

An Independent Review of Government Communications

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1. Background

- The terms of reference of the Review were set by Douglas Alexander, Minister for the Cabinet Office:

“In the light of the Eighth Report of the House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee, to conduct a radical review of government communications. This will include the examination of different models for organising and managing the government’s communication effort, the effectiveness of the current model based on the Government Information and Communication Service, and the roles played by other civil servants, including those special advisers who have a responsibility for communications.”

- These arose from a recommendation of the Public Administration Select Committee’s (PASC) inquiry into the Jo Moore/Martin Sixsmith affair in its Eighth Report, *These Unfortunate Events: Lessons of the Recent Events at the Former DTLR* (HC 303). The Committee identified the need for “a sustainable improvement in the quality of the service provided by the permanent civil servants in the Government Information and Communication Service”, and called for a radical external review of government communications. The Review Group met for the first time in February 2003, chaired by Bob Phillis, Chief Executive of the Guardian Media Group. It initially comprised 13 members, representing communications experience within government, across the media and in advertising and public relations (see Appendix A).
- We would like to thank all those who contributed their time, energy and thought to this Review, and without whom this Report would not have been possible. The quality of the evidence and the contributions from the individuals and groups whom we met during the course of our work was of a very high standard. The debates within the Review Group were both rigorous and challenging in addressing the terms of reference we had been set.

2. Introduction

- The three-way breakdown in trust between government and politicians, the media and the general public is the central theme of this Review. This breakdown has led to increasing disillusionment amongst parts of society, particularly the young and certain ethnic groups. There has been a corresponding disengagement and withdrawal from the political and democratic processes, evidenced by declining participation in local and general elections. The traditional culture of secrecy in British government has not helped this breakdown.
- If these trends are to be halted or reversed, the Group believes that there must be a sustained commitment to a long-term programme of radical change in the conduct, process and style of government communications.
- The tradition of Civil Service impartiality is a key bulwark on which to rebuild trust, and steps need to be taken to preserve and reinforce it. In addressing how government communications should be reformed, we have looked for recommendations we believe will help to improve the consistency, credibility, reliability and accuracy of all government communications.
- The interests of the general public should be paramount in any programme to modernise government communications.
- The breakdown in the level of public trust in, and credibility of, government communications and the disengagement from the political process pose questions both to politicians and to the media as to how they conduct their legitimate, but very different, roles and responsibilities.
- We believe that modern government communications should be based on the following principles:
 - Openness, not secrecy.
 - More direct, unmediated communications to the public.
 - Genuine engagement with the public as part of policy formation and delivery, not communication as an afterthought.
 - Positive presentation of government policies and achievements, not misleading spin.
 - Use of all relevant channels of communication, not excessive emphasis on national press and broadcasters.
 - Co-ordinated communication of issues that cut across departments, not conflicting or duplicated departmental messages.
 - Reinforcement of the Civil Service's political neutrality, rather than a blurring of government and party communications.
- The Group has developed a set of recommendations which we believe, if implemented with vigour and commitment, will over time contribute to the process of restoring trust in, and the credibility of, government communications. To be effective, this programme must be led from the highest levels within government and the Civil Service.

3. Summary of Main Findings and Recommendations

R.1 A redefinition of the role and scope of government communications

We found that, as a whole, the Civil Service has not grasped the potential of modern communications as a service provided for citizens.

Our central recommendation is that communications should be redefined across government to mean a continuous dialogue with all interested parties, encompassing a broader range of skills and techniques than those associated with media relations. The focus of attention should be the general public (page 12).

R.2 A strong central communications structure

We have recommended, and the government has already accepted, a new structure, led by a new Permanent Secretary, Government Communications who will be Head of Profession, provide strategic leadership for communications across government and build a new and authoritative communications service within government. The Prime Minister's Senior Official Spokesperson will report to the Permanent Secretary, Government Communications, and will work alongside the Prime Minister's Director of Communication (page 12).

R.3 Strong, integrated departmental communications structures

We found inconsistencies between departments on the significance attached to the communications function.

We recommend that, led by the Director of Communication, each department's communications activity must clearly contribute to the achievement of the department's overall policy aims and objectives (page 15).

R.4 Disband the Government Information and