

TRAINING AND RETAINING PUBLIC SERVANTS FOR THE FUTURE

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Abstract

Demographic changes with an ageing population and declining birth rates, alongside economic challenges, have implications for the public service labour market. A growing challenge for public institutions is that the public sector is no longer the employer of choice. The public sector is already facing challenges in recruitment, filling vacancies with competent and talented personnel, and retaining public servants. The UK civil service is also wrestling with how to train and maintain skills within the mid-range officials and one way it has addressed this is to partner with King's College London and other UK universities to co-develop and co-deliver customised courses. The paradigm shifts in the state from public administration to new public management and new public governance in part underlies this declining interest in public service with the introduction of neo-liberal public sector reforms over the decades, downsizing of the state, relatively lower pay, and various austerity measures. The article revisits these paradigm shifts of the state, providing a review and discussing the impact of these shifts. Furthermore, the article argues for a new paradigm shift. A New Public Service Bargain, which recognizes and values public service because it is the human resource capacity of the state that is key to addressing crises, wicked policy problems and turbulent times.

Keywords: public service bargain, UK Public Administration, talent management, new public management, new public governance.

1. Introduction

This paper brings together the fundamental themes of the joint keynote talk delivered by Karen Johnston and Andrew Massey at the Transylvanian International Conference in Public Administration, 3rd–5th October 2024, at Babeş-Bolyai University on the theme of University—community relationship. Part of this is also a refinement of Johnston's (2023) paper on a New Public Service Bargain. It commences with a discussion of the contemporary concerns surrounding training and development of UK civil servants and then explores the concept and elaboration of a New Public Service Bargain suggesting that governments recognize and value public servants because it is the human resource capacity of the state that is key to addressing crises and wicked policy problems.

2. UK context

The UK's National School of Government (NSG), Sunningdale, previously the Civil Service College, no longer exists, having been sold by the last government. It is obvious, however, that there remains a need for such an institution as government and governance becomes increasingly complex and officials are in need of acquiring specific and transferable skills, and to enhance its human resource capacity to address wicked policy problems and deliver public services with better outcomes for society. The experience and knowledge to provide this has dissipated with the closure of the NSG. King's College in 2019 established the International School for Government in London in order to fill this void with King's College now ranked the highest institution in the UK for public administration, and with the specific intention of working in cooperation with the civil service to co-develop and co-deliver the kind of courses required. These are often of a hybrid nature (online and face-to-face) and use university research and expertise to join with civil service experience to develop and deliver taught post-graduate modules in response to Departments' needs and obligations.

The UK government has developed a range of *Professional Standards* over the last few decades to meet the needs of its departments to develop informed policies and deliver these as public services. Because the NSG no longer exists it has sought a range of academies and pathways to develop these skills in its officials, of which one is the International School for Government at King's. Although some of these professional standards are constant, they do evolve over time in response to the issues and problems faced by government. (All the following information of UK government standards and professions is taken from Government Professions, Cabinet Office, 2024).

2. Professional standards

Strategy. Policy professionals solve problems and improve outcomes, working collaboratively with other professions.

Change. Policy professionals seek to initiate and lead change.

Democracy. Policy professionals have a key role to play in ensuring democratic accountability, working effectively with different levels of government to make policy that works for citizens.

Delivery. Policy professionals also ensure effective delivery of policy, evaluating its impact and adapting as necessary (Cabinet Office, 2024).

These standards exist within the structures of the UK Central civil service, some of which appear at first glance to overlap and repeat themselves:

Specialist Professions

- 28 professions organised into four types
- Operational delivery
- Policy
- Functional professions
- Specialist professions

Functional Professions

- Planning
- Planning Inspection
- Science and Engineering
- Tax
- Veterinary
- Human Resources – aligned to the HR function
- Internal Audit – aligned to the internal audit function
- Legal – aligned to the legal function
- Project Delivery – aligned to the project delivery profession
- Property – aligned to the property profession
- Operational Research – aligned to the analysis function
- Risk Management – aligned to the government finance function
- Security – aligned to the security profession
- Social research – aligned to the analysis function
- Statistics – aligned to the analysis function

Operational delivery profession. The Operational Delivery Profession is the public face of the Civil Service with over 250,000 members.

Policy profession. It supports the government in its role in improving the welfare, security, and prosperity of the nation.

