



NZ State Services Commission, Institute for Governance and Policy Studies & the Australia and New Zealand School of Government present:



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‘You say you want a revolution’: does public sector reform have a happy history?

Speaker

Professor Catherine Haddon

Historian

UK Institute for Government

Speaker

Colin James

Political Journalist

Moderator

Dr Michael Macaulay

Director

IGPS

‘You say you want a revolution’: does public sector reform have a happy history?

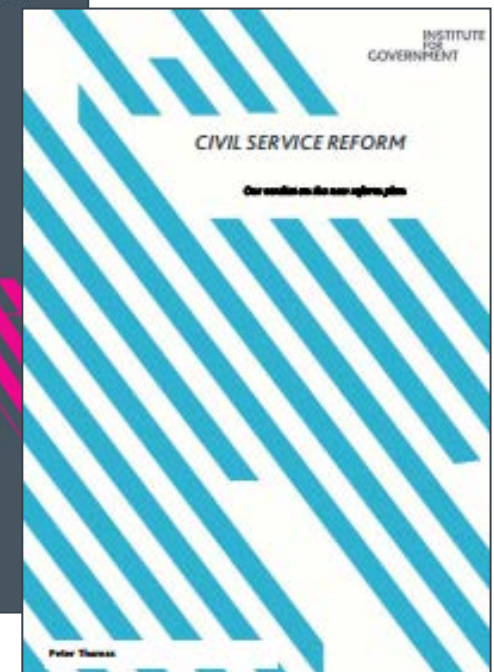
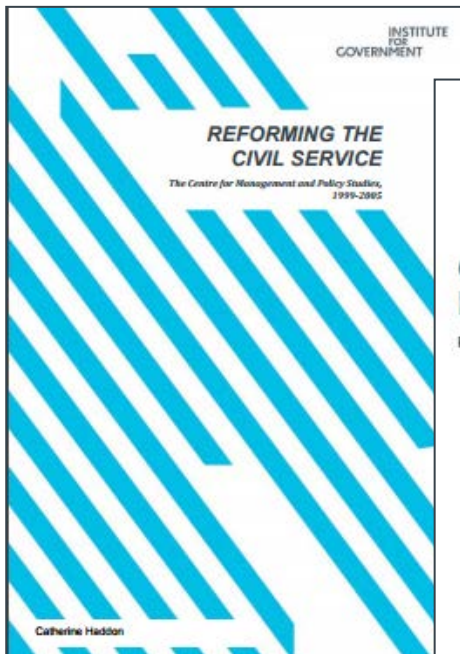
Dr Catherine Haddon

- Rhetoric versus reality
- Historic reforms
- Difficulty measuring outcomes and judging success
- Lessons from Civil Service Reform in the Real World

IFG work in this area

IfG covers different aspects across its work:

- Specific changes for improving government
- Assessing departmental transformation programmes
- Scrutinising CS-wide reform
- Examining wider historical context



1. RHETORIC VERSUS REALITY

People don't just seek revolution, sometimes they seek utopia

- 'Others may question whether this plan will actually be implemented. Too many plans to reform and renew the Civil Service lie gathering dust on library shelves. The difference this time is that there's no choice. As the Institute for Government recently said, the question is "whether the Civil Service will adapt... as a confident and capable organisation or shrink in both size and stature". That is why the actions set out here in words must translate into real change in the real world that civil servants, as much as the public at large, daily inhabit'

(Francis Maude, Minister for the Cabinet Office, *Foreword Civil Service Reform Plan 2012*)

What the CS Reform Plan actually set out

“innovating service delivery; using technology to achieve efficiencies; working in partnerships across departments; and looking at whole-system continuous improvement approaches.”

- 18 Actions
- Multiple aims, tasks, measures underlying each of them – ranging from targeted, achievable to hopeful and vague

Focus on:

- Policy making
- Innovative culture
- Digitisation
- Leadership who would push through these reforms
- Measuring success of the reforms (One Year on?)

By 2016, the reform agenda had moved on

- Improved outcomes through efficient, trusted services designed around user need;
- Inspiring, confident and empowering leaders who live the organisation's values;
- Skilled people who are high-performing, adaptable and take personal responsibility; and,
- Making the Civil Service a great place to work that is inclusive, flexible, modern and connected, sitting at the heart of a wider public service

2. HISTORIC REFORMS

History sees all sorts of reforms

- **Big holistic reforms** – Fulton, Modernising Government, Continuity and Change, Civil Service Reform Plan 2012, Better Public Services??
- **Specifically-focused large-scale reforms** – Next Steps, Bringing in and Bringing on Talent
- **Unit-based change** – Efficiency Unit 1980s, Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit, Capability Review programme
- **Departmental change** – Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Defence, Department for Education

3. OUTCOMES

Achieving revolution?

Reforms aren't just presented in advance as utopia, often the historical account misses the messy detail – Fulton 1968

‘Coherent though the Report’s recommendations might appear, their effectiveness as a blueprint for reform depended in practice on the extent to which they were well researched, well argued and well directed. Their effectiveness, in short, depended on the Committee exhibiting the same qualities it demanded of a reformed Service—professionalism and dynamism. However, these were the very qualities which—by common consent—it lacked. As one of its signatories confirmed, its proceedings were characterised more by “anarchy than strategy”; another confessed that, of the many reports he had signed, it was undoubtedly the “worst.”’

(Rodney Lowe 2011, 120)

... judging success is the hardest thing

Criteria for success always difficult

- Recent CS reform plans have measures of success, outputs, milestones and implementation goals
- More difficult to judge whether they achieved outcomes wanted
- Historians judge changes, but difficult to disentangle what initiatives achieved versus longer historical evolution.

However the bigger factor is inertia, loss of interest

- Those driving reform change jobs
 - Criticisms evolve
 - Ministers not interested
 - New initiatives are launched and take over
 - Fighting the next war
-

Looking across a range of historic reforms, we identified six areas where those involved felt that success had been achieved

1. A stronger sense of personal responsibility and accountability for delivery – whether of policies, projects, programmes or services.
 2. The use of objectives, performance indicators and measurement to make progress transparent.
 3. More open competition for senior roles and greater diversity of the Civil Service.
 4. Greater value placed on the quality of leadership and management.
 5. A more outward-facing organisation connected to other organisations, perspectives and ways of thinking to inform the policy development process.
 6. Learning and adopting new ways of working, which outlasted the reform that introduced them.
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4. KEY LESSONS

Prepare and take off

- Clarity around the reform idea and purpose
 - Personalised leadership
 - The right degree of political support
 - Ambitious while connecting with departmental priorities
 - The support, or at least permission, of the Treasury
-

Deliver and refresh

- A dedicated and diverse team to drive the vision and the model
 - Balancing compulsion with collaborative values
 - The right use of accountability and governance
 - Managing critical transitions
 - Building a lasting coalition of leaders around reform
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