

Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Strategic Leadership in the Civil Service: Building Future Capacity, HC 1536

Tuesday 16 October 2018

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[Watch the meeting](#)

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

Questions 1- 114

Witnesses

I: Julian McCrae, King's College London, and Dr Catherine Haddon, Institute for Government

II: Sir Richard Mottram, Better Government Initiative

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Julian McCrae](#)
- [Julian McCrae](#)
- [Dr Catherine Haddon](#)
- [Better Government Initiative](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: **Julian McCrae** and **Dr Catherine Haddon**.

Q1 **Chair:** I welcome our first two witnesses to this very first evidence session on our inquiry into the future of the Civil Service and strategic leadership in the Civil Service. Our objective in this is to understand how the Civil Service can sustain itself better as an institution, develop its capacity, understand and deliver its values more effectively, and get the balance right between specialist and generalist—a lot of familiar themes—and also to see what we can learn from other jurisdictions. Could you each identify yourselves for the record, please?



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Dr Haddon: I am Dr Catherine Haddon. I am a senior fellow at the Institute for Government.

Julian McCrae: I am Julian McCrae; I am currently at King's College London helping set up their international school for Government.

Q2 **Chair:** Congratulations on your appointment. We have a lot to get through, so if you can keep it snappy that would help us. We will stick to short questions, please, colleagues.

Compared to other countries, how seriously has the Civil Service taken leadership, learning and development?

Dr Haddon: Historically not as seriously. If you go back over the history of the Civil Service, it took us a long while to decide to do learning and development in a much more professional, sustained way, and other jurisdictions developed stronger, more institutionalised approaches to it, in ways that we did not. This is something that the Fulton report addressed, which is why we then did decide to create a staff college, the Civil Service College.

More recently, it has taken this much more seriously and tried to take an approach that is more about progression in the Civil Service, not just learning and development. It has had to do so because it has had so many ups and downs over the years in terms of different ways in which it has tried to tackle this, different problems that have come up, and different institutional approaches that it has tried to resolve the issue of how you get the best Civil Service.

Julian McCrae: The change that has happened most recently is—this is the underlying thing that I am sure we will come back to again and again—linking up what you are doing to develop capability in your training. How is that linking to how you are developing people more broadly—their careers, and how that moves forward? That really has been a change in the last few years—to start to recognise those links. Without it you get the type of institutional churn that Cath's written evidence brings out, where you just do not have the purpose behind the training to make sense to Departments and to civil servants generally.

Q3 **Chair:** Why do you think there has historically been this lack of attention?

Dr Haddon: It is partly just the culture both of the Civil Service tradition and how that has evolved, but I think it is also the culture of how we deal with public administration in this country. If you look internationally, certainly across Europe, there is a very strong tradition of public administration that is quite closely embedded through a number of different structures with both Civil Service learning and development, but also thinking about policy problems.

If you look at Australia, Canada and New Zealand, who have very a similar Westminster model-approach to us, and a similar Civil Service



set-up by and large, they still have quite a strong scholarship around public administration. That is not the only reason why learning and development is not necessarily tackled, but I think that, over time, or certainly in an earlier period, there wasn't this approach to looking at these problems in a systematic way that some of those other countries did.

Q4 Chair: What is the bit of our culture, or the values, that we need to change or challenge?

Julian McCrae: Like so many things, you can probably trace this back to the Oxbridge system of creating a lot of people who are really enthusiastic about tackling a problem from first principles with relatively little knowledge. That has been a very successful way of developing civil servants if you want a cadre of people who are able to attune themselves to the political nuances of what is happening, and very flexible about creating solutions that will work inside that. It is not a great system if you want to develop the skills and expertise for doing proper and systematic policy analysis, and it has been a very weak system at developing the skills like commercial and financial and other human resource skills, which are essential to the running of a modern state.

Q5 Chair: This is not new, is it? The Fulton Commission lamented the culture of the amateur; here you are lamenting the culture of the amateur.

Julian McCrae: I sometimes quote Fulton to people and then tell them—after I have quoted it—that it is not a quote from five years ago, but a quote from half a century ago, about the lack of development of management accounting and things like that. But I do think that, over the last five years, there has been more move and shift in this. I have said it to this Committee before, I think, that there is a reform process at the moment that is one of the most significant that we have seen, and the key is finding ways to encourage and drive that forward and not have it falter before it can become embedded within the culture of our Civil Service.

Dr Haddon: It is worth saying that there are aspects of this that have worked very positively for us. A lot of aspects of the British Civil Service have been exported to various places around the world. It still attracts very high-quality candidates into it. It is a very competitive option for people coming out of university, but the intellectualism has meant that at times it has missed some of these other ways of professionalising it. It is about getting the right balance between the two.

Q6 David Morris: There has been a succession of different institutions with responsibility for learning and development in the Civil Service. Why has there been a lack of this continuity?

Dr Haddon: Where shall I start? There has been continuity over a certain period of time, from Fulton through to the abolition of the National School of Government. We had a staff college approach, both an institutional centre and also an almost monopolistic but not actually monopolistic—



they used other providers as well—provider of a lot of learning and development. Over that period, it managed to do bulk training reasonably well, but it moved towards the development of a funding model that took it more towards what you could do mass training for—what would get in the most money—because it had to do that to survive.

Where it has always struggled, and this again goes back to the focus on on-the-job training and on learning how to be a civil servant by being a civil servant, has been more around more senior leadership development and mid-career development as well. It has tried different ways to address that, and it partly comes from the fact that you have a variety of different Departments who have different training needs and want different things. Over time they and the centre—the Cabinet Office, the Treasury—have not quite found the right balance between the two.

Q7 **David Morris:** What do you think the effect of this lack of continuity on the Civil Service capability has been over a period of time?

Dr Haddon: The biggest thing is not necessarily always knowing what it wants out of its civil servants and knowing what it needs—what type of skills and development it needs to be focusing on. It has not lacked for coming up with bright ideas about how to do that, but it sometimes struggled to find a way that makes them work, basically. It can create institutions very quickly; it has used the Cabinet Office to drive change in a number of different ways, and has sometimes been successful for a period of time. At other times it has struggled to get the institutional balance right. It is more something that is endemic in the federalist structure of the Civil Service and the way in which the centre versus Departments works.

Julian McCrae: That is an important point at the end there. We do operate—and our constitutional structure makes it inherent in Whitehall—in a way that means Departments have a lot of autonomy to do what they want, even when it is obvious that they should be working together. That is the sensible outcome. In training and developing people like financial experts or commercial experts, it really doesn't make sense to have 18 different Departments going about that in different ways.

Q8 **David Morris:** Do you find that most Departments seem to go it alone—they seem to have their own methodology of training, or they don't seem to want to cross-pollinate with other Departments?

Julian McCrae: That has historically been the case, but much more recently, in the last five years, there is the notion of functions that cut across Departments, so how do you put glue into a fundamentally federated system? The only way you do that is by creating a sense of professional ethic that people have a loyalty to, as well as the Departments. That is essentially what we have been trying to do at the functional agenda.



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The second thing I would say is the Civil Service Board has started to resemble an executive team—it is not there yet—a place where you could actually have the conversations about what capability does the Civil Service need today, in five years' time and in 10 years' time.

If you go back to what Cath said, you have to embed this in a clear understanding of what capability we need, otherwise they are just training institutions that come and go. We are obsessed with churn in the UK; we just churn these things around whether it makes sense or not. You cannot do that if you really want a capable workforce in five, 10 years' time.

Q9 Dr Rupa Huq: You have started to answer this already. You mentioned cutting across Departments. To what extent is it possible if you have all these disparate cultures and component parts? To what extent is it possible to roll out the consistent approach across all Departments, and at the same time reflect their different needs?

Julian McCrae: Two things. First, this is simply a matter of will: you have to decide you are going to do it and then execute it. Secondly, it is a matter of being very careful about the scope with which you try and do things on a cross-departmental basis. In the first case, as I said earlier, it is about some of that professional ethos. Am I good at finance? What does it mean to do finance well? These are obvious things where you can make a clear decision: "This is how we are going to do it."

This Committee has looked at what happened at Carillion. There were huge numbers of contracts across Government Departments. There were things that could have been done better, but at least by 2018 we had a list of where the contracts in central Government were—not necessarily the whole of Government. All of those things are reasons why you can create momentum around things that can pull across Departments. If you try to go too far into, say, policymaking and try to say, "Well, you have to have a common analysis across Departments", that becomes very tricky for the Civil Service, because they know the name of the game is an adversarial policy-making process, and they need their own autonomy in that space to come up with their own arguments for where they are.

I think it is perfectly possible. The danger is that it is very easy in a federated culture to just decide, "It is all quite difficult, so we will not even bother". That essentially has been the history from Fulton onwards; we just didn't bother. I do think it is starting to change in the Civil Service, but it is still in danger of being undermined.

Dr Haddon: The only thing I would add to that is we have got the Civil Service leadership now in place where there is a broad agreement at the top about what to do in a shared vision for quite a lot of the aspects of the current model. Where I think it is struggling—and Julian slightly touched upon it—is sharing of data through a decentralised model, what different Departments are doing when they are purchasing in their own learning, and development versus what Civil Service Learning are



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providing to them. They are not necessarily keeping the data in such a way that they are able to look across the broad aspects of it.

It goes back to the point that we were making earlier about decentralisation. There are clear leaders on many of the aspects of this, but having a single owner of what is the agenda, where is the data and so forth is tricky because of the nature of what we are talking about. It is something that cuts across different functions, different Departments, different professions and different parts of Whitehall in the centre of Government.

Q10 Dr Rupa Huq: Just out of interest, would you be prepared to look at external things like local government and how they do it there?

Dr Haddon: I have looked a bit in the past at local government, but I have never looked at it systematically. Yes, I think that is a very interesting option.

It goes back to the point earlier about the professionalisation of doing this. It used to be, 20 years ago or maybe a bit longer—30 years ago maybe— that you would have senior civil servants who did a lot of this work; they were called establishment officers, and they came up the same track. It is really only much more recently, probably since the time of your next witness, that they have started to professionalise doing learning and development in a way that we would understand it and that we would see in the private sector. They have got a lot better at that recently.

Q11 Sandy Martin: Given that civil servants often can learn quite a lot from working in one Department and then moving to another Department, do you not think that, following on from what Dr Huq is saying, having more encouragement of civil servants to spend some time working for local government as well as the Civil Service and vice versa would also be useful? I am speaking from my own experience, in that we had a civil servant who came to work for us as a chief executive at Suffolk who proved to be an extremely good chief executive because he understood the way the Government worked as well as local government.

Julian McCrae: That is exactly right. Getting experiences around your career is very, very important. We had a session at the Institute for Government yesterday on accountability in Government, where one of the permanent secretaries, Jonathan Slater, was talking about his time in local government when he had been a director of education and about the contrast between that—what he had learned from that experience—and being a civil servant.

The key thing is: are those experiences structured? Do we have a clear understanding of why we want people to work in particular environments? Quite often in the past you had this thing where someone knows one policy, or they know something about the HR side of the Department, so let's put them in charge of running the HR side of the



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Department. That, of course, is a disaster because you end up with someone who does not know what they are talking about running something that is notionally a learning experience. It is much more sensible to put people in at a more junior level when they can learn what this is really about and, of course, vice versa, to take your HR people and give them exposure to policy roles a little bit earlier.

