

Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Civil Service effectiveness, HC 497

Tuesday 1 May 2018

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Members present: Mr Bernard Jenkin (Chair); Mr Marcus Fysh; Dame Cheryl Gillan; Kelvin Hopkins; Dr Rupa Huq; Mr David Jones; David Morris.

Questions 522 - 639

Witnesses

Oliver Dowden MP, Parliamentary Secretary and Minister for Implementation, and Rupert McNeil, Chief People Officer, Cabinet Office.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Oliver Dowden and Rupert McNeil.

Q522 **Chair:** I welcome our two witnesses to this session of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Select Committee on Civil Service effectiveness. We have been looking in particular at the effectiveness of departmental leadership across Whitehall and the relationship between Ministers and officials—something that in years gone by people have been very reluctant to talk about, yet has become very topical. We have innovatively commissioned a report from Professor Kakabadse of Henley Business School to conduct a large number of interviews with officials, Ministers and special advisers, both serving and former, in order to try to understand better the nature of this relationship.

I ask each of you to identify yourselves for the record, as a preliminary.

Oliver Dowden: Oliver Dowden, Parliamentary Secretary in the Cabinet Office.

Rupert McNeil: Rupert McNeil, Government Chief People Officer in the Cabinet Office.

Q523 **Chair:** Welcome to you both. Professor Kakabadse's evidence to this inquiry has stressed the loyalty of civil servants to their Ministers and the very strong culture of the intention to serve the will of the Minister, if at



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all possible and when at all possible. Minister, what has been your experience in this regard?

Oliver Dowden: I fundamentally agree with what Andrew Kakabadse says in what is a very good report: that there is a desire to serve the Government. However, I do think that rightly there is a creative tension between Ministers and senior civil servants. Clearly there would be no point in having Ministers if there was not that sort of tension. The tension is that Ministers need to make sure they represent the will of the people that elected their Government and they need to provide challenge to their civil servants. Civil servants in turn need to be encouraged to challenge the other way, in the sense of saying when things that Ministers want to do are going to be difficult and the challenges involved with it.

In a healthy relationship there is that constructive and open challenge between the two of them, then the issue is resolved, the Minister makes a decision and it is implemented. In a less healthy relationship there is insufficient challenge, either because civil servants do not feel their role is to question what the Minister is doing or Ministers do not feel they need to be terribly cognisant of what civil servants are saying. Rather than the issue being aired openly, it gets pushed further down the line. It is an unhealthy relationship if that then translates to civil servants deciding not to implement something or to go slow on it because they do not think it is a terribly good idea, but that has not been expressed at an initial stage.

Overall the relationship is good. One of the things that Andrew Kakabadse identifies is that it is important at the beginning to get that relationship right. Ministers need to be clear about their expectation that there should be constructive challenge so civil servants feel they are able to get their view across, and then once an issue is resolved, proceed with implementation.

Q524 **Chair:** What circumstances arise that make it difficult for a civil servant to have that open discussion with the Minister so these things get bottled up?

Oliver Dowden: I have a little experience with this, coming in as a new Minister, and also from my time working in Downing Street. Sometimes the speed of ministerial appointments means that when Ministers arrive they get an excellent and extensive briefing on all the policy issues on their desk, they get to meet a succession of officials and are told, "This official is dealing with this issue". Then the official will say, "These are all the issues I have to deal with". However, time is not found for a conversation about how relationships should work and what the mutual expectations are. That is partly the job of the Permanent Secretary—to try to find the space for that, and partly the job of Ministers to know when they come in that they should be having those sorts of conversations.

Q525 **Chair:** In the end—as we have once again just discovered this week—the buck stops with the Secretary of State. In the end it is for the Secretary



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of State to generate the right atmosphere between the Secretary of State and the Permanent Secretary so the Permanent Secretary can generate the right atmosphere throughout the Department.

There are some Ministers, not necessarily new Ministers, who take the view—Francis Maude was a very strong case in point—that there are elements of the Civil Service determined to resist what Ministers want because they have their own agenda. First of all, is this an accurate understanding of their relationship with their officials? I can think of one or two serving Ministers who feel that very strongly today. If this is a misconception, what can be done to address this misconception?

Oliver Dowden: There are a number of points there. On the first point on whether this is the case and whether Francis is correct, it has not been my experience. However, I have had relatively limited experience, I admit, on that front.

What I have seen previously—although I would not say I have seen it as a Minister—is there can be something in the term “the departmental view”. I never quite understood where the departmental view came from because Departments are servants of the will of the people and the will of Ministers. Sometimes from Ministers there needs to be a clear sense of what their priorities are when they come in, to challenge that the status quo does not prevail and there is not an ongoing departmental view, that they have their own priorities. In terms of what we can do about it, clear prioritisation from Ministers is important.

I am realistic about how much formal structure you can put in when Ministers arrive because they have enough on their plate. There is another thing that I have discussed with Rupert of having some sort of agreed checklist or set of priorities. When a Minister starts, the Permanent Secretary sits down with the Minister and says, “What are your priorities? How do you want to work?” so you try to get that relationship off on the right footing.

Q526 **Chair:** I know one former Secretary of State who, when I said, “How often do you meet your Permanent Secretary?” said, “About once a fortnight. She just does the pay and rations”. How much is it a responsibility for the Government to make sure Ministers understand their fiduciary responsibility for the care of their Departments as institutions?

Oliver Dowden: It is clearly the overall responsibility of the Cabinet Office in terms of its co-ordinating function for Government as a whole. There is clear guidance to Ministers in the Ministerial Code. I know the current Prime Minister—and former Prime Ministers—take a close interest in the Ministerial Code, ensuring that it enshrines what is expected of Ministers.

Equally, there is guidance in the Civil Service Code for civil servants and guidance for special advisers in the Special Advisers’ Code. There is clarity about what the responsibilities are. The challenge is making sure,



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particularly when Ministers are first appointed, they take the time to bring those issues to the front of their mind.

Q527 **Chair:** Ministers have occasionally decided to trash their Departments, starting with John Reid saying the Home Office was not fit for purpose. The Home Office seems to have been bit of a punch bag for successive Secretaries of State—not least the most recently departed, who seemed to be criticising her officials for her predicament rather than taking responsibility for herself. What do you think the effect is of this public criticism, also from former Ministers, on civil servants?

Oliver Dowden: First of all, with respect to Amber Rudd as the Home Secretary who has just resigned, she has taken responsibility for inadvertently misleading the House and has resigned. Clearly I am not a Home Office Minister, so I do not know all the ins and outs of it.

Q528 **Chair:** How justified was she for implying that her officials were somehow to blame?

Oliver Dowden: She has taken full responsibility for herself.

Chair: I appreciate that, but I am asking a different question. How justified is it ever for a Minister to lay the responsibility for the outcome of some policy on the officials rather than to take responsibility for themselves?

Oliver Dowden: The doctrine of ministerial accountability is very clear: they are accountable to Parliament for their actions. In the case of the Home Secretary she has followed that. I cannot get into the details of what the specific criticisms were because I am not a Home Office Minister. The doctrine is clear, Ministers are accountable to Parliament.

Q529 **Chair:** When is it justified for Ministers to criticise their officials in public?

Oliver Dowden: The doctrine of responsibility is clear: Ministers are accountable to Parliament.

Chair: There is a very simple answer to the question: when is it justified to criticise civil servants in public?

Oliver Dowden: What I am saying to you is that there is a clear—

Chair: Isn't the answer never?

Oliver Dowden: There is a clear principle that Ministers are accountable. That is set out both in the Civil Service Code and in the Ministerial Code.

Chair: Why isn't the answer never?

Oliver Dowden: I have said what the position is. If you are saying to me there are no circumstances in which a Minister can in any context comment on the sort of advice they have received, I do not think that is acceptable. The principle is clear—and I think Ministers adhere to it—they are responsible to Parliament for their Department and the officials who report to them.



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Q530 **Chair:** There is a very clear principle, but there are circumstances when you would depart from it?

Oliver Dowden: No, the principle is very clear: there is clear accountability to Parliament.

Q531 **Chair:** What do you think the officials feel like when they are criticised by their Minister and they cannot answer back?

Oliver Dowden: If you look at the statistics, civil servant satisfaction is pretty high.

Chair: That is not answering my question. What do you think they feel?

Oliver Dowden: They know the doctrine. Ministers know the doctrine. People adhere to that doctrine.

Chair: What do they feel when they are criticised in public and they cannot answer back?

Oliver Dowden: I am not personally a civil servant. I cannot speak for each civil servant in that situation. They have the defence of very clear guidelines, both in the Civil Service Code—

Q532 **Chair:** Shouldn't Ministers be capable of imagining what their officials are feeling like?

Oliver Dowden: Ministers know full well that they are accountable to Parliament. The Civil Service Code is clear. The Ministerial Code is clear. It is observed. It is almost an exception proves the rule. It is very, very rare that Ministers will comment on their officials. I do not think there is any Minister who does not fully accept the principle that they are accountable to Parliament as Ministers for their Department.

Q533 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** I agree with you that Ministers have to ultimately take responsibility. I am afraid in my experience I do not think a Minister should blame in public a civil servant. You are responsible for your Department or for your area and you need to take that responsibility.

Is it acceptable for civil servants to leak documents from a Department if they disagree?

Oliver Dowden: No, it is clearly not and they should not be doing that.

Q534 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** By the same token, the emphasis you put in the early part of your evidence was that it is Ministers, special advisers and political advisers that need to have the training. What about training for officials and civil servants? Maybe Mr McNeil would like to answer this. In my experience, a sophisticated and intelligent civil servant will do the mental gymnastics to be able to switch from serving a political Government of one complexion to a political Government of the other complexion. They may not agree with either, in fact, but their very task is to serve that Government to the best of their ability. What training goes into the civil servants about that switch in mindset? That is very key,



even more key perhaps than ministerial priorities.

Rupert McNeil: It is absolutely critical that we make sure civil servants at all levels are as effective as possible in fulfilling that responsibility and supporting the Ministers in their Departments of the Governments that govern on the day. It has to happen at every stage.

For example, last month we were running the standard course for our Fast Streamers—who are the leaders in the next generation—on policy and delivery, making sure they are being exposed to that and hearing from senior civil servants who do that day-to-day. It is a very fundamental part of the Civil Service Leadership Academy's structure.

