



Science and Technology Committee

Oral evidence: [Government Horizon Scanning, HC 703](#)

Wednesday 4 December 2013

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Written evidence from witnesses:

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Members present: Andrew Miller (Chair); Stephen Metcalfe; Stephen Mosley; Pamela Nash; Graham Stringer; David Tredinnick

Questions 166-220

Witnesses: **Professor Sir Mark Walport**, Chief Scientific Adviser to Her Majesty's Government and Head of the Government Office for Science, and **Jon Day**, Chair, Horizon Scanning Oversight Group, Cabinet Office, gave evidence.

Q166 Chair: Welcome to our second inquiry—and welcome back, Sir Mark. Mr Day, will you kindly introduce yourself?

Jon Day: I am Jon Day. I am a permanent secretary in the Cabinet Office. My formal title is Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, but I am also lead for cross-Government Horizon Scanning.

Q167 Chair: Thank you for joining us this morning.

First, we want to explore the potential weaknesses in the Foresight Unit's approach to Horizon Scanning. As we have taken evidence in this short inquiry, I still remain a little unclear about the difference between Foresight and crystal ball gazing. We are struggling to get clear definitions here. Perhaps there are different vested interests in this space.

It has been suggested that the Foresight written reports, Sir Mark, take too long to prepare and that the policy agenda has sometimes moved on by the time that they are published. Do you agree with that? If so, what will you do to improve it?

Sir Mark Walport: In my last session, I talked about the Future Cities Foresight programme, which has just kicked off. I indicated that as part of that we were going to have intermediate end points. You can deduce from that, I think, that the model of two years of work followed by a single output could be improved, so we are moving to do that:

we will not have a single, monolithic end point. We will have outputs during the process, and the process itself will be part of the project in the sense that I have already talked about. So the seminars that we are having in individual cities will be outputs and impacts in their own right.

In terms of Foresight and Horizon Scanning, they are both different ways of looking at the future. I hope that we are a little more effective than a crystal ball, but it has always been easier to predict the past than the future. The point about Horizon Scanning and Foresight is to look forward, to use the best evidence, to talk to the best people and to look around the world. Foresight is a particular implementer for Horizon Scanning, where a particular topic is picked from a very broad horizon survey and focus is based in those areas. So the Future Cities project is an example of that. A recent project that my predecessor, Sir John Beddington, undertook—the Foresight Future of Computer Trading project—was over a much shorter time scale and had important impacts. Some Foresight projects—there is a subset around certain security projects—happen over sometimes six months.

Q168 Chair: Some Foresight projects, it seems to me, have multiple target audiences. As I understand it, however, the principal target is the policy makers. How do you manage in terms of drafting documents that need to address both the policy makers, encouraging them to get the policy right following these studies, and the broader public issues, where you need behavioural change particularly to kick in to achieve the kind of vision that has emerged?

Sir Mark Walport: If I may, I will give you an example from another Foresight project that concluded very recently, the Future of Manufacturing project, which again was kicked off by Sir John Beddington, my predecessor. The lead expert group there was chaired by Sir Richard Lapthorne of Cable & Wireless. I think most Foresight projects are not directed at just one audience. The Future of Manufacturing project is about manufacturing and therefore is at least as much directed to industry as it is to Government.

There was a lot of public engagement following the production of that report. I went to Berlin to launch the report in Germany, because there is a sense that the UK has been viewed [in some other countries] as not being a significant manufacturing nation any more. That could not be further from the case: 10% of our GDP is from manufacturing. Admittedly, it is significantly down from a number of years ago, as it is in many economies, but it is still £124 billion a year approximately. It was important to talk about that with our partners in Europe and the Germans produced a rather similar report around the future of manufacturing.

We have seen dramatic changes in manufacturing and the impact for policy makers is that, if we are to have the best policy support for manufacturing, we need to measure it in different ways—we need to measure the whole value chain. Manufacturing is a lot more now than just turning out hundreds of widgets and measuring their value. It is everything from the design through to the embedded services that go with many products. If you buy a jet engine, you are also buying the future servicing—its re-manufacturing, effectively—over five years and more. So that Foresight report was directed to Government but was also directed to industry. A great deal of evidence was commissioned in preparation of the report so that, as far as possible, it was a well-illuminated crystal ball, to use that metaphor.