There are many ways that you can do this. The Civil Service has started to talk about career pathways and started to create the language where we could talk about how you build your career to move forward and what experiences you really need to be a senior leader. I don't think it is doing enough on thinking outside of Whitehall and cross-departmental fertilisation. I don't think it really takes local government seriously. I don't think it recognises the value of the experience from there enough, and similarly from the private sector as well.

Dr Haddon: I would slightly disagree with Julian. I don't think it is just about it being structured. I think it is about it being valued. The Civil Service has often struggled to value people going out on secondment and also people going through learning and development. They have tended to value on-the-job experience, what post you have held, what kind of projects you have worked on and things like that, rather than recognising the value of those other things. Someone would go out on secondment and then come back, maybe five years later, and—I heard this story from someone the other day—people just said, “Have you been a holiday?” It is things like that that make it quite difficult for the Civil Service to show that they appreciate learning and development and that they understand that these things are important to having a good career, to developing strong capable individuals.

Q12 Dame Cheryl Gillan: I want to take you now to look at this from the perspective of the individual civil servant within the system. I declare an interest in that I am married to a man who has been a civil servant, man and boy, all his career. He never really escaped totally, except briefly to the World Bank. I always got the impression that the Civil Service College and the training that was given by the Civil Service College fed into the career progression, and so learning and development was linked to career progression, as well as other things like, for example, secondments outside and then returning perhaps to a different Department. How well do you think the current system is linked to career progression?

Julian McCrae: Cath will have different views possibly on this. I think the Civil Service has done very well at the induction side, at people—internal people—moving between grades, for example, when you are moving into the senior Civil Service and moving up to director-general.

Q13 Dame Cheryl Gillan: It will be looked at and studied in the process?

Julian McCrae: Particular courses that people have gone on and development courses that have been run. A lot of that is due to getting out of the idea that it is just a training course. A lot of that is due to the



networks people developed on those courses, and they are quite intense. These were serious investments in those individuals. That has historically been a strength, and that is a strength that you can still see in the provision now.

Where there has been a lot less is things like people coming in from outside, where there has been a sense of sink or swim—figure out how you run this. Down at more junior grades where—as Cath alluded to earlier—recruitment is very strong in the Civil Service and some of the changes with the fast stream made it stronger and look more broadly. But you do not get to a lot of the training offers until the SCS level. There is a big gap there about development. If you look at some of the private sector examples—if you look at any of the strategic consultancies—the first two years they have you is the intense learning and development time immediately out of university. We do not have quite the same culture.

Q14 Dame Cheryl Gillan: Before we come to Dr Haddon, can I ask whether, when the individuals are looked at for career progression, the learning and development looks at the lacunae as well? For example, I have often heard that really poor education exists within the Civil Service for risk assessment, which is absolutely vital when you are looking at contracts and positions that we have ended up with with Carillion.

Julian McCrae: It is certainly true that historically your ability with Ministers as a strong policy generalist has probably been the most important factor in progression to the more senior ranks. The more technical skills have been less valued in that. I wouldn't say that has changed that much. There are the roots of change. I also would not say it is wholly a bad thing. You need senior cadres of civil servants in basically all the jobs—not just the policy jobs—at the top of a Department who understand the world of politics. These Departments are fundamentally about interfacing between the political and the administrative worlds.

The Civil Service has a bias to a set of skills that are important; it is just that it has become very focused on only those sets of skills. That I see is the big change that hopefully can embed itself, to start saying, "Look, there are other skills we need in our leadership teams, not just policy generalist skills".

Dr Haddon: Your question is a very good one because we have seen good development—in the last couple of years in particular—of these competency frameworks, which say where you should be at at the various stages in your career. The idea is that these are then linked to your learning and development but also your career development and how your line manager manages you. That is great. We have seen iterations over the last five years, and I think the current ones are really good. They are clear, and the definitions are much better than we have seen before.



However, what we need to see now is that this is reflected in how career progression works in the Civil Service, because you can have the best formula for how you go about developing people, and you can tell them you need to do this, this and this, and they will go off and do it. But if they then see the action that gets you ahead in your job is doing other things—things that are not touched upon by them, things that are rewarded implicitly, things that perhaps people know you ought to do even though you are told to do other things—then it undermines all the hard work that you have done in developing these competency frameworks in the first place. They need to make sure that they follow through with that.

Q15 Dame Cheryl Gillan: What do you think of these success profiles that have been recently introduced?

Julian McCrae: They are a horrible phrase but quite a good idea in themselves. Cath is absolutely right about this valuing piece. If these are pieces of paper that are held by the HR Department and have no real impact on your career, then that is a completely pointless waste of time. We still have that.

I go back to the embedding point. I sat with a group of junior civil servants quite recently, and they were talking about their Department's real emphasis on people staying in post for four years at least. They all said, "Well, we don't believe that at all because we know the people that get on are moving jobs every 18 months, and that is exactly what we are going to do". An organisation always suffers when it has on the wall a poster that says, "These are our values and these are what we care about", and the staff know the real poster reads almost the opposite of what that is.

I do think there are some very senior people in the Civil Service who recognise that cultural problem that they have at the moment. So all these attempts are good in themselves, but they are only going to work if, genuinely, the Civil Service leadership is saying to its people, "We are going to promote people on this basis, and we are going to penalise people who play the old game". Nothing will change unless that changes.

Q16 Dame Cheryl Gillan: Nothing else to add?

Dr Haddon: No, I agree with that.

Q17 Mr David Jones: The Government has introduced a model of learning and development called the 70-20-10 model. Can you explain what you understand by that?

Julian McCrae: Effectively, I think 70-20-10 is a recognition of the nature by which people learn. Most of the things you learn are not in a formalised classroom, although academics would love to tell you that. My colleagues at King's, I am sure, would say it is really important, but you only take on about 10% of what you are learning through those very formal routes. About 20% is more structured learning in a wider sense of



mentoring, coaching schemes and things like that, and then about 70% you learn from the experience of doing something—succeeding, failing and learning from that sort of stuff. The numbers themselves are just heuristics; they are not scientific, but they probably give roughly the right proportions as to how you should be thinking about developing yourself.

Q18 Mr David Jones: Do you think that proportion is approximately correct?

Julian McCrae: Approximately correct. As I say, these are heuristics. The problem is when you got to 100% on the job and zero in the two other categories, which the Civil Service did historically—it did the formal training but it was not really what people thought was developing them—that causes biases. You end up very good at handling a situation but extremely bad at analysing the situation.

Q19 Mr David Jones: You mentioned the phenomenon of churn, moving from post to post within 12 or 18 months. If you have 70% of your training being delivered on the job, so to speak, how does that phenomenon of churn affect the efficacy of that 70%?

Julian McCrae: The thing to think about here is this is not about the time you spend; this is a model of how people learn and where they acquire knowledge from. In terms of what you are effectively doing when you apply that to the Civil Service churn model, if most people are spending the first 12, 18 months as your key learning experience in a new role, you are really effective in delivering two years-plus. In terms of the Civil Service model of churning people, the private sector has this problem as well—it is not just a public sector or even a Civil Service problem. Talking to some people who are non-execs, they would say, “Our problem is around three to four years. We get a year or two of people being really effective at their job after the learning period”. The Civil Service, by having a churn rate that takes a year less, is almost exclusively people learning their jobs and developing those ideas, but you never get the person capable of delivering at peak performance. This is in all organisations, but the Civil Service is quite extreme.

Q20 Mr David Jones: It has a fairly significant impact on the efficacy of the model?

Julian McCrae: It is so obvious when you deal with the Civil Service, having been a civil servant and indeed on the outside. The amount of times I have turned up, and it is, “Hello, I am the new person in the job. Could you please tell me about your area of expertise? But please be aware that, in about 18 months, there will be another person along to ask you exactly the same question”. From outside, I now do that on a regular basis with civil servants when they come into post. It makes a huge difference to the amount of time that is generated, especially to judge which relationship is best.

Dr Haddon: The 70-20-10 model is something that has come from private sector learning development theory. This is not something the Civil Service have developed themselves. Therefore there is a long



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tradition of talking about it, the pros and cons of it and so forth, which I am sure the Committee can explore some more with people who have looked into it in great depth.

I think it is valuable because it reflects the problem that the Civil Service have had with learning and development for a very long time, which is that on-the-job training is really important to them. If they are having courses developed for them by people outside, they need to know that they are going to be taught things that feel like how they do their job. They need that sense of, "This is reality. This is what it is like to work on Cabinet Office papers, to write submissions to Ministers, to deal with a Minister's diary"—all the parts of the job that they actually do, and not something that does not feel like reality to them. That is why learning on the job is really valued. If it is helping them to envision what they are learning and to understand that it is all part of the package, that is important.

To go to your second question, yes, that is all undermined if churn is too high. I hope the Committee will be pleased to know that the institute has a report coming out about churn next month, so we will be able to tell you more about what is going on in the Civil Service at the moment in terms of the data, and what problems are being caused, and also to link it to some of the other problems that come out of all of this. The internal market that exists for people to find new jobs—compared to the old model of 30 years ago, where someone decided where you would go, rather than you getting to look around for jobs—is a very different model. It is one of the reasons, in terms of when people feel the pressure of "You have to be getting on to the new jobs every 18 months to be moving up the career ladder", why that has occurred. We are going to explore that in a bit more depth next month, hopefully.

Q21 Sandy Martin: There has been an increased focus on development of technical skills through the professions, functions and the establishment of several specialist academies. To what extent is this focus on specialism improving policymaking?

Julian McCrae: It comes with two directions. First, to allow you to make successful policies, all of these functional skills and expertise are essential. You cannot have a policy unless its financial basis is underpinned, the commercial relationships have been properly advised and so on. It directly helps in improving the capability of Departments to do their job.

The second thing is it has set a path for policymaking. Chris Wormald, the head of the Policy Profession, when he talks about it, he says, "Policymaking has a much tougher job. There is no professional academy of policymaking; there is no really understood way, unlike in our legal profession or finance or something along those lines". They are having to develop what they mean by a professional policy maker.



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There is a lot they can learn from the structures that have been put in place in the other functions, that start to say the key thing here—going back to the point Cath was making—is linking up. This is about people and their careers. What skills and knowledge do you need to do your job well and to move forward in your career? The functions unite all of that. That is a very powerful, quite close, linkage when you are talking about the finance profession, the commercial function.

Can we get policymaking, which is still probably, at the moment, more defining what it means to be a good policy maker, to start to think, “What would that mean about how you link that into your promotion routes? How does that link into how people are really recognised for their skills within the system?” There is a way to go, but I think it shines a light for policymaking, and certainly one that is pretty accepted now in the policy profession as a clearly identified thing, a profession not a group of amateurs, which is a very big mindset change.

Q22 **Chair:** Could you say that last bit again, please?

Julian McCrae: We have a policy profession that sees itself as a professional approach as opposed to an amateur approach.

Q23 **Chair:** If I could butt in for a second on this idea that policymaking is a profession, isn’t there something rather artificial about this? Obviously we know that senior civil servants very much value being the Secretary of State’s principal policy adviser—that is a very high status thing in the Civil Service. So they have turned it into a profession to try and make sure that its status is protected from all the challenge about commercial skills, digital skills and accounting skill, which deliver policy?

