal Justice Reform

2007

Appointed director general, Transforming Justice, at the MoJ

2011

Moves to Ministry of Defence as director general of head office and commissioning services



2015

Made director general of the Economic and Domestic Secretariat, Cabinet Office

2016

Appointed permanent secretary of the Department for Education

what is broken, and how it should be fixed.

Top of DfE staff's 'broken' list was, it seems, the performance management system: under the widely-criticised 'forced distribution' appraisal policy, introduced in April 2013 by then-Cabinet Office minister Francis Maude, managers had to grade 25% of their staff as performing well and 10% as failing.

"We won't have forced ranking any

Change - improving the way an organisation works - is also an expert's task

more, that's gone," says Slater. And instead of holding annual appraisals, managers will now "have a monthly conversation with their staff – so people can change course along the way, rather than waiting until the end of the year," he promises.

The system under which only the top 25% received a performance bonus is

also being reformed. "That's telling 75% of our staff that they're not all that good, and that's not relentlessly positive!" says Slater. Instead, the bonus pot will be distributed across the directorates, and "if someone does something impressive over and above their job, they're entitled to a small financial reward. So we can respond immediately when somebody's done something really well," he adds.

Such changes are likely to boost an ongoing rise in departmental morale. The Civil Service People Survey shows that the headline employee engagement figure, which fell 12 points between 2009 and 2013, has now fully recovered. But the results for pay and benefits remain eight points below the 2009 position. Here, Slater has far fewer levers.

"In any walk of life, whatever the job is, you would want to give people the hope that they could improve their standard of living, and that would apply in the civil service as much as anywhere else," he says carefully. "So the government has to balance its wish to reward people doing a good job, and to give them a sense of confidence about what's coming down the track, against their responsibilities

to the taxpayer. That's a decision the government has to make."

Slater's focus on "relentless positivity" strikes a contrast with Maude's approach to civil service reform, which often left civil servants feeling undermined and criticised. But he argues that Maude, who warned in September that "institutional complacency" and a "bias to inertia" are stalling the reform agenda, shouldn't worry. To meet ministers' goals, the department must "grow the commercial, digital, and customer focused skills that Francis Maude spoke about", says Slater. "He needn't fear: our ambition for making those changes has not diminished as a result of him no longer being minister for the Cabinet Office."

Meanwhile, Slater is working to equip the Department for Education for its newfound role overseeing public service delivery. When Michael Gove became education secretary in 2010, there were just 200 academy schools – which report directly to the DfE, rather than to local education authorities. "But I've now got 7,000 academies reporting through 3,000 trusts," Slater explains, and ministers and parliamentarians "expect the department to be able to account for their performance, the quality of their buildings, the number of teacher vacancies."

Then there's the need to offer 30 hours of free childcare to the parents of toddlers, and to create three million apprenticeships by 2020. "We're now largely a delivery department, and that requires hard graft and real expertise," he says. His latest change programme, launched late last year, is designed to "reflect that reality" – building the systems and teams required to monitor and manage frontline services.

This expansion of the DfE's remit may worry those in the education sector who have long warned about its tendency to meddle endlessly in frontline delivery. Former DfE Permanent Secretary Sir David Bell, for example, argued during Gove's tenure that "the system is being held back by teachers being subjected to constant, short-term policy and structural changes driven by the electoral cycle and political firefighting."

Change is inevitable, responds Slater, and elected politicians must make the key decisions, but his collaborative, consultative approach to reform sounds very different from Gove's head-

down battle against the educational establishment he called 'the Blob'.

"I take my daughter to school, and there's no shortage of opportunities to keep it real," says Slater. "So I recognise the concerns people have, and we're always asking ourselves whether we're being as helpful as possible to help them achieve their goals."

Slater cites his department's recent announcement on the next phase of primary school testing. Following "a comprehensive, genuine consultation process, I think it landed pretty well: people acknowledged that as we were



“I’ve heard examples of ministers saying, ‘Why didn’t they tell me what they thought?’”

bringing new things in, we were taking old things out, and that we had worked hard to build a consensus across the profession."

It seems the relationship between ministers and civil servants has also come a long way since Gove's tenure, when some apparently politicised appointments, the behaviour of his special advisers, and accusations of bullying prompted a flurry of leaks and senior departures. "I haven't seen any civil servants acting in an inappropriately political way," says Slater, adding that ministers consistently ask for honest advice – even if it runs against their political views.

"In my time as permanent secretary, I've never found a single example of a minister who objected to a civil servant advising them on something they chose not to do," he explains. "I can imagine a scenario in which that would not be the case; I'm just telling you what it's been like whilst I've been permanent secretary

here. On the other hand, I've heard examples of a minister saying: 'Why didn't they tell me what they thought?'"

Slater points out that current Secretary of State Justine Greening is a former accountant – and says the two share an evidence-based, data-driven approach to assessing policy and reform ideas. "I'm instinctively interested in the costs and benefits of making a change, in quantifying and comparing them," he says, adding that Greening tends to ask about the NPV: the 'net present value' of inflows and outflows.

