



CabinetOffice

Listening to the front line:

Capturing insight and learning
lessons in policy making

This report is a response to the Sunningdale
Institute's 2009 study, *Engagement and Aspiration:
Reconnecting policy making with front line
professionals*

**Making
government
work better**

Foreword



The next decade of public service reform will be different to the last. Since 1997, we have transformed the performance of public services from an unsatisfactory state to a sound state, thanks to record levels of investment and system wide reform.

The next decade will require further and faster reform, as our needs as a country change and as citizen expectations continue to rise at pace. But we must meet these new expectations as the growth of public spending slows, and we must recognise the limitations of diktat from Whitehall. The public service reform of the future will be driven only by innovation.

The Sunningdale Institute Fellows' report, *Engagement and Aspiration*, is well timed. Underpinning its analysis and recommendations is the insight that front line public servants are often our greatest source of innovation. In my experience it is these front line staff who recognise how public services can respond more flexibly to users' needs, who identify opportunities to redesign provision, and who see how we can join up to provide new mixes of services in different areas to different people.

I am pleased to say that we are already addressing many of the recommendations in *Engagement and Aspiration*. We are:

- developing a core curriculum for policy makers
- working with departments across government to demonstrate different ways of embedding the report's principles, and
- working with Government Skills and the National School of Government to develop tools and resources to share learning and best practice.

Our recent vision for *Building Britain's Future* sets out clear priorities to help us create a stronger, fairer and more prosperous society. Central to this vision was a power shift from Whitehall. A shift above all to powerful people: in charge of their communities; their own care; their self-development and the unlocking of their future. A power shift too to front line public servants whose daily contact with citizens can teach us in central government how to best manage this transfer of power.

So I hope in this report we signal loudly and clearly the message that policy making in Whitehall must be informed by front line public servants alongside the voice of citizens themselves. I am convinced that the successful civil servants of tomorrow will be those who heard it from the front line.

Rt Hon Liam Byrne

Chief Secretary to the Treasury and
Minister for Public Services Reform

Contents

	Page
Executive summary	7
Introduction	8
Part 1: What current work exists to support front line engagement in policy making?	10
Part 2: How can we work together to support better front line engagement in policy making?	17
Part 3: What systems and tools can we use to embed front line insight in policy making?	22
Next steps	27
Annex A Summary of <i>Engagement and Aspiration's</i> recommendations	28
Bibliography	29

This report contains a number of case studies from across government that demonstrate existing good practice, or areas where departments are putting processes in place to support the use of front line insight in policy making. The authors would like to thank those departments for contributing their examples.

The Sunningdale Institute's report included a number of helpful examples of good practice, which this response attempts to build on. The case studies in this response are illustrations only and are not intended to represent all the good practice going on across government.

This response does not address the Sunningdale Institute's recommendations point for point, but tackles the key themes and challenges that their report presents to government.

Executive summary

- i. This report is a response, on behalf of government, to the Sunningdale Institute's 2009 report to the Cabinet Office on reconnecting policy making with front line professionals. The report, *Engagement and Aspiration*, set a number of challenges for government to improve the way it makes policy and ensure it is grounded in front line insight and experience.
- ii. The idea of involving front line staff in the development of policy is not new for government, and there are many good examples of where this is happening, or where departments are developing robust processes to support it to happen in the future. To meet the challenges set out by the Sunningdale Institute, however, it is important that such good practices are further encouraged, extended and embedded into the culture of policy making across government.
- iii. There is work currently going on within government that supports this shift, including an increased emphasis on customer insight, and an 'Innovators Council' to enable innovative ideas to emerge from the front line. These pieces of work support the ambition for public services reform set out in *Excellence and Fairness*¹ and the acceleration of front line-driven service innovation described in *Working Together*². The challenge now for government is to join up these initiatives to strengthen its drive to embed front line insight into policy making.
- iv. However, more can be done to change behaviour and embed the culture change necessary to make *Engagement and Aspiration* a reality. This will be the responsibility of a wide range of people from across government, but there will be a particular role for the policy community, working alongside the operational delivery profession and a range of other stakeholders including the National School of Government, Government Skills and the Civil Service Learning and Skills Board.
- v. Policy teams will require practical help to embed the principles of *Engagement and Aspiration*. This report outlines a number of ways in which the Cabinet Office and the policy profession will work with partners across government to develop tools and systems that will support departments to seek and make effective use of front line insight in the design and development of policy. This includes:
 - updating professional standards for policy work to recognise the importance of front line insight
 - developing a core curriculum for policy work
 - supporting demonstration policy areas to consider different ways of embedding front line insight
 - developing civil service capability to respond to the Sunningdale Institute Fellows' findings, and
 - developing systems and communities to enable the sharing of ideas and good practice.
- vi. To drive this forward, the Cabinet Office will put in place appropriate steering and governance arrangements, led by the heads of policy profession as part of their broader work programme to deliver world-class policy capability and skills.

¹ Cabinet Office, *Excellence and Fairness: Achieving world class public services*, 2008.

² HM Government: *Working Together: Public services on your side*, 2009.