One of the things that we put up there is not just making sure people understand the technical aspects of their role—which is obviously very important, whether it is working with Parliament, working with Ministers or running the large organisations they are involved in—but also one particular element: making sure they have experience from Permanent Secretaries and Directors General about what it is like to go through quite difficult situations.

For example, the Civil Service Leadership Academy's case studies, which we are piloting, have covered everything from the Ebola response, to WMDs and the West Coast Main Line. These are all areas where we think there are a lot of lessons to learn, provided they are hearing from the people who actually did it. It is hugely important.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: May I also declare an interest? Up until 12 months ago I was used from time to time as a paid lecturer for the Civil Service Fast Stream, so I feel I need put that out.

Rupert McNeil: Very grateful for that.

Q535 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** Coming back to Mr Dowden, isn't it very difficult for officials when you have a new Secretary of State coming in who immediately announces that their priorities are yet again to reorganise a Department that has gone through the agonies of being reorganised almost on an annual basis? The tree will continue to grow, but if you keep picking it up by the roots to see whether it is growing and whether you can alter the direction of the roots, the tree is going to die and wither. How acceptable is that, for Ministers to come in and suddenly and completely restructure a Department or threaten it?

Oliver Dowden: You have to distinguish between two changes. If there is a change of Government then clearly—

Dame Cheryl Gillan: That is different.

Oliver Dowden: —different priorities are going to be set. You would certainly hope for a consistency between Ministers, although Ministers will necessarily have different priorities and different issues that they focus on. What I would hope is that it becomes a question of reprioritisation rather than ripping up the whole tree. You would hope a Minister would



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come in and once they have come to grips with their Department, sit down with their Private Office and senior officials and say, "These are the five priorities I really want to drive as a Minister".

Coming back to your previous question, I do think special advisers have quite an important role to play here. Special advisers can provide a buffer between the Minister and the permanent Civil Service so you do not find a situation where incoming Ministers, particularly when there is a change of Government, feel the civil servants are completely inculcated with a different governmental agenda.

I have found already that—I do not have a special adviser myself, but have worked closely with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's special advisers—having that relationship whereby the special adviser can be a political counsel and can give political guidance to civil servants as to what they want to achieve helps in terms of ensuring civil servants' impartiality, helping that transition and guiding it as well.

Q536 Dame Cheryl Gillan: Surely that is one of the reasons you have this handover period at general elections when civil servants are able to work with the opposition in case they are the next incoming Government. How effective is that transition period if you feel special advisers have to play such a major role for a change of Government and an incoming Government?

Oliver Dowden: I have very limited experience of that. One of the things the transition period does is that civil servants are able to look at the manifesto of potential incoming political parties and look at the deliverability of it. Certainly I think when the Conservatives came into power in the coalition in 2010, civil servants had a pretty clear idea of how they might go about delivering the manifesto commitments.

Q537 Dame Cheryl Gillan: I am asking whether that could be made more effective.

Oliver Dowden: On the point about special advisers, special advisers can then help with driving what the priorities are—most manifestos are pretty broad—within that manifesto.

Are there other things that could be done? I am sure there are further things you could do to improve it. However, as I said, my experience was that it is pretty good at analysing the full suite of policies from the manifesto. Clearly once Ministers come in you are going to have to have conversations that are also based on the reality of the sort of Government you have.

There is a very big difference between if you come in with a 100 majority versus a minority Government versus a coalition Government. You can prepare a lot, but in relation to each of these general elections I would imagine civil servants were very surprised, as most political commentators were, about the outcome of the 2010, 2015 and indeed



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2017 elections. The outcome of those in turn influenced the extent of the implementation of manifestos.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: Did you have something to add, Mr McNeil? You were shaking your head. Was it in agreement?

Rupert McNeil: In agreement, yes. It is very useful to look at what happened after the referendum and how quickly new Departments had been stood up within a matter of weeks. My observation—as a relatively new civil servant, having worked in large private sector organisations—is that there is a remarkable level of organisation and agility within Government in the UK, which is something we have to keep sharpening and improving.

Q538 **Dr Rupa Huq:** Congratulations, by the way. I do not think I have said that to you.

Oliver Dowden: Thank you.

Dr Rupa Huq: You mentioned the Ministerial Code and the Civil Service Code. Obviously, there is slippage if the other week the Home Secretary appeared to blame officials and it seems like a retaliatory action that the last memo was leaked. It was not a leak, but someone wilfully turning on the tap. Is there any way to make these things more enforceable if people are mucking about? It seems that was revenge, which is what it looks like to me from the outside.

Oliver Dowden: Clearly the conduct of civil servants is principally guided by the Civil Service Code. The enforcement of that is the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary working with Permanent Secretaries in each Department. In respect of the alleged leak, I understand the Home Office is conducting a leak inquiry and the Permanent Secretary is clearly organising that process.

Q539 **Dr Rupa Huq:** We have seen these before. Clive Ponting was the example before when I did A-level politics, so these things are not new—they have happened before.

The other thing I wanted to ask you about is that traditionally the Civil Service are these faceless bureaucrat yes men. Do you think there has been something of a change? Maybe it is due to the fact things are televised or that there is social media that someone like Olly Robbins is talked about as a Remainer who is frustrating Brexit or whatever it is. Maybe he is not a household name, but in a previous era nobody would have known who he was.

Oliver Dowden: It is partly a function of the change in the media. The media is much more interested in process stories now than they were 20 or 30 years ago. A part of process stories is identifying who the different players are and so on. Inevitably for high-profile civil servants—who have a pivotal role such as Olly Robbins or indeed the Cabinet Secretary—there is going to be some sort of comment on them.



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Going back to the previous question, the accountability is clear and is through Ministers to Parliament. Those Ministers should be the ones who are scrutinised for conduct. On the underlying point about the conduct of civil servants in relation to Brexit, certainly it has been my experience that everyone is trying to do the very best they can to give effect to the will of the British people and to implement Brexit. Clearly within that civil servants need to be able to raise problems and issues that need to be dealt with so Ministers can make decisions on that.

Q540 Dr Rupa Huq: Ex-civil servants as well—I suppose once they have gone they have gone—Martin Donnelly and people like that.

Oliver Dowden: In which case they are private citizens and they are as entitled to speak out and be interviewed as anyone else.

Dr Rupa Huq: You mentioned challenge is also a good thing, thanks.

Q541 Chair: The only reason Olly Robbins has become so prominent is that there is a lack of collective responsibility among Ministers.

Oliver Dowden: I am afraid I disagree with you on that. There is clear collective responsibility. It has been well publicised that Cabinet has discussed Brexit, reached collective positions on it and agreed with the Prime Minister's position. There are Cabinet sub-committees that deal with various aspects of it in relation to the negotiation strategy and in relation to the domestic implementation of it. All of those proceed on the basis of collective responsibility. Decisions are taken to those committees, including the Cabinet. They are explained, Ministers give their view and they all take collective responsibility for it.

Q542 Mr Marcus Fysh: Who leaked the cross-Whitehall Brexit Impact Assessments?

Oliver Dowden: I have no idea. This is the purpose of leak inquiries: to try to get to the bottom of who did the leaking.

Q543 Mr Marcus Fysh: How is the inquiry going?

Oliver Dowden: I can provide you with a written update after this. I am afraid I do not have the details of where we are, but I can certainly ask officials where they are with it.

Q544 Mr Marcus Fysh: Is it a possibility that civil servants were behind the leak?

Oliver Dowden: It is a possibility, yes. I am not being obfuscatory over this; I simply do not know the answer. That is the purpose of having a leak inquiry. Leak inquiries are difficult by their nature, but there is a pretty well-versed machine that looks into this and has various mechanisms for trying to determine where the leaks have taken place. Clearly the Cabinet Secretary takes a close interest in that as well.

Q545 Mr Marcus Fysh: Is it possible that a Minister is behind the leak?



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Oliver Dowden: Genuinely, we will have to see the outcome of the leak inquiry. I am not indicating one way or the other. I simply do not know.

Q546 **Mr Marcus Fysh:** This is a very important matter because it goes to the heart, to be frank, as to whether the people of the UK can trust the Civil Service to be impartial in this matter. I would say that we need an answer. It is not good enough for the Cabinet Secretary to just shut it down and not come up with an answer.

Oliver Dowden: All I can reflect on is that I have some limited experience of this, as I quite often represent the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on some of these Cabinet Committees, particularly ones that he chairs. Therefore I have some sort of insight into Civil Service mentality. I am on the record as being a Remainer. I supported Remain, but I am very clear that the British people decided to leave the European Union.

Our job as a Government—and it was in the Conservative party manifesto when the Conservative party was elected—is to deliver on Brexit. It has certainly been my experience that while civil servants rightly raise issues that need to be resolved, they are always done in the spirit of, “How can we deliver the Brexit that the British people want?” I have not had experience of civil servants seeking to obstruct Brexit.

Q547 **Mr Marcus Fysh:** Before the referendum, the Treasury analysis, which different people disagreed about, had the virtue of publishing in detail its methodology so it could be analysed. The cross-Whitehall Brexit Impact Assessments do not have any methodology described in a way that would allow the numbers to be analysed for their quality in a sufficient or professional way. Do you think it is right for the Government to effectively be publishing work purporting to inform choices that are crucial to the nation without also making it possible for us to scrutinise it and analyse it properly?

Oliver Dowden: I do not want to get too far into the detail of these documents that are produced by a different Department. DExEU Ministers will account for it.

In terms of my overall perspective, clearly in all these things there is a balance, in that Ministers need to be able to take sometimes sensitive decisions—particularly in some difficult negotiations—based on what we discussed earlier: full, free and frank advice. I would have a concern if we found ourselves in the position that every internal document can potentially be put into the public domain because I think it is very important that Ministers can rely on confidential advice at a time of sensitivity. The principle is that Ministers make decisions off the back of that advice and then will come to Parliament and account for themselves, which is happening extensively.

Q548 **Mr Marcus Fysh:** Were Ministers given the full methodology and therefore the ability to do their own economic analysis of the figures



involved?

Oliver Dowden: I am afraid you will have to ask DExEU Ministers on that point.

Q549 **Chair:** Can I just come back? You have two instances of leaks. One was where officials seem to be replying to the criticism they cannot answer that has been levelled against them by Ministers and this other situation. If any Secretary of State utters the words within their Department the equivalent of, "Who shall rid me of this turbulent priest?" is it any surprise that the officials who wish to serve their Ministers feel they are justified in doing something that is perhaps slightly over the edge of propriety in order to satisfy their Minister?

