

Mr Matt Phillips – Written evidence (FFF0054)

Recruitment, retention and training

We need to get rid of this idea that public service is something you enter and training and development happens within. It should be a lot more porous with other sectors, primarily the private sector. Salary differential and the bureaucracy of public sector organisations act as obstacles to this freedom of manoeuvre that would benefit all sectors.

The questions perpetuate this issue – the implication is that careers are spent in the public sector, the training is referred to as being between public sector services, the fact that it talks of competing with the private sector as if they are distinct entities. We are part of the jobs market when it comes to talent, not picking sides, and we need to act as such.

We seem to act from a position of insecurity that leads to protectionist mindsets. This is an obstacle to recruitment and retention.

Effectiveness

Tech should enable the public sector to encourage individuals to find their best way of working. But tech is a tool, and we miss the point if we don't talk about leadership. Why is there a presumption that sacking people in the public sector is difficult? It comes from a lack of moral courage and a lack of leadership. These skills are lacking, and the frequent mistake that is made is that we look to develop leadership without gripping some of the more difficult issues (such as sacking people).

Covid has presented a massive opportunity because we've learned that individuals have found better ways of working. So the whole network needs to embrace these gains and that includes stakeholders. The Court system is a very good example of such a stakeholder – the largely unchallenged and ungoverned Judiciary will cite the needs of justice to remove all of the gains of electronic documentation and remote hearings (for administrative matters), with a massive knock on effect in the whole ecosystem within which they sit but do not acknowledge.

Structures

Integration, partnership working etc are ingrained within public sector thinking. It is a mistake to think that they aren't. Where they fail it is often because integration acts as a drag anchor rather than an economy of scale or pooling of knowledge and experience. It can work well, and it can run contrary to the significant benefits of devolved, local decision making and agility.

What is missed is that it is politics that acts as a barrier to success. Anyone organisation that has ever sought to partner with the NHS will attest to the fact that it is a behemoth – it bends light and gravity not because of its size and power but because it is a political and public entity that has a completely distorted narrative surrounding it that cripples honest debate at a political level and makes it the focus of funding and public opinion.

As an example, if you want ambulance waiting time to improve you don't need more ambulances, nor do you need more beds to stop ambulances queuing at hospitals, you need more domiciliary care workers. But social care is not understood by voters or politicians and so money goes to the NHS, feeding the problem not the solution. And we don't know how to value skills like care and empathy and so domiciliary care workers get paid minimum wage, and when we talk about increasing pay then people try to justify it structurally by talking about qualifications and degrees (like the 2000 reforms for the nursing profession and the creep with police officers), rather than having a conversation about how we value less tangible qualities that degrees cannot capture. Mark Carney's Reith lectures should be heeded.

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