Introduction

Background

1. In 2008 the Cabinet Office commissioned the Sunningdale Institute³ to produce an independent report looking at how to ensure better engagement with front line staff in the design and development of policy. The report, *Engagement and Aspiration*, was published in March 2009 and set out a number of recommendations to support government in embedding front line evidence and experience into its policy making processes.
2. The principle of involving the front line in policy making is not a new one for government, and being 'outward looking' and 'evidence based' has for a long time been part of the core features of good policy making.⁴ *Engagement and Aspiration*, however, goes further in challenging government to ensure that these principles are put into practice, ensure that policies are grounded in front line evidence and experience, and give front line staff the authority to innovate and strive for world-class outcomes.
- **strategic leadership**, changing the role of government to set standards, drive productivity and enable innovation, allowing public services themselves to decide how they achieve the expected outcomes.
4. The drive for increased use of front line insight resonates with all three of these principles: better policy outcomes will follow from policy development with a more comprehensive front line evidence base that includes the views of citizens and public service professionals and leaders. The drive towards a 'new professionalism' in particular outlines this even further by emphasising the role that front line professionals in public services have to play in delivering government policy and achieving world class performance.

Context

3. *Excellence and Fairness* set out three principles for public service reform:
 - **citizen empowerment**, which recognises that excellent public services put power into the hands of the communities they serve,
 - a **new professionalism**, to give freedom to service leaders, professionals and communities to lead, run and personalise services, and
5. Policy teams across government are responding to new public service challenges by finding innovative ways to develop policies that are grounded in experience from the front line. Illustrations of where this is happening can be found throughout this report, and these provide excellent examples of how front line insight can be captured or how departments are putting processes in place to enable this to happen systemically. The importance government affords to front line insight is also reflected elsewhere: a core element of the Service Transformation Agreement (STA)⁵, for example, is to involve front line staff in the design and delivery of public services. This agreement underpins the

³ The report was authored by Sir David Omand GCB, Professor Ken Starkey and Lord Victor Adebowale CBE.

⁴ CMPS, *Better Policy Making*, http://www.nationalschool.gov.uk/policyhub/better_policy_making.

⁵ HM Government, *Service Transformation Agreement*, 2007

- whole of the government's set of public service agreements, and sets out the key principles of how services should be delivered.
6. *As Engagement and Aspiration* points out, however, although front line insight is now a key part of many departments' policy making capability, it has not yet been universally embedded. Many departments are taking steps to improve their front line engagement, but the good practice exists in pockets and there is an appetite for further mechanisms to support already busy policy teams in embedding the gathering of insight into their policy making processes.
 7. This means we need to establish the routine use of front line insight **systemically** across government, turning it from **good practice into common practice**, and further **embedding** the gathering of front line insight into government's general approach to policy making.
 8. The publication of *Engagement and Aspiration* therefore provides government with a good opportunity to reflect on how it can best do this. Our approach is set out as follows in this report:
 - Part 1: this looks at what **current work** exists to support the drive for better front line engagement
 - Part 2: this considers how we can facilitate better engagement through **working together**
 - Part 3: this outlines **tools and systems** to embed the use of front line insight in policy making.
 9. This report does not attempt to provide government's full response to *Engagement and Aspiration*: to do so would be a knee-jerk reaction to what is in fact a very important study for policy makers. Instead it sets out some practical steps to support departments to better connect with their front line.
 10. In doing this it will be vital to link up wherever possible with existing work to improve the skills of policy makers. It is good news that there is already a great deal of this going on, reflecting the many issues that policy teams must juggle to develop good policy that can be delivered on the ground and the intended benefits of which can be realised. This report sets out details of this work, with an emphasis on building on best practice wherever possible whilst continuously seeking out better ways of engaging with the front line.

Part 1: What current work exists to support front line engagement in policy making?

11. *Excellence and Fairness* sets out an ambition for better public services, delivered by an empowered workforce. This is supported by a number of pieces of work being coordinated by government and – as well as looking at what new activities need to occur – activity to take forward the actions set out in this response will need to join up across all these areas.

Innovators Council

12. The focus on innovation recognises that reform of public services will in the future have to be driven by front line staff in partnership with central government, and that the people who are closest to the delivery of services often have the best ideas about what needs to change.

“If we want Whitehall to focus on innovation, we have to change the signals we give at the top – and the support we give policymakers at the bottom. And crucially we have to showcase the kind of innovation we want to see, in a way that keeps the ‘flash-to-bang’ as fast as possible.”

*Rt Hon Liam Byrne MP,
Minister for Public Services Reform,
launching the Innovators’ Council*

13. The Innovators Council was launched in May 2009 in order to fast-track ideas generated by front line staff and citizens to deliver better and more efficient services. The council, which comprises a panel of experts drawn from the private, public and third sectors, aims to encourage suggestions for public service reform from those who know services best (the front line staff who deliver them and the citizens who use them), to identify

the most promising areas of work and to lead those through a process of development, testing and implementation – with the involvement of the idea originators at every stage.

14. The Innovators Council therefore provides us with a great opportunity to ensure that front line insight, alongside customer insight, is used in the development of public services that are fit for the future.

Customer insight

15. Policy making works best when it involves all those who will be involved in its delivery. This includes not only front line staff but also its customers – that is, those who will be directly affected by the policy when it is implemented. Customer insight is distinct from front line insight and serves a different but complementary purpose; both are key to the development of successful policy.

“Insight into the potential impact of government policy on people’s lives should be developed from the outset and (it should be) emphasised that driving the effective use of customer insight across government is a key priority.”