I feel we are having a slight non-conversation here about some very serious issues about the relationship between Ministers and officials. Yes, there are codes of practice. Yes, there are Civil Service codes and spouse codes and all that sort of thing, but what can be done to improve the understanding between Ministers and officials so these tensions are resolved internally rather than splurging into the public domain or it finishes up with Ministers not being properly informed about what is going on in their Departments?

Oliver Dowden: We have posited a number of things. First, there should be free and frank advice and conversations taking place between senior officials and their Ministers, and both Ministers and Permanent Secretaries should seek to engender a culture whereby that can happen so that differences are aired, but ultimately Ministers will make a decision and be accountable to Parliament for that.

If Ministers find themselves in a position where they do not feel the advice from an official is satisfactory or they do not feel officials are seeking to implement the Government programme they were elected on, they can go to their Permanent Secretaries, ultimately the Cabinet Secretary or the Prime Minister, and say they want to move those officials. It is within their gift, because in the end they have to come to Parliament to account for it.

We are dealing with very limited examples. By and large, this principle works well. The principles are clear, but of course from time to time there is going to be tension where officials feel they want to go—I do not know the facts of the case, so I do not even want to say they necessarily have gone public. I simply cannot comment. There may be cases where the relationship breaks down to that extent, but I think across the piece the relationship is working well. The principles are clear, but in any organisation—and the Civil Service is no more perfect than any other organisation—there are going to be tensions from time to time.

Q550 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** Can I just briefly ask you what is the range of sanctions available to you, for example, if you identify a civil servant who has leaked a document and are they exercised?



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Oliver Dowden: I do not know, Rupert, whether you want to talk about the specifics of the sanctions, but clearly in terms of the overall principle that officials in the Department ultimately report to the Permanent Secretary in that Department, the Permanent Secretary reports to the Cabinet Secretary and the Cabinet Secretary is accountable to the Prime Minister, but these become HR issues.

Rupert McNeil: They are governed by multiple points so we have the Civil Service Code that is embedded in management codes in Departments that would include, for example, provisions around the Official Secrets Act. There is a wide range and I would be very happy to write and confirm what that is, but in my experience, they are taken extremely seriously.

Q551 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** I would be grateful, because Mr Jones and I have experience of a civil servant whose behaviour was completely unacceptable, and rather than leaving the Civil Service that civil servant was moved sideways without reference to my Department. I would like to see the full range and how often it is used because it is a vast organisation, so it must be used with some frequency.

Rupert McNeil: I am very happy to respond on that.

Q552 **Mr David Jones:** You want to move on, I know, but it does strike me that this is extremely important. It looks very much as though there was a leak by officials of internal correspondence that has had the effect of bringing down the Home Secretary, put simply. I fully understand that would be regarded as a most serious matter and it would ultimately go to the Cabinet Secretary and so on. But is it not the case though that if an official was tempted and in fact did leak such a document, carry out such an egregious breach of professional duty and confidentiality, there is a significant problem within the Civil Service and whatever sanctions may be available were not sufficient to deter that individual from doing so? Is that not a concern to you that clearly there is such scant regard for professional duties among civil servants? That was addressed to Mr McNeil.

Rupert McNeil: I take it extremely seriously. I am responsible for the HR function at a professional level in the Civil Service and for the policies that sit alongside that and co-ordinate that to some extent. My colleagues in the propriety and ethics team are responsible for the aspects of the code. I take it extremely seriously, as I would in any employer and every employer I have worked for and done those roles for.

Mr David Jones: To repeat the question, is it not a concern to you that there is such scant regard within the Civil Service profession?

Rupert McNeil: First, I would say I was reassured by Professor Kakabadse's report about the overall view of the climate of the Civil Service and what I have observed. I think it is very important that where you have a breach of any form of code or corporate rule it needs to be followed up very vigorously.



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Q553 **Mr David Jones:** But this looks like a particularly shocking breach, doesn't it?

Rupert McNeil: As the Minister said, the inquiry has to take place to find out—

Q554 **Mr David Jones:** Is it happening?

Rupert McNeil: My understanding is it is, yes.

Oliver Dowden: Yes, it is. The Home Office has made clear publicly, but I can confirm the Permanent Secretary is looking into exactly this and there will be a leak inquiry.

Q555 **Chair:** There might always be a public interest defence.

Oliver Dowden: One has to establish the facts first and then the mitigation subsequently if there are—

Chair: I want to move on.

Q556 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** I wanted to clarify, is there any referral point back in the sanctions process to politicians, to Ministers?

Oliver Dowden: I think the process of accountability is that Permanent Secretaries are responsible for Departments. They report to the Cabinet Secretary and the Cabinet Secretary is held to account by the Prime Minister so ultimately the political decision can end up with the Prime Minister since she or he is responsible for the actions of the Civil Service.

Q557 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** You exclude the Secretary of State? The Secretary of State in the most recent instance was a casualty, but if the Secretary of State was still there you would exclude them?

Oliver Dowden: What I would describe to you is the strict chain of accountability. I would imagine the reality of it is that the Permanent Secretary would have a conversation with their Secretary of State about this, but the accountability is clear, that is Permanent Secretary to Cabinet Secretary, Cabinet Secretary to Prime Minister.

Q558 **Mr Marcus Fysh:** Briefly, you mentioned the Official Secrets Act earlier. My understanding is there have been DExEU officials who have been investigated under the Official Secrets Act for acts. I do not know what they are. How is that different from the leaking to BuzzFeed of the Cabinet's early considerations or the materials that were being considered by the Cabinet? Why is there not an Official Secrets Act investigation into that matter?

Oliver Dowden: There is clearly a hierarchy of leaking and Cabinet Committee conversation. The Cabinet discussions have always been regarded as at the most sensitive end of it and would be taken particularly seriously.

Chair: It might be worth asking your ministerial colleagues about that point, to be fair, and if civil servants leak, to some extent they are just



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following the example of their political masters. There is another lesson in there perhaps, but moving on to question 2.

Q559 Kelvin Hopkins: There is a range of views on the relationship between civil servants and Ministers. There is a quite sharp difference indeed between Lord Maude, who suggested obstructionism was fairly common among civil servants and he wanted to bring them to heel, and Professor Kakabadse, who said it was a one-sided love affair where civil servants are totally loyal to their Ministers, but the love is not always returned by the Ministers.

You have a third view of Sir Amyas Morse, the Comptroller and Auditor General, who has told us that civil servants are too responsive to Ministers and they have not been willing to challenge them. What, if any, examples of this have you seen as a Minister in your time in Downing Street and is there not enough speaking truth to power?

Oliver Dowden: I was not a Minister when I worked in Downing Street. I was a special adviser in Downing Street. Certainly it has been my experience that officials will speak truth to power, but you need to have a relationship based on confidence. I certainly found in my personal experience I tried to say right from the very beginning, "Please challenge me in terms of things I say. Question the evidential basis. Let us have those conversations in public. I want that to take place".

I found that when I was working for the Prime Minister, David Cameron, he equally engendered a culture whereby he liked to be challenged. But equally we must be clear as Ministers that once that challenge has taken place we are the ones accountable to Parliament, so if we take a decision you need loyalty from the Civil Service in terms of following that through. As I was saying earlier, I think where it can go wrong is if a challenge does not take place in person with the Minister and the challenge passively takes place by going slow with implementation. That can cause frustrations of the sort that Lord Maude described.

Q560 Kelvin Hopkins: I do not have the benefit of having been a Minister like my colleagues here, but I have been familiar with Government over a long period. I remember that back in the days when Tony Benn was Secretary of State for Energy there were tensions then between civil servants and himself. But these were resolved privately through Cabinet, so Permanent Secretary to Cabinet Secretary to Prime Minister, decision made at Cabinet. The convention of civil servants being confidential and private and Ministers being responsible was preserved. That is tending to break down now. Is that the case?

Oliver Dowden: I am not sure about that. We have discussed extensively two particular examples, but if you think about the range of difficult decisions that are taking place all the time, even as a junior Minister in the Cabinet Office I have very robust conversations with my officials and those have never leaked.



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I am sure that was the case across almost every Whitehall Department, that by and large there is a healthy relationship whereby Ministers have robust conversations, then a decision is made. Ministers are accountable for that. Civil servants seek to implement it. As we have seen from time to time, those spill out into the public domain, but I would say across the piece it is working on a day-to-day basis.

Q561 **Chair:** What advice would you give to your ministerial colleagues to win that exemplary trust that there is every evidence your officials hold in you?

Oliver Dowden: I would be cautious as a junior Minister trying to advise those more senior, but I think it is about building a culture of openness and respect. Being clear at the beginning, I certainly said, "Please, first, I want to know if something is going wrong. I will never blame someone for something going wrong, but I need to know that something is going wrong. Equally, no one is infallible and I am certainly not infallible. I would welcome your challenge to me if you feel that things I want to do, there will be problems with delivery of it. We can have that conversation, so that further down the line I do not discover that something I thought was happening is not happening for reasons you failed to raise at the time".

I think to a certain extent I am fortunate that I did have some experience working for the Prime Minister, but equally we had a very good session at the Institute for Government that was attended by some junior Ministers when we were first appointed, when we heard from both the Cabinet Secretary and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who is clearly a very experienced Minister at every level. I found that helpful in terms of even given I had a degree of experience before, someone saying to you that it is good right at the beginning to set expectations clearly, to rapidly move to a position where you have established your priorities.

I think most of the time it is not because civil servants are secretly trying to frustrate. Often there is either a lack of clarity about how the new Minister's priorities have diverged from a previous Minister's priorities, so the ship is still sailing in another direction and the new Minister has not pushed it in the right direction sufficiently clearly, or officials fear that if they are too vocal in terms of their concerns it will be taken that they are being obstructive, rather than they are seeking to provide that independent advice.

What one can do—and I think there is some merit in this, and I have discussed this previously—is try to find some sort of checklist or some sort of thing whereby both an incoming Minister and a Permanent Secretary have a moment where they think, "Have we had these conversations?" I would be cautious about trying to formalise it too much just because I am very cognisant of the enormous pressures incoming Ministers face. For example, when I was first appointed, within 12 hours I was on my feet answering questions in the Chamber and by the weekend one of the major strategic suppliers was entering liquidation.