Julian McCrae: I know Cath will want to come in in a second, but let me just try to say what I think is important about it. The word “profession” is always a very slippery word. The acceptance that undertaking policymaking properly involves a set of knowledge, skills and tools that are teachable and learnable is, to my mind, at the core of what the policy profession is trying to say. I don’t agree that this should be a profession at all; I think it should be a function, for obscure reasons about the definition of language. There is a responsibility in a function to make sure that we have not just taught people how to do this, but it is done properly. They are not quite at that level of maturity at this point.

Q24 **Chair:** Shouldn’t the people who are designing the policy be the people who can deliver stuff rather than some isolated, cloistered, robed, haloed specialist that—

Dr Haddon: In general terms you are right that the policy profession has somewhat evolved as the bulk of the remnant that wasn’t the evolving specialist function—but that was 20 years ago, not so much what has happened recently. The focus over the last 20 years has increasingly been towards, “Okay, let’s get even more professional about how we do what they call policymaking”.



It is, though, a very loose term. It is a very loose way of conceiving of it. It is difficult to get the full data on who is in the policy profession because it ends up being people ascribing themselves to the role, and the figures can move around all over the place. It is usually about 20,000, but some people think it is much higher recently. I think, in terms of the way in which they are trying to focus on the skills that these teams—whether they call them policy teams, or by the individual name of whatever group is in charge of a particular policy area or something like that and providing support to the Minister—need to provide the evidence, data and so forth for Ministers to make those decisions, yes, you could ask, should it be called policy, should it be called the delivery profession or something like that, or should it be called the implementation profession? On the other hand, that encapsulates all of the other civil servants who are doing commercial skills, who are doing operational delivery and so forth. For me, it is not such a big problem at the moment that we have this large, bulk policy profession. We should keep asking these questions.

The bigger issue is just keeping focused on how you up their skills. How do you get them to be really good? We know an awful lot about that. There is a lot of work that goes into how you do better support in policymaking. How do you make sure that evidence is provided in better ways? How do you make sure that you are thinking about implementation and providing the best advice for your Minister so that they can decide? Focusing on those skills is what is really important, and if the policy profession is the mechanism to allow them to do that, I am quite comfortable with it.

Q25 Kelvin Hopkins: Just briefly, surely policy depends on political previous position. One is broadly social democratic or socialist or broadly neoliberal or free market. Just a simple example: railways. Labour wants to nationalise them; the Conservatives are opposed. Within the Department, there should be civil servants working on both options, but they don't make the policy; they work out how policies can be implemented.

Dr Haddon: Exactly. What they basically do is that the Ministers will tell them, "I want you to look into this problem", and they will go away and look into it and come back with ideas, submissions and so forth—evidence-based and all of that kind of stuff. They are not the ones that are sitting there saying, "Minister, we have been going away and thinking about this. We really want you to go and look at this problem". It is about staffing out. That is basically what they are doing. Most of the policy profession that we are talking about will be having those policy elements broken down to quite a granular level in terms of what they are doing and what they are looking at.

Julian McCrae: Just on this policy point, one description that has been put to me is that the policy profession is a set of people who are ringmasters for bringing in the other functions and skills to apply to a problem. That is a very, very loose definition.



Jill Rutter and I put in a paper, which I apologise for being quite long, as evidence for this inquiry, and it does talk about this. What do civil servants need to know? The sections in there try to make out what in policy development and design is specifically policymaking. There is a lot of literature now on what does digital design look like if you apply that to public sector policies, and what does design thinking that is used in the private sector look like? Things like how you run budgeting processes within the public sector. How you properly account to Parliament is a set of issues that occurs within policymaking.

One of the things that I think would be incredibly helpful for the Civil Service and the journey they are on is breaking down this terrible word “policymaking” that covers a load of very specific tasks that occur in the centre of Government and that do not occur in most other large, complex organisations, and start to think about how we make sure we are doing those jobs well and how we do them better in the future.

I agree with you that policymaking can be a slippery word, but I don’t agree that it is contentless. There is a lot of content that is different to just the summation of project management, finance, commercial and so on.

Dr Haddon: Also, we are not just talking about new policy; we are talking about oversight of existing Government services, ALBs, regulations—all kinds of things where Ministers need people to be conscious of what is going on in that area and to make sure that things are escalated quickly so that you do not have crises suddenly coming to the Minister’s attention. Unfortunately that does not always work.

Q26 Dame Cheryl Gillan: I am just getting very frustrated by all this chat about policy professionals. When I grew up, there were only a certain number of professions, being medicine, accountancy, law and one other that probably better remain unnamed in this environment. *[Interruption.]* Yes, and the church, of course. I forgot about that.

What I was going to ask is, where do policy professionals start and where do they stop, because surely a special adviser is a policy professional because he is there giving advice? Surely politicians are the policy professionals because is that not where the ideas come from, as Kelvin said—from our political parties? Are we not talking about people that are specialists in the areas and the subjects where we want to capture their expertise and listen to their bright ideas?

By calling this the policy profession and starting to make some sort of grandiose plan out of it, are we not doing a great disservice, because some of the brightest ideas come from the lowliest people in an organisation just because they are close to the engine room? I think you are driving out whole areas of innovation and where people can come forward, by labelling this thing “policy professionals” and elevating it to some sort of level that I fail to understand. Where does it start? Where does it stop? Who is a policy professional?



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Dr Haddon: I agree with you, and you will have to ask your next witness as to why the word “profession” was attached to it and not another word. I think it is also a problem that we are now getting to a point where we have function specialisms and professions. What is the dividing line between them all? It is in danger of getting silly, I agree.

As to the context by which they mean it is a policy profession within the Civil Service, they do not mean that it is a profession out there in the wider world. Of course I would assume they recognise that politicians are policy professionals in many more ways than civil servants.

It is also worth noting that, around the time at which the concept of the policy profession developed, it was because you had had the development of a large number of agencies, and you had had a much greater focus on the concept of what we call operational delivery—that is the people who are out there running the jobcentres and arm’s length bodies and doing the bulk of the work that the Civil Service do. We have largely been talking about Whitehall here today, rather than learning and development in its very broadest sense across the Civil Service. That was one of the problems that they encountered: there was a danger of a separation between doing the stuff that you have been asked by Government to go and make sure is being delivered, managed and run, and that also feeding into understanding, “Okay, how can we improve it? How can we change it? How can we make it better?” You cannot hive it off. If it just becomes a purely intellectual exercise that a bunch of people in Whitehall are doing, then, no, it is not working. It is a phrase that needs challenging.

Julian McCrae: Can I just try to make this a little bit concrete, because these words are terrible words. I do agree with you “profession” is the wrong word. It may be easier to think about the tasks that are associated with policymaking. In terms of your insight, the notion that this is about the ideas that we are going to generate has always been a completely illusory one. The notion that people sitting in small rooms in Whitehall are going to come up with the best ideas to run the country is crazy. If you think about something like digital design and how it applies to universal credit, the policy processes that went into that that just did not work started with a set of Whitehall people thinking, “We need the computer systems to do these things. Go and tell people to go and write some code that will do all this”. That completely broke. The way that they have got universal credit to where it is now is by taking completely the opposite view of what this is—“Let’s sit down with people interacting with the computer system. Let’s see how they react to this question when they are asked it. Do they get confused?”—and then building everything out of what the public is doing. There are other things that are going on at the moment in that design.

If you really want to know how to sort out problems in a local area, get a room full of the people who are working on the frontline, and they will give you as many ideas as you like for how to improve things in an hour



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or two. If you put the public into that setting as well and do it quite carefully, you will get even better ideas. All of those are, to my mind, professional tasks that can be undertaken to help politicians come up with policy solutions to the challenges the country faces that are better and more robust. We do not teach our policy professionals, "This is what it is to do digital design or to engage in facilitating a conversation with the public".

- Q27 **Chair:** That begs a very important question. How good is the Secretary of State's principal policy adviser if they are parachuted into the Department having spent most of their career or their entire career in other Departments and they are starting from scratch? They probably know less about the Department than the Secretary of State does.

Julian McCrae: I personally think the movement that we have seen of permanent secretaries across Departments has now become quite worrying because it is quite difficult to do that. I also think the cadre of current permanent secretaries, some of them are exceptional people who really know—

- Q28 **Chair:** It is the gifted amateur again, isn't it?

Julian McCrae: The other thing in this is never, ever in such complex jobs do we look at just the one individual. The real question is: what are the team advising the Secretary of State? If you are going to have a permanent secretary who is coming in who does not know much about the policy area, is there a serious director-general who really knows their stuff backwards who is going to be part of that team that is going to work with you? It is not necessary—

- Q29 **Chair:** The Department could have two ignorant people, the Secretary of State and the permanent secretary. It is just a crazy system. Can you be a policy professional if you do not know much about the subject in which you have been asked to advise on policy?

Julian McCrae: I do agree with that. I think that is one of our problems, and it is not just at permanent secretary level that we have that. If you go down to director and DG, you can find quite a lot of people who are moving Department. As Cath said, the way to get a promotion is to move Department. That loss of core subject knowledge is an important part of this.

- Q30 **Sandy Martin:** Leaving aside the word "professional", because I do not think it is particularly helpful in this context, do either of you believe that there are functional skills over and above the functional skills that most people learn in order to do a specific job that are essential to working as a senior civil servant with politicians? If so, do you think those functional skills ought to be taught?

Julian McCrae: There are and, yes, they should. We talked a little bit about approaches to designing policy, which I think can easily be taught and indeed are taught. There are many sets of skills in very



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straightforward decisions. How do you help Ministers get to a decision? Some Ministers like long papers. The Civil Service like producing long papers; most people do not. I think most Ministers do not. Some people like a big open discussion; some people hate it. If you looked at that in the private sector, decision support is quite a meaty subject in and of itself. We allow people just to learn it as they go along.

As I said in the paper, there are quite a few areas of horizon scanning. How do you know what is going to happen in the future? How do you prepare for it? That is quite a technical thing. Even more importantly, how do you get those insights, which are often quite fluffy and off in the future, and bring them into real decision making now, which is the only reason to do that? Those are the interesting things that you can find. People think very hard about how you run horizon-scanning models in ways that engage the existing leaders so that they will make a difference to the decisions they are making now, if that makes sense.

I just go back to your top question. There is a whole set of these skills. They are unique to Government and to policymaking, and they are eminently teachable. The steps I think the policy people have put together are helping to tease out what exactly these skills are and what exactly the ones are we want to teach our people, in a way that hasn't happened historically.

Dr Haddon: Part of it goes back to the previous discussion. You could look back at a rose-tinted time when there were fantastic policy people—we will not call them professionals because the term did not exist then—who would have been the principal adviser, who would have been 30 years in a Department, who knew the that one policy and that one area inside out. Some of them were not very good at managing. Value for money, running a Department, bringing on staff, and understanding how very large organisations work—these are all things that Whitehall in the 1980s, 1990s, and a bit in the 1970s, had to learn. They had to learn hard because they were quite rightly being criticised by successive Governments for poor management.