*Sir Gus O’Donnell, Cabinet Secretary,
announcing work on customer insight*

16. There is growing recognition within government of the added value that customer insight gives to the evidence base used by policy makers: whether from primary sources such as customers and communities, or from front line staff with direct involvement in customers’ experience.

Customer insight is critical for successfully and continually improving the delivery of services to the public, and has played an increasingly important part in achieving this. In the Department for Work and Pensions, for example, a customer insight team was established in 2007 as a permanent departmental function to help ensure that the needs of the customer are at the heart of policy and service delivery. HM Revenue and Customs has a 'customer understanding team', made up of social and market researchers, psychologists, customer analysts and economists, to deliver practical support and insight into customer needs.

Skills strategy

17. Better policy making needs to be backed up by the development of skills. The *Skills Strategy for Central Government* was agreed by permanent secretaries in 2008.⁶ The aim of the strategy is to deliver better public services by enabling all parts of central government to work together to address skills needs. Its main components are:
 - driving up professional standards
 - taking common action to address common skills needs, and
 - realising the potential of the higher and further education sectors to re-skill the workplace.
18. The professions in government, and particularly *operational delivery* and *policy*, will play a much stronger role in identifying skills needs, and the development of both these professions is a key element of the skills strategy. During the first year of the strategy both the policy and

operational delivery professions have increased in profile, and there are now small teams to support the heads of the two professions. As part of their development, both professions will be working closely with each other and looking at their use of front line insight. The expectation is that by March 2010 both professions will be well established and starting to drive the development of skills across government in line with the needs of the business. Further details of how they will be involved in this work are included in parts two and three.

Capability building

19. Policy makers regularly face complex, cross-government issues that require multi-disciplinary interventions. A key need is for practical help to learn about how they can bring people from across government to work together, learn from each other and better understand the front line and customer experience.
20. Central government's *Capability Building Programme* (CBP) is pioneering a new approach to achieve this. The programme was established in response to demands from departments for support in tackling long-term capability issues, and the recommendation for a central team to 'build dynamic capability and a self-sustaining culture of improvement'.⁷ As a result the CBP is developing a programme that recruits, develops, mobilises and deploys cross-government teams to tackle priority cross-government challenges.
21. The CBP approach is being road tested in a number of projects, which are demonstrating that it has real benefits in helping to connect policy makers with those working on the front line.

⁶ Government Skills, *Building Professional Skills for Government: A strategy for delivery*, 2008.

⁷ Sunningdale Institute, *Take-off or Tail-off? An evaluation of the Capability Reviews programme*, 2007

The Capability Building Programme works by:

- identifying cross cutting capability gaps
- carrying out fieldwork to identify better practice across Whitehall, the wider public sector and beyond
- capturing the “know what” that underpins improvement
- recruiting, developing, mobilising, and deploying people against priority projects that need cross government resource and expertise
- making and taking time out to consider the task and the teamwork
- applying the team’s “know what” and building on their “know how”
- disseminating the learning across government, and
- building a talent bank that has the knowledge and experience to work successfully across the public sector.

Case Study

Capability Building Programme – Worklessness in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

The Capability Building Programme is helping the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham build a new approach to worklessness: a front line challenge that spans across agencies and delivery partners. The cross government team is drawn from LBBB staff and central government departments. Combining their ideas and experience, they are finding ways of using existing resources better to provide more effective support to get women with children into sustainable work. They are making real the principles of partnership across different parts of the public sector.

Feedback from participants has been overwhelmingly positive:

“This is a practical application of all the things I’ve learned on courses!”

Central government team member

“I’m usually out there on the front line, tackling the day-to-day issues, it’s really good to step back and get involved with the more strategic side. I appreciate the breath of fresh air when it comes to looking at the issues I face everyday”

Team member from the front line

“We’re achieving so much in such a short timeframe; only 12 weeks and the team only works one day a week!”

Central government team member

Current examples of good practice

22. As outlined in the introduction, there are many pockets of good practice in front line engagement across departments. This report sets out how government will support the spread of this good practice, some examples of which are included in this report as case studies. These case studies build on the excellent examples in *Engagement and Aspiration*.
23. The Department of Health, for instance, as discussed by the Sunningdale Institute Fellows, has developed a particularly comprehensive approach to managing system change which recognises the importance of front line insight in developing policy. The approach is based on four principles, which were applied during Lord Darzi's recent 'Next Stage Review' of the NHS⁸ and which the Department of Health is currently taking steps to embed throughout its policy making.

Case study

Department of Health – four principles of system change

The Department of Health faces a wide range of complex challenges across the health and care system and beyond. These can involve *technical* changes where the department and its delivery partners are faced with clear issues with known solutions such as dealing with a flu outbreak, to more *adaptive* changes in responding to less clearly defined challenges and solutions such as halting the rise in childhood obesity.

To deal with these varied challenges, the department needs to be adaptable and flexible enough to enable it to work in a range of different ways to confidently and effectively deal with issues as they arise whilst still adhering to a set of core values.

This approach is defined by the four principles of change now being used in the department and with delivery partners to frame their work. These four principles; leadership, subsidiarity, co-production and system alignment, were developed through the evidence and experience gathered from the Next Stage Review of the NHS.