3. Public service bargains

Within this framework of professions and standards, Johnston (2023) has suggested that one way of meeting the needs of the public sector is to reinvent public service bargains. There is not the space to discuss the dynamics for this in detail, but government is

facing human resource challenges, because:

- In many developed countries, the public sector is no longer employer of choice (Bankins and Waterhouse, 2019)
- Demographics changes and a falling birthrate in developed countries (Burke and Ng, 2006; Ng and Johnson, 2015)
- Millennials' values and attitudes form different expectations about work (Lyons and Kuron, 2014; Twenge and Kasser, 2013; Twenge *et al.*, 2010)
- There is a war for Talent (Kravariti and Johnston, 2020)
- Difficulties attracting and recruiting competent personnel, fewer applicants, increasing vacancies (Fowler and Birdsall, 2019)
- Reduced interest because poor working conditions, low salary, and the retirement of the baby boomer generation (Sievert, Vogel and Feeney, 2022)
- Poor bureaucratic reputation (Bankins and Waterhouse, 2019)
- Workload burdens and stress (Fernandez-i-Marín *et al.*, 2023)
- Neoliberal reforms (Hinna *et al.*, 2021)

For example, in the UK since 2022, the health and social work sector has been facing the highest number of vacancies at around 206,000 with over 10% of National Health Service (NHS) nursing posts and nearly 6% of NHS doctors' posts being vacant (House of Commons, 2022). Staff in the NHS are often demoralized at lower grades, with low pay, heavy workloads and constant pressure, leading staff to quit (House of Commons, 2022). A quarter of social workers left the profession after a year of registration and 28.7% left after 10 years of registration (Social Work England, 2023), while in 2022/23, 44% more teachers intended to leave the profession than in the previous year (McLean, Worth and Faulkner-Ellis, 2023). The decrease in recruitment and rising attrition rates point to the escalating severity of teacher under-supply, with 10 out of 17 secondary subjects forecast to under-recruit in 2024/25 (McLean, Worth and Faulkner-Ellis, 2023).

4. Conclusion: a New Public Service Bargain

There have been continuous paradigm shifts in the state since 1945:

- Traditional Public Administration
- New Public Management
- New Public Governance

This has led to the development of a range of theoretical perspectives to explain the change and its impact on governance. These include hollowing-out of the state and public services (Rhodes, 1997). Alongside this is a hollowing out of human resource capacity. Pollitt (2005) noted when measuring results little attention is paid to human resource issues such as equity, staff morale and motivation. Hood and Lodge addressed these developments with the development of public service bargain: politicians normally expect a degree of loyalty and competence from bureaucrats and in return bureaucrats expect a

mixture of tangible and intangible rewards such as a permanent career and good remuneration (Hood and Lodge, 2006).

Declining rates of public employees, however, mean there is less capacity for government to deliver upon services and formulate policies to address increasing complex societal challenges. Ways to address this may include to again make the public sector and civil service an attractive employment option. This may be accomplished through:

- Person-vocation fit (Jakobsen, Lokke and Keppeler, 2023)
- Millennials attracted to public sector if meaningful work, job security and work-life balance (Ng, Gossett and Winter, 2016)
- More inclusive approaches such as improving the representation of women in public administration (Johnston, 2019)
- Henstra and McGowan (2016) Canadian MPA students attracted to public service because:
 - witnessed other people's disadvantage or hardship
 - being personally exposed to discriminatory treatment
 - desiring meaningful employment experience
 - wanting to serve as change agents
 - hoping to work towards solving social problems and address inequalities
 - improving government programs and services
 - enhance the lives of the next generation of Canadians.

New Public Service Bargain? A Paradigm Shift

Paradigm	Theoretical Roots	Nature of the state	Focus	Emphasis	Resource allocation mechanism	Nature of the service system	Value Base
Public administration	Political science and public policy	Unitary	The political system	Policy creation and implementation	Hierarchy	Closed	Public sector ethos
New Public Management	Rational/public choice theory and management studies	Regulatory	The organization	Management of organizational resources and performance	The market and classical or neo-classical contracts	Open rational	Efficacy of competition and the marketplace
New Public Governance	Institutional and network theory	Plural and pluralist	The organization in its environment	Negotiation of values, meaning and relationships	Networks and relational contracts	Open closed	Dispersed and contested
New Public Service Bargain	Human relations theory	Empowering	Organization for effective public service delivery	Meaningful and rewarding work	Fair and decent employment contract	Open	Public service capacity

Adapted from Osborne (2010, p. 10).

We end this paper we did our talk, with the question—is there a paradigm shift to a New Public Service Bargain and how can that be delivered in the new structures of the public sector?

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