Jon Day: In my experience, a critical factor is to make sure that you know who your readers and customers are. That is one of the things that we have tried to do in the broader Horizon Scanning work. For example, the papers that we are producing for the group that Sir Jeremy Heywood chairs are five or six pages. By contrast, some of the work on which they are based is much longer. For example, the DCDC's "Global Strategic Trends" that the MOD produces is a very large document.

I think the problem has often been in the past that the Horizon Scanning community has adopted a one-size-fits-all approach and has produced a single document without thinking who the customer is and what the customer needs. Part of what we are trying to do is to build on what Sir Mark has said and be more nuanced in the way in which we approach this across the board.

Q169 Chair: So you would endorse the idea of interim reports like the city report and tailored reports for different audiences?

Jon Day: Very much so.

Q170 Stephen Metcalfe: Following on from that, can you talk specifically about the Horizon Scanning Centre? Can you give us some indication of the volume of work it does each year on behalf of Departments? What would be an average number of reports and can you give us some examples—I know you already have—of what the Horizon Scanning Centre might do?

Sir Mark Walport: A lot of the work of the Horizon Scanning Centre is not in producing reports; it is working with networks of people both inside Government and outside to catalyse Horizon Scanning work. A recent example is the work of the Horizon Scanning Centre with DEFRA and Cranfield, where the Horizon Scanning Centre, DEFRA and the Futures team at Cranfield ran a workshop to help inform DEFRA's upcoming evidence investment strategy. So the Horizon Scanning Centre is running workshops. In 2012, its work on technology and innovation futures was done through workshops and helped to inform the Science Minister's thinking of technologies. So a lot of the Centre's work is about catalysis. The Horizon Scanning Centre provides expertise and the reports are often ultimately produced by others.

Q171 Stephen Metcalfe: And the volume of work?

Sir Mark Walport: I don't think I could tell you, although I have some information. The Horizon Scanning group, for example, trained more than 100 officials in Horizon Scanning between June 2011 and December 2012, plus another 26 when the training was re-launched in September. There have been three futures networks, heads of Horizon Scanning, 70 representatives and Horizon Scanning from 34 Departments and agencies, so the Horizon Scanning toolkit has been accessed by more than 530 individual users. I am not sure whether that is a useful metric. I could provide further statistics, but a lot of it is in the form of workshops and meetings.

Q172 Stephen Metcalfe: Is that why the HSC does not publish the work that it conducts?

Sir Mark Walport: Yes. A lot of it is catalytic. It is the Foresight bit that does most of the publications for GO-Science.

Q173 Stephen Metcalfe: Do all Departments use the HSC as effectively as they could?

Sir Mark Walport: Again, I have a breakdown of the Departments that are involved in the communities of interest—the officials group—that look at Horizon Scanning, and it is a comprehensive matrix that I would be happy to share. Most Departments are involved, so on emerging technologies there is a tick next to virtually every Government Department.

Q174 Stephen Metcalfe: Is there one particular Department that stands out as not having a tick against it that perhaps should have?

Sir Mark Walport: On this matrix, I think that every Department has a tick in at least one box, going from emerging technologies to social attitudes among young people, resource security, emerging economies, demographic change and the officials group that supports the Cabinet Secretary's group. So there is no completely missing Department.

Q175 Stephen Metcalfe: My final question is on the FAN club—the Futures Analysts Network—that had met fairly regularly, quarterly I believe, from 2004 onwards and was disbanded in 2010. Do you know why that was? What has replaced it?

Sir Mark Walport: Yes, my briefing has worked for me. The FAN club was disbanded in 2010, which of course was before my time, to allow the development of more focused, leaner networks that better meet the needs of Government. Those networks include the Horizon Scanning Centre networks. There is the Heads of Horizon Scanning Network—70 representatives and 34 Government Departments and agencies. There is the Future Intelligence and Security Outlook Network, which focuses on security issues and includes more than 60 members from across 20 organisations. There is also a developing private sector network. The FAN club was disbanded because it was thought to be unwieldy and cumbersome, and it was replaced with more targeted activities.

Q176 Chair: Before we leave Departments, are you satisfied that there are sufficient skills across the Departments? What is happening to ensure that training is given?

Sir Mark Walport: The analyst community is very strong across Government Departments. Part of the role of the analysts, and indeed the policy makers, is to scan the horizon. I do not think I can give you a detailed breakdown Department by Department, but there are certainly people employed in each Government Department who cannot do their job properly without scanning the horizon.