The four principles in more detail are:

- **leadership and ownership**, which focuses on identifying and working with the right leaders and influencers across the system to bring about effective change
- **co-production**, or working together, which focuses on how policy teams can work with stakeholders, delivery partners, users, patients and citizens to shape and implement policies and better ways of working
- **subsidiarity**, or making decisions at the right levels, which focuses on how teams can ensure that decisions are made at the right level so that they add the most value and are as close as possible to the needs of the users, patients and citizens, and

⁸ Department of Health, *High quality care for all: NHS Next Stage Review final report*, 2008.

– **system alignment**, or joining up, which focuses on how policy teams can ensure that all parts of the health and care system are working together to achieve shared goals.

Much of this is not new for the department, however, with strong examples of work under the principles already to be found across the health and social care spectrum, two of which are detailed below. The department now needs to learn from these areas of good practice to apply this approach in a more systematic way over the coming years. The department is seeking to do this through the sharing of good practice, development of pilot areas and engagement with staff on what the four principles mean for the way they work and the support they need in putting this approach into practice. This work will form part of a wider organisational development programme for the department as it continues to evolve to meet the challenges of the future.

NHS Next Stage Review

In July 2007, the Prime Minister, Chancellor and Secretary of State for Health asked Lord Darzi to lead a review of the NHS, working with patients, front line staff and the public, to develop a vision of a service fit for the 21st century.

From the outset, the review was co-produced with patients and staff and reached over 2,000 clinicians and 60,000 NHS staff, patients, stakeholders and members of the public. This engagement was led locally by clinicians, with eight clinical working groups in each of the ten regions looking at the clinical evidence and engaging with their local communities.

The resulting *High Quality Care for All* sets out a compelling ten-year vision for the NHS which seeks to give patients more choice and information and reward hospitals and clinics that offer both the highest quality of care and provide the most responsive services.

Positive feedback was received from a number of key stakeholders on the review:

“For doctors, it feels that at long last their call for clinical leadership in policy making has been heeded. It is now up to the profession to take this exceptional opportunity and make it work for the patients.”

The Lancet, July 2008

“The good news is that there is no top-down re-organisation or any dramatic changes in direction. Instead, the report is a sensible set of measures to improve quality and equity, and a clear signal that responsibility for shaping and leading health services lies with staff at local level.”

Niall Dickson, Chief Executive of the King's Fund, June 2008

Dignity in Care campaign

The Dignity in Care Campaign launched at the end of 2006 seeks to inspire and equip local people, be they service users, carers, relatives or care staff, with the information, advice and support necessary to drive up standards of care with respect to dignity for the individual.

Since the launch of the campaign, over 7,000 people from across the country have volunteered as dignity champions, from doctors to carers, MPs to hospital porters, to take action to create a care system that has compassion and respect for those using its services.

In May 2008, Michael Parkinson was appointed as Dignity Ambassador and has worked with the Care Services Minister to highlight the importance of dignity throughout the country through the National Dignity Tour. The success of the campaign thus far has seen the Royal College of Nursing start their own dignity in care campaign with a number of other stakeholder organisations, such as the Anchor Trust and Southern Cross, providing dignity training and actively encouraging their staff to become dignity champions.

Case study

Home Office – front line practitioners group

The Home Office strategy for 2008-11 makes clear that engaging front line staff and local partners in the development and delivery of policies is critical to delivering on its purpose of 'working together to protect the public'. It also states its ambition to be a leading department in working openly and collaboratively with partners.

In line with that ambition, the Home Office policy methodology stresses the importance of engaging front line staff at every stage of the policy making process. To support this it is delivering a series of front line seminars for central policy makers, delivered by practitioners, which aim to give a deep insight into the complex challenges faced at local level, as well as rolling out a programme of visits to front line locations in the UK Border Agency and Identity and Passport Service.

Engaging with front line practitioners is at the heart of the Home Office's programme to cut police bureaucracy announced in the July 2008 Green Paper *From the neighbourhood to the national: policing our communities together*. It has appointed a retired police officer with strong front line credibility as an independent reducing bureaucracy advocate, chairing a front line practitioners group with a remit to challenge and advise the Home Office on the front line impact of new policies. Members of the group come from all over the country and from the full range of front line ranks, PCSOs and police staff. Since it was established in December 2008 the group has helped identify ten key processes in policing which would benefit from streamlining and greater standardisation in systems, procedures or forms. Fieldwork is currently under way on these processes, and the reducing bureaucracy advocate will report on progress shortly.

Case study

Social Exclusion Task Force – Inspiring Communities

The £10m *Inspiring Communities* programme takes a community-led approach to raising the aspirations and attainment of young people in deprived communities. This new approach has been developed in response to evidence that young people in certain types of deprived neighbourhood are less likely to develop high aspirations.

The Cabinet Office, the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Department for Children, Schools and Families worked together to investigate the attitudes of young people, parents and practitioners within three deprived neighbourhoods. The team spoke to 50 local practitioners and managers from a wide range of young people's and community services through a series of workshops and one to one interviews. In addition, they spoke to over 100 young people and parents through focus groups.

Front line staff emphasised the influence of aspirations on young people's outcomes. They discussed the processes by which young people's attitudes are influenced by the people and places where they live. They spoke about the drawbacks of closely knit, isolated communities where fear of new experiences and low expectations can hold people back. They stressed the importance of parents and wider role models in encouraging young people to be ambitious.

These insights informed the design of the Inspiring Communities programme. This programme recognises that communities have different histories and different make up. It recognises that front line staff, parents and the wider community are crucial in shifting attitudes.