"I'm not suggesting that's universal: you don't get that question from all Secretaries of State," he adds. "But the fact that my political boss is just as interested in value for money as I am makes my task as accounting officer easier, and it's a really good discipline." Slater says his conversations with Greening tend to focus on three questions: "Number one, is this going to promote social mobility? Number two, is it going to work? And number three, what's the NPV?"

This forensic approach to policymaking and organisational reform, Slater says, captures the hidden burdens of change as well as the cash costs: "If we announce a change to education policy, by definition there's going to be a cost on the frontline: what is that cost, what's the benefit, and how clear are we that one outweighs the other?"

Jonathan Slater seems to have found his sweet spot in the civil service: a place where, working with a like-minded Secretary of State, he can deliver evidence-based change in a field of service delivery about which he's passionate. His approach to leading reform is, he says, "a combination of maths and parents": it's about applying his own strongest abilities to the "noble" vocations of his teacher father and social worker mother.

"Watching my parents do their jobs, I could see they were operating within a system in which there were constraints on what they did," he recalls. Now, he runs the department which oversees both teachers and social workers – "amazing how life has come full circle", he says – and has the opportunity to tackle those constraints. "The question for my department," he concludes, "is how we're helping them to do their jobs better – and then can I quantify it?"

The real value of public service

The response to the devastating fire at London's Grenfell Tower demonstrated the very best of public service. But as **Matt Foster** reports, the blaze raises major questions about the resources and respect given to those who work every day to keep people safe.

"They got the call at 00:54. They were there within six minutes. It was like nothing they'd ever seen before,"

says Dave Green, national officer for the Fire Brigade's Union (FBU). In the early hours of 14 June, 250 firefighters using 70 pumps were locked in a desperate battle to control the blaze at Grenfell Tower, which had turned the skies around the Lancaster West Estate in North Kensington a fierce orange. "Very little can prepare you, operationally or emotionally, for what's about to happen," Green continues. "You know there's a job to be done and you've got to do it. It's what everyone trains for. But the reality is that firefighters are just people – just human beings who try and do the best they can."

Some firefighters returned to the burning building six times, while others were forced to make agonising decisions about which residents they could realistically save. "As soon as the fire started spreading up the building, I'm

afraid there were people who were not going to get out," Green tells *PSM*. "It's as plain and simple as that."

Exactly how the tragedy at Grenfell – in which at least 80 people died – unfolded is now the subject of both a criminal investigation and a public inquiry, chaired by retired appeal court judge Sir Martin Moore-Bick. Meanwhile, central and local government staff have been working flat out to respond to the tragedy, with officials at the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) working seven-day shift patterns to support councils and housing associations with the painstaking job of testing the cladding fitted to tower blocks. "Day after day I've

"Day after day I've seen dedication and commitment that goes above and beyond the call of duty."

Melanie Dawes



seen dedication and commitment that goes above and beyond the call of duty," the department's Permanent Secretary, Melanie Dawes, told her staff in a message seen by PSM.

The way ministers and officials respond to Grenfell will shape for decades to come how the public views those whose job it is to keep them safe. For Green, the inquiry must not shy away from asking searching questions of ministers. "The reality is that there are now 11,000 fewer frontline firefighters in the UK than there were in 2010," he says. "That's around one in five firefighters no longer protecting people in our society."

These cuts have, Green says, left firefighters running to stand still, a situation that will be all-too-familiar to many in the diminished ranks of Britain's public sector workforce. "The government takes the attitude that they will get away with it and that those that are left can do a bit more for less – hopefully the cracks will be papered over and no one will actually notice," he says. "But then something like this happens and it's exposed for all to see."

Even with the largest brigade in England, Green says, the London Fire Brigade relied on support from neighbouring counties in responding to Grenfell. He points out that most brigades don't have 70 pumps and "if that fire had happened in any other city, you would be talking about a much slower response, a much riskier approach. You would not have the resources there immediately."

Regulatory changes have also drastically reduced the role of firefighters in fire safety since Green joined the fire service in Nottingham in 1985. "We carried out inspections of buildings deemed to be at risk in our station area – old people's homes, care homes, hospitals, things like that," he explains. "We got to know them. In effect, it was recognised that the fire service had the expertise and so we were given the responsibility to enforce regulations."

In 2005, however, the Labour government shifted responsibility for fire safety to employers and landlords, who were required only to appoint a "responsible person" to carry out in-house assessments. Green says this

led to confusion over accountability and, ultimately, a relaxation of standards. Buildings can now be inspected by an unqualified fire risk assessor, with the fire service reduced to an overseeing role. Crucially, Green adds, the fire service no longer has "any say in what cladding is put onto a building, or what holes are knocked through walls" – exactly the kind of alterations that can turn a previously safe building into a death trap like Grenfell.

"The safety of our people, especially the vulnerable, is of paramount importance," Green says. "You cannot give responsibility for that to people who've got a vested interest in properties. It has to be given to an independent body – and that body is the fire and rescue service. It's run by firefighters, every single one has attended fires in high rise buildings, knows what the dangers are. We've got no axe to grind. We are public servants - we are not compromised by conflicts of interest."