So they focused on that. That is one of the reasons why you will have permanent secretaries today who are professionals, who have worked in careers not just in the Civil Service but elsewhere, and have developed a deep range of skills across lots of these different pockets. You are never going to find one individual who can be all things. I do not think you would want to, because if you find somebody who can do all of this, they are probably not doing some parts of it as well as they ought to. They need to be able to delegate, and they need to be able to make sure, if they are not so deeply knowledgeable about the specific policy area in the Department that they are working on, that the Minister has the next-level-down person who really is.

That comes to the heart of what we are talking about here today, which is not just making sure that an individual rises up through the



organisation and become permanent secretary and has the right skillset—you do want that—but also that the Civil Service is learning how to have the right skills and the right people in a different way that can then be brought to bear for Ministers to be able to use to get the policy and the delivery of that policy that they want. That is what it is really about.

Q31 Chair: When I hear the term “evidence-based policy” why do I feel that is a struggle for control of the agenda? Policy is inherently driven by motivation and beliefs and values that are beyond evidential analysis. This mantra of evidence-based policy feels like civil servants trying to get back control of the agenda from an incoming Government.

Dr Haddon: I think it was a mantra that came about as much because the new Labour Government were pushing for it as something that grew up within the Civil Service. But, again, it came about from a lack of it—from a lack of evidence, from a lack of what that Government felt was really robust work on the policy issues that they wanted solved. So they pushed towards it.

Yes, discussions today about the quality of policymaking have to be just as much about values as they are about what is the latest research, what are the latest statistics on this or anything like that. That goes to the heart of what this so-called profession ought to be focused on trying to do—making sure that it has good material to be able to provide to the Minister but, ultimately, doing what the Minister has decided they want to happen.

Q32 Chair: It must feel like a put-down sometimes—a rather a passive-aggressive put-down.

Julian McCrae: One of the great weaknesses of the formalised policymaking processes that occur within Whitehall at the moment is that they do not start in the right place, which is an understanding of the values and views of the public around the issues that are being discussed. That has led to some of the worst policy errors, in my judgment.

Q33 Chair: It is very topical.

Julian McCrae: It is very topical, and I will not give an illustration, because it might draw us into actual policy pieces, but that goes back to some of the things we were talking about in terms of involving the public and involving practitioners when you are designing policy. Evidence-based policymaking, and it is a very horrible phrase, does suggest that if you just stare hard enough at the evidence, you will finally find the answer to the political issue. That is not true.

In terms of evidence-informed policymaking, which is what Cath is really talking about, a world where we used to just have the views of the 30-year serving permanent secretary substituting for evidence is not a good world to return to either. We need to bring those two worlds together.



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Yes, politics is about values, views and opinions, but it also has to have analysis and evidence within it.

- Q34 **Chair:** This is my last question. At risk of being topical, but without being specific, how much does elevating the policy profession as a guardian of policy, if you like, put civil servants unfairly into the frontline of controversy, where they should not be and should not be exposed, because they cannot answer back?

Julian McCrae: I do not think what they are doing with the policy profession does that, to be fair. In addition, I think the functional agenda should be de-elevating—if that is a word—the policymaking role. It is emphasising the range of skills and specialisms that have to come together to work properly. Policymaking has historically been seen as the peak of this. If you look correctly at Departments, it is just one part of the mix that should be there. That is how we should think about it.

- Q35 **Kelvin Hopkins:** To what extent have specialist academies emerged in response to dissatisfaction with the way in which Civil Service Learning works and the absence of a single school for Government?

Dr Haddon: Probably quite a lot. The abolition of the NSG was supposedly for value for money. I think the NAO has said that, in theory, the model that they worked to would have done, but the initial experience of Civil Service Learning was not wholly successful; there was not—as we have discussed previously in some of our work looking at different kinds of markets that Governments have tried to set up—a good internal market. They had a poor contract, and it was a waste of money. They had to learn a hard lesson. It goes to what I was saying back at the beginning, that an institutional response is often the way that the Civil Service ends up thinking through how it organises and manages itself, and the development of different leadership academies has been one of those.

In terms of where they are at the moment, where they seem to be evolving and what they are trying to do, compared to a variety of different approaches that I have seen over the years, this is one that could work, because it is one that does focus on Civil Service development of people at the top. It is one that seems to have backing across different parts of the Civil Service.

There are risks. At the moment it feels like the Centre for Public Service Leadership—there are an awful lot of horrible acronyms; we talked about phrases, but there are so many acronyms in this as well—is being quite well supported. On the Civil Service Leadership Academy, we wait to see how well supported that will be.

This happened in the early 2000s as well. There is a danger that you get different organisations set up and they become in conflict with each other, people don't understand their separate remits, there is an overlap between who controls them and so forth. It is all part of the same story



of the last five years since the decision to abolish the National School of Government.

I would not say that what they have done since that has necessarily meant that we should reintroduce the National School of Government, because that had many flaws as well. They are trying a different way of tackling the same issues and also tackling some of the underlying issues that existed in the National School of Government. The main thing, and why I am very pleased this inquiry is happening, is that they now need other people to be focused on them and to be asking the right questions—the kind of questions that the Committee is asking. Is this working? Do you know where you are going with it? Are you clear about what your ambition is? And are you collecting the right kind of information to be able to judge whether what you are doing is working? That, ultimately, is the test of this. Is it working? Is it value for money?

Q36 Kelvin Hopkins: I am someone who thought abolishing the national school was a mistake. Since then, have things not been disjointed, fragmented and indeed more costly than what went on before? If there was a National School for Government, all the skills you have been talking about could be taught to this Civil Service elite at the early stages straight out of university, when they have got their firsts or whatever, because they have to be that good, and you would have a much better cadre of civil servants for the future.

Dr Haddon: It is not quite as easy as you can just teach it to everyone as soon as they come out of university. Learning development has to be a career-long experience, otherwise it just doesn't do for you what you need it to do. There are multiple different options that you can go for. You can go the way that France has gone, which is that you really institute a very strict, "You must learn this much, and you must take a qualification in it", but that leads you even further down what we are calling the functions approach, and you end up with a very narrow, "You can only do this job and no other". It causes other problems; it leads to a much more bureaucratic and much more expensive process of developing staff.

The problem with the National School of Government, as I was talking about earlier, is how you pay for it. Either you give it a bulk amount of cash, and you hope that it is providing you with the service that you want, or you use a charging model, and they used the hard-charging model for a good period, which means they end up defaulting towards what pays well rather than what is really important. If you are using public money to pay a public institution to provide a public service, you ought to make sure that it is doing the thing that you want it to do, not just creating a feedback loop. That needed tackling.

The other problem is it goes to what we are talking about in terms of the 70-20-10 model. Its courses were not always good. A lot of people have fond memories of the initial course they went on, but interviews I have done across the Civil Service often spoke about the network they built up,



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the importance of spending some time together with colleagues and things like that. It was not necessarily, "I learned these skills and I came away with all of this experience. Look at how I have used it". I think it struggled sometimes to provide the quality of service. However, that does not mean that the question is not true, inasmuch as I don't think they have quite got it right in terms of how disjointed it is at the moment.

The biggest area, and one you should focus on, is the procurements of different kinds of learning and development that they are getting across and how they get a picture of what the Civil Service as a whole is procuring at the moment to provide learning and development. Is that value for money? The way in which contracts work in Government means that it is very hard for them to do that. We do not know whether or not it is providing value for money.

Q37 **Chair:** I am sorry, but that is a very long answer. We must have shorter answers.

Julian McCrae: One very short answer to this. The main lesson I draw from the abolition of the National School of Government and the reintroduction of CSL is that big-bang changes very seldom work in the way you intend them to, so we probably should avoid them and build on what we have in a strategic direction.

Q38 **Kelvin Hopkins:** Out of the two questions, effectively you have covered what are the weaknesses and so on, but has there not been a tacit admission that it was a big mistake and that we are creeping back towards a more centralised system now? Isn't there something to learn from this? As you have said, a big-bang approach is a mistake.

Julian McCrae: Because the Civil Service is itself federated, you have to be very careful of something that ends up saying, "We are going to centralise everything". CSL was an attempt at centralising and, as you rightly say, produced a fragmented system because the centralisation did not work.

Q39 **Chair:** Who should be ultimately accountable for the quality and coherence of provision?

Julian McCrae: Two things, I think, are not working at the moment. I think the function—

Q40 **Chair:** That is not answering my question. I asked who should be ultimately accountable.

Julian McCrae: The answer is in the papers that Cabinet Office provided. The Leadership and Learning Board and ultimately the Civil Service Board are responsible for this and have to—

Q41 **Chair:** The Civil Service itself is directly accountable for its own education, even though it was a ministerial decision to abolish the National School for Government.



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Dr Haddon: You can speak to the Minister for the Cabinet Office. You could speak to the Prime Minister, the Minister for the Civil Service.

Q42 **Chair:** What kind of continuity do you get from transient Ministers when the Civil Service is a permanent institution?

Julian McCrae: Look, if you do not think the leadership of the Civil Service is fundamentally responsible for developing the capability of the Civil Service, then you should not be employing these people at all. What are they there for if they are not responsible for that?

Q43 **Chair:** Right. That is a very strong statement.

Julian McCrae: Yes, there is a constitutional convention that we report to Ministers, but this is not something that I think should be high-level party politics. It just does not make sense to me in that sense.

Q44 **Kelvin Hopkins:** One more question. It is a challenging question, but isn't what has happened driven by those who want to weaken the state, who are anti-big Government and who want to outsource and so on, and not about how to run a state better?

Julian McCrae: I do not think the changes were directly politically motivated with a view to the state. I think they were driven by some of the issues that Cath raised. I think it is very unhelpful to start to think about the future of our Civil Service as a competition between political ideas of the state. That makes it difficult.

Q45 **Mr David Jones:** Pursuing that point, CSL was established with an emphasis upon outsourced learning. Could you develop your comments on outsourced learning, and is it your view that some elements of learning should never be outsourced?

Julian McCrae: It is my view that outsourced procurement always turns out to be more difficult than the slide pack that you had saying it is a wonderful idea that will save you money—pretence. We have talked about it a lot. The key thing in specific learning and development courses, which is 10%, is that they are closely connected to the rest of the 20 and the 70, your career progression and what is truly being valued. So it is about mechanisms that bring that, "What courses should we have and who are we going to get them from?" much closer to the people who are thinking, "Well, what people do I want, and who am I going to promote?" That has to be a good thing, and CSL broke that. It had massively removed CSL from the people who were developing capability, and it created a procurement system that was very complicated. You had these prime contractors subcontracting to other contractors way down the chain. That is just way too complex.

I think the functions work quite well and the academies work well. Departments are procuring their own training and, as Cath says, we are not sure how much or where. Some of that makes sense. Tax is a very particular specialism for HMRC and some of the Treasury. It makes sense



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to have an academy doing that. There are many policy schools in Departments. It is not quite clear where they are all joined up.

Q46 **Chair:** Anything to add to that?

Dr Haddon: See my previous answers.

Q47 **David Morris:** The Civil Service Leadership Academy addressed the need for developing strategic leadership among its future leaders.

Julian McCrae: It should. It has the potential to. It is not there yet. I think they have the right ingredients, but holding them to account for what measures they are looking at that will tell them, and when they have achieved this it will be a very good thing for this Committee to look at.

Q48 **Chair:** Perhaps you could send us a note about what you think those factors are and how they should be measured.

