

Joint University Council Public Administration Committee

– Written evidence (FFF0023)

Designing a public services workforce fit for the future

Response to consultation

1. The JUC Public Administration Committee

- 1.1 The Joint University Council is the UK Learned Society for public administration and social work.
- 1.2 The JUC is an institutional membership organisation and represent the vast majority of higher education institutions who teach and research in these subject areas. We promote these subjects through the work of our two sub-committees: the Social Work Education Committee (SWEC) and the Public Administration Committee (PAC).
- 1.3 The Public Administration Committee publishes two academic journals (in partnership with SAGE): *Public Policy and Administration* and *Teaching Public Administration*. We also fund research and seminars in public administration, hold an annual academic conference and work with relevant national and international bodies such as the *Academy of Social Sciences* and the *International Institute for Public Administration* to ensure that the interests of UK public administration are recognised across social science and in international arenas. In 2018 we celebrated our centenary year.

2. Recruitment, retention and training – UK Teaching of Public Administration

- 2.1 Research by our members has consistently shown a decline in the teaching of public administration in the UK over the last several decades (Chandler, 1991; Chandler 2002; Elcock 2004; Fenwick

and Macmillan 2014; Greenwood 1999; Johnston Miller 2012; Jones 2012). Most recently it has been noted that only 16 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the UK currently offer public administration at postgraduate level.

- 2.2 This is up from only 7 HEI's in the 1970's but is in stark contrast to other countries where public administration can be found to be much more prevalent. For example, the US State of South Carolina has 6 universities that offer Master of Public Administration (MPA) programmes alone, the State of Minnesota has 8 universities offering MPA programmes, whilst Scotland (with a similar population size) has only 1 MPA programme.
- 2.3 In relation to the largest accreditation bodies no UK MPA programmes are accredited by US Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) (compared to 207 programmes worldwide) or European Association for Public Administration Accreditation (EAPAA) (compared to 32 worldwide).
- 2.4 Budgetary pressures across the UK public sector have had a particular impact on learning and development opportunities. This has been found to have a detrimental impact on innovation and strategic change (Elliott, 2020).
- 2.5 The public service workforce is increasingly fragmented with a distinctly decentralized and disaggregated system of public administration (Elliott et al., 2021). Previous initiatives to support professional development have been largely ad hoc and opportunistic. Consequently, there has been a lack of cross-organizational learning and development of boundary-spanning skills which would typically be a feature of public administration programmes such as the MPA.
- 2.6 Those MPA programmes that do still exist within the UK typically have strong links with local public service organisations. For example, Ulster University has for over 20 years run an MPA programme with excellent links with the Northern Ireland Civil

Service. They are also the only UK university to be a member of the European Masters of Public Administration Network. It has been found that this programme has facilitated greater understanding across policy areas and subsequently greater levels of collaboration (Knox and McMahon, 2014). Other examples of good practice within the UK include the Wales Centre for Public Policy albeit this is primarily a research centre rather than offering educational programmes.

3. Recruitment, retention and training - International Comparators

- 3.1 Internationally, it is recognised that greater levels of collaboration are needed to address the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The UN have created their own Curriculum on Governance for the Sustainable Development Goals. Undoubtedly there is a key role for universities to play in supporting such initiatives. Yet this is only possible with availability of funding for the education of public service professionals. It is also important that public administration education take place at multiple levels (undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research) and with multiple types of students (full-time, part-time, early-career, mid-career and so on).
- 3.2 There are examples of good practice such as the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG). This is a consortium of organisations including governments, universities and business schools that conduct research and education in public policy and administration including an Executive Master of Public Administration programme.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 The UK have steadily reduced the amount of training and development for public service professionals for many decades and where this has taken place it has increasingly been in professional silos rather than in collaborative, generalist subject areas such as public administration. The closure of the National School of Government in 2009 and the closure of the Royal Institute for Public Administration in 1992 are both examples where there has been a lack of sustained long-term investment in professional development.
- 4.2 More recently the changes to the Level 7 Senior Leader Degree Apprenticeship programme have again closed off a potentially significant funding opportunity for public sector employers to support the professional development of their staff. Too often examples of good practice are developed, then closed, before being reinvented some years later.
- 4.3 The JUC Public Administration Committee welcome moves to create a strategic and holistic approach to professional development for the public service workforce. We believe that it is important that this is grounded in the practical and theoretical context of public administration.
- 4.4 It is important that, with the development of the Leadership College for Government, the mistakes of the past are not repeated. Support for the professional development of public service workers is key to supporting more collaborative working, innovation and retention of experienced staff.
- 4.5 The JUC Public Administration Committee have a potentially significant role to play as the voice of UK universities that teach and research in this subject area. We would welcome any opportunity to support this work further.

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