Behind the frontline, others are asking serious questions about the capability of UK public services to protect residents

Asking the right questions

The Grenfell public inquiry, chaired by retired appeal court judge Sir Martin Moore-Bick (pictured right), will cover the history of Grenfell tower, its most recent refurbishment, building and fire regulations, the response of central and local government, and the local authority's relationship with the tower's residents. But Campaign group Justice 4 Grenfell, among others, says the terms of reference are too narrow, and warns that the inquiry has missed the chance to look at broader policy on "safe, affordable, appropriate and adequate housing".

Cambridge University's Colin Talbot, who was on the 1996 prison service inquiry panel, believes keeping the inquiry scope relatively narrow is the best way to ensure justice. "If you go too broad with inquiries like this, then rather than focusing on what's directly broken in the system you end up with it just draining away into the sand because there is too much to consider," he says.

Former Cabinet Office official Jo Clift, who helped set up the BSE inquiry in the late 1990s, says running an inquiry is "tough, relentless, and really very hard", and warns against setting sky-high



expectations for what it can achieve. She advises inquiry staff to be as open as possible, using technology to make sure interested parties have all the information they need. "Justice has to be seen to be done," Clift says. "You want people to trust the process and you want them to trust the inquiry team, and specifically the committee."

Clift also advocates doing everything possible to make sure people giving evidence – many of whom are likely to be vulnerable – don't feel intimidated by the process. As an example, she explains how the chair of the BSE inquiry had

a horseshoe-shaped table specially constructed to try to make proceedings less adversarial, and also decided not to televise proceedings.

However, running an effective inquiry is only half the battle. Clift says ensuring the Grenfell probe's findings don't simply gather dust will require "very positive working relationships" between the inquiry team and DCLG officials. "That way, in a couple of years' time when the report lands, those in government will feel like it's a document that they can take seriously," she says.

Professor Talbot urges Moore-Bick to follow the example of Michael Richard, who reconvened the Soham child protection inquiry a year after reporting as a check on progress. "That sent shockwaves around Whitehall – nobody had ever done that before," he says. "For the first time ever after an inquiry, the civil service set up implementation groups all over the relevant departments and made sure they had done enough to be able to put in a credible submission when the inquiry reconvened. I think that's the only way that the Grenfell inquiry will have a really lasting impact."



of blocks like Grenfell. Dr Richard Simmons is the former chief executive of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), an advisory body abolished in 2011. He tells *PSM* that the “utterly shocking” events of 14 June should prompt us to question how ministers have come to value private sector advice more than the expertise in their own departments.

“What’s happened is the government has increasingly come to depend on external advisers on building regulations,” he says. He explains how the Building Regulations Advisory Committee (BRAC), the industry-led voluntary body advising the government on building regulations, is chaired by the chief executive of a building consultancy, while the committee’s members include the technical director of a firm which produced the insulation fitted to Grenfell Tower – which many observers believe may have contributed to the spread of the fire.

Although Simmons stresses that neither appointment implies any wrongdoing, he questions whether the “thinning out of the public service for reasons both technological and ideological” has undermined government’s ability to properly regulate industry. “You need expertise in-house,” he says. “You need people who can go and talk to ministers directly, and who can draw attention to issues which might not be highlighted by people in the private sector.

“I’m not somebody who says the private sector is bad. I like profitable

“If that fire had happened in any other city, you would be talking about a much slower response, a much riskier approach. You would not have the resources there immediately.”

development companies: they are good people to work with, and if they’re profitable you know they’re good at their job. But at the same time they have very direct financial interests. Sometimes there are public interests that are not reflected by the financial interests of the private sector.”

Others believe hiving off key functions from departments into arm’s-length bodies and agencies may have reduced accountability and complicated oversight. “The assumption was that smaller, locally-managed, more flexible units would be better at delivering,” says Colin Talbot, professor of government at Cambridge and Manchester universities. “Of course, what happens over time is you realise that they don’t have the resources to do some things. Take Grenfell as an example: if you decentralise fire regulations to local authorities, those individual local authorities don’t have the capacity to do their own research about which sort of cladding, and which type of insulation behind the cladding, is going to be safe.

They can’t set up their own laboratories to research that sort of thing. It becomes incredibly difficult for them to do that job properly.”

Talbot believes that the UK’s system of “diffuse governance” could make properly investigating the Grenfell tragedy – and learning the right lessons from it – exceptionally difficult. “In a sense, what may have caused the problem in the first place – which is that there was no one central authority looking at the tower as a whole to make sure it was safe – may present the same problem when it comes to assigning blame. There’s not one person to blame or one single thing to put right.”

Talbot is sceptical that the Grenfell inquiry will seriously challenge ministers’ mindsets, but says the tragedy shows the need to give central government ultimate responsibility for critical issues like fire safety. “The thing I’ve found most fascinating... is that nobody could say for certain whether or not the materials used at Grenfell were legal or not. That alone tells you something about the regulatory regime – there’s obviously a massive lack of clarity about what is and isn’t allowed.”

Simmons agrees that central government needs to strengthen its oversight of key safety regimes. He believes that bodies such as the Building Research Establishment – privatised in 1997 – may have to be brought back in-house to ensure that experts’ concerns are properly heard in the corridors of power. “Ministers deserve the best advice they can get – and unless there’s a strong core of professional advice within the civil service itself, I don’t know how they’re going to get it,” he warns.