Dr Haddon: I would say the same, inasmuch as we need much greater transparency about it. What is it trying to do? How is it going to operate? How is it going to tell us whether it is achieving what it says it is going to achieve? I will leave it there.

Q49 **Dr Rupa Huq:** How can you tell if the current learning and development strategy is effective?

Dr Haddon: You cannot.

Q50 **Dr Rupa Huq:** Is it impossible to review something on a constant review process?

Dr Haddon: There is no way at the moment for me, as an outsider, to be able to get enough data to know what is departmental spend. I was looking at the Treasury's accounts for 2017, and learning and development comes under core Treasury. The only reference to it is that they say they spent £1 million less than they did the previous year, but they do not give the overall figure of what they did spend, so you cannot tell. You can go through some of the information about contracts that go above a certain threshold, but it is very difficult to get a picture across the whole, and it is something that—

Q51 **Chair:** How about you measure the answers of the people that you are trying to educate?

Dr Haddon: Sorry?

Chair: Why not ask questions of the people you are trying to educate and see what they think?

Dr Haddon: Sorry. Yes, there are other ways. I was answering about not being able to tell what they are spending on this so we do not know whether the contracts are working. Another part of that is obviously, yes, finding out whether or not they are being valued.



Chair: The question was about spending.

Q52 **Dr Rupa Huq:** Is it working?

Julian McCrae: Is it working? I think Catherine is saying that, basically, on the information that the Government provides, it is impossible for someone outside the Government to tell. If the question is, what information would we ideally want to be able to tell, you want to look at people going on courses. Do they value these courses? Do they think they are sensible? You then want to have them doing the six-months-on evaluation, preferably with line managers. Did these people come back with capabilities that were improved and that you had wanted from being on these courses? Then you want to look at the assessment of what is occurring in the Civil Service. This is very well documented; the PAC and this Committee constantly produce reports where capability was missing that led to problems. What is happening, and how are those capability gaps being filled?

There are easy ways. Well, it is difficult to tell whether training is making a difference, but there are ways to get yourself insights into what directions it has gone.

Q53 **Dr Rupa Huq:** Yes, and there are different ways of operationalising whether it is effective. You could do it on the financial—

Dr Haddon: Yes. What I am trying to say is that I cannot see that they are currently gathering the right kind of information. I used expenses or the spend on it. The other one is to say, we just simply do not know how many people are going on courses in any one year. We do not know lots of details about this because there is not enough transparency.

Julian McCrae: My suspicion is that they are not systematically gathering that information.

Q54 **Chair:** Has IFG done any work on that lack of data?

Dr Haddon: No. We are starting to look into it but—

Chair: I think we would be very interested in that.

Q55 **Dr Rupa Huq:** It can be tick-boxy, even if you do create all these exec questionnaires. And what happens if they leave the system and take their skills somewhere else? That might not be accounted for in some blunt instrument of a questionnaire.

Julian McCrae: Yes, very true, but it does get accounted for: do we have the capabilities to do the tasks at that higher level? So you can start to get views on this one.

Q56 **Kelvin Hopkins:** What lessons should we be learning from the way these issues are addressed in other countries?

Dr Haddon: On many of the ones that we talked about today, you can understand that different models can work. That is one lesson that you



can take away, but you have to have certain principles in place. You have to have certain information in place. You have to have certain leadership in place. I think you can take away other lessons about the kind of questions that you have rightly been asking. Is it connected to career progression? Is it providing the kind of trained people that we need to do the work that we want to do in the Civil Service? Do we know what that work is? Those kinds of things. I am not sure that there is a simple "Let's take this model and use it" approach, but there are many different lessons that you could take. I do not think one specific one can be applied in the UK.

- Q57 **Kelvin Hopkins:** One that interests me in particular is the French system, Énarques, the ENA, and that has been imitated in a number of countries. They are recruited and they spend their whole lives as essentially loyal to the state. They see themselves as serving the public realm. They may also go out into industry and to commerce for some time and come back in again, but their primary loyalty is to the state. They are not people who have been taken from the private sector and maybe have different loyalties, different interests. Isn't that a good model?

Dr Haddon: It is a good model, but it is also one that not everyone would like, because it can lead to a very technocratic approach to policymaking, and all the discussion we had earlier about values can be more problematic because you have instituted a much higher technocratic approach to policymaking than the UK has traditionally gone for. That is at the heart of all of this.

There are other things, though, that you can do which happen across Europe. We have not talked about universities, and the UK is also trying to move towards greater provision of university schools of Government, public administration, public management, public policy, executive masters and other types of things. That is something that happens in the US, in Canada and indeed across Europe, and in some ways what happens in France is a reflection of that because it is also about whether you can learn this stuff in the university context and then have a qualification and go out and use it. It is something that I think the UK would value; if the UK valued that kind of qualification more, that would help some of the issues that we talked about today.

- Q58 **Kelvin Hopkins:** One simple quick question to finish my section. How do we build into the Civil Service a proper debate about the policy, rather than recruiting people who are committed to a particular philosophy? How do we build it? I remember, as a student 50 years ago, that one of my lecturers had been a civil servant in Treasury, and he said that the great advantage was that there were people in there who had different views. When it came to devaluation, there were those who said, "We want a strong currency", those who said, "We have to have a flexible currency, to devalue and to manage our balance of trade". Those views are legitimate views that should be debated within the Civil Service. If there



is only one view, you can often go wrong.

Dr Haddon: There is a big focus on the importance of diversity in the Civil Service, and that is not just about representation, it is also about diversity of perspective, background, experience and so forth. I would be very nervous about the idea of looking for civil servants who have particular political approaches that we want to get a balance of. It should not be part of this debate. You were getting into a very different system.

Q59 **Kelvin Hopkins:** It is excluding people who might have different views. That is the problem.

Julian McCrae: Yes, and I think that is right. There is a paper we put out with the Behavioural Insights Team recently about applying behavioural science to the Civil Service itself and about the biases that you have and the conformity that comes into the decision-making process inadvertently. It is not just about people with different ideologies. It is just consensus gets forced. There are interesting things the Civil Service can do about that, which, to be fair to them, they are thinking about in the context of Chilcot and other things.

Q60 **Sandy Martin:** Just based on what Dr Haddon said about diversity, do you think that if we had something similar to the École Nationale d'Administration here in Britain it would stultify diversity? Does it tend to create a particular class?

Dr Haddon: I think you would have to address the issue of where people are coming to it from, because I do not know enough about the French system in terms of how they are dealing with inequality and diversity of candidates into ENA to know whether or not that might return us to an even more Oxbridge system than we tried to get away from in recent years.

Julian McCrae: The only other thing to add is the apprenticeships, and the drive to introduce Civil Service apprenticeships, is important because it is starting to skip out that university cadre, which we were very biased towards.

Chair: It has been a very full session, and we have probably stolen a bit of time from the next session, so I apologise for that in advance. But thank you very much for being with us. There will be a very brief adjournment before our next witness.

Examination of witness

Witness: **Sir Richard Mottram.**

Q61 **Chair:** Could I ask our witness to identify himself please for the panel?



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Sir Richard Mottram: Yes. I am Richard Mottram. I am here as the chair of the Better Government Initiative, but in the light of some of the earlier conversation perhaps I should also say, Chair, that in the 1990s I was the permanent secretary in charge of the Office for Public Service and Science, which dealt with some of this stuff. In the 2000s, I was one of the architects, among others, of the Professional Skills for Government initiative, which is obviously relevant to some of the conversation that you had earlier.

Q62 **Chair:** Did that include the creation of a policy profession?

Sir Richard Mottram: It did, Chair, yes.

Q63 **Chair:** We look forward to your thoughts on that, and I am sure we will come to that point. To kick off with, compared with other countries, how seriously do you think the Civil Service has taken the whole question of learning and development?

Sir Richard Mottram: This picks up a lot of what was said earlier. I think that it has varied over time. Obviously, following the Fulton report, there was big effort to introduce a system into the country, which was very like—from some of the questions earlier—the French system.

For example, I was a civil servant—I joined in 1968—and in the first four or five years that I was a civil servant, I had more than 40 weeks of classroom-based training, which led to no qualification of any kind, but was obviously based upon a model very like ENA. Over time the Civil Service became rather nervous about whether all of this was cost-effective, and also it became a less elitist thing, and it was quite difficult to sustain that sort of model. Then the National School for Government—the Civil Service College reincarnated—essentially got cast adrift by the Government and was replaced by a model, which I think was in some ways an ideological model, which has not worked. That would be my exaggerated answer.

Q64 **Chair:** The Civil Service model has not worked?

Sir Richard Mottram: What we have at the moment is a mixture of things, and it is very unclear how they all fit together. I do not think Civil Service Learning, as a model, is quite the right model.

Q65 **Chair:** Why has the Civil Service fumbled around on this?

Sir Richard Mottram: I think partly because it is a very complicated subject. When you try to map what 400,000 people do at very different levels and work out the learning and development which needs to be applied in relation to each person in relation to the possible career pathways of each person, to use jargon, it is a very complicated subject. I think that the system has struggled consistently to understand the nature of the problem and then, secondly, struggled to build from one position on to the next position, as opposed to occasionally washing its hands of what has gone before and starting again.



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I think it is genuinely a very complicated thing because of the scale of the Civil Service, the scale and complexities of its responsibilities, and the number of—before we get into whether policy is a profession—professions that are embedded in the service, for instance. Mapping all of that and understanding what bits of it the centre should worry about, which bits of its function it should worry about, and which bits of it Departments should be allowed to worry about is a very complicated subject. That would be the forgiving version. It is very complicated.

Q66 **Chair:** The word “excuse” came to mind.

Sir Richard Mottram: Possibly, yes. I am not defending it, Chair. I am saying that an organisation like the Civil Service obviously should have a vision of what it is trying to do and it should be able to explain what it is doing.

Q67 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** You once said, “You need a communications message the staff can follow across the Public Service not just the Civil Service. People are bombarded by initiative after initiative and they deal with that by tuning out.” There has been such a succession of different institutions with responsibility for learning and development in the Civil Service. Do you think that people have tuned out to it?

Sir Richard Mottram: From my anecdotal evidence, people find it very difficult to understand what the messages are. Perhaps before I say something about where we are now, let me say that when I was responsible with others for the Professional Skills for Government agenda, we tried to develop communications related to that agenda that the staff could understand, and I think we genuinely struggled to do that. They struggled over the word “professional”. They were unclear about what the messages were, and we spent about five years or whatever doing that, and then, lo and behold, it was announced that that was over. That was gone. We were going to do something different, and I think that is the problem. At that point people think, “Well, why did I try to get to grips with all of that if it is now just being abandoned”.

Q68 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** There is no doubt that organisations thrive when there is a corporate memory and there is a continuity of activity. Do you think that the Civil Service’s capability has been damaged by this failure to have this continuity and by literally throwing the baby out with the bath water?

Sir Richard Mottram: I would say yes. I think that there has been a failure at the centre of the Civil Service to give this sufficient consistent attention on the basis of a clear vision and clear communications, and that has cost the Civil Service, yes.

Q69 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** Would you agree with us if we said we regretted the passing of the Civil Service College, and that it should have been taken as the basis to build and develop something that was moving in a different direction to respond to our needs?