Jon Day: Part of our work in looking at Horizon Scanning more generally was on building up civil service expertise in Horizon Scanning and other skills. I think we expected to find a shortfall of trained individuals and significant gaps, but that is not what we found. What we found was a problem of joining up, directing and making use, not a problem of skills. Initiatives are going ahead in other related parts of Government. I am the professional head of intelligence analysts, and we have just launched a major initiative to professionalise and train more effectively that cadre of people. A lot is going on, but it is not against a background of what I would call a significant skills shortage.

Q177 Chair: Is that “joining up the dots” problem substantially reflecting the silo nature of Government?

Jon Day: Yes, and specifically the silo nature of Horizon Scanning, which we discovered when we did this work last year. It was very striking how stovepiped the world was, but also how enthusiastic the people within the stovepipes were to networking and establishing a framework across Government.

Q178 David Tredinnick: I want to ask you both about definitions and terminology. When I think of Horizon Scanning, the image that I have in my mind is of a 19th century warship, probably the Victory, with a man up the mainmast called the crow's nest, in a barrel, with a telescope looking for French ships on the horizon. I think there are other phrases out there—there is future analysis, future thinking, long-range planning maybe. What is your view of this terminology?

Jon Day: My personal view is that Government and international organisations spend too much time focusing on definitions and the theology that surrounds them. We found, as you say, that there was a whole range of different definitions but they all broadly meant the same thing. What we tried to do was create a common description that would apply to all of these disciplines across Government. The single sentence is: “A systematic examination of information to identify potential threats, risks, emerging issues and opportunities, beyond the Parliamentary term, allowing for better preparedness and the incorporation of mitigation and exploitation into the policy making process.”

We deliberately didn't make it any shorter than that because we were trying to describe. I think that is now the definition that we are trying to use and it certainly sums up what the community that we have brought together under the Horizon Scanning heading actually does.

Q179 David Tredinnick: Quite a long definition, if I may say so.

Jon Day: It is.

Chair: I am surprised your Defence colleagues haven't invented an acronym for it.

Jon Day: They will.

Chair: They will, yes.

Sir Mark Walport: You had another answer in your inquiry earlier, which was from Doug McKay at Shell, who said: “There are a number of different tools to help you think about the future better, but this is fundamentally about thinking long term.” I entirely agree with John. I think one can get into a sort of dance on the point of a pin in terms of definition.

Q180 David Tredinnick: But it is not quite that though, Sir Mark, is it, because some practitioners in industry and academia have criticised this terminology. Isn't there a danger that if you don't have a common terminology which is agreed and accepted, then it is a bit of a muddle out there? Really what you have just summed up is something called long-range vision, isn't it? Three words.

Jon Day: You could, but then you would have to describe it.

Sir Mark Walport: It is about analysing the future. I must pay tribute to Jon and his work because it has been very helpful for the Government Office for Science and the Horizon

Scanning Centre because it has enabled our work to be embedded much more effectively across Government, so I think it has been entirely good news. Part of the work we did recently for the Cabinet Secretary's group was around Horizon Scanning the Horizon Scanning environment. Here I have four A3 sheets which describe the extraordinary environment of Horizon Scanning that is going on out there. Actually part of that Horizon Scanning is scanning what other good horizon scanners are doing.

Chair: It does sound “Yes, Minister”-ish.

Q181 David Tredinnick: I used to work on the other side, in industry, and we were always taught that you should be able to describe anything in a phrase if possible, and a sentence at most. It does seem a long description to me. You are focusing on Horizon Scanning as the key phrase. Is that the only one? Is there anything else out there that you would like to use, as a subset of Horizon Scanning?

Jon Day: My own prejudice is that if we change course now it would be more confusing. We have branded this within Government as Horizon Scanning, made it clear it is not creating a single centralised focal point that does everything. It is a network of groups which are much more joined up, much more directed, and much more relevant than they have been in the past. My own personal view is that if we tried to rebrand it, it would be more rather than less confusing.

Q182 Chair: Can I just halt there and check that we are on the same wavelength? We are talking about different groups of people applying not just a single technique, but a spectrum of techniques.

Jon Day: Exactly.

Q183 David Tredinnick: Finally, witnesses have told us that most practitioners use the term “futures research”, but you feel strongly that you should stick to Horizon Scanning.

Jon Day: I do.