Three months on from the fire, the blackened shell of the Grenfell Tower still looms over Latimer Road station. As the public inquiry begins to gather evidence and government officials work to ensure that such a tragedy will never be repeated, the FBU is calling for a permanent shift in the way Britain views its public servants. “I’ve heard lots of people say that that building is now an edifice, a monument to what successive governments have done to public services,” Green says. “If that stark, charred building isn’t forever etched on people’s minds as they think about the impact of this, then I don’t think lessons will ever be learned.”



The equalisers

The UK civil service has made real progress with getting more women into senior jobs, but new research shows we still lag behind countries like Canada and Australia. **Matt Ross** and **Tania Mason** explore what we can learn from our Commonwealth cousins.

“If you want to ensure your organisation’s success, why would you dream of choosing to ignore the leadership capability of half the population?”

It sounds as if Michael Parkinson, Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet in Australia, is asking a rhetorical question. But this is a challenge he’s felt the need to put to

his own staff: the battle to persuade men of the merits of gender equality is, he believes, far from won.

British civil servants may suspect the Australian chief is engaged in an uphill struggle against his nation’s macho, outdoorsy culture – but new research reveals that Australia has the second highest proportion of female senior civil servants in the G20, just behind Canada and two places ahead of the UK. We may have a lot to learn from our Commonwealth cousins.

The Women Leaders Index is an annual ranking of G20 nations, setting out the proportion of women within their top five civil service grades; it also includes similar data on EU nations, and compares the G20 stats to figures on female representation within national assemblies, cabinets and private sector boards. Going back four years, the Index and its accompanying report – produced by specialist publishers Global Government Forum and supported by EY

– offers useful lessons for British officials interested in promoting equality here.

Topping the table for the fourth year in a row is Canada, on 46.4%. Since 2013 Australia has risen from 37% to 43.3%, staying narrowly ahead of third-placed South Africa’s 41.1%. And the UK’s 5.1 point growth over 2013-17 leaves it on 40.1%, a couple of points ahead of fifth-placed Brazil.

Canada’s success appears to be rooted not in civil service employment or leadership initiatives, but in the country’s early adoption of equal rights and anti-discrimination rules covering society in general and the jobs market. “We have legislation which dates from the nineties which requires employers to remove barriers to the four designated groups: women, visible minorities, indigenous persons and people of disability,” explains Michael Wernick, Clerk of the Privy Council and Canada’s most senior official.

These labour market regulations,

introduced over 20 years ago, gave Canada a head start on comparable nations. Following the arrival of what Wernick calls the “real pioneers – the first women in particular jobs”, Canada saw its number of female senior civil servants rising fast. And the country is now, he says, in “the third wave, which is more about workplace culture: how meetings are conducted; avoiding ‘mansplaining’ and ‘manterruption’; tackling unconscious bias – that more subtle and nuanced stuff.”

So Canada’s success is rooted in wider labour market policies – suggesting that over time, a commitment to pursuing gender equality through employment regulations will bear fruit. But Australia has taken a different route to its second place in the ranking.

In recent years, the Australian Public Service (APS) has rolled out a series of government-wide policies requiring action by individual departments. The latest is the Gender Equality Strategy 2016-19, which sets “ambitious stretch targets” for female representation among senior officials, says Parkinson. “We don’t require every department to get to 50/50, because if you’re starting at 10% you’re not going to get there in three years,” he explains. But each department has been required to publish implementation strategies and targets for the period to 2019, and to report on progress.

Similarly, the APS has set a target of achieving gender parity among those sitting on boards across government, with each board required to comprise at least 40% women. And it’s created a database of women who might make good board members. The cross-government figure has now reached 41%, adds Parkinson – a “big increase from where we were”.

Parkinson is a big fan of flexible working, arguing that “removing any stigma or disadvantage” from part-time, job-share and teleworking roles “allows people to balance their work and their outside responsibilities, and still advance their careers.” During his time leading the Treasury, he introduced an All Roles Flex scheme – meaning that line managers were expected to demonstrate why roles couldn’t be made flexible, rather than employees having to explain why they could be. If the results of a trial are positive, it is likely to be rolled out

Women Public Sector Leaders in the G20: 2017

Canada	46.4%
Australia	43.3%
South Africa	41.1%
United Kingdom	40.1%
Brazil	37.8%
United States	34.4%
France	34.0%
Mexico	34.0%
Russian Federation	33.0%
Italy	32.0%
Argentina	28.8%
Germany	21.0%
Indonesia	17.4%
India	17.0%
China	12.6%
Turkey	8.8%
Korea, Rep.	4.7%
Japan	3.5%
Saudi Arabia	1.3%
Ave.	26.4



“We have got further to go at the top, and these things can slip away from you if you don’t keep up consistent pressure.”

Melanie Dawes

across the APS.

Looking further down the WLI results table, in joint seventh place lie Mexico and France – which have expanded their proportion of SCS women by 20 points and 12.6 points respectively since 2013. This year, France has shown the fastest progress of any G20 country.

Both countries have introduced quota systems, driving up the percentage of women in senior roles, and shifted their goal from equal opportunities to equal representation. And quotas have also worked elsewhere. Ireland required at least 30% women candidates for the Dail in its 2016 general election, boosting the number of women in its lower house by 40%. And Germany and Italy have seen female representation on the boards of publicly-quoted companies climb sharply, following the introduction of laws to drive up the numbers of women.