Sir Richard Mottram: Without going back over what the previous witnesses said, there was an important point in there that the Civil Service leadership—and I used to be one of these leaders—found it very difficult to make the best use of the Civil Service College and the National School of Government for all sorts of reasons, including that we could never quite make our minds up whether this was to be a serious academic-style institution or something rather different, and whether it would have a lot of in-built academic expertise or it would essentially rely on networks for those sorts of things.

There were all sorts of genuine problems, but there was a lack of consistency that this is a central function of the Civil Service and it must be thought about at the highest levels consistently and given weight. So why, for instance, was the National School for Government rather cast off, and why did the Civil Service invest in an institution called Government Skills, where I used to be the chair, which is a sector skills council, and then close it down? These were all interesting examples of the ability of successive generations of people to say, “I will make my mark by abandoning what went before”.

- Q70 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** Just as a last question, I think you once described the Civil Service as being like a very loyal dog to its Ministers, wanting to serve and to please. Do you think that this lack of attention to creating or continuing something that had the academic and the sort of engineering qualifications as well has altered the attitude of the Civil Service towards Ministers and towards the political classes?

Sir Richard Mottram: After I compared the Civil Service to being a loyal dog, which, in the context, I cannot now quite remember, I was taken to one side by my superiors—and there were not many people above me—who said, “Do not make these canine analogies”, and I do not quite know why.

- Q71 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** I saw it as a compliment.

Sir Richard Mottram: First, fundamentally, the Civil Service is called a service for a reason, and it is because it serves the democratic society run by the people in charge of it, who are not civil servants, and secondly, personally, I feel that civil servants should show a lot of loyalty to the people they work with and for—ie Ministers and so on.

I do not think what has happened has fundamentally changed that. What I think is very interesting—and this is touched on in the Better Government Initiative’s evidence—is whether we pay sufficient attention to how we inculcate the values of the Civil Service and how we inculcate in the minds of all civil servants the nature of the democratic society they are serving and what that means for all of these relationships.

In our paper, we point out that a lot of this is based upon the idea of tacit knowledge—another ghastly jargon phrase—acquired over the years and so on, but it is being applied in the context of a service where a lot of



people are moving in and out, and the people moving in, often at very senior levels, can struggle to understand what some of these rules of the game are. It is very important—this is not an argument against bringing people in, incidentally—that the service underpins and explains its values when it has a different model for how it populates itself. I do not think the loss of the Civil Service College or the National School of Government has fundamentally undermined the idea of the values of the Civil Service.

Q72 Mr David Jones: The written evidence submitted by the Better Government Initiative noted that there is “a paucity of coherent explanations of the Civil Service’s learning and development strategy, plans and programmes”. Why do you think that there is that lack of coherent explanation that you note in your evidence?

Sir Richard Mottram: It is partly because it is very complex, and then it is partly because it is being allowed to grow piecemeal, and the people who are allowing it to grow piecemeal do not seem to worry about questions around taxonomy.

I noticed the evidence put in—I suppose it was by the Cabinet Office—and it has an annex, on Civil Service functions, professions and academies, which is a very interesting taxonomy, because any outsider might say, “Well, as there are only eight academies—some are not academies actually—how do the 26 professions get their training?” When the Better Government Initiative set out to offer your Committee evidence, I, for example, thought I that would find by normal means of search evidence that there were, beyond the slogans and the visions—Brilliant Civil Service, which is a good slogan—ways of tracking how all this fitted together, and that we could offer your Committee a coherent set of comments in relation to all of that. I could not find it. I think it is because it is all developing in a very piecemeal way. I suspect—but I am absolutely open to being told this is not true—the people at the centre who are working on this find it quite difficult themselves to understand how it is all fitting together.

Q73 Mr David Jones: What would you say would be the impact of that lack of coherence?

Sir Richard Mottram: The risk in that lack of coherence is that it is not coherent and, secondly, even if it is semi-coherent, the staff do not understand its coherence, and from my conversations with members of staff, that would be true—they puzzle over it. They understand individual institutions. They get the idea they might be this profession or that profession according to where they sit. Some bits of this are very well developed. In our evidence, we pointed out—and this was comforting in a way—that the HR profession has quite clearly gone to a lot of effort to explain all the job families that relate to HR, to explain career pathways for people who are going to be HR professionals, to relate the career pathways to learning and development and so on. You would expect you could find the same thing for each of the main Civil Service professions. It may be it exists, but I could not find it. If I could not find it, perhaps



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other people, for whom it is a much more important consideration than it is for me, could not find it either.

Q74 **Chair:** The Institute of Government cannot find it either.

Sir Richard Mottram: They could not find it, no, which is interesting, isn't it, Chair, because they have more time to look than I have, and more staff to look?

Q75 **Dr Rupa Huq:** To go back to the question of the Civil Service values, you say in your submission that they are inadequately understood and embedded, from the days when people had long careers and a gold watch at the end, to now, when people are externally recruited at different levels. How would you sort this out? Is it just more awareness of the Civil Service code, or is it a more fundamental, radical approach to inculcate those values?

Sir Richard Mottram: I think there are perhaps two dimensions to that question. First, for the generality of civil servants—the whole 400,000 or whatever it is—the evidence of Better Government Initiative is quite disobliging. What we have here is the Better Government Initiative saying, "Well, as only 92% of people are aware of the Civil Service code, it is not good enough". Whereas the Cabinet Office says, "92% of people are aware".

My point there would be that you would expect that every civil servant, 100% of civil servants, should understand what the Civil Service Code is, and they should understand it sufficiently to know that inside it—and it is only about 16 paragraphs long, from memory—is an explanation about what you do if you are unhappy about it. I think that the Civil Service is complacent about this.

The reason why I think it is disobliging is that I would suspect that when I was a very senior leader in the Civil Service the score would have been lower. My former colleagues could say, "This is a bit rich coming from you. You were happy with numbers that were lower than these, and now you are complaining about them", but I do not think it is good enough.

The Civil Service, basically, in relation to the code, has done two things. One, it rewrote it to make it more understandable. I was involved in all of that. Then it has put quite a lot of effort into ensuring that people know about it. It has not put enough effort in, in my view. That is the whole Civil Service.

Then I think there is a very interesting question, which the Civil Service is focused on, particularly at more senior levels, because these are the people who are going to lead and explain. In relation to their own staff, do they know enough about it? I think that that is both about induction and also, for quite senior people, offering them, essentially, a buddy or a mentor. That is the policy of the Civil Service. Certainly when I was a senior civil servant, I did that with some very senior people who had been brought in from outside. Essentially, they would say, "I just cannot



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understand why it is this, that and the other thing”, and I would guide them.

I think it is just not enough, probably for the senior people, to give them a piece of paper and say, “Learn this”, because they will do that. It needs a more interactive process. The Civil Service has a little guide for people coming in from outside. I think it is about doing both. The Civil Service is focused on this. We are saying, “These numbers, that appear superficially to be good, are not good enough”.

Q76 David Morris: How could non-partisan understanding of future Civil Service capability requirements be developed in practice?

Sir Richard Mottram: Sorry, the last bit of your question.

David Morris: How do you think that the requirements could be developed in practice in terms of non-partisan understanding of the future of the Civil Service?

Sir Richard Mottram: My own view is that—this is one reason why I am associated with the Better Government Initiative and we keep sending this Committee evidence—there has to be a way of engaging Parliament in a non-partisan way as a key part of all of this. In the 1990s, I was involved in Civil Service reform, and we very conscientiously worked towards engaging the Select Committee as a forum that would provide a non-partisan sense, through a series and succession of reports, of where the Civil Service should go. That is one answer.

Secondly, it is important for civil servants, and this is awkward because sometimes it has been rather frowned on in recent years, to get about a bit and talk to think-tanks and engage with them on a private basis—things like the Institute for Government. These are all very positive developments. Similarly, there have been very positive developments in the academic community of public policy institutes of various kinds—King’s, the LSE, which I am associated with, and so on. All of that is good in shaping an informed grown-up discussion about an institution, which we would all agree here I think, has to be steered on a non-partisan basis because it is an asset for any Government, as some of the questioning earlier was focused on.

Q77 Sandy Martin: We had a brief discussion about evidence-based and evidence-informed policymaking, as opposed to policymaking by policymakers who had no evidence. Those were not exactly the words that were used, but let me take you back to the Soviet Union in the 1950s and to Lysenkoism, which you have probably heard of, and the whole way agricultural breeding programmes were designed by Stalin to mirror something that was scientifically proven to be rubbish. To what extent do you think the Civil Service has the capacity, or ought to have the capacity, to tell Ministers when they are just plain wrong?

Sir Richard Mottram: Yes. I am reluctant to say this, but I was not entirely myself, personally, convinced by the earlier discussion, because



the opposite of evidence-based policymaking is non-evidence-based policymaking. Why would you want an institution to serve up for you non-evidence-based advice? I do not think that—with particular deference to the Chair, because I think this is a point that he made—evidence-based policymaking is incompatible, in terms of the role of the Civil Service and the advice it offers, with political control and the political injection of values-based decision making. I do not think these two things are incompatible.

What I think is an important role of the Civil Service is to take evidence, to analyse it in a rigorous fashion, which also relates therefore to the roles of policymakers and other advisers, and to say to Ministers, “If these are your goals and these are options towards your goals, evidence suggests that this is likely to be more effective than that” and so on. That seemed, to me, to be a fundamental responsibility of the Civil Service, and it draws upon a whole pile of techniques, which are widely recognised to be useful techniques. Personally, I am a supporter of evidence-based policymaking, as opposed to policy-based evidence making.

Q78 Chair: Also in your evidence you talk about the need for the Civil Service to gain the trust of Ministers and of Parliament and that this might require more robust “reputation management”. What do you mean by “reputation management”?

Sir Richard Mottram: What I mean by “reputation management” is that almost any organisation you can think of should be thinking about how it can safeguard its reputation. In the evidence that we put forward, what was not in our minds was that we need to do this in a very structured way— in relation to Ministers, for example. You build your reputation as a civil servant with Ministers by the way you behave towards them, but in relation to the views of the general public about the Civil Service, the views of think-tanks about the Civil Service or the views of Parliament about the Civil Service, do we spend enough time explaining what we do, why we do it and how we go about it?

What I did not mean by this was, therefore, we would employ reputation management consultants. I believe there is a good PR business that does this sort of stuff. We are not going to spend public money doing this. To draw a contrast—since I spent a lot of my career in the Ministry of Defence—the armed forces very consciously and quite rightly think a lot on a consistent basis about their reputation. What I think we are saying here is, the Civil Service should be doing the same but not spending public money, not manufacturing an artificial reputation. That is not what I am proposing because that does not work anyway.

Q79 Chair: Reputation is not an input; it is an output. What are the inputs that you need to control?

Sir Richard Mottram: The quality of your service, for instance.

Q80 Chair: So it is a governance question, isn't it?



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Sir Richard Mottram: It is partly a governance question, but also it is a communication question, going back to the earlier point.

Q81 **Chair:** We know reams of companies that have sought to manage their reputation, and they have turned out to be a heap of something not very nice.

Sir Richard Mottram: We do.

Q82 **Chair:** Because basically they are people on the make and on the take, and only using their reputation for their personal gain.