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Clearly Ministers will have to focus on those immediate priorities and you do not want somebody saying, "I am sorry, you have to go off to a training course for three hours". I think there is scope for having some more clarity around them, but in the end it does come down to those personal relationships and getting them right in the first place.

Q562 Chair: You used the word "blame" and you try to avoid blame. How do you as a Minister emotionally prevent yourself feeling that the officials are to blame and encourage them to understand that you are not going to blame them?

Oliver Dowden: There is an element of self-discipline in that we all face frustrations in all our working lives and probably our personal lives as well, things not happening quite as we had intended them or not at the pace we had intended them. The trick is to try to understand why and have an honest conversation about why that is happening rather than immediately looking for someone else to blame. I think it is a human instinct to try to look for someone to blame. We need to try to force ourselves to have those conversations.

As I keep saying, I think it is a two-way street. Permanent Secretaries and senior officials should seek to facilitate that as well. There is quite a lot of good training that is going on in terms of engendering those skills on the Civil Service side, but it is inevitably going to be an ongoing process.

Chair: I hope your officials are listening to this exchange because it will fill them with confidence in your leadership.

Q563 Dame Cheryl Gillan: We always try to be constructive on this Committee, as you know as a former distinguished member of it. Back in 2015 we produced a report that recommended a parliamentary civil scheme along the lines we run the armed services scheme here, for example. We thought that would be a good way of putting politicians alongside the Civil Service in various areas to understand how it works and what should make for a good relationship between future Ministers. What is your reaction to that, Minister?

Oliver Dowden: In broad terms, it is a good idea. I was a member, albeit briefly, of the Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme. When I was appointed as a Minister I had to put it on hold, but I certainly found the Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme very valuable and nothing beats being on the ground in bases talking to servicemen on the front line. It gives you a very different perspective to a glossy MOD presentation.

I think it would be a good idea in terms of enhancing the understanding of MPs in general of how the Civil Service works. The reality of it is you cannot be trained for becoming a Minister because ministerial appointments are a matter for the Prime Minister and one cannot predict or second-guess who the Prime Minister might choose to appoint as Ministers.



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I think in terms of strengthening MPs' understanding of the Civil Service it would be a good thing and even if they do not end up becoming Ministers, helping in terms of parliamentary scrutiny. I think understanding how that relationship works would be a valuable thing and it is something I am certainly open to. In preparation for this Committee I had a preliminary conversation with some of my officials about it and I am happy to look at it further as to how we can look at deliverance.

Q564 Dame Cheryl Gillan: That is very encouraging. Could you give us a timescale as to when you might come back to us with an opinion on this? 2015 is a long time ago and the wheels of Government grind slowly, but there is great merit and value in this. I have never been a Defence Minister and not likely to become one, but I have sat in a fast jet—or several fast jets—and I know what we ask and when we vote in this place what we are asking of our armed services. In many ways, I think it would inform Back-Bench MPs of what they are voting for and how we arrive at those decisions.

Oliver Dowden: If I may, may I write to the Committee outlining a potential timetable and decision points around this? Clearly this will have to be a decision for the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who runs the Department, and we may need to consult with No. 10, but I am certainly open to it in principle. I would like to see some options as to how we might go about delivering that and then have discussions with more senior colleagues about whether that is something they would like.

Chair: We would be grateful for that. This idea has always been welcomed as intriguing and useful and constructive, but nobody has done anything about it. The three-hour emergency training session the day you are appointed is no substitute for the proper preparation you have had as exposure as a special adviser. If MPs coming from outside politics could have some similar exposure to the inside of Whitehall before they were appointed as Ministers, would it not make life so much easier?

Q565 Dame Cheryl Gillan: To a certain extent you have answered this. I wanted to know how you felt the adequacy of your training was when you were appointed into the new role, because Professor Kakabadse has suggested that more support is required for new Ministers.

Oliver Dowden: As I said, I think the briefing on policy issues is very good and clearly officials were prepared and ready for this. I had good advice from responsible officials for each departmental area and clearly a lot of background reading on it as well. I think, and we have discussed this quite extensively now, that in terms of methods of working there may be scope for doing some more in that area.

Q566 Dame Cheryl Gillan: Who would you like to see provide that?

Oliver Dowden: It probably makes more sense for it to be done internally. It would be interesting to look at how we could provide some sort of centralised guidance. Cabinet Office is in a good position to do this. I am sitting next to our Chief People Officer. You have the



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mechanisms to look at providing some general guidance. Again, I am at the beginning of the process of understanding how we go about doing this, but my instinct would be that we should set out some broad principles.

We may want to consult with people such as the Institute of Government. I am sure we would look at many of your reports and certainly we would be interested to see your reflections on the Kakabadse report in the report you are producing off the back of this inquiry. We would consult on it and then look at how we can have a light-touch enforcement of it so that it is certainly brought to the front of mind of new Ministers and their Permanent Secretaries or senior officials when they come in, so at least there is a prompt for that conversation to take place within the realities of the pressure of an incoming Minister.

Q567 Dame Cheryl Gillan: You keep referring to the Institute of Government. I went through that process, but having been a junior Minister in the Major Administration, I had a mixed view of how good the Institute of Government was. You are quite clearly saying you think it should be internal. I think that would have more merit because I felt there was a lot of side to some of the briefings that potential Ministers had before the 2010 intake.

Rupert McNeil: I was about to reinforce what the Minister has said in terms of hearing from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in his induction. I think it is a general principle for any training of this type that is about the science and the art. It is important to have it from people who have experienced it and there is a lot of goodwill to draw on in that respect, whether it is serving Ministers and Permanent Secretaries or people who filled those jobs in the past. This is the same principle we are applying at the Leadership Academy, that is leaders teaching leaders, people who have had the experience. I think that is where we would look.

Oliver Dowden: One thing I would add is it is as much just prompting that conversation in the first place, finding the time. Inevitably there is a tendency to have to dive straight into the details of a ministerial brief. Trying to find time to have even half an hour where those expectations are set early, that is one of the things the Kakabadse report highlights that can at least set you on the right path.

Q568 Dame Cheryl Gillan: It is imperative to make that time. It should be compulsory. In a way, we are seeing Ministers being driven to the media's timetable, but not to the good governance of the country's timetable.

Oliver Dowden: Yes, and there is a comparison with when Ministers come in they are required to complete their declaration of ministerial interests. The Minister might not do it in the first five minutes, but nobody doubts that in the first couple of weeks they need to have sat down with their Permanent Secretary to have that conversation about



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their interests and how they should be handled. There is a template for that in terms of ways of working.

Chair: Indeed, at the moment declaring your interests is more important than being taught how to lead your Department.

Q569 **Kelvin Hopkins:** Fresh-faced new Ministers who have just come into Parliament and rocketed into office as Ministers may not be aware of the importance of the conventions we have had about civil servants being private and Ministers taking responsibility. Is it not incumbent, not just on the Permanent Secretary but perhaps the Prime Minister, to say very definitely, "You are responsible. The civil servants are private. Whatever they say to you in private is private and you take the flak in public" and to make sure they understand that?

Oliver Dowden: Certainly when I was first appointed—and I know this is the case for all incoming Ministers—we were told very clearly. In fact, one of the first things my Principal Private Secretary said was, "I have been told by Downing Street that you need to read and familiarise yourself with the Ministerial Code and I need to be able to confirm back via the Department and No. 10 that you are familiar with the Ministerial Code". That was directly from the Prime Minister and I was quite impressed that Ministers were told that explicitly. Many of those issues are covered by the Ministerial Code.

Chair: We must move on much more quickly. I am as ill-disciplined as anybody else, but we now have 12 questions to get through and it is 11.10 am. We are going to ask short questions and we will have short and crisp answers because there are lots of topics we want to get through. That is not to undervalue the very important conversation we have already had. question 5, Special Advisers' Code, Dr Rupa Huq.

Q570 **Dr Rupa Huq:** I feel like we have gone to some extent from "Yes Minister" to "The Thick of It". Special advisers, I think from the days of Alastair Campbell, when he was seen as being the real power behind the throne, have attracted quite a lot of controversy in the past. The evidence that we have received in this inquiry is that they are beneficial and they play an important role. What changes would you advise to the SPAD Code to improve the understanding of the relationship between SPADs, civil servants and Ministers?

Oliver Dowden: I think it is already on the record, but I should declare an interest in that I am not entirely impartial in this, having spent a number of years as a special adviser. I would say that they perform a valuable function, but certainly it has been my experience the other way around. While I do not have a special adviser myself, David Lidington, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, has been very generous with making sure that we have departmental and special advisers who support us.

As I said in the previous answer, I think special advisers play a very important function in terms of maintaining the impartiality of the Civil



Service. Ministers benefit from feeling that they have counsel on political issues, and certainly in conversations I have had with civil servants, they value having somebody that can have those conversations with a Minister so that they are not dragged into political conversations.

Looking at the relevant provisions of the code of conduct for special advisers, it has quite a lot about what special advisers can and cannot do. Perhaps it may be worth providing some greater clarity around that so-called bridging role whereby they help the machinery of government, as it were.

Q571 Mr David Jones: Mr McNeil, we have heard from Professor Kakabadse and others that the Civil Service will be focused upon delivering the Minister's priorities. To what extent is the Civil Service hampered by its own capability challenges? How does it balance those challenges against its need to deliver what the priorities are?

Rupert McNeil: On this, we are constantly looking at ways of making sure we have the right capability. In fact, the EU exit process has been a very good proving ground or testing ground for what we have been doing. The fact that we now have much more structure around functions and professions is an extremely important part of that.

Again, if I go back to the long-range view with the Civil Service Fast Stream, as we reshape that and continue to sharpen it, we are making what has been the generalist Fast Stream very much the place where people have to get as part of that training in policy and in operational delivery and making sure those two are very interlocked.

Then if we go back to the most senior civil servants and the senior Civil Service, we are looking there at making sure that people are well experienced in multidisciplinary leadership across a range of things, whether it is commercial skills or policy skills. There it is really just making sure that all that is very integrated. I see it as a main role of my job to make sure that we are providing capability that can deliver the ministerial priorities, the priorities of the Government of the day and—

Q572 Mr David Jones: You mentioned Brexit as posing obviously the ultimate challenge, I would have thought, to this Government.