However David Cagney, Chief Human Resources Officer at Ireland’s Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, is

not using similar tools within the civil service: many women are “anxious they are not seen as token appointments”, he says, and he’ll be relying on “good practice, not compliance” to make progress.

On this side of the Irish Sea, there is also little appetite for the introduction of quotas – and Britain’s civil service is still making progress on gender diversity, having raised the proportion of women in the senior civil service from 27% in 2005 to 40.1% in spring 2017. Melanie Dawes, Permanent Secretary of the Department for Communities and Local Government and the civil service gender champion, points to new data putting the figure at 41.6%.

Instead, the UK is likely to continue with its broad-based approach of reforming selection and promotion systems, creating more flexible roles, and working with up-and-coming women. Sir Paul Jenkins, the UK civil service diversity champion from 2011 to 2014, praises the latter approach: “The trick is to look at the feeder grades and do what has always been done with the blokes, which is identify the ones that have potential and give them a package of development tools – formal mentoring, coaching, career development,” he says.

Ultimately, the barriers to women’s advancement vary between departments. As Dawes says, each organisation needs to get “quite detailed and granular” about understanding and addressing their specific challenges. She’s proud of the progress that’s been made so far – pointing out that ethnic diversity is now a bigger challenge – but says there’s still a long way to go.

“Until you’ve got gender parity right up to the top of the system, you haven’t got enough role models that show women at all levels that this is a place that’s truly gender-blind,” she says, pointing out that only a third of UK permanent secretaries are women. “We have got further to go at the top, and these things can slip away from you if you don’t keep up consistent pressure.”

The Women Leaders Index report and data tool are available at www.globalgovernmentforum.com. Tania Mason is the author of the report and Matt Ross is a communications adviser to the FDA and editorial director of Global Government Forum.

Meet the FDA

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

Victoria Taylor

**FDA national officer for
Moj, DExEU and DIT**



When she's not working hard representing FDA members, Victoria takes visitors from around the world on tours of Highgate Cemetery. While she enthuses about the

history of the famous Victorian burial ground, her tour groups try to guess what she does for a living. "The best one I've had is dentist," Victoria says. "I'm not quite sure where that came from. And I've had people guess that I'm an actor a few times."

Victoria made the leap to full-time union work in 2015, after developing a passion for complex casework at Gingerbread, the national charity for

single parents. After joining Unison as a local organiser, Victoria had the challenging task of organising migrant workers who had a limited understanding of unions. "We had to explain that they wouldn't lose their job by being in a trade union, and tell them all about the educational benefits of joining a union – especially when they didn't have English as a first language."

Victoria joined the FDA as a national officer in 2016, tempted by increased professional autonomy and the opportunity to hone her casework skills. She now looks after the Ministry of Justice, the Department for Exiting the European Union and the Department for International Trade.

“Helping people through really difficult times at work is one of the best bits of the job”

Despite their different remits, Victoria says members in all three organisations share common challenges, with recruitment and retention difficulties exacerbated by the cap on civil service pay. "For example, the Moj is going through a really huge change programme at the moment – court closures, restructuring, and thinking about how they can deliver justice in the best way," she explains. "It's really exciting work, but it's not paid very well, and the amount that you're expected to do simply as goodwill is really significant."

Victoria says representing individual members is "one of the best bits" of her job, because it involves directly supporting people "through something really difficult or really challenging at work – and getting the right outcome". She would like to see the FDA shout louder about its achievements for individual members through casework – something that might finally get her job recognised on one of her Highgate tours.
Matt Foster

Alan Bailey

FDA Organiser



Alan joined the FDA following a successful track record in the student movement, being elected as Vice President of the University of Salford Students' Union and

as a full-time paid national officer for the National Union of Students (NUS).

After leaving Salford, he joined the staff of the University College London (UCL) Students' Union, to do democracy and campaigns work. It was here that

Alan became active in his Unison branch – becoming LGBT officer, a rep, branch chair, and branch secretary – before deciding to take the step to a full-time trade union work with the FDA.

"I felt like I'd done my time in the student movement. I'd really enjoyed all the trade union work I had done as a branch secretary, so I wanted to continue on from that," Alan explains.

Alan says the work the FDA Organiser is an "exciting and interesting challenge" because the union is "still relatively new to organising" and "it's not your typical trade union, by the nature of its membership being managers". Alan admits that the approaches available to him at the FDA aren't the same as when he was working in the student movement. But Alan says this has forced him to be more creative with a smaller

range of options.

Alan's first big aim is to improve the support and training given to FDA reps – to bring it up to the same standard as the FDA's professional development offering. He also wants to make better use of the skills of FDA members. "We've got the most skilled membership base of maybe any trade union and that is a potential advantage if we are creative in how we can tap into that," Alan explains. "We should think about how we can use that strength."

Outside the office Alan enjoys singing Karaoke with friends, although he claims his singing voice is "embarrassingly bad for a Welshman". Perhaps aiming to do better justice to his Welsh heritage, Alan has also started learning the Welsh language.