Sir Richard Mottram: I am not saying that, Chair.

Q83 **Chair:** I know you are not. It comes back to that question that we dealt with earlier about values. How do you promote the values in the Civil Service so that they are talked about and understood, so that when people think of a civil servant or a permanent secretary, these values are the halo around that person or the institution, which is the reputation of the Civil Service?

Sir Richard Mottram: That can be generated largely internally by how people are trained and developed, how behaviours are sifted out, who gets promoted, who does not, and what is expected of people, as consciously modelled. What we had in mind here was a slightly different thing, which is about the Civil Service's reputation more broadly with the public, let us say.

The problem for the Civil Service might be that, insofar as members of the public understand it, apart from their dealings with it, which fundamentally of course should be a positive experience for them—if not, that is a governance question, as you say, Chair, and then an effectiveness question for the training of the staff who deal with them—they probably have a whole set of stereotypes in their minds about the Civil Service, and insofar as they have them, they probably came from “Yes Minister” and “Yes Prime Minister” and so on. How can you have a way of explaining to people more broadly, Parliament, think tanks and so on, what the Civil Service does that shoots down some of the notions about the Civil Service that are false? That is all we are saying.

Q84 **Chair:** Such as?

Sir Richard Mottram: That it is all a very bureaucratic organisation, self-seeking, self-sustaining, self-everything and so on.

Q85 **Kelvin Hopkins:** On this point about reputation, one of the things that has declined in recent times, as I understand it, is recordkeeping—meticulous records of what is said in private committees—and the thirty-year rule. In terms of reputation, if one knows that one's words are going to be recorded and reported back in 30 years' time, that is going to make a difference to the way you behave, but part of that has been lost. Is it not very important for public servants to have records taken of everything that is said, particularly by politicians?



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Sir Richard Mottram: Yes, it is. That was not quite what we had in mind. but that would be an example. If the Civil Service ceases to support the proper conduct of Government in relation to that, for example, then eventually that is going to damage its reputation. That would be an example of the Chair's point, but that is an issue about governance and control and so on. I probably should not have got into this. We should have put it in our evidence.

Q86 **Chair:** I think it is very interesting, because I think leadership development is intrinsic to reputation, and the haphazard way that leaders have been developed in the Civil Service over the last 20 or 30 years has had a bearing on the reputation of the Civil Service. Is that disputable?

Sir Richard Mottram: Probably not.

Q87 **Chair:** If we concentrated less on reputation management, whatever that may mean, but concentrated on leadership and leadership by example so that leaders live the values of the Civil Service and talk about the values of the Civil Service much more openly, surely that reputation would become intrinsic to the way that the Civil Service is and you would not need to manage the reputation of the Civil Service. Sorry, that is a proposition.

Sir Richard Mottram: Yes. I am not going to dispute it, Chair.

Q88 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** Can I just say that a lot of this conversation that we are having about this reputation management is about how people understand the work of the Civil Service? I feel that the Civil Service has not necessarily brought that to the forefront, and it is particularly exemplified today by the letter from Sir Mark Sedwill in *The Times* defending the Civil Service after a report that a civil servant was threatened when he was talking about Brexit implementation. Do you not think that the Civil Service itself should continue to reinforce its role, or otherwise its reputation is going to be irrevocably damaged in many quarters?

Sir Richard Mottram: Do you mean, should it continue to reinforce its role as a politically impartial—

Q89 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** Absolutely. All civil servants that I have ever known at a senior level take great intellectual joy in serving Governments of different complexions.

Sir Richard Mottram: They do, and I do not think that that is in dispute.

Q90 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** It is when Sir Mark has to put a letter in *The Times* today. That is what I am saying.

Sir Richard Mottram: Yes, I agree, but I think that the reason why Sir Mark has put his letter in *The Times* is we are living in a very unusual period. The threats to the life of Jon Thompson obviously are quite disgusting.



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In the case of the other thing, which I think is about Olly Robbins, yes, there is an argument that says, "Have we sufficiently explained how it is that senior civil servants work in support of Ministers?" Some of the targeted attacks on Olly Robbins are from people who probably know the way the system works. They are using it. It is a political device.

Q91 Dame Cheryl Gillan: But the trouble is it then spreads like a poison to those people that do not know, unless you are managing the reputation of the civil service.

Sir Richard Mottram: Yes. One of the things that I think is interesting here is that if you said to me, how do civil servants and the leadership of the Civil Service deal with issues when civil servants are being blamed or there are issues around their impartiality and so on, I would say the top management of the Civil Service is usually—for reasons that I am quite sympathetic to and understand—quite cautious about doing that. I think that the fact that Sir Mark Sedwill has written a letter is indeed very significant. That it has reached that level—in this particular case—is a very significant thing. I think the Civil Service is quite reticent about getting engaged with this, precisely because it does not want to get itself enmeshed in what are political battles and partisanship of various kinds, which is not part of its professional role.

Q92 Chair: How much sympathy do you have for serving senior civil servants who are defending the reputation of the Civil Service for its impartiality when recently retired senior civil servants are actively taking part in very political campaigns. Isn't there something about the professional ethos of the Civil Service that should imbue in people who are retiring from the Civil Service that they still bear some measure of responsibility for the profession that they have grown up in?

Sir Richard Mottram: What is the example you have in mind, Chair? I can only speak for myself. I personally feel that, and I think this is probably a very old-fashioned view, if you sign up for being a career civil servant, if there is such a thing—a civil servant who spends a long time in Government on a politically impartial basis—and you end up at the top of that organisation or another organisation, you should be quite reticent about getting engaged in political debate after you have left, yes. That has been my own view, but other people might have a different way of doing it.

Q93 Chair: How much has Olly Robbins been exposed by the fact that he has been given by Ministers a very political role?

Sir Richard Mottram: I do not think he has been given a political role. He has been given the role of negotiating on behalf of the Prime Minister. I do not think that is a political role.

Q94 Chair: I deplore personal criticism of civil servants because it is unconscionable that they cannot answer back. It is exceptional that Sir Mark Sedwill has chosen to answer back on behalf of his colleagues.



Sir Richard Mottram: Exactly. Generally speaking, they should not answer back, because they should keep below the parapet of political partisan debate. Equally, however, they should not be blamed for things where quite clearly—as in the case of Olly Robbins—they are not to blame for things they allegedly are to blame for.

Q95 **Sandy Martin:** I do not know the Civil Service code off by heart, I am afraid. I have never read it. My guess is that it is about being non-partisan and not allowing your own opinions to get in the way of the work you are doing.

Sir Richard Mottram: Yes.

Sandy Martin: That is quite an intellectual sacrifice to make, to take on a role where your own personal opinions are not allowed to get in the way of the advice you give. In order to be able to fulfil that role. I would suggest you should be able to expect not to be talked about at all. Is there not something where the media should be expected not to talk about civil servants? It seems deeply unfair to me that somebody should not be allowed to expound their own political view from a soapbox or whatever but, at the same time, have people in the media talking about what those views might be.

Sir Richard Mottram: As someone who never managed to live this life of silence, monk-like and out of the media spotlight, I think there are different cases obviously. What is unacceptable about the Olly Robbins case is that the accusation is he is engaging in a set of activities on behalf of the Government that are motivated by his own personal opinions. I find that implausible and totally against the ethic of policy civil servants.

On the other hand, let's face it, things go wrong, and some of the things that go wrong in Government are the responsibility of civil servants and there has to be accountability for that.

There is then the third category, which is when things that were not their responsibility go wrong, but civil servants are blamed. That category also is very awkward because the ethos of the Civil Service is based on the notion that Ministers take the credit, Ministers take the blame and civil servants keep quiet. That is quite an effective deal. When it breaks down—because Ministers will not take the blame for something that is their “fault”—you get a different phenomenon, which I think the Committee has commented on more than once, Chair.

Q96 **Sandy Martin:** In that case, can I take us back to the training and development of the Civil Service? We are talking about the values that should inform a civil servant. To what extent do you think those can be taught, and to what extent do you think we need to be better at making sure people have those values before they join the Civil Service?

Sir Richard Mottram: Some of the values of the Civil Service, like honesty and integrity, they should have before they are recruited. If they do not have them, they should not be recruited. However, the Civil



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Service has unusually strict rules about notions of honesty and integrity, and on top of that it adds notions about objectivity and political impartiality, which people have to be inducted into insofar as they apply to their work.

Alongside that are two other things which are fundamental in our evidence. One is understanding what Government is about and what the job is, because the job is rather different to other sorts of jobs. Alongside that, there are professional skills—I am going to use that word for the moment until I get beaten up—of two kinds; one kind is to do with techniques, understanding, use of evidence and all that sort of stuff, and the other kind is about knowledge of specific subject areas. If you are going to work in the Ministry of Defence, you need to know something about defence. You do not need to know something about defence before you join, but you really do need to know something about defence as you go along. If you are going to work in the Home Office, you should have an understanding about what the Home Office's subject areas are and be engaged with and understand debates around those subject areas. That is quite an unusual collection of things.

Depending on your level and where you are heading, you need to have a learning and development system that gives you all of those things alongside career pathways that reinforce those requirements. As I think the earlier discussion showed, that probably is not what we have at the moment in full.

Q97 Sandy Martin: Is there anything else about the policy profession you wanted to add?

Sir Richard Mottram: I know why the Committee does not like the word "profession"—because professions can be seen as closed institutions like lawyers, solicitors and all those sorts of things that have very specific professional development and knowledge requirements. You could argue, secondly, that the essence of being a policy professional is to be quite broad ranging and to not necessarily be very narrow, to be partly—although this was disputed earlier—someone who can help to orchestrate teams in certain directions on the basis of a set of agreed procedures.

The reason why we chose to call it a "profession" was partly because the opposite of profession is amateur. Dr Haddon said to me as she left, "I hope you are going to explain why you thought it was a good idea to call it a profession". One reason at the back of my mind was you had professional cricketers and amateur cricketers, you had professional footballers and amateur footballers, you had professional people in the Civil Service and then you had these generalists who were called amateurs.

Q98 Chair: Calling an amateur a professional, does that actually improve the situation?

Sir Richard Mottram: No, it does not. Exactly, Chair.



Q99 **Chair:** Is it reputation management?

Sir Richard Mottram: I really wish I had not put that sentence in. Precisely, it does not. Therefore you must ask yourself, are the skills, knowledge, techniques and everything that policy people—we can talk about who these people are, and I spent 30-odd years being one of these people—bring to bear on this simply something any old bloke or lady who came off the street could do. The answer is they are not. They require a deep-seated set of understandings about how you organise things, what is relevant, what techniques are appropriate, and what orchestration is needed in support of decision making by Ministers. This is not an amateur game. This is a professional game, and these people are professional people—they are dedicated.

Whether you want to put the label on it, I do not mind, but do not do what the Civil Service has done, which is accept that they will be called generalists or whatever, and that a critique that goes back to the late 1960s is wheeled out every week of the year by people who wish to attack the Civil Service.

This would be a good example, Chair, of reputation management. Do not put a label on something that enables your critics, very unfairly, to criticise you for something that simply is not true. My own view is that these skills in the Civil Service are akin to the skills of lawyer, who is absolutely regarded as a professional. They are different to a lawyer, of course. Labelling it a “profession” is useful if these people are going to be criticised as being amateurs. The other passionate thing I feel is that there should be a set of learning and development associated with being one of these people.