15 neighbourhoods will take forward a community-led and locally-designed drive to broaden horizons, raise expectations and create new opportunities for young people, their parents and the wider community. The programme was launched in the New Opportunities White paper and successful bids will be announced in the summer.

Inspiring Communities takes a new approach to partnership working at a neighbourhood level. Schools, businesses and local agencies will work together, pooling and aligning budgets to make best use of existing resources. Each neighbourhood is receiving an additional £450k of investment from central government over two years.

Part 2: How can we work together to support better front line engagement in policy making?

24. The new challenges facing public services – slower growth in funding coupled with increasing expectations from the public – mean that government's ambitions for public service reform are bigger than ever. The role of Whitehall must be, where possible, to allow this reform to be led by the front line.
 25. Where Whitehall needs to take the lead in reforming public services, however, the policies that back this up must be developed in partnership with the people delivering them at the front line and the people who use them, as part of a wider culture of evidence-based policy making and innovation.
 26. Making 'front line insight' a one-off, separate initiative, seen as an additional burden for policy staff, will not be the right way to embed this approach. Only by taking it into the heart of everything that it does, and linking it with other key policy drivers, will government succeed in bringing front line insight into the core of policy making. Policy makers have a vast array of initiatives, customers and stakeholders that they must take into account when developing policy, like the ones named in part one of this report. This work must therefore:
 - complement existing work to improve policy making and other skills in the civil service
 - be part of an overall package of support for policy makers and government more widely, and
 - support the drive for public service reform and better outcomes for the public.
- Working across government to improve policy making**
27. To make this approach really work, it has to be embedded into the ethos of those who are involved in and who support policy making and its delivery.
 28. The *Engagement and Aspiration* report has already been widely circulated throughout Whitehall and in particular around permanent secretaries, who have a key role to play in enabling good policy making practices in their departments. The principles in the report have also been discussed at and endorsed by the Civil Service Steering Board, whose aim is to enhance the performance of the civil service.
 29. In taking the work forward, however, it will be vital to work with a number of existing groups who can influence the development of and support to our policy making capability, and who are involved in related pieces of work aimed at improving the policy function.
 30. The policy profession will therefore be working with the operational delivery profession, Government Skills, the Civil Service Learning and Skills Board and the National School of Government to support a wider discussion of insight issues. The HR Leaders' Council will also be working across these bodies to help policy makers understand how the HR profession can contribute to good policy making and its delivery.

31. Ministers and their advisers also recognise the important part they play in ensuring that the policy process incorporates the principles of the Sunningdale Institute report, and that sufficient time is allowed before decisions are announced. This is vital to ensure that, as far as is possible, the relevant experience and evidence has been considered and that issues of implementation have been worked out with those who will carry the responsibility for the implementation of the policy.

The professions

32. The policy profession within government is key to the fostering of good, inclusive policy making processes that support public services reform, and it will be taking forward work to strengthen the government's policy making capability together with the Policy Profession Executive Board. Robert Devereux, Head of the Policy Profession and Permanent Secretary at the Department for Transport, has welcomed and endorsed the *Engagement and Aspiration* report as a reminder that front line experience is a key part of evidence-based policy making.

"Together with the departmental heads of policy profession, I want to ensure that departments are in the best possible place to generate innovative, deliverable and effective policy options. It is critically important that we bring front line staff directly into policy making and use their experience to improve both its design and delivery."

*Robert Devereux,
Head of the Policy Profession and Permanent
Secretary at the Department for Transport*

33. The policy profession is clear that good policy making demands that an open, two-way dialogue between policy makers and front line specialists is maintained as a key evidence stream in the development and evaluation of policies. Effective policy interventions are not the product of a detached, linear process, and good policy makers bring together a wide range of views to bring resolution to the variety and complexity of challenges inseparable from the nature of government. In order to provide the world-class public services to which we all aspire, input from front line professionals must be part of the habit of policy work.

34. Each of the 23 government departments has a head of policy profession and, together, they are responsible for developing the vision and work plan for professionalising the skills and culture of policy making across government. Within their departments, they work with senior colleagues to help ensure that the policy capability is able to generate innovative, deliverable and effective policy options that are grounded in evidence and sound analysis. The role can include:

- promoting joined-up working across professional and organisational boundaries, including working with other heads of profession and in particular the head of operational delivery
- ensuring the provision of appropriate induction and training in policy development and the machinery of government context
- developing channels of communication between policy staff at all levels
- helping the department corporately to learn from experience and to recognise and share best practice, and

- working with senior management to foster innovative policy techniques and improve policy making capability, including exploiting the use of tools and methodologies and the development of performance standards for policy staff.
35. This means that the departmental heads of policy profession are uniquely positioned to respond to the Sunningdale Institute's report. Together and individually, they will play a central role in leading the changes outlined in this response.
36. Alongside this, it is important to recognise the vital links between the policy community and the operational delivery profession. Policy and delivery should work in unison, as it is only in delivery that policy makes a difference on the ground. The operational delivery and policy professions will be working together and with other colleagues across the public sector to ensure that the customer and front line perspectives inform both the development of policy and its implementation, and also drive further improvements in delivery.

Case study

Department for Children, Schools and Families – National Children and Young People's Workforce Partnership

In December 2008, DCSF published the 2020 Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy, which sets out a vision for everyone who works with children and young people. The strategy was founded on the substantial evidence base considered by its expert group (drawn from across the whole workforce and professional bodies), who worked collaboratively with all key government departments with responsibility for improving services for children and young people (*discussed in Engagement and Aspiration*).