David Tredinnick: Despite what these other witnesses—

Jon Day: My prejudice is based on what we inherited in the confusion that existed. I think we have clarified that within Government, and indeed outside Government, and I would be reluctant to move away from it.

Q184 Stephen Mosley: You talk about the confusion that you inherited. Was that why the Government felt it was necessary for you to commission your report?

Jon Day: In part. The genesis of this was Sir Jeremy Heywood's concern about the Government's ability to do long-term policy planning, if you like. His concern was that the Government were not joined up in terms of what they were doing. From my own experience in defence, there is a sense of defence and security being insular at times, compared with the rest of the Government. For example, with the global strategic trends work that the Defence Development, Concept and Doctrine Centre produces, which is of the highest quality, most of the rest of Government hadn't the faintest idea it existed.

My aim was to try to break down the stovepipes that we had been talking about and bring a sense of relevance to this work. What struck me in the work that we did on what the situation was last year was that a lot of Horizon Scanning work was not directed by policy, but self-initiated. It was not directed at a particular customer and was therefore often unintelligible for potential users. It was finalised and then essentially thrown over the wall into the policy area without any structure for following up. All those weaknesses, we felt, meant that there was a better way of doing things.

Q185 Stephen Mosley: Why were you specifically chosen to do the review?

Jon Day: You would have to ask Jeremy Heywood that. I think because I have a background as a policy customer of Horizon Scanning and related experience in policy planning and intelligence analysis. The Joint Intelligence Committee was seen as something of a model for central co-ordination of work of this kind. And I was around.

Q186 Stephen Mosley: Eleven months after the publication of the review, do you feel that your recommendations have been implemented as you intended?

Jon Day: Eleven months is too early to say. They have certainly been implemented as I intended, but I think it is still too early to say whether they have been as successful as I had hoped. I think that is something that we will have to focus on at the end of next year when we have been through a first cycle of issues and also seen what the second round comprises.

We talked to a very respected senior academic about this and he reckoned that over the years, and probably since the '50s, the Government had attempted to do what we are trying to do—revitalise what we now call Horizon Scanning—on nine or 10 different occasions and they had all failed, so there is a challenge here.

Q187 Stephen Mosley: Sir Mark, from your perspective, how do you feel the review went and how is it being implemented so far, although it is only 11 months in?

Sir Mark Walport: I, of course, have started in Government since the review. As I said before, I think it has been entirely helpful from my perspective. It has been consistent with the direction in which I am taking the Foresight programme in general. I think the point about customers is extremely well made; there is no point in doing something if there isn't someone who wants to receive the work. Certainly the work of the Horizon Scanning Centre is, I think, now being used in support of the Cabinet Secretary's Advisory Group on this, so I think it is heading in the right direction.

The challenge in Horizon Scanning is to scan over a relevant time period for policy makers. Actually, to go back to Mr Tredinnick's naval metaphor, the point about Horizon Scanning is using the appropriate instruments. If you are on a ship, you want binoculars so that you can scan the whole horizon, but when you see something, you want a telescope to look and find out what it is. I think Horizon Scanning uses a whole variety of different techniques to scan both broadly and narrowly.

We are trying to work in areas that we believe have contemporary policy relevance, and Future Manufacturing is a good example of that—it is looking a long way out, but with short-term policy relevance. But then, of course, the challenge for us is that it is up to the

policy makers—the politicians—actually to make the decisions. We think this is an important tool to help them.

Q188 Stephen Metcalfe: Under the new governance structure that you have described, who will actually do the work? Who will do the Horizon Scanning?

Jon Day: A network of communities of interest drawn from across the Government, bringing together the relevant experts, most of whom are the Horizon Scanning groups that already exist in individual Departments, but with some wider constituents as well, including outsiders. We looked at the option of setting up a whole new central organisation that would subsume Sir Mark's world as well as the other departmental groups, but decided that was not something that would add value—it would probably become more bureaucratic and would also run the risk of lowest common denominator joint groupthink. We have tried to bring together the existing skills and expertise and to develop them, as I say, in this series of communities of interest.

I was keen to use another JIC process. The JIC is there to test the work that comes before it and there was no collective vehicle for that. We have tried in both Sir Jeremy's group and my group—that has a challenge function. The JIC has been doing this for decades. We have been doing it in the Horizon Scanning field for a year, but I hope, over time, that that will be one of the real benefits of this process, and that as the reports come up to Jeremy's group, there will be a coherent, organised, structured process of challenge. That means that there will be some occasions when the work will be pushed back to be started again or just finished. I am keen to use this to challenge some of the preconceptions that exist within Government about what we do and do not know. If that means that we identify that there aren't problems, it is part of the process.

