

### **Classification Review Workshop**

Cabinet Office led a workshop for members of the PCF and ACE, which offered Chairs and Chief Executives an opportunity to discuss the themes that had emerged from government's classification review of public bodies, and to think about how the current framework could be changed or improved.

Cabinet Office's discussion paper, which was published towards the end of last year, invited people to share their views on the current classification system. Over 50 responses were received from public bodies, departments and academics. The classification review team is now in the process of testing the evidence, and possible solutions, with stakeholders at a series of workshops.

Common issues arising from the responses include clarity of understanding: where the classifications fit and how they work; better guidance on the existing classification process; as well as the impact of controls. But there are also a significant number of people who say that the system works well for them as it is and that crucially, any reform must not impact on delivery.

#### **Options for the Review process**

Each group considered the implications of three different approaches: tightening the existing classification system; loosening it; or starting a new classification system from scratch.

Some of the key points from the group discussions included:

- Greater clarity is needed around how classifications are applied and what this means for governance.
- Building in flexibility to the system is very important.
- The size of the public body has an impact on whether people think classification is important.
- Increased clarity would be a better way of describing tightening the existing classification system, as tightness implies restriction.
- Form should follow function.
- Increasing clarity will in turn increase accountability and awareness.
- Any change in classification should promote delivery.
- The taxonomy should not be a defining characteristic.
- The real issue for classification relates to independence and the distance a public body has from ministers.
- In the event of starting a new system from scratch, each department would build a framework that works for them.

- In terms of the process, education is needed to ensure everyone understands what different classifications mean.
- Consistent application of the classification framework is necessary.
- Risk management drives the relationship between departments and public bodies.
- The new classification process would need to allow sufficient innovation.
- Control is inversely related to accountability.
- Frameworks have the potential to be helpful at solving problems.

### **Next Steps**

Since this event, there have been three further workshops that have been attended by departments and academics, staff working in public bodies, as well as Chairs and Chief Executives. If you have a particular interest in this area, or would like to discuss the review or the emerging findings with the team in Cabinet Office, then please do get in touch with [Amy Noonan](#), or with [Catherine Elkington](#) and [Tariq York](#) at Cabinet Office. The initial recommendations are due to be published in March 2015, with the possibility of further work later in the year.