In order to maintain this key link with the front line and to support the implementation of the strategy at a national level, ministers decided to establish a National Children and Young People's Workforce Partnership (NCWP) to support and advise on the development of DCSF policy in relation to the strategy.

The new partnership will bring together a range of people from different parts of the workforce to improve communication and allow a mutual exchange of experience and thinking. It will influence policy development and encourage members to act as advocates of workforce reform. It aims to:

- champion quality in the children and young people's workforce
- offer a real world view of the challenges facing the workforce
- provide a perspective on the effectiveness of workforce policies and their impact on other policies
- secure commitment to workforce reform by advocating reform and mobilising partners to lead and deliver workforce development, and
- promote effective communications between partners.

DCSF hopes that the breadth and depth of membership from right across the whole workforce, including the representatives from trades unions and professional bodies, allied with the principles of challenge, advice and strategic perspective, will give a powerful voice to deliverers of front line services. DCSF has also made a commitment that it will bring emerging policy to the partnership at an early stage and engage in a ongoing dialogue with the partnership on how policy should develop, the challenges that it will need to address and the support issues for the workforce.

Case study Ministry of Justice – Frontline Forum

The Frontline Forum was introduced into the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) by the Permanent Secretary, Suma Chakrabarti, as a mechanism for him to sound out ideas and to hear directly from staff in the operational arms of MoJ's business. The MoJ has around 95,000 people, the majority of whom work in an operational context: in prisons, courts, tribunals, probation and other justice system offices, and it was important to Suma that there were continuous lines of communication between him and all parts of the MoJ. This is one of those lines.

The first meeting was held in July 2008 and the meetings are now held every two months. There are usually 14 to 16 members at the forum, and attendees include governors of prisons, area managers in the Tribunals Service and Probation Service and courts and probate office managers. The forum has proved extremely useful and attendance from the centre has grown to include communications and strategy colleagues. The Deputy Permanent Secretary and Director General for Business Transformation are also invited to attend. The Justice Secretary attended the meeting in January and will do so again in September.

The meetings provide an opportunity for staff in the field to give their views to the Permanent Secretary directly and for him to gauge the temperature of staff on the front line. Agenda items are a deliberate mix of subjects suggested by forum members (what is on their mind, or a particularly thorny problem that the group might, together, try to resolve) and corporate issues (sometimes to gauge the members' reaction to changes in policy or to get a sense of what policies or procedures might work in the operational environment). Recent agenda items have included the outline of the MoJ's Business Transformation Programme, which aims to transform MoJ's services and improve outcomes and the user experience by transforming the way both headquarters and the front line work together to deliver our policies. Other items include the development of MoJ's corporate plan, responding to sick absence and communicating effectively. Both central and operational attendees are extremely positive about the work of the forum.

Following the forum's first meeting, attendee Phil Taylor, then Governor of HMP Bullingdon, said: *"This was an excellent opportunity to put forward a front line perspective on the work of MoJ, to engage with the Permanent Secretary, be able to challenge perspectives, test out ideas and put forward suggestions."*

After the same meeting, Suma said: *"I'm very excited about the Frontline Forum. It is an opportunity to build a strong connection between the front line and Permanent Secretary in such a large organisation, and will be used as a way to learn lessons about (and then communicate) what is and isn't working. They will also help take forward the change management agenda over the next few years – by identifying where messages aren't getting through and how problems can be addressed."*

When Jack Straw, the Justice Secretary, joined the forum for a wide-ranging discussion about the MoJ's performance and efficiency programme, he welcomed the opportunity to talk to forum members about the way they had influenced change in their areas and how that engagement might be applied to other parts of the MoJ. In discussion with the Justice Secretary, the Forum noted the considerable value that operational understanding brought to decision-making in the MoJ.

Forum member, Andy Sleight, Deputy Governor at HMP Wakefield said recently that: *"As a member of the forum I have the opportunity to better understand the business of my MoJ partners, how my business can have an effect on the delivery of their business and it also gives me the opportunity to provide MoJ with feedback relating to business delivery from the front line."*

Part 3: What systems and tools can we use to embed front line insight in policy making?

37. Embedding the principles of *Engagement and Aspiration* will require concerted effort from across government on a number of fronts. Some systems and processes may have to change in order to facilitate the approach; in addition some tools, resources and support mechanisms are likely to be required. As set out in part one, there has already been recognition within government of the importance of capturing insight and, as a result of this, some work to develop these tools and mechanisms is already in train.
38. This section sets out:
- how the professions will embed front line insight into policy making
 - how specific areas of government will try out different approaches to capturing front line insight, and
 - tools and support mechanisms to embed the approach and ways of measuring success.
- Policy standards**
39. The policy profession has recognised that current challenges – including the need to involve people at all stages of the delivery chain in policy making – must be reflected in the professional standards to which policy makers work. Between March and May 2009, therefore, the policy profession undertook a broad consultation on policy skills across government. This research investigated the skills used in functions across the policy community and highlighted the contribution of front line insight. Using the results, the profession is currently updating the professional standards for policy work that underpin recruitment and performance management, and is extending these standards to cover staff below grade seven (more junior grades).
40. The Policy Profession Executive Board, leading this work, is aiming for these standards to be meaningful, accessible and readily translated into actions. Importantly, **the policy profession will ensure that the revised standards further integrate and embed front line experience and expertise within the process of policy design and development.**
41. As well as updated skills standards, policy makers will also benefit from more targeted training provision. Indeed *Engagement and Aspiration* recommended giving consideration to a core curriculum for policy work. **The National School of Government, the policy profession and Government Skills will continue to work together on developing the ‘core learning programme’ for policy**, ensuring the resulting core curriculum emphasises the importance of front line insight as set out in *Engagement and Aspiration*, as well as taking into account the skills needs analysis that was commissioned for the policy profession in order to identify the learning and development gaps that exist for policy professionals of all grades across government.

