



Building and Engaging our Workforce: A two part event

21 April 2016
Institute for Government, 2 Carlton Gardens,
London, SW1Y 5AA

Event Summary

We were delighted to host a two-part event on 21 April at the Institute for Government, with the overarching theme of building and engaging our workforce.

Part One: Engaging staff in transformational change (14.00-15.30)

As many ALBs prepare for transformational change and reform over this parliament, there is no doubt of the importance of Chief Executives building effective leadership skills, including expanding their commercial capabilities, engaging staff and creating the right working culture for productivity. In this first half, our members had the opportunity to hear from Rupert McNeil, newly appointed Chief People Officer for the Civil Service and Steve Radcliffe, leadership coach and mentor.

Rupert began by sharing his people-related priorities and plans for HR reform over this parliament, including:

- **A plan to build the Civil Service workforce** using the Civil Service Workforce Strategy which will be launched by the Minister for Cabinet Office in May. The workforce strategy will aim to share the vision of the Civil Service, raise organisational and functional capability, culture, talent, reward, diversity, permeability and create leadership development opportunities. The Civil Service also aims to be smaller, more efficient, adaptable and flexible.
- **Improving HR functional capability and deployment.** The Civil Service are particularly keen to engage with ALBs that have specialist skills.
- **Building a customer centric focus** into the decision-making process, particularly as part of the digital agenda.
- **Creating organisations with fewer layers and greater empowerment for managers.**
- **Developing the Leadership Academy** – the new comprehensive civil service leadership development programme for leaders of government and ALBs.

Rupert emphasised the opportunities for ACE to engage with the Civil Service reform agenda, particularly in:

- Exploring a mid-career offer, including a programme of secondments to meet the commitment of 50 secondments to ALBs by 2018.
- Involvement in the design of the Leadership Academy.
- Performance management knowledge sharing between ALBs and the Civil Service – what works well?

Steve Radcliffe, leadership coach and mentor, then shared his expertise in building leadership capabilities more specifically. He was keen to emphasise that leadership is natural and uncomplicated, and the importance of building confidence in one's own leadership capabilities. Only 38% of middle-senior level staff are able to say that they feel their organisation is well-led. One of Steve's main points was to stress the importance of leaving behind the skills of the operating, technical and managerial roles when you progress to high-level leadership positions. Even when involved with operational tasks; CEOs should bring a different leadership mind-set.

There are three key elements to effective leadership:

- **Future** – looking progressively towards the future rather than focusing on operational practicalities.
- **Engage** – interacting effectively with the operating and managerial levels they need to build the future.
- **Deliver** – implementing visions into action whilst developing others as leaders.

Feedback from the floor discussion:

- Although CEOs welcome the user-centric focus in Rupert's priorities, some members felt it was important to acknowledge that the meaning of 'customer' can change across government, ALBs and other sectors. For example, departments may regard their Minister as the customer, as opposed to the public or user of the delivery service. However, Rupert also noted that the elected officials are still the voice of the user.
- Members noted that leadership for ALBs also involves another level of engagement through the quality of conversations with the Ministers as well as staff.
- Members welcomed Rupert's plans but also cautioned the need to see rationalisation of bureaucratic controls within government in order to create this new working culture. Rupert invited members to get in touch if they were ever to face problems with controls.
- Members feel that at times it is difficult for ALBs to access and share civil service resources. Rupert confirmed that Cabinet Office are looking to make big changes in knowledge management and collaboration.
- Social inclusion will be a key work stream on the diversity agenda; Rupert would like to see an increased focus on apprenticeships and getting apprentices fully involved in the civil service's work, including attending high-level meetings.
- Rupert is keen to reduce the number of grades, so there are fewer, more efficient managerial levels and consistent ways of working across the civil service. However there also need to be debates about deployment.