Rupert McNeil: It has been a very interesting experience because what it has allowed us to do is to get much greater granularity about our sources of supply and to track that on a much more frequent basis. I chair the EU Capability Capacity board, which is a meeting of Departments and functions together to look at that source of supply and to see where gaps might be and how we would fill them. It has been a very useful process and has led to us doing new things. For example, our first Civil Service-wide advertising campaign for professionals particularly in project delivery, which we are continuing. We will see more initiatives like that.

Q573 Mr David Jones: You have prioritised increasing digital, commercial and



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project management capability. Has this been shown, particularly in the context of the Brexit exercise, to be the right priority?

Rupert McNeil: I believe it has, absolutely. We have various sources of supply for each of those, whether it is training senior leaders of projects through the Major Projects Leadership Academy, which we have been running for a number of years very successfully with Saïd Business School in Oxford, or similarly Directors General.

For example, last year I went on the Orchestrating Major Projects programme, which is for those people who are looking after the leaders of large projects and have them in their portfolio, down to how we get in people in the projects profession. I think the projects profession is a very good example, and probably one of the more mature examples of what we can do where we recognise a skillset that needs to be applied at multiple levels.

The other thing that has happened that I have been really struck by is the work that Chris Wormald as Head of Policy Profession has done to set capability standards for people doing policy roles as well. Part of our career framework work across Government and our workforce plan is to make sure that every civil servant has the opportunity to have a career framework and know how they are going to progress through that.

Q574 **David Morris:** Single departmental plans were intended to align policies with the resources to deliver them, but John Manzoni told us that they have failed to do this thus far. A recent PAC report said that BEIS had a problem with recruitment and were behind on IT implementations. What steps do you think the Government should take to improve this?

Oliver Dowden: I think the value of single departmental plans is it provides a point of focus and clarity. It forces the Departments to think about what they are doing and what their priorities are. It then forces wider engagement because the process for approval for single departmental plans is that there is engagement at official level and then at ministerial level with Cabinet Office, Treasury and ultimately No. 10. It ensures essentially that everybody is on the same page and I think it can then flush out whether there is a difference as to whether we think something is a priority or is not a priority. I think the process of doing them and getting them in one place is a good thing.

If you look at some of the feedback that we have received, certainly there have been positive comments from various organisations about how this process has worked, and I think the Institute for Government has welcomed improvements. Clearly these were a relatively new initiative—they came about in 2010—so it is a process of refinement.

Q575 **David Morris:** In the case of what the PAC found and in the process of what is happening at BEIS, where in effect they are behind because they cannot get the right recruitment, they cannot get the IT systems working properly, what would happen in this case where it is evident that it is not



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running as smoothly as it should do? How do you speed that along and get the result that is intended?

Oliver Dowden: I know Rupert wants to intervene. I would just say one brief thing. There are two areas of responsibility. Each Department must account for its own resources, but I think through the single departmental plan, because there is engagement with the Cabinet Office and because we have developed this functionality, it does give us an opportunity to look at whether there can be functionality support in relation to those things. Certainly we have developed quite extensively Government digital capability and Government HR capability. It provides an opportunity to link in.

Rupert McNeil: It is very interesting. The single departmental plans are a hugely important way for us to surface issues like that and then for the Department and the function to work out how they will resolve it. In parallel with the single departmental plans, we are at a lesser stage of maturity with functional plans, but really the two interlock. It is proving a very effective process for us, but the single departmental plan in a sense creates a focus for identifying those types of issues and seeing where the same type of issue may be a potential blocker across a number of different Departments and come up with collective solutions.

Q576 **Mr David Jones:** You are stuck with me again, I think. To what extent is it right that the Civil Service should be addressing capability issues by external recruitment rather than by training and promoting from within?

Rupert McNeil: It is a very important question and I think it is perhaps best to look at this in terms of again maturity. The ideal that I think we would aspire to—and we are seeing already the benefits of in areas like digital and projects as well and I think we will rapidly in commercial—is that we are building our own capability. I would certainly hope that we would get to a point over the next decade where we are in a sense a manufacturer of capability nationally in those areas. People come to learn those skills and develop them.

When we are kick-starting new areas like commercial, for example, and changing the way in which we approach those, I think there will be a disproportionate number of people coming in from the outside. Technology is another example where we have seen that. Certainly we would want to get to a point where it is primarily internal.

Something we are seeing again—particularly with technology, but I think we would want it across all areas—is much greater permeability, where people can maybe start their careers in Government or come into Government at some point in their careers and move in and out with ease. Again, the fact that we are putting in place career frameworks, which make it easier to have conversations about where one's career fits within Government and outside, will be very helpful for that.

Q577 **Mr David Jones:** Of course the Baxendale report did highlight pressures



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on external recruitment and the frankly unwelcoming atmosphere that a lot of the external recruits reported. What steps are being taken to ensure that that issue is now being addressed by the Civil Service?

Rupert McNeil: It was a very helpful report from Ms Baxendale and we have responded to all of those elements. It was interesting at the time it was written, when you think before particularly function professions became much more widespread. It makes a big difference.

For example, I addressed a group of the new intake of Fast Streamers in October 2017, and it is a group where all the Fast Streamers, whether they are coming on the generalist Fast Stream or for project delivery or digital or commercial, are in one room together. You get a sense of professional diversity and more accommodation and understanding of the different roles that people will play.

The same is true when we are running our Leadership Academy, the base camps, for example, for new members of the senior Civil Service and on our accelerated development schemes. We are bringing people in and looking carefully at the balance of not just Departments that people are coming from, but also their function. I think they were very well-made points and we just need to keep working on them.

Q578 **Mr David Jones:** So far, does that approach appear to be working? Will external recruits find a more welcoming environment when they come in?

Rupert McNeil: Undoubtedly. I found it an extremely welcoming environment and we just need to continue that.

Q579 **Kelvin Hopkins:** The detrimental effect of high levels of churn in the Civil Service—we have looked at this on a number of occasions—have frequently been highlighted. Do the Government agree that churn is a problem? What evidence is there to explain the persistent and high level of churn in the Civil Service?

Oliver Dowden: I think that it is important to distinguish two types of churn: there is churn from inside the Civil Service to outside the Civil Service and the wider public sector. I do not necessarily think that is so much of a problem in that I think it is healthy for the Civil Service, for civil servants, to feel that they can pursue careers outside in the wider public sector or the private sector and equally people from the private sector can come into the public sector. It mutually enriches and gives you a wider experience. Indeed, I think if you look at the statistics there, clearly the Civil Service is not directly comparable to the private sector, but I think our churn rates are about half the level of the private sector.

Q580 **Chair:** How do you measure the churn rate and would you give us the figures?

Oliver Dowden: I am just trying to flick through my folder to find it. Yes, here we are, 3,500 leavers in 2016-17. That is 8.3% of the workforce and that compares to a 6.5% UK average turnover in 2016-17.



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Chair: I do not think this is quite what we are concerned with.

Oliver Dowden: Yes, forgive me. I think there are two churns. There is the internal to external churn. There is more of a challenge around churn within the Civil Service.

Chair: That is what we are concerned with.

Oliver Dowden: This is where civil servants who are developing a skill in one area feel that the only way that they can advance their career is to move upwards and across, so there is a constant loss of stability within the Civil Service. In terms of how we address that—

Q581 **Chair:** What are the figures on that?

Oliver Dowden: Would you happen to have them?

Rupert McNeil: 10.8% is the number of senior civil servants who have moved internally to another Civil Service organisation in the 2016-17 year. That is a statistic that we think is probably slightly too high.

Q582 **Chair:** What is the average period that a senior civil servant spends in a leadership role?

Rupert McNeil: I will have to revert on that.

Oliver Dowden: From memory, I think it is around two years. I do not want to spend ages flicking through to look for the relevant page.

Chair: I am told it is much lower than that.

Oliver Dowden: We can certainly give you clarity on that.

Chair: If you take into account all the temporary appointments, the secondments and everything, it is in fact—

Oliver Dowden: Indeed, it is quite a complex number to get to.

Q583 **Chair:** What is the average term in office of a chief executive of a top 100 company or a top 200 company?

Oliver Dowden: Again, I am afraid I will have to write back to you on that.

Chair: It would be in the order of five to 10 years.

Oliver Dowden: I simply do not know. I do not want to put my finger in the air and hazard a guess.

Q584 **Chair:** This is why this is a concern to us, because we think the churn level is much too high.

Oliver Dowden: Sorry, maybe I digressed too much on the internal to external churn. I do think there is an issue of churn within the organisation, so I think there are a number of things that we can do.



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First, we have introduced the so-called pivotal role allowances, which allows an increase in civil servants' pay if they feel that they are being underpaid relative to other people in comparable roles within the Civil Service or indeed externally. Those come to me as a Minister to sign off and I frequently sign those off. That gives you about a 10% scope to increase pay.

If you look at the submission that we made to the Senior Salaries Review Body, we are looking at trying to take that further both as a carrot and a stick, as it were, so there is not an incentive for you to move to a similar job in another part of the Civil Service, so to get alignment, but also to try to cap those increases so there is not an incentive there.

There is also a deeper conversation to be had, which we have initiated with the evidence to the SSRB, which is how you create a culture whereby people feel that they can develop an expertise in an area and remain there. Oliver Letwin has made this point to me and I think he has made it to your Committee as well. His concern is are we really rewarding properly those specialists that are vital to the Civil Service and I think that is an area where we need to do more work. Our submission to the SSRB is a good start on that.

Q585 Kelvin Hopkins: This is a serious problem and there have been all sorts of examples of things that have gone wrong because people move on too quickly—with early retirements, cutting down numbers in the Civil Service, people moving from Department to Department. Sometimes they are tiny stages of time looking after a particular area.

You need to be in a post for a fairly long time to really develop expertise. For example, in railways—and I know about railways myself—would it not be a simple job just to promote people within that particular Department, put them on a higher salary, a higher grade, within that post so they could develop skills? There is a question of corporate memory too. If people move on, memory is lost and record-taking is not what it was. Isn't it very, very important to have much more stability in terms of working efficiency?

Oliver Dowden: Before Rupert interjects, I agree it is important that we have that corporate memory. Part of the idea of movement was to try to give civil servants a more rounded experience, but there is a risk that this comes at the expense of a loss of corporate memory. As I said, we are moving down the path as to how we address that.