Demonstration areas

42. To generate new learning about effective ways of engaging with the front line, it will be useful to see how individual policy areas can use the report's principles to re-think their policy making processes.

43. **Departments will work with the Cabinet Office and the Sunningdale Institute to demonstrate how *Engagement and Aspiration's* approach can best be incorporated into their work to facilitate their use of front line insight and further improve their policy making.** The policy areas taking this forward are:

- Obesity:

The team behind *Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives: A Cross-Government Strategy for England* (2008) is based across both the Department of Health and the Department for Children, Schools and Families. It supports government's ambition to be the first major nation to reverse the rising tide of obesity and overweight in the population by ensuring that everyone is able to achieve and maintain a healthy weight.

The obesity front line is interesting and diverse, including not only GPs, practice nurses, dietitians, charities and those working in schools, but also non-traditional delivery routes such as employers, food manufacturers and even supermarket staff. The obesity policy team will select a number of policy areas within their portfolio in which to look at *Engagement and Aspiration's* principles.

- Climate change:

The Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) was created in October 2008 to tackle the unprecedented challenges of climate change and energy security in a holistic and integrated way.

The front line of climate change policy is diverse and in many instances difficult to identify or define. For example, in relation to enhancing home energy efficiency, a wide range of front line partners are involved, ranging from energy companies, to the Energy Saving Trust and retail staff. DECC will consider how the *Engagement and Aspiration* recommendations can best be applied to one or more specific policy areas within its portfolio.

- Capability Building:

The capability building project (discussed in part one of this report) works closely with the National School of Government to apply a cross-government approach to addressing priority challenges. The approach is designed to deliver results in complex policy areas that span different parts of public services.

The Capability Building team will apply the principles of the *Engagement and Aspiration* report to an upcoming project to understand what approaches to front line engagement work best in complex, multi-disciplinary working environments.

44. These demonstration areas will work with the Cabinet Office, which will facilitate learning across the three areas. **Cabinet Office will then revisit each area to see the different ways**

that they have approached the report's principles, and how they feel their policy making has changed as a result.

Ensuring and measuring success

45. Civil service structures and processes can help enable good, evidence-based policy to be made.

Gaining operational experience

46. The direction given to policy officials, particularly new entrants into the civil service, is extremely important in setting the tone of their future contributions and helping them to acquire the skills to develop policy that is grounded in front line and customer insight and fits with the new challenges of public service reform.
47. There are several initiatives to encourage policy officials to get front line experience, for example the 'Broader Experience' element of the Professional Skills for Government (PSG) competency framework⁹. The Civil Service Fast Stream is another example. Operational posts have not traditionally been valued as a destination for fast streamers but, since the introduction of PSG, we have moved away from this perception and promoted the operational content of a fast stream career as equally important. Although operational experience is a requirement for fast streamers, implementing this ambition is more of a challenge. **The Cabinet Office will ensure that requirements for broader operational experience are clear and will support departments to achieve this for all their fast streamers.**

Capability Reviews

48. The Capability Review process is designed to improve the capability of the civil service to meet today's delivery objectives, and could be an important way of assessing the capability of departments to deliver effective policy, grounded in front line insight.
49. **Cabinet Office is revising the capability review model to ensure that it remains relevant and appropriate for the future challenges facing the civil service.** This will include looking at departments' policies and programmes to ensure they are customer-focused and developed with customer and front line involvement and insight from the earliest stages.
50. The capability review process will also challenge departments to develop an innovation culture by looking at the extent to which they have the structures, capacity and systems to support and manage innovation, and how leaders empower and incentivise the organisation and its partners to innovate to improve delivery.

Service Transformation

51. Departmental *service transformation plans* show how departments will transform and deliver public services in line with the 2007 Service Transformation Agreement. This agreement advocates the design of public services in a way that better meets the needs of the public and businesses through principles such as creating simpler, more streamlined, intuitive, accessible and convenient services.

⁹ By 2012, to enter the senior civil service, civil servants must be able to demonstrate that they have gained broader experience during their career in line with the requirements of the PSG competency framework.