Part two – Talent Interchange (16.00-17.30)

Following the ACE event with Cabinet Office on talent interchange in November, this seminar was an opportunity to update attendees on progress and set out a proposal of how to work together to deliver the 50 interchange places between ALBs and the centre of government, which was announced by John Manzoni, Chief Executive of the Civil Service, at ACE's event on 11 February. We were also delighted to hear from Peter Unwin, Chief Executive of the Whitehall and Industry Group (WIG) sharing his experiences of facilitating cross-sector placements, leadership development programmes, workshops and high level talent interchange across business, charities and the public sector.

Thea Collins from the Cabinet Office Talent team began the seminar by highlighting the drive in the Civil Service to access the talent across ALBs to create strong, diverse and high quality leaders through talent interchange and secondments, despite the challenging fiscal environments and demanding ministerial expectations. Many ALBs have been excluded from opportunities as they do not have access to Civil Service Learning however, they are now developing an offline nomination process for the Future Leaders Scheme and Senior Leaders Scheme. Over this parliament the Civil Service aim to make interchange much more accessible to ALBs, build specific talent schemes, produce best practice guidance for ALBs and departments, identify talent and succession planning, using the 9-box grid and create greater permeability through secondments. There is a Civil Service commitment to create 50 2-3 year secondments to ALBs by 2018. The new civil service Leadership Academy will also be used to create a structured development curriculum as the secondment scheme is developed. They will be doubling the numbers for the Future Leaders Scheme and increasing the Senior Leaders Scheme to 65. Whilst these schemes are still currently in scope, Thea was keen to emphasise their potential in developing 'world-class' leaders and welcomes ALBs to engage with this agenda.

Peter Unwin, CEO of WIG, then began talking about his experiences in his previous role at DEFRA and the notable shift to engage more with their ALBs. The department now have their 'One DEFRA' agenda which involved shared services with their ALBs. The finance director of the Environment Agency is also now in charge of this function across the department. However, Peter agrees that despite these positive developments in ALB and departmental interaction, talent interchange is an area for significant improvement. He welcomes the initiative from the civil service to improve talent interchange and secondment opportunities.

Peter gave a short introduction to WIG and its role in facilitating cross-sector learning through secondments, short-term placements and also offering mentoring for leaders entering new roles in a different sector and training for Non-Executive roles. WIG runs leadership programmes for high level talent through from graduate level to Director-General level. These programmes are for small groups of 12-16 people and are conducted through a series of knowledge-sharing, action-learning modules. They also provide women's leadership programmes for Deputy Director levels, one day development seminars which are available of the Civil Service Learning Portal and have a strong alumni network. They also host events which are free to members. Peter

noted the value of leaders having cross sector experience to reach the highest levels of the civil service with the strongest possible leadership capabilities, which WIG is able to help build.

Peter emphasised some of the challenges that the Civil Service will face to meet their ambitious secondment challenge; notably how to deal with geographical barriers, attracting young people and the importance that secondments are treated as jobs not temporary roles.

Feedback from the floor discussion:

- It is important to ensure there is not an unnecessary and overcomplicated amount of bureaucracy when building these secondment and interchange schemes.
- Some members expressed concern that policy professionals will be unable to provide the skills needed for specific delivery roles.
- Other members cautioned the danger of polarising policy and delivery skills, noting there are also some generalist roles in delivery too. Rather the emphasis should be on thinking carefully about the skills available and how they can be interchanged effectively.
- Members suggested also incorporating international secondments into the schemes.
- The visibility of secondments and opportunities to ALBs needs to be improved. One opportunity has been advertised through ACE but members would like more accessibility.
- WIG is also trying to facilitate cross-sector learning across UK. It has some members from devolved administrations and regional programme in place, including an event it is hosting in Cardiff soon.
- WIG is also in conversations with stakeholders to advertise its services better; including Chris Wormald, Head of Policy Profession in government.
- It was suggested that Cabinet Office Talent liaise with the Foreign Office who already have a secondment scheme in place, albeit for longer placements of 4-5 years.

This event concluded with networking drinks, which was a great opportunity for members to continue the day's discussions in an informal setting.