I would caution one thing as to how we do that. I think we need to make sure that we reward that corporate memory in the right way. What we do not want is people squirreling away corporate memories and being indispensable. We need to make sure that they are sharing that corporate memory. Part of their promotion and their greater pay is about how they share that with the wider organisation so that other people get to benefit from that experience. It can sometimes be the case that if you just have



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one person you then as an organisation become too reliant on that person. That person needs to be incentivised to share it with colleagues.

Q586 **Kelvin Hopkins:** You talk about one person; I came across one case where there was no person. The person moved on and there was a great gap and policy was not being pursued at all by anybody, and it was—

Oliver Dowden: The only thing I would say about that is it does cut both ways. If you keep on rewarding that person and then that person goes, you create a large gap. You both need to reward them so they stay, but also incentivise them so that they can share their knowledge with others so that we are not reliant on that one person. Rewarding skills and expertise is something that we need to do more on, but we are moving towards it. That needs to be combined with ensuring that those skills and expertise are shared.

Q587 **Chair:** How many officials are on pivotal role allowances now?

Oliver Dowden: They are done on an ad hoc basis. In 2017-18, 23 were agreed. Clearly we are only just starting 2018-19. I have certainly signed off a lot more of them this year, so I suspect that number will rise.

Q588 **Chair:** Could you let us know what the figure is now? Because 23 sounds like a bit of a pinprick.

Oliver Dowden: Yes, but I think this does not give the full picture because I can certainly say I have signed off probably more than that in the past month or so. This is partly as we deal with challenges around Brexit and so on. With functionality, we are identifying more core skills that we really need to retain, so we are getting more alert to how we reward those.

Q589 **Chair:** We recognise this is work in progress, but it is urgent. The other problem that this churn creates is more generalists than specialists. I make no criticism of Philip Rutnam, the Permanent Secretary in the Home Office, but he is not a Home Office home-grown official. He has come in from outside. A new Home Secretary and a new Permanent Secretary in the Department must create challenges for a Department than a real specialist in that Department being put in as Permanent Secretary. What views do you have about making sure that Permanent Secretaries have real subject knowledge, expertise and experience in the field for which they are being given responsibility?

Oliver Dowden: Before I come to your earlier point, I think there is another thing that we have slightly overlooked, which is that we are rewarding functionality skills. For example, if you look at digital or commercial, we are getting people that have real expertise there. Certainly setting aside how we ended up in the Carillion situation, in terms of the response of the Carillion situation, we had genuine commercial expertise there that helped the Government manage that process.



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Clearly the key thing for a Permanent Secretary is having the leadership skills, so looking to the person who has the best leadership skills. Ideally you will have someone with leadership skills and the subject knowledge, but part of getting those leadership skills sometimes involves working in another area.

Q590 **Chair:** You favour generalists over specialists?

Oliver Dowden: I think it is a combination of the leadership skills, which is more of a generalist thing, and the subject knowledge.

Q591 **Chair:** But if you are not developing people with experience, subject expertise and real knowledge, you are creating far bigger challenges for those leaders.

Oliver Dowden: If you look at the comparison say with the private sector, you would not always think that you had to promote somebody internally within a private organisation to become its chief executive. You could see that there were skills that were learned that were required for an organisation, whether it is restructuring that was needed, whether it was a cultural change and look at whether they have developed those skills from elsewhere. I do not think it is always the case that subject knowledge trumps everything else. If you have somebody that you feel has the skills that they can lead that Department, you need to balance the two.

Q592 **Chair:** What analysis evidence do you have for this assertion? What evidence do you have that leadership skills are more important than subject knowledge and expertise?

Oliver Dowden: I can only observe from my previous role as to what you are looking for. When you are looking for new leadership in a Department, a new Permanent Secretary, one is not just looking for somebody that has—

Q593 **Chair:** You keep saying this, but what is the evidence base for this? Can I submit that if you looked for it, the evidence is that leadership skills and subject knowledge and expertise would trump everything? Why isn't it more of the Government's priority to make sure that you have a choice of Permanent Secretaries for each Department who have been growing up in that Department? This is how it used to work. Defence is my favourite subject. A Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Defence would be steeped in the expertise of deterrence and strategy and defence planning and defence policy. We do not have that now. That is a loss.

Rupert McNeil: Just reinforcing what the Minister has said, I absolutely think that it is not an either/or—it is an absolute "and". If we think about how we develop people, if I could start again with the Fast Stream, which is our main pipeline, and then go up to Permanent Secretaries, at the moment we are looking at people acquiring their skillset in the generalist Fast Stream, as we have called it, which is really policy and operational



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delivery in a number of clusters of Departments that have similar issues, which I think, Chairman, is to your point.

This is where the career frameworks become very important. Everybody who joins the Civil Service should have a career anchor. It may be more than one career anchor, but they should have anchors that they then use and know what they need to do to develop their skills in that particular area, because everybody needs an area of expertise.

When you get to the most senior levels and the senior Civil Service, then there is inevitably a broadening out. That is where we have put a lot of attention—which we recognise has not been there in the past—into making sure that there is more formal training for people across the full range of functionality. That includes taking people who are in non-policy disciplines and giving them the skills that they need.

Q594 **Chair:** Why do you think for most of the history of the Civil Service since Departments were created and following the Haldane report that recruitment of Fast Streamers was done into each Department? Why do you think that was done and how wise was it to do away with that and make all the Fast Stream recruits cross-departmental?

Rupert McNeil: I think we have moved from a Civil Service that is very much made up of a collection of Departments to something that retains the strength of that with this additional overlay of collective training and development. The idea that you do your first job in a number of Departments as well as getting your professional base established is very important. You then move around within your function or professional area, ultimately in every role that you are doing, building capability. I think we are still very much in this—

Q595 **Chair:** How are you growing departmental experts?

Rupert McNeil: If I take an example, you have a cluster that includes the Ministry of Defence, for example, and there are particular things that you need to learn in that context. There are other Departments associated with national security that have similar skills and we want to make sure people have the opportunity and also because they have an interest in joining that, whereas some people have an interest in joining areas that are working on other parts of social policy, for example. We are balancing both the interest of the person who wants to join the Civil Service and also the needs of the Department.

Oliver Dowden: When we recruit into the Fast Stream, we are not just looking for people who are going to end up as Permanent Secretaries in Departments. We are also looking for people who can actually deliver. We have rightly corrected a bit of the focus that has just been seeing the Fast Stream from a policy perspective to also looking at how it can be used from a functionality perspective.

We have made great strides in relation to, for example, the digital or the commercial function where we are thinking about what the skills are.



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Regardless of what Department it is, you need good people, for example, to procure Government contracts. We have seen that recently. In an increasingly digital age, we need to have good people who can challenge Government output and think, "How can we deliver this in a digital fashion?" It is important that the recruitment into the Fast Stream also looks at those functional skills.

Q596 Dame Cheryl Gillan: This business of moving Permanent Secretaries from one Department to the next, I think the Chairman mentioned Philip Rutnam and I am just interested in the destabilising of the Department for Transport by that move, because that Department had had four Secretaries of State, I think it was, over a relatively short period of time.

If the Permanent Secretary was doing such a fantastic job, why would you then move the Permanent Secretary, which then gives an even bigger problem to that originating Department? It might have been good for the Home Office, but it was not very good for the Department for Transport. What actual co-ordination goes between the ministerial role and the Perm Sec's role? Because it seems to me that there was not much attention paid to that.

Oliver Dowden: In terms of the co-ordination, I think it is a good point: that we need to ensure that there is stability within Departments, both as far as we can with a ministerial role and also at a senior official role. Clearly the Cabinet Secretary has overall responsibility for the Perm Secs and will look at that distribution of skills and will advise the Prime Minister on it. Certainly in my experience, it is something that the Prime Minister takes a close interest in, the appointment of Permanent Secretaries. Those are the sort of conversations that need to be had.

I am certainly not saying that there is not value in people having policy experience in a Department. Certainly that is the case, but I think there is also potential in Permanent Secretaries who have wider leadership skills to transfer those leadership skills to other Departments, because there are certain commonalities in terms of what Departments need to do, whether it is finding efficiencies within limited budgets, whether it is enhancing their delivery, whether it is enhancing certain capabilities.

There are commonalities among Departments. I agree with the Chairman's point: there are certain Departments where specialist knowledge is at a greater premium. Defence, for example, is quite an esoteric area. But again, I am trying not to be absolutist about this. I think one has to balance the two.

Q597 Dame Cheryl Gillan: I am just wondering, because surely it demotivates civil servants growing up in those Departments who are aiming for the top job. It is like in the Foreign Office: people will work for ages, improving their skills in diplomacy and then somebody has jumped into one of the top jobs that has had no experience at all. Surely that demotivates that cadre of civil servants that are poised ready to become our star Permanent Secretaries of the future or ambassadors?



Oliver Dowden: I think the Foreign Office is a good example as to how we are trying to engender those skills. For example, a Diplomatic Academy has been set up whereby we are trying to ensure that those skills are encouraged. As I said, I do not think we are in massive disagreement. We might be as to scale, but I accept the point that the Committee has made repeatedly about the challenges around churn. I believe from my conversations with the Cabinet Secretary and others that the Government as a whole accepts this and that is why we have recommendations in the SSRB and so on.

Q598 **Chair:** What is the evidence that you are improving the rate of churn or reducing the rate of churn?

Oliver Dowden: We accept that it is a problem, which is why we are introducing these measures to try to address it.

Q599 **Chair:** But isn't it obvious that if you are putting a premium on generalist leadership skills, that will encourage people to move around rather than stay in a job and gain expertise?

Oliver Dowden: Yes, I agree, which is why are trying to redress that balance and give more of a premium to people developing those actual skills.

Q600 **Chair:** But it is just a financial premium. Anyway, I feel we have made our point. I will be very blunt: I think this is a real failing of today's Civil Service, this obsession with making everybody a leader when in fact what the Minister wants is somebody sitting in front of them who knows about the subject they are talking about.

We finished up with Oliver Letwin sitting there saying he had been in his job for six years and most of the subjects he was dealing with he knew more about than the officials who were advising him, because he had been there for just six years. What kind of permanent and impartial Civil Service is that if the officials are less permanent than Ministers?

Oliver Dowden: To be clear, I agree with you that this is a challenge; I agree with Oliver Letwin that this is a challenge. This is a challenge that we are seeking to address. Have we addressed it? No, we have not, which is why we have spent a lot of time in our submission to the SSRB talking about both how in the short term and in the longer run we can seek to address that.