Tommy Newell

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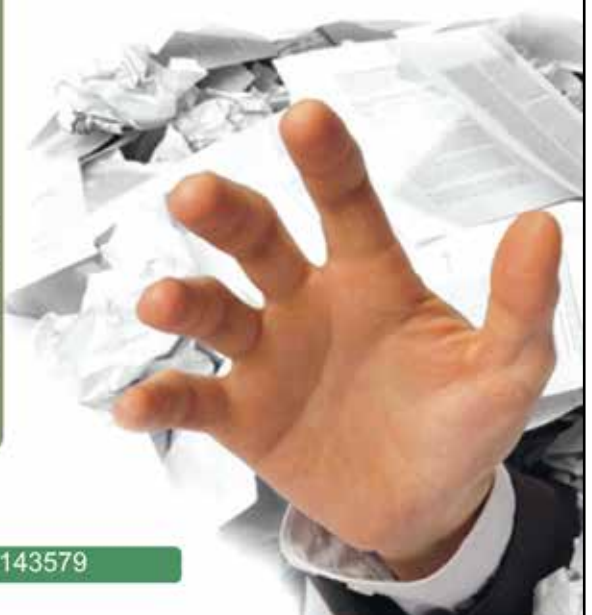
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Books

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

Citizen Clem

by John Bew

riverrun paperback, 688pp, £12.99



For someone often cited as our greatest prime minister, something of a reverse cult of personality surrounds Clement Attlee. The aura of heroism attaches more

readily to his government than to the man himself. Who knows much now, for example, about Attlee's distinguished service in World War I, when he was, as John Bew gleefully tells us in this classy new biography, "shot in the buttocks as he carried the red flag over the top"?

That red flag was the flag of his regiment, the South Lancashires, not the socialist standard sung about at Labour conferences. Bew argues convincingly that Attlee's deep sense of patriotism and loyalty is the key to understanding his enduring political achievements. As a "social patriot", his patriotism "meant not fidelity to caste or cohort, but to the commonwealth". Attlee himself said his proudest achievement was not the NHS, but taking Labour into the wartime coalition with Winston Churchill.

Bew explains how Attlee "matured into socialism" – developing the sense of purpose and steely determination that turned this shy and diffident man into the great achiever of the British left. Attlee "went left by going east": his politics were forged in the years he spent as an East End social worker, subsisting in a garret above the youth club – an experience that Bew says inured him to the "Fabian aloofness" that infected many of his comrades.

Genuine modesty led almost everyone to underestimate Attlee (but not Churchill who, while often rude about his rival on the stump, deeply respected Attlee and defended him fiercely in private), and historians have long puzzled over how he survived 20 tumultuous years



“Labour would do better to learn from Attlee's ethos rather than just basking in the reflected glow of his government's achievements”

as Labour leader. While admitting that luck gifted Attlee the leadership in 1935, Bew suggests he was simply better than anyone else: "One of his undoubted skills was to navigate around the larger egos surrounding him, without letting disputes over personality get in the way of the swift execution of government policy."

Like most effective revolutionaries – Thatcher, Lenin, Napoleon – Attlee was well read but always more of a doer than a thinker. Rejecting Marxism early on, he doggedly disputed the idea that socialism demanded an abrupt and complete break with Britain's history and traditions, accusing more doctrinaire and impatient colleagues, like Harold Laski and Nye Bevan, of "demanding a caesarean section rather than a natural birth" for socialism. Poverty and inequality were a "national problem" which required the attention of the state. Attlee may have been a gradualist, but he

knew where he wanted to go.

Bew shows how Attlee painstakingly accumulated a bag of ideas about how democratic socialism should work, which he assembled into a distinctly British programme for government in the post-war years. They included a firm commitment to social justice, a balance between radicalism and pragmatism, a deep sense of patriotism, an emphasis on personal probity and loyalty, and a willingness to work with other traditions within society: Attlee knew that conservatism and socialism were different, but not opposites.

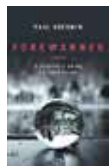
For today's Labour Party, looking to combine radical socialism with electoral credibility, Bew's book is a great place to start. Bew is right to argue that Attlee's was a quintessentially 20th century project – 1945 cannot be repeated – and Labour would do better to learn from Attlee's ethos rather than just basking in the reflected glow of his government's achievements. After all, Attlee's socialism – democratic but patriotic, principled but pragmatic – is the only kind of socialism that ever really worked.

Reviewed by Craig Ryan

Forewarned: A Sceptic's Guide To Prediction

by Paul Goodwin

Biteback Publishing, 304pp, £12.99



Recent events in the UK and abroad suggest these are parlous times for forecasters. Nevertheless, forecasting is still forms a vital part of policy development and our individual attempts to control our lives. This guide provides a critique of the various approaches which have been used to predict the future and offers some suggestions on how to differentiate a good prediction from a bad one.

For Goodwin a bad prediction is one which shows signs of the three cardinal sins of forecasting: contamination, incompleteness and ineptitude. In this context, contamination refers to predictions designed to serve an ulterior agenda. Referring to examples of political interference, Goodwin quotes novelist Andrew Lang: "Politicians use statistics in the same way that a drunk uses lamp-posts: for support rather than

illumination".

Another potential source of confusion arises from 'datafication' – "the ability to convert many aspects of our lives and environment that were previously unmeasured into computerised data". Goodwin points out that unexpected correlations in large datasets often occur, and need to be examined with care and scepticism.