Q189 Stephen Metcalfe: Thank you. I would like to explore the membership of some of these various groups. You have talked about the communities of interest. Who makes up the communities of interest when it comes to looking at emerging technologies? What is the make-up of that group?

Jon Day: I don't think I—

Sir Mark Walport: I have the list here.

Jon Day: You do? Excellent.

Sir Mark Walport: It is: Department of Health, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, Treasury, Department for International Development, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, UK Trade & Investment, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure, Department of Energy and Climate Change, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Department for Work and Pensions, Government Office for Science, Ministry of Defence, Cabinet Office, Office for National Statistics, Department for Communities and Local Government, Ministry of Justice, Government Communications Headquarters, Department for Transport, Home Office, and the Northern Ireland Executive. Sorry it is a long list—

Jon Day: But everybody has an interest in that.

Q190 Chair: Yes. Could you make that list available to us?

Sir Mark Walport: I should think so, yes.

Q191 Stephen Metcalfe: How was the group drawn up? Does someone express an interest—

Sir Mark Walport: That would have been the work of the Horizon Scanning Centre and GOSH, with the different Departments. You can see that they all expressed an interest in this. It makes sense that emerging technologies, including big data, would be of interest to all those Departments.

Jon Day: There are some that are much more discrete. For example, a much smaller group of Departments are interested in resource. We have found that, in some cases, there were no groups bringing together Departments in this way, or in other areas there were groups that had atrophied and we managed to revitalise them.

Q192 Chair: Can we be clear: is this just Departments, or are there external bodies on some of these? For example, the big data one. Obviously, there is plenty of expertise out in the private sector that ought to be involved in this discussion.

Jon Day: The first year has been focused on doing this internally within Government to get added value for the Government. Increasingly, we are now moving out and engaging with the private sector and academia.

Q193 Chair: So the next generation of that list will be an entirely different beast?

Jon Day: It should be.

Q194 Chair: It should be. Should or will?

Jon Day: Should, at the moment. I will come back to you in a year's time as to whether it has.

Q195 Stephen Metcalfe: You talked about your group and Sir Jeremy's group. What is the make-up of those?

Jon Day: Sir Jeremy's group is a group of permanent secretaries who he has brought together on a personal basis, including Sir Mark and me. My group is essentially a group of the Departments that are most interested in Horizon Scanning as a whole, represented broadly at the Director level. I chair it, but it is broadly Director level.

Q196 Stephen Metcalfe: So neither of those groups gets any external input?

Jon Day: Not at the moment, no. That is one of the things that I want to engage with. Sir Jeremy, in particular, is keen to bring outsiders into that group, but we haven't yet done so.

Q197 Stephen Metcalfe: What I am taking from this is that we are in a period of great change. Actually, we should get you back in a year and do a follow-up to see whether any of these changes have actually taken place.

Jon Day: We really need to make sure that our feet are held to the fire on this, but at the moment this is work in progress. In a year's time we will have a far better idea of what works and what doesn't.

Chair: That is an invitation to review our inquiry in a year's time. Thank you; we will do that.

Sir Mark Walport: It is worth a comment in terms of externals. The Horizon Scanning Centre's Heads of Horizon Scanning network does include non-governmental organisations: the Royal Society, Nesta and the Forum for the Future. GO-Science is developing a private sector network. Although I don't want to repeat the "Yes Minister" answer, that network of Horizon Scanning that goes on inside and outside Government is actually rather well connected. Some of the discussions about the policy implications for Government need to go on within that.

Q198 Graham Stringer: Are you going to—or do you—publish all the outputs from these Horizon Scanning groups when they are not classified?

Jon Day: Our presumption is in favour of publication unless there is a reason not to, so the answer is yes.

Q199 Graham Stringer: I am not sure about the time scale, but are you currently publishing them? How many have you published in the last year?

Jon Day: No. One of the exercises has been through the full process at the moment. My aim would be to publish it as soon as possible next year.

Q200 Graham Stringer: And then there will be a stream of publications.

Jon Day: Yes, and the default is that they will be published and will contribute towards the broader debate that exists within the academic and public sector communities.