52. A key element of the Service Transformation Agreement includes involving front line staff in the design and delivery of public services. By using their experience to drive service transformation, staff will be more engaged in the services that they are delivering, and services themselves will provide better value for money for the taxpayer by improving processes and cutting down duplication and waste.
53. **Cabinet Office will review the service transformation plans to which all customer-facing departments are committed to assess how we can improve the way front line staff are engaged with the design of services.**
55. Although valuable resources exist for policy makers, they need to be regularly reviewed and be structured to facilitate the sharing of information. **Government Skills and the National School of Government will consider together how to develop the existing *policy hub* web pages as a resource to share learning**, building on the valuable information that is already there.
56. As well as day-to-day learning for policy professionals, it will be important to bring together a range of stakeholders from across government to debate this issue and develop the 'active circle of learning' envisaged in *Engagement and Aspiration*. **Cabinet Office will work with the Institute for Government to organise seminars for ministers and other key players to increase awareness of the importance of bringing customer and front line insight into policy making. It will ask the National School of Government to develop proposals for master classes for policy and delivery officials to share learning and expertise.**

Support to share learning

54. As this report demonstrates, there are many examples of good practice in policy making across government, some pockets of excellent practice, and many processes in place to make improvements more widely. In order to make excellent practice the norm, however, we need systems that allow policy practitioners and those involved in delivery to routinely share learning and ideas.

Case study

Department for Work and Pensions – Back to the floor (referred to in *Engagement and Aspiration*)

In response to staff survey results, a diverse group of first-line managers and senior leaders were brought together by the Permanent Secretary to consider how they could make DWP a better place to work. Working across traditional departmental boundaries, the project team captured the hearts and minds of the department's senior leaders when they presented their ideas to the executive team, and as a result one of the teams' recommendations was to introduce *back to the floor*.

Back to the floor is now an ongoing initiative which gives senior leaders the opportunity to experience a customer-facing role for up to a week, working with front line staff and discovering at first hand the issues they face in delivering to the Department's customers. It is demonstrating that working directly with staff helps to develop new and more meaningful communication, enables senior leaders to become more visible to staff and identifies potential improvements to existing ways of working. It also provides a vital opportunity for senior leaders to build a greater understanding of first-line customer contact and the business context to inform policy and decision making.

To date over 300 senior leaders have participated, working in offices and contact centres right across the country. 90 per cent of business hosts see it as a positive experience as it provides an opportunity for staff to meet and feel valued by senior leaders and to have their voice heard.

Katherine Courtney (Director of DWP Customer Insight) believes her *back to the floor* experience enabled her to influence change for the better. "*Seeing the real help we provide customers when they need it most reminded me why I joined DWP in the first place. I was able to influence issues arising from lone parent customers transitioning from Income Support to Job Seekers Allowance*".

Next steps

57. Over the past decade, better public services were driven by clear national standards that sat alongside increases in investment. As standards have gone up, the next phase of reform calls for fewer targets, coupled with new freedoms for front line staff and more people-centred services that empower staff and citizens alike. The drive for increased front line insight in policy making is a reflection of this revolution in public services.
58. The best way for front line insight to become part of the habit for policy work will be to ensure that we look collectively at how we continue to embed good, evidence-based policy making that encourages innovation and uses front line and customer insight as a core part of the process. This means working across a wide range of stakeholders, and for this reason we are developing steering arrangements that take into account the priorities of the policy and operational delivery professions, and link closely with parallel work on customer insight.
59. The work will be steered by Robert Devereux and the departmental heads of policy profession, who will integrate the monitoring of activity over the next year into the reporting arrangements of the Policy Profession Executive Board. They will also publish a further short report on progress, which will set out:
- findings from the demonstration policy areas
 - progress with the development of support processes, such as online sharing of best practice
 - examples of good practice, and
 - overall progress with embedding the principles of *Engagement and Aspiration*.
60. Measuring the impact of these actions on policy making is intangible and not straightforward. However, if we are to assess our progress in the short to medium term – and carry on assessing ourselves in the future – it is important that we try to set some indicators to gauge our success.
61. Cabinet Office and the heads of policy profession will, therefore, together with all our partners in this work, develop a set of indicators. Some of these will be measured within twelve months, some may be more appropriate to measure over a longer period. These will be either process or outcomes-based and are likely to include the following themes:
- Process**
- fast stream placements into operational positions
 - use of the policy hub web support tools
 - policy makers' views of whether their behaviour has changed
- Outcome**
- capability review performance
 - front line views on level of input and outcomes
 - quality of policy output.
62. If you would like to contribute to a bank of best practice or would like any more information, please get in touch with the Public Service Workforce Reform Team at workforcematters@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk.

Annex A: Summary of Engagement and Aspiration's recommendations

Support to and from ministers

1. Make 'front line insight' a compulsory part of all policy advice to ministers on public service reform, to match and complement the increasing use of 'customer insight'.
2. Make time and space to develop and formulate long term policies in partnership with key stakeholders (community and professionals).
3. Ensure relevant front line staff are engaged in the design of policies that they will be responsible for implementing before public announcements and formal consultations.

Policy making ethos and structures

4. Re-shape policy work in support of the new principles of Public Service Reform, and so ensure it is 'fit for purpose' for current and future policy challenges and their complexities.
5. Organise policy teams so they have access to relevant insights, information and networks; set up specific arrangements to capture, develop and disseminate front line thinking.
6. Seek out ideas and practical experiences to improve the policy – optimise use of existing networks and develop routes to new sources of front-line information.
7. Increase awareness of conditions at the front line within departments.

Incentives, skills and capabilities

8. Give policy making skills and capability a stronger emphasis on connecting with and drawing professional insights from the front line.

Communicating with the front line

9. Capture local professional pride in their work and public service ethos.
10. Ensure policies are accessible and understandable.

Learning

11. Ensure an active circle of learning between the front line, intermediaries and central Whitehall departments so that relevant insights in both directions are captured.

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