Q601 **Dr Rupa Huq:** One solution to reducing churn was this new strategy to go for professions. The Cabinet Office's recent submission to the Senior Salaries Review Body, I think they have been identified as high earning, market facing—whatever the terminology is—things are to be the basis of future pay strategy. But then they have included policy and operational development. There is no coherence to it.

The evidence we had from Garry Graham of Prospect says that 72% of their members have little or no engagement with their profession; there are different degrees of leadership; varying degrees of integration. What



effect will using professions as the basis of future pay strategy have on recruitment and retention?

Oliver Dowden: Rupert is probably itching to answer on some of the detail. I would say it is a general observation. We are on a path with this. I think some professions have quite a high degree of identification, particularly those are that aligned with functionality.

For example, I think most of the people with digital skills, particularly within the GDS, understand we have other initiatives that help entrench that. I think commercial is another area. Clearly we are working through a process of both broadening and deepening to make sure that people have a greater understanding of their profession and also within those people that have that understanding, deepening that professionalism.

Rupert McNeil: That is absolutely right, as you said, Minister. I think that this is an area in which we are actively moving forward. For example, the operational delivery profession in which most civil servants sit is now being led by Jon Thompson, Permanent Secretary at HMRC, and having the right professional leadership who can then brigade things like the solutions on reward is very important.

In terms of what we have said to the SSRB, we have suggested that there are three categories. There is a category that includes many professions, whether it is policy or operational delivery or HR, then there are a number of market-facing professions where we believe they need particular solutions like, for example, finance or digital data and technology. Then there are a number across the 23 professions. There are some that are very specialist, including some of the scientific specialisms, which need to be addressed separately, so really reinforcing and providing support to professional leadership is extremely important.

Q602 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** You have touched on this in earlier answers, when you said, Mr McNeil, that there was a lesser stage of maturity in the cross-departmental functions. How much is it still a priority for Government? I think the Minister said that in digital and in procurement that you were moving ahead on that.

Oliver Dowden: As I said, I think it is a path that we are on. I know that Lord Maude has some frustrations with the speed and pace of it. For example, just within the past few weeks we have launched the Government Property Agency. As I said, I think it is a case of both broadening and deepening. I could bore the Committee with listing various things that we have done.

Q603 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** Could you drop us a note on that? Could you just highlight for us where you still think the weaknesses are? For example, is risk assessment a weakness, which we have heard on this Committee before?

Oliver Dowden: Yes, I am happy to address that in writing to you. There is a sort of pipeline of things that are coming up. For example, we have



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created the Government security function; we are moving through each of these. I keep coming back to commercial and digital just because I think those are the sort of exemplars of how far we can go, but we are working through the process.

Credit to Lord Maude: what he did when he was when he was a Minister, he really kick-started the thing. I think it needed that force to get it going, because it was such a cultural change. What we need to do now is just to continue to keep up the pace on it, because I think inevitably within Whitehall, there is this sort of Napoleonic versus baronetcy pressure.

You see it terms of the leadership of Departments, but you also see it in terms of the functionality, in that we are trying to achieve those efficiencies that we get from working collaboratively together. Departments are always going to have a little bit of a sense of, "Hang on, we know our own Department. We can do it better". First of all, it requires demonstrating, so I think we are demonstrating through areas such as digital and commercial that there is value to Departments, but also I think it requires collaboration as well, working at Minister to Minister level, official to official level, so that we both expand the range of these things, but also continue to entrench them.

Q604 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** Who is accountable for it? You?

Oliver Dowden: I and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster are the Ministers accountable to it. John Manzoni as chief executive of the Civil Service and the Permanent Secretary in the Cabinet Office is the lead official in terms of delivering it. He reports to both me and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. I certainly, just on this agenda, meet with him every couple of weeks and I know the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster does as well. Then we both are accountable to Parliament for it.

Q605 **Chair:** What does success look like?

Oliver Dowden: As I say, I think success looks like, first of all, getting those less developed on functionality up to the level of the best-performing Departments, but it also involves further entrenching. For example, if you take the Government Digital Service, we have made a lot of progress, but there is a lot more to do. One of the things we are looking at is, for example, end-to-end digitisation. We have done very well in ensuring that most Government services can be accessed digitally, but sometimes behind the digital façade there is still an analogue process.

The next phase beyond that is GovTech, so taking existing things that we have always regarded as a non-digital process of Government and seeing whether we can digitise them. For example, the Chancellor announced in the Budget, I believe, the GovTech challenge, where we are going to seed fund for these challenges. I will be making an announcement shortly on



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what we are going to do, pilot areas where we can start to take areas that have never been thought of as amenable to digital and grow that. There is clearly progress to be made in each of those areas, but there is also progress to bring other areas up to speed. I think success looks like both entrenchment and extension, as it were.

Q606 Dame Cheryl Gillan: Lastly on this, you referred to the hierarchy of Departments. What are the bottom three Departments at the moment?

Oliver Dowden: In what sense?

Q607 Dame Cheryl Gillan: That are behind the curve in functionality.

Oliver Dowden: I would not characterise it on the departmental basis. I would characterise it on a functional basis and I would characterise the functionality in terms of how along the path we are. As I was saying, we have just recently created the Government Property Agency; we have recently created the Government security function. Clearly they are not going to have an as entrenched culture as the Government Digital Service and digital function or the commercial function, which have been going for a lot longer.

Q608 Dame Cheryl Gillan: Will the Government property function embrace arm's-length bodies?

Oliver Dowden: I think over time. Maybe this is a point of difference from the approach taken by Lord Maude, in that we have not gone for a sort of complete big bang in that they have all straight away gone into this. We have a rollout through Departments, because I think there was some criticism in the past that when we tried to do them all at once, perhaps the level of delivery was not good enough across the board, so that caused some Departments to lose faith. What we are trying to do is roll out the Government Property Agency across Departments, that it will move through Departments and potentially through to agencies subsequently as well and arm's length bodies.

Q609 Dame Cheryl Gillan: And local government?

Oliver Dowden: Local government clearly is structurally different. It is independent, but certainly it is something that I was discussing just yesterday with one of my ministerial colleagues, the Minister for Local Government. He and I are going to meet in the next couple of weeks. We cannot direct local government, but it is how we can incentivise local government to use some of this, because I think there is a potential for a win win here, whereby we give them access to our expertise, they make efficiency savings and then they can help us deepen the skills that we have.

Q610 Chair: Local government have made far more efficiency savings than central Government so far.

Oliver Dowden: Yes, indeed.



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Q611 **David Morris:** What evidence is there that departmental boards add value and which Departments have the best-performing boards and why?

Oliver Dowden: I think the value of departmental boards and non-executive directors is providing a senior level challenge to Ministers. They can genuinely, on a level, challenge using their commercial experience. It can be a way of surfacing issues that are perhaps beyond the normal day-to-day of a Department, but clearly there is variability between Departments as to how often boards meet and the level of engagement. Clearly some Ministers or some Cabinet Ministers are more engaged in it than others, but I think overall, again, as it gets more entrenched and Ministers have more experience of them, they are becoming more part of the landscape of the governance of Departments.

Q612 **David Morris:** What is your response to the recommendation that departmental boards should be chaired by non-executives rather than Secretaries of State?

Oliver Dowden: I am pretty sceptical on this one. I think that in the end—and it goes back to our conversation about ministerial accountability—if Ministers are going to be the ones that have to stand up in Parliament and account for the conduct of that Department, I really think they have to ultimately bear responsibility for those boards. That said, good non-executive directors have a very big role in terms of setting priorities, suggesting areas that the board should discuss, but I am not convinced on that point.

Q613 **Chair:** How about making sure that board meetings happen in the absence of the Secretary of State and formally appointing a deputy chairman who is a non-executive to make sure the board meeting happens, even if the Secretary of State is not present?

Oliver Dowden: Yes. There is definitely a need for ensuring that the prospect of a board is not met with a sigh by a Secretary of State, that this is something they have to do, but realising that it is something that is valuable. As I said, I am not pretending that there are not differences across the piece. It is an interesting idea, about how we can entrench that happening, but I suppose my query would be if the Secretary of State is not there, first, is it going to have a feeling of an effective board? Also it could, if the Secretary of State is maybe not so signed up on it, provide an opportunity for it to be slightly downgraded, in that the Secretary of State does not turn up to these at all.

Q614 **Chair:** Just a few final questions. What is the evidence that the Civil Service is developing its future talent and leadership as effectively as it could?

Oliver Dowden: Rupert, I do not know whether you want to start on that.

Rupert McNeil: The first thing I would reference is the number of people who have applied to join our scheme, so are we accessing the best talent



in the UK in our graduate schemes and our apprenticeships? I think that is a very important starting point. The fact that we have quite mature accelerated development schemes for people at various levels in the Civil Service after the Fast Stream and taking people on to those is also a very positive indicator. There is a lot more that we can do and what we have in our workforce plan and the Leadership Academy is a very important part of that.

Q615 Chair: We are rather shocked by the diversity figures that came out about the Fast Stream quite recently, which showed that the number of black Caribbean candidates who applied for the Fast Stream was 339, but not one was selected for recruitment. How has this happened? Are you attracting the wrong people or not assessing them properly?

Oliver Dowden: Perhaps if I could start, then I am sure Rupert will want to interject. It is clearly not acceptable that on those figures we have not recruited a single person. Clearly we need to sort of cleanse these numbers, as it were, to make sure they are completely accurate, but certainly the preliminary indications that both the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and I have had is that will not be the case for certainly the 2017 round and we should see different numbers.

I accept that there is more we can do. First of all, it is understanding what the challenges are both to recruitment and to success for those communities into the Civil Service. For example, we have discovered interesting things, that there is an issue around time between interview and starting. Clearly it is not the case for all black Caribbean communities, but if you are more socially disadvantaged, you do not have the time to wait around for an offer to start work, so shortening that time. Looking at where we conduct the interviews: we have the centre in London, but also having one in Leeds, I believe it is.

Rupert McNeil: Newcastle.

Oliver Dowden: Newcastle as well, so we have different locations for it. I think we also need to provide greater top-down pressure on this, so we are in the process of agreeing targets for BAME recruitment right the way through to 2022 and hopefully we will shortly be in a position to announce that. That was underway a long time before the most recent story on this. I think to a certain extent it is also part of wider initiatives. I strongly believe that it is both morally the right thing to do, to have the diversity of the country reflected in recruitment into the Civil Service, but also it strengthens the Civil Service to have that breadth of opinion, so that we have stronger decision making.