Q201 Graham Stringer: I got confused by your answer to Stephen's question with all the acronyms and different groups. What is your group called?

Jon Day: The acronym is GOSH.

Q202 Graham Stringer: That is GOSH. What does the Horizon Scanning Oversight Group consist of? Who is on that, if you haven't already told us?

Jon Day: There are two groups: there is the Cabinet Secretary's Oversight Group, which is Sir Jeremy Heywood's; and then there is my group, which is GOSH, and then there are the communities and interests below that. It is a very spare structure.

Q203 Graham Stringer: So, the Horizon Scanning Oversight Group. Which one is that?

Jon Day: I think that's probably what we now call the Cabinet Secretary's Oversight Group.

Q204 Graham Stringer: Are they one and the same thing?

Jon Day: Yes, I think so.

Sir Mark Walport: Within the Foresight programme, within the Government Office for Science, there is the Horizon Scanning Centre, which has been there for quite a long time and is increasingly working with the Cabinet Secretary's group.

Graham Stringer: Thank you. I think I'm clearer.

Jon Day: Oh, actually, I do see what you are saying. The Cabinet Secretary's Advisory Group has remained the Cabinet Secretary's Advisory Group. The Horizon Scanning Oversight Group has become GOSH, which I chair.

Graham Stringer: Right. I'm even clearer now.

Q205 Pamela Nash: Will the primary focus of the new Horizon Scanning programme be on policy—to answer specific policy questions—or on strategy?

Jon Day: As far as the Horizon Scanning—

Q206 Pamela Nash: What will be the focus of Horizon Scanning in the near future?

Jon Day: I don't think it is constrained to policy or strategy or, indeed, implementation. It does not have a constraint. We have consciously not said that it will operate in a particular sphere. That is why we have been quite careful about the definition, so it does not box it into a process. I suspect its focus will depend in large part on the political context and the individuals who are driving it.

Q207 Pamela Nash: Can I ask about that? Who does drive it? If we take policy first, when Horizon Scanning is expected to provide information to facilitate specific policy making, who decides which policy areas are looked at? Who gives that indication?

Jon Day: Jeremy Heywood's group essentially commissions, although my group can commission. At the moment, it is commissioned by Jeremy's group and Ministers are briefed on what we are doing. Horizon Scanning can contribute to policy, strategy and implementation. We have not constrained it into specifics, into another set of stovepipes. The aim is for it to contribute to the development of policy, strategy and implementation across Government.

Q208 Pamela Nash: So that I have a better understanding, how often do those groups meet? Are these monthly decisions? Do policy makers get a chance to update Jeremy's group? How often is it, or can they call on the expertise at any time?

Jon Day: I will be able to tell you at the end of next year how regularly they have met. The aim is for them to meet two or three times a year. But the communities of interest meet regularly depending on the circumstances. Some of the communities of interest will be formed, do their work and then disappear. Essentially the process at the moment is based around two or three meetings a year for the broad picture. Frankly, if you try to do much more than that you cease to be strategic.

Q209 Pamela Nash: Okay. As this is a new programme, part of the answer is that you will come back in a year's time. Can you tell us how success will be measured in that programme

and, in the meantime, how is the success of the programme going to be assessed and monitored?

Jon Day: We are developing a process for this at the moment but I am quite keen for this to be process lite. It will be based around a review probably by the secretariat, probably with some outside engagement, to come back to Jeremy's group on an annual basis. My own view is that we will measure success by the impact that the individual programmes have on policy and strategy. If at the end of next year they have essentially had little impact then we will not have succeeded and will need to look again at the model. I think already there has been impact: big data is a good example. If there has been some impact, we will be able to identify what works and what does not.

Q210 David Tredinnick: Mr Day, in your answer to Graham Stringer I got the impression that you were struggling to work out what all these different groups are. I wonder if we need so many advisory groups. We have got the Cabinet Secretary's Advisory Group. We have got GOSH, which used to be called the Horizon Scanning Oversight Group. Do we need all these different groups?

Jon Day: The structure is based very much on the successful model that we have developed in the Joint Intelligence Committee. The Joint Intelligence Committee produces intelligence advice which is then injected into the policy and strategy work of the National Security Council. There is a real distinction to be drawn between providing objective advice, which is what Horizon Scanning is doing, and taking policy decisions.