This is not to say these policy professionals operate in isolation from other professionals, because that is not how a well-run Government Department works. It certainly is not to say they should be devising policy in a little ivory tower unrelated to the people who have to deliver it. You have to think about it the other way round. Everything they do must be in a context of, “Can it be delivered?” For example, when I was the permanent secretary of the Department for Work and Pensions, we were categorically clear that our policy people had to work hand in glove with our operational delivery people, and we should have ways of thinking about how their careers were developed and about the sort of learning and development they needed to underpin those careers that ensured policy people knew about delivery and also worked in teams with delivery people.

Q100 **Mr David Jones:** What is your assessment thus far of the Civil Service Leadership Academy?

Sir Richard Mottram: Insofar as there is public knowledge about it and insofar as I anecdotally talk to people about it, I think it is doing a reasonable job. The interesting question is why did it have to be recreated? I think it sort of existed before. It might be that it had to be



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recreated on a different model. The model they are using, which has a lot of involvement by senior civil servants themselves and practitioner-based—to use ghastly jargon again—development, is a good model. It is an interesting institution. It floats freely, as far as I can see. The governance of it is very unclear. The reporting of what it does seems to me to be unclear. However, I think it is a good idea in itself.

Q101 Kelvin Hopkins: When Civil Service Learning was established, some of the responsibility for creating, “innovative learning that meets the needs of the Civil Service, Departments and professions” was outsourced to the private sector. What should be kept in-house?

Sir Richard Mottram: What should be kept in-house—our evidence touches on this—is a capacity to commission and/or, if you cannot commission it, to deliver those things that any standard outsourced providers cannot provide for you. Do not think you can solve the problem with, “I will have a small commissioning team that will work through prime contractors and will go to institutions who are serving up training everywhere and that will do”. It will not do.

Whatever model you have, you do not want it to be closed, so it will always involve engaging people from outside. The Civil Service College itself and the National School of Government always involved engaging people from outside. Some of the best training I had was from outsiders who were brought in, so it was, in that sense, outsourced. The model they chose is very interesting because it has commissioning, then these prime contractors and then other suppliers. From reading between the lines of the evidence that was put in by the Civil Service itself, you can see the initial version of this was not a success.

Q102 Kelvin Hopkins: I understand one of the organisations that has been used is Capita. Yet Capita was described by a former Chair of the Public Accounts Committee as such a bad organisation it should never ever again be given a Government contract. There is a difference between having a profit-making organisation with a bad reputation and the Institute for Government, or whatever it is, doing things. Do you not have to be very careful, if you are outsourcing, about whom you outsource to?

Sir Richard Mottram: You do. I cannot now remember, but I think Capita was used in the prime contractor role. I might be wrong about this, but it was effectively being used as an orchestrator for the bringing in of other organisations.

Q103 Chair: I thought that was what the Civil Service was meant to be good at. So it should not be contracting it out, then.

Sir Richard Mottram: Yes, but perhaps for a time, in Government, there was a conclusion that this was not something the Civil Service was good at and it needed a big shake-up. I think that was what it was about. That model is quite difficult to deliver, as the Civil Service is hinting itself.



Q104 **Kelvin Hopkins:** Isn't using an instrument like Capita putting the fox in charge of the henhouse, in a way?

Sir Richard Mottram: No.

Q105 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** Do you think learning and development at the moment is linked to career progression in the Civil Service well? I would also like your view on success profiles, just briefly.

Sir Richard Mottram: On the first point, the answer is that you can see one or two examples—like my one about HR—where people have really thought about this. It seems to me it is well communicated, and if they can sustain it in delivery, fine. Then you ask yourself, "Can we find the evidence that all these other professions have also worked all this through in a similar way?" The two that are key are the policy profession and operational delivery. It is quite difficult to see precisely what lies behind how they think learning and development relates to careers.

Success profiles, fine. I think it is just five criteria. One of them is about technical or something. What is interesting about success profiles is that the underlying idea is that every Civil Service job will effectively be put to competition and the success profiles will be used for that purpose. As I do not believe every Civil Service job should be put to competition, my enthusiasm for success profiles is slightly muted.

Q106 **Chair:** One senior civil servant, who had come in from the private sector, said to me, "I find it impossible to know how you could possibly plan somebody's career in the Civil Service". He found that very alien to the environment he had come from. What do you make of that remark?

Sir Richard Mottram: He is right. From my own recent experience, when I was working in some large private sector organisations, the view of some people about what large private sector organisations do, and what large private sector organisations actually do in this space, is completely different. Therefore we are using a false analogy.

Q107 **Dr Rupa Huq:** How far is a model based around in-post training affected by a high rate of churn in the Civil Service?

Sir Richard Mottram: It is affected—I agreed with the earlier evidence. This may have been brought out earlier, but it is affected also in the sense that you do want people to have careers that basically build on, including experientially, what has gone before. If you have a highly competitive chasing-new-postings model, where you can go from X to Y to Z, then that will not necessarily happen.

There is an opposite problem as well. You need to have the capacity to encourage bits of line management to take people who do not necessarily have experience so they can learn. I do not know how that is going to work in the model that is being developed. For example—going back to my earlier point about Work and Pensions—you have to persuade people in a delivery function to take a person whose basic experience up until



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now has been policy, to give them the experience that will enable them to have that broader vision, and the opposite way round. You cannot take all your job decisions on a narrow basis of, "Which person best fits the immediate demands of this job?" You need a model that is subtle both ways round. That requires a philosophy that recognises all of that.

Q108 Mr David Jones: How would you contrast the challenges of leadership in the Civil Service with challenges in other sectors?

Sir Richard Mottram: They have a number of similarities. If you are running a large Civil Service organisation, it has, in itself, similarities to other large organisations in terms of how you might lead it, how you might communicate, how you might do this and how you might do the other. Therefore there is scope and benefit in civil servants receiving training alongside others. I had the good fortune, for instance, to go on a thing that no longer exists called the Top Management Programme that was designed to do that.

There is also the interesting point that if you are the permanent secretary of an organisation, or the chief executive of it, you may have a board with you, you may have a chair of that board or you may have a Minister who is effectively the non-executive chair of the organisation. That too has similarities to other sectors.

There are also big differences because, obviously, Ministers are not, simply by analogy, non-executive chairs of management organisations. They do something very different and they expect of their top civil servants a set of skills that are not necessarily the same as those you would find in a big company, for instance. There is a lot more focus on strategy and there is political advice. That is not in a partisan way, but as Government Departments operate in a very contested and difficult environment, experienced civil servants spend a lot of their time with Ministers thinking how best to manage that environment. Those sorts of things are rather different.

Q109 Mr David Jones: Do you think these differences are well understood?

Sir Richard Mottram: I think they are reasonably well understood, yes, as long as you do not make the mistake of thinking you could simply—which I do not think the Civil Service has done or will do—buy in a load of a leadership training that is standard to every sector. You cannot. I do not think Kelvin Hopkins will particularly thank me for this, but if you can find ways of engaging private sector organisations both in the learning and in the teaching, you probably will get benefits, as long as they are the right ones.

Q110 Chair: One of the key questions of our inquiry is asking how well the Civil Service is sustaining itself. To what extent do you think the Civil Service is addressing these issues effectively and independently from Governments, which come and go and show varying interest in Civil Service reform? It is something that preoccupies a Prime Minister about



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once every 10 years I think.

Sir Richard Mottram: Yes, because the Prime Minister has lots of other things to think about, hasn't she? I would say, generally speaking, the Civil Service is doing this well. Although I have criticised some of the planning, the programmes and the capacity to understand what they are doing—say in the learning and development area—some of the agendas that were touched on earlier about strengthening functional capabilities for instance are all good agendas. Personally, I would invest more in the learning and development of the policy profession, or non-profession, and I would like to see the plans for the operational delivery organisation, because that is really key to the future of the Civil Service. However, I would say, "Well".

I do not, myself, Chair, think the Civil Service should develop these things independently. Whenever I see the phrase, "The Civil Service is independent", I choke on it. I know that occasionally the Civil Service calls itself independent. It is not independent. The Civil Service serves the Government of the day. As part of serving the Government of the day, it has to sustain itself for the next Government. In my experience, the Ministers and the Government of the day generally—I can think of one or two that might not quite do this—are acutely conscious of that, not least because they think, "Hang on, I might be the Government of the day next time but one around".

Therefore the idea that there is a machinery of Government that needs to be sustained, which brings with it the requirement for investment and all that sort of stuff, I think is well understood in Government. It should not be seen as being an independent function.

Q111 **Chair:** To help this Committee do its job, who do we hold accountable for the learning and development of the people in the Civil Service? Not in a negative way, but in a positive and forward-looking way, who do we support?

Sir Richard Mottram: Obviously there is a Minister for the Civil Service, who has an important responsibility, on my argument that the Civil Service is not an independent institution. Then you look at the Civil Service itself, and here I get a bit puzzled because maybe I just do not understand this properly. There appears to be a board and, in my opinion, this board is chaired by a very gifted civil servant. However, you cannot really hold a board to account. Therefore who is the individual in the top management of the Civil Service whose day job is to answer the question, "Are the leadership and development plans and programmes and the philosophy of the Civil Service up to scratch?" I am not sure I know the answer to that. It could be that it is Rupert McNeil, but then he has lots of things that he is doing. It might, in the old days, have been seen to be the chief executive of the National School of Government or the equivalent sitting in the Cabinet Office. The governance of all of this is really quite unclear and probably not sufficiently strong. Therefore it



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will be a very good question: who does the Committee ask the question of, how does all this add up and how do you know it is good enough?

- Q112 **Chair:** Permanent secretaries, generally, are directly accountable to their Ministers. Only in matters of accounting are they directly accountable to Parliament. Is there a case for a named permanent secretary being accountable directly to Parliament for the state of learning and development and leadership development in the Civil Service, to provide that constitutional underpinning and continuity that is not evident in the Ministers that come and go?

Sir Richard Mottram: I am tempted to say yes, but I think the answer is probably no.

- Q113 **Chair:** You think it requires some thought?

Sir Richard Mottram: It requires thought but the Committee can hold to account the head of the Home Civil Service. The head of the Home Civil Service, as he is also the Cabinet Secretary, is also a fairly busy person. However, it would be interesting to ask who the head of the Home Civil Service turns to to get the answer to, "Is all of this up to scratch? It is disjointed and fragmented, with lots of different organisations who do not appear to have any meaningful self-standing status that requires them to report what they are up to and how they measure their performance. Who at the centre of Government is leading this part of the Civil Service vision? It is opaque to me."

- Q114 **Chair:** I hazard a guess that, in this age of pre-appointment hearings, if there was a National School for Government, the head of the National School for Government might well be subject to a pre-appointment hearing. However, there is not a head of the National School for Government.

Sir Richard Mottram: No. In fact, according to the Civil Service, there are about nine different organisations.

Chair: Then they should all have pre-appointment hearings.

Sir Richard Mottram: However, some of these academies are not academies, so it is a curious world.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed, Sir Richard. Your completely infectious enthusiasm and passion for the subject is very evident in your evidence. Thank you very much for being with us today.

Sir Richard Mottram: It was my pleasure, Chair.