I think historically there was a slight—I would not say complacency, but, “The Civil Service is a great institution. We attracted a huge number of people to apply to the Fast Stream. We let them apply and we just cream off the very best people”. I think what we need to do more of is looking at the routes that people take and help managing people through that,



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clearly not letting down on standards, but making sure that the system gets the people we really need.

For example, in terms of taking this further, we are working with delivery organisations such as MyKindaFuture and Rare Recruitment. Certainly something that I am pushing on is around apprenticeships, outreach into schools. I think this is not just BAME communities, but also looking at regionally. Are we too London focused; are we too focused towards one socioeconomic background? All of those are about ensuring that morally the Civil Service reflects the country as a whole, but also strengthening the Civil Service through that diversity.

Chair: I do not wish to dwell on this for too long and I thought that was a very comprehensive answer.

Q616 **Kelvin Hopkins:** One very simple question. It may not be agreed with around the table here, but isn't the senior Civil Service now too small? Do we not need more senior civil servants at every level, the support staff for them as well, to do the job properly and that one of the things that has gone wrong is there are not enough people doing the jobs?

Oliver Dowden: The most recent numbers show that we are increasing the senior Civil Service, again particularly with the challenges around Brexit, so that isn't the case any longer.

Q617 **Kelvin Hopkins:** But there might still not be enough and the slash and burn of the last eight years has not been helpful.

Oliver Dowden: The public rightly expect us to run as lean a ship as we can, but as I said, with the challenges of Brexit we are recruiting more people. We are certainly investing a lot, particularly in functionality and lead roles in those functional areas.

Q618 **Chair:** In previous reports, we have recommended consideration that the Government should re-establish some kind of National School for Government. What assessment is being made of the learning and development provisions that have been put in place since the abolition of the National School for Government and the potential that would exist if we re-established something like the National School for Government?

Recently the Committee went to Canada and saw the Canadian School for Public Service and we see around the world, most civil services—and indeed, most large organisations—have a major permanent established training component in order to develop their own stream of talent and leadership for the future. It is odd that the Civil Service now does not have this.

Oliver Dowden: I have a lot of sympathy for this. Without being too political over it, I compare it a bit to my position on grammar schools in that I do not think we should have abolished grammar schools in the first place, but in terms of where we are now, we would not necessarily want to go back to creating that binary division. I do not mean to be flippant about it, but I think what we need to do is try to draw out the best of



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some of the innovative things that we have done post the abolition of the National School of Government, for example, looking at how we use digital technologies, how we have actual in-Department training. But I do think there is probably a case for looking to see whether we can have some sort of permanent physical base. They are using Shrivenham a bit, but that is probably not good in the long run.

The process for doing this, without trying to add another tier to it, is the Chancellor has initiated the Centre for Public Service Leadership, under Sir Gerry Grimstone's chairmanship. That is looking not just at the Civil Service Leadership Academy, but all these other initiatives such as the Defence Academy, the NHS Academy and so on, how we umbrella all of those. I think the recommendations from that may provide us with the opportunity to provide some sort of permanent base, because as you say, I think we are somewhat anomalous in the United Kingdom compared to other comparable countries.

Q619 Chair: That begs the question: I am encouraged to hear of these developments, but presumably this is based on some evidence that the outsourcing of learning and development has not been wholly successful. What is your evidence on this?

Oliver Dowden: In the latest figures, the Civil Service Leadership Academy held 92 events between October 2017 and March and the overall assessment for those in terms of people participating, was over eight out of 10—better than the equivalent external trainer provision. Since its launch in October 2017, there have been 1,678 bookings from across 44 Departments. As I say, I do not want us to lose some of the innovation we have had there.

Q620 Chair: But the Civil Service Leadership Academy is an in-house capability, isn't it?

Oliver Dowden: Yes.

Q621 Chair: I am talking about outsourcing. Civil Service learning was largely outsourced. What is the evidence that that has been a success?

Rupert McNeil: I think the key thing was to have an overall system for how we do learning and development within Government across the Civil Service.

Chair: Yes. I am just asking you a very simple question: what is the evidence that outsourcing Civil Service learning was a success?

Rupert McNeil: I do not think the way in which it was set up was right. The way in which we have responded to that through the Civil Service workforce plan and through the work we are doing—

Q622 Chair: I am delighted to hear that, but we would love to have the evidence that you have that will demonstrate that we cannot outsource our learning for the Civil Service, that we have to take much more primary responsibility for this.



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Rupert McNeil: Absolutely. If I could just reiterate something that I mentioned earlier, which is the principle that leaders should teach leaders and that you then pull in the resource that you need, some of which will necessarily be external. It is very important to make sure you have the right whole-system approach.

Q623 **David Morris:** Why have so many separate academies sprung up since the National School for Government closed?

Oliver Dowden: I maybe partly answered that in my previous answer, but I think it is useful to have expertise in certain areas. I think the Defence Academy is a good thing. It goes back to our previous exchanges around the defence area where you need to have that expertise.

Q624 **Chair:** That was not a new creation. It was a development from something called the National Defence College. For a long time defence has had that capability. That was not a response to the closure of the National School for Government.

Oliver Dowden: Sorry, I did not mean to imply that it was. I was taking the Defence Academy as an example of how there is value in having subject specialist areas, just as there is value in having NHS subject-specific academies in other areas where they are being developed.

The challenge we have now is how we co-ordinate all of that, so we have a unified approach, not a dispersed approach, of how we look at the lessons that can be drawn across all of them, how we can use that to drive productivity, which was one of the reasons why the Chancellor established jointly—we are doing this between the Treasury and the Cabinet Office—the Centre for Public Service Leadership, so that we both get the benefit of areas where there is a need for that specific subject knowledge, but also make sure we act coherently, including with the Civil Service Leadership Academy.

Q625 **David Morris:** On that point, why is there a Civil Service Leadership Academy and a Public Service Leadership Academy? It seems to be—

Oliver Dowden: I think it is an unfortunate naming that implies that there is a different academy. In fact, it is the overarching body that sits over the top of them, but I agree with you, it is a slightly confusing wording, but it does not reflect a duplication there.

Q626 **Chair:** One seems to originate from the Cabinet Office and the other seems to originate from the Treasury. Why is this?

Oliver Dowden: It is a joint Cabinet Office/Treasury initiative. It does not originate just from the—

Q627 **Chair:** Who is the accountable Minister for the Public Service Leadership Academy?

Oliver Dowden: The Public Service Leadership Academy, it is essentially a review led by Gerry Grimstone.



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Q628 **Chair:** Who appointed Gerry Grimstone?

Oliver Dowden: I believe it was the Chancellor, but I would have to confirm. I would imagine it would have been in consultation with the Cabinet Office.

Q629 **Chair:** If somebody puts down a question to the Treasury about the Public Service Leadership Academy, we would expect you to answer the question?

Oliver Dowden: No, I said that I think the Chancellor appointed, in consultation with—

Q630 **Chair:** We have spent about two hours talking about joined-up Government and this appears to be at sixes and sevens.

Oliver Dowden: I think it is joined up, because we are working with the Treasury. The reason why the Treasury became involved in this was because the Chancellor's view—which the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and I also share—is that there are opportunities by looking across the piece of these different academies to think of how they can be used to drive public service efficiency and wider productivity across the economy, so that is why—

Q631 **Chair:** Why did the Treasury not come to the Cabinet Office and say, "We think this is a good idea. Why aren't you doing this"?

Oliver Dowden: They did come to us and we work jointly. Sorry, Rupert.

Rupert McNeil: Absolutely, it is very much a joint initiative and I am very pleased to say we have a joint team of Treasury officials and Cabinet Office officials working on it. I think the origin was exactly as the Minister has said, the idea that there were opportunities to look at efficiencies and also the general point about public sector productivity as well. That joint work is the Secretariat for Gerry Grimstone's taskforce.

Q632 **Chair:** When does he conclude his review?

Rupert McNeil: In time for the Budget.

Q633 **Chair:** It is a Treasury-led initiative, this one?

Rupert McNeil: No, only in terms of that being the fiscal event that we have the timing for, but it is absolutely joint and between the Cabinet Office.

Oliver Dowden: It is not uncommon to work jointly. For example—

Q634 **Chair:** It is very common for the Treasury to grab things off other Departments.

Oliver Dowden: The IPA, I worked very closely with Robert Jenrick, who is the other responsible Minister for it, because infrastructure has an element of cross-departmental working and an element of public finance implications. If I could gently counter that it is evidence of Government



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working together. We are perfectly capable of working together as two Departments. We are very much engaged with it, particularly Rupert as Chief People Officer, but I am also engaged with it. I think we can work together on this. The timing is just a matter of when it was announced in the first place.

Q635 **Chair:** It was announced in the Budget.

Oliver Dowden: Yes, exactly. Announcing the Budget tends to sort of—

Q636 **Chair:** What consultation was there between the Cabinet Office and the Treasury before the announcement?

Oliver Dowden: It was before my time as a Minister, so I can write to you in terms of the detail of it.

Chair: Mr McNeil?

Rupert McNeil: It was extensive. I am very happy to confirm that, yes.

Q637 **David Morris:** To what extent are these various academies an adequate replacement for the National School for Government?

Oliver Dowden: As I was saying in my previous answer, we want to try to preserve the best of the new while recognising there is a need for some sort of permanent location. I think that the process that we have just been describing is the way by which we move this forward.

Q638 **Chair:** What kind of location will you be looking for? Is that part of the review?

Oliver Dowden: I think Gerry Grimstone has a wide remit, but we can then have further discussions with him at ministerial level. I think in terms of our overall sense of the direction that we should be moving in is that there is probably a need to have some sort of physical location. That was one of the things we definitely lost when the decision was made to abolish it. I think there is value in that.

If you take, for example, the Defence Academy at Shrivenham, it clearly has a location to it, which having been there myself, certainly enhances it as an institution.

Q639 **Chair:** We shall be watching these developments very closely and, if necessary, we will ask the Treasury Minister to come and account to us for them. Whenever somebody else grabs one of my ideas, I do not resent it—I regard it as influence.

Oliver Dowden: It always helps having the Treasury onside, because in the end the Treasury has to sign the cheques.

Chair: Thank you very much for joining us today, both of you. We feel we have covered a lot of ground. I think it has been very helpful for our report, which we hope to make public shortly after the recess.