Q211 David Tredinnick: I put it to you that the acronym GOSH it is open to ridicule. It is the sort of thing you might find in a comic strip. I just cannot imagine why the Horizon Scanning Oversight Group was given the name GOSH. It just seems that you are asking for trouble.

Jon Day: The reason was to do exactly what you said about marketing: to give it a degree of focus that it would not otherwise have had.

Q212 David Tredinnick: There is another word that springs to mind that goes with GOSH, which I am not going to use. It is seen in comic strips. I just don't think it is very good marketing. May I ask you something else? Why did you consider it important for the Government chief scientific adviser to be on the Cabinet Secretary's Advisory Group?

Jon Day: Why?

David Tredinnick: Yes, why is that important? It is a fairly obvious question but we are trying to explore these avenues and I would be grateful if you would answer.

Sir Mark Walport: I could give you an answer—

David Tredinnick: Thank you. That is why I asked the question.

Sir Mark Walport: Given the previous hour, where I think it was acknowledged that science, engineering, technology and social science are important in almost every area of Government policy, it would be surprising not to have a very strong input into the Cabinet Secretary's Advisory Group on this topic. Leaving acronyms aside, I come in—I am

relatively new in Government—and I look at function. I don't think this is a complicated structure. It is basically two committees at the centre of Government. It is the Cabinet Secretary's Advisory Group, which is supported by another committee which has the acronym GOSH.

Form should follow function and the function here works well. I then inherited within the Government Office for Science the Foresight Horizon Scanning group and they work together very effectively using the instruments of the binoculars and the telescope. That feeds into this process very well. I am delighted that the central structure is now set up in Government, which is a very good customer for the work of the Government Office for Science. If you look outside Government at the sorts of organisations that are involved in scanning the future you will see that it is those organisations that are effective and where science, engineering and technology are important. I could not conceive, personally, of having a Horizon Scanning group that did not have scientific input.

Q213 David Tredinnick: Sir Mark, you touched on this and I seek clarity here: what is the role of GO-Science in the new Horizon Scanning programme?

Sir Mark Walport: We provide support for it. We work, as we have done, on identifying important areas of the future where science, engineering and technology are likely to make contributions and we do detailed pieces of work. Working with the Cabinet Secretary's group we have been doing work in support of demography, which underpins almost every aspect of future policy. And demography feeds very nicely into our work on Future Cities. I don't think there is any incompatibility at all.

Q214 David Tredinnick: Finally, do you feel that there are clearly defined responsibilities for the departmental chief scientific advisers to ensure that there is sufficient scientific input into Horizon Scanning across Government?

Sir Mark Walport: Yes.

Q215 Chair: A final question, if I may. A few years ago I was privileged to attend a course—Jon Day will be familiar with it—at the Royal College of Defence Studies. There was significant academic input into the course, not just from King's, which runs it, but from outside. It engaged the students, who are our future military strategists, on issues such as the future causes of war—water, religion, climate change, you name it. Would it not be better to have such systems inside the civil service training system so that you inculcate that thinking in every part of the civil service, rather than these committees operating independently?

Jon Day: So that I understand, are you suggesting a version of the RCDS for civilians?

Q216 Chair: Yes. Bringing in the greatest academic expertise into the general training of the civil service, so that on a day-to-day basis they are thinking about those things.

Jon Day: I agree with you. In part, that is the role that the Civil Service College has traditionally undertaken. As far as the defence and security field is concerned, the RCDS is now part of the Defence Academy, which has a strong civilian teaching component.

Q217 Chair: On defence, it is part of history. We have been doing it for some time. Indeed, people come from all over the world for courses such as that.

Jon Day: Exactly so.

Q218 Chair: Why is it not done in the rest of the civil service? That is the question I am trying to get at.

Jon Day: I'm not sure that is really a question for me.

Q219 Chair: But wouldn't it be a good idea?

Jon Day: Traditionally, the role played by the Civil Service College—I am picking my words carefully—is one that I have a lot of sympathy for, because I have benefitted from it. Increasingly over the years we have moved to a more dispersed process of delivering that sort of engagement. The one thing I will say is that in every field in which I have been involved where there is training, whether it is within the defence and security field or more widely, it has always been with the strong engagement of the academic community. There are issues and questions around how you do it, but the fact that you need to do it is entirely accepted and part of the way in which we try to do business.

Q220 Chair: That sounds like a yes to me.

Jon Day: You may well think so.

Chair: Mr Day, Sir Mark, thank you very much for your attendance this morning.