Goodwin provides some interesting examples of this phenomenon: "Data analysed by a San Francisco company suggested that orange used cars are more reliable than those in other colours. A US online lender found that people default

on their loans more often when they complete their loan application forms using only capital letters."

However, good predictions can act as a valuable corrective to complacency, and occasionally point out possibilities that could too easily have been dismissed. Goodwin suggests that techniques for producing such predictions could include scenario planning and implementing anti-fragility measures, where forecasts can help build flexibility and redundancy into systems so that they are not unduly affected by unforeseen events.

With its amalgam of entertaining anecdotes and scientific research, this is a good read for policy professionals and for those with a general interest in understanding the predictions which pepper the headlines.

Reviewed by Anne Grikitis

Bad predictions show signs of the three cardinal forecasting sins: contamination, incompleteness and ineptitude

Off the shelf Other recent reads

If Only They Didn't Speak English: Notes From Trump's America

by Jon Sopel

BBC Books, 323pp, £9.50



The trouble with writing a book about a President as unpredictable as Donald Trump is that by the time it hits the shelves, it's probably already been superseded by a volley of early-hours White House tweets. The BBC's North America editor Jon Sopel wisely eschews a detailed account of the 2016 campaign, to focus on how the most powerful nation on earth ended up putting The Donald in charge. Peppered with sharp humour and offering newbies to US politics a solid crash course what shapes the American psyche – from the Wall Street Crash to segregation – Sopel's account is a pacy, unintimidating guide for anybody currently looking across the pond and scratching their head.

How to Lose a Referendum: The Definitive Story of why the UK Voted for Brexit

by Jason Farrell and Paul Goldsmith

Biteback Publishing, 480pp, £20



Despite its title, this book by Sky News's Jason Farrell and political blogger Paul Goldsmith is not a blow-by-blow account of the 2016 referendum campaign. Instead, it puts Brexit into a historical context, giving 18 reasons for why Britain voted to leave the EU: from the UK's absence at the EU's birth to Thatcher's careless stoking of opposition to her own European policy and Nigel Farage's incendiary role as "the pied-piper of the disaffected".

The broadly pro-EU authors sprinkle blame over a succession of Prime Ministers and Foreign Secretaries, concluding that the balance was tipped by "people who felt left behind", who took "this one opportunity to cast a vote that would definitely, really count".

This is not America

by Alan Friedman

Biteback, 352pp, £12.99



Attempting to answer the question 'What happened to America?', Friedman takes readers on a comprehensive journey of 'real America' to unpick the events that led to Donald Trump's election as President on 8 November 2016. Navigating through the complex backdrop that led to this landmark moment in American political history, Friedman seamlessly weaves together the history of Donald Trump the Man with the political and economic history of America, and personal accounts from American voters.

It's these personal accounts which add real intimacy to the book and offer a glimpse into the thoughts and experiences of a polarised nation.

Reviews by Tommy Newell, Craig Ryan and Matt Foster.

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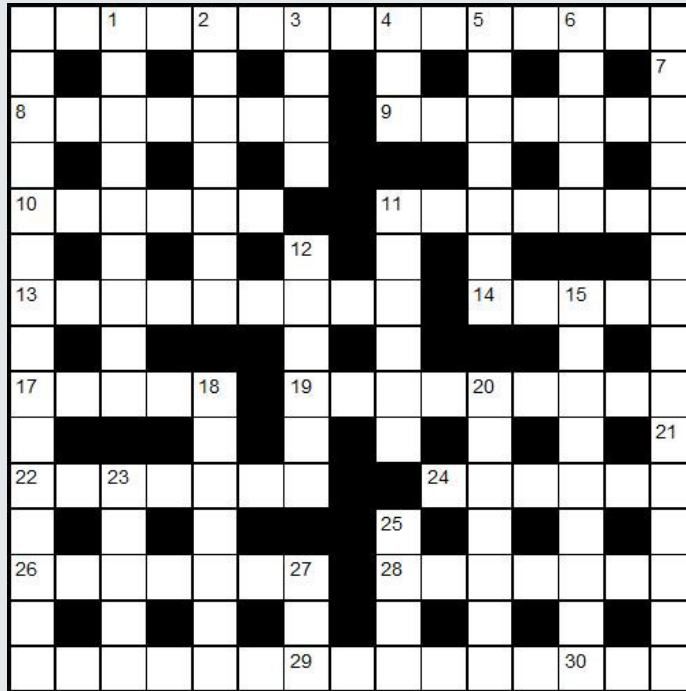
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Crossword

Post Holders by Schadenfreude

The perimeter entries (clued without definitions) and four others represent an unbroken sequence. Solvers must highlight the four normally clued entries. Perimeter answers are clued as if they are entered from left to right.



CLOCKWISE PERIMETER

- 3 Mother's area of knowledge includes English (9)
- 7 Commercial backing wisely abandoned (8, hyphenated)
- 21 Temperature inside blazing house close to ninety (7)
- 30 Embrace male soprano (6)
- 29 Competitive event for lyric poets spanning new year (8)
- 26 Throw out after verbal contention (10)
- 8 Yankee perhaps meeting Mike wearing short trousers (8)

ACROSS

- 8 Bachelor cycles round German circuits (7)
- 9 Anonymous cripple deserted next to a tree-lined avenue (7)
- 10 Revolving disc on the front of this hand tool (6)
- 11 Home for colonists opposed to accepting hard lines (7, hyphenated)
- 13 Failures of more than one embassy (9)
- 14 Hand round a soft fruit (5)
- 17 Remedy incorrect values out of university (5)
- 19 Popular Italian site alive with American launches (9)
- 22 Revolutionary cruel nationalist framed again (7)
- 24 Kid abandoned by daughter taken in by some crazy Greenlander? (6)

- 26 Floating through the air back into part of the building (7)
- 28 Aquatic plant engineers planted in border (7)

DOWN

- 1 Idolater excited about *Independent* newspaper article (9)
- 2 Capital India invested in large reorganised society (7)
- 3 An essential mould (4)
- 4 Marine taking time away from station (3)
- 5 American carrier failure probed by attorney (7, hyphenated)
- 6 Resinous substance beginning to exude on diseased lime (5)
- 11 Necromancer drops female in US state capital (6)
- 12 Fancy having money for new piece of mechanism! (6)
- 15 Father organised a trip with cunning (9)
- 18 Excuse Virginia overcome by raised disturbing sound (7)
- 20 Proceeding takes place making a legal claim (7)
- 23 18th century Irish nationalist, upper-class and very loud in the borders of Derry (5)
- 25 St Agnes perhaps remains extremely loveable (4)
- 27 Humour's good for weak fool (3)

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Solution and winner

Ego Trip by Incognito



The perimeter "MALICIOUS PLEASURE OBTAINED BY THE MISFORTUNES OF OTHER PEOPLE" defines SCHADENFREUDE (the true pseudonym of the setter) which is an anagram of UNDERFED and CHASE.

Winner: Alan Walker, Ministry of Defence (retired).

How to enter

Crossword entries should be sent by Friday 17 November 2017 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 Please provide an email address so we can tell the winner how to claim their prize.

Back channel

Let's not make Brexit even harder

A policy official at one of the key Brexit-focused departments says pay restraint and a lack of political direction are undermining innovative work by the department's civil servants.



When the department was announced it was a bit of a surprise to everybody. A general expression of interest for more people was published across the civil service in 2016, and I thought: 'I want to be part of this, it sounds really interesting. It's probably going to be the biggest thing we'll ever work on.' Given that the prime minister said, "I want a new department and I want it tomorrow", I think the civil service has adapted marvellously - particularly as the UK is still working out where we want to be at the end of it.

The way that we've built an 'all in it together' environment has been incredible. I've never seen anything like it, certainly not within this kind of timescale. We've got really well-established and innovative diversity and inclusion networks to make sure that everybody's getting the opportunities they should have. There's also a lot of attention being paid to personal development and learning, and everybody - all the way up to the top - is aware that we're a time-limited department and therefore we need to make sure we're thinking about supporting people in their next move. That's absolutely something the rest of the civil service ought to be thinking about - there are a lot of departments out there where they don't care what happens to you next.

So it's a unique employer, with some marvellous challenges you won't find anywhere else. But that only goes so far

- after all, really interesting work doesn't pay the bills. We're working flat out for not very much when you look at comparable roles in the private sector and, in some parts of the organisation, we are struggling to find the best people. They look at the job and think, "Oh I could go and work somewhere else and earn £20,000 a year more. Why shouldn't I?"

We do have a significant problem with turnover. I don't think ministers have cottoned on to just how bad it is, or the fact that it is going to get significantly worse over the department's lifetime. People are starting to think, "What next?", and when you already have that kind of mentality, it's much easier in your head to jump ship rather than stick around. That uncertainty adds to the pretty high stress levels that are already here.

In some departments you get a real 'us and them' feel, with the support mechanisms - whether it's IT, finance or HR. That's very much not the case here and, given their extremely limited resources, they're certainly doing everything they can to improve the situation. But their hands are tied to a great extent by wider civil service policy or the Treasury's pay constraints. There is a sense that management would love to do more and realise that pay is an issue, for example. But when ministers say "It's 1% or nothing", the employer only has so much leeway to make changes. There are certainly some parts of the organisation where it feels like we urgently need more

resources, but it's not obvious that that's being addressed. Some of the support functions are recruiting, but not - in my view - with the scale and urgency that they need to get it all under control.

There's also the issue of political direction. With so many different people, departments and stakeholders involved in Brexit, keeping everybody aware of what's going on at any given stage becomes more and more complicated. Pulling people's views on board and prioritising them is quite a challenge, but I think it's being done as well as it can be on an official level.

The challenge is more at the political level, where not everybody agrees, even on the general way forward. That's very difficult to deal with as civil servants - it's not up to us to decide on the outcome. Ministers need to identify what they want to do and then we can do it. The entire purpose of the civil service is to enact the will of the government, and to make that work. But when government doesn't necessarily know what it wants, how are we supposed to deliver?

Back Channel is your chance to tell politicians and employers how their policies affect your work and your organisation. If you'd like to work with a reporter on your own story, email us at psm@fda.org.uk using a personal e-mail account. Anonymity is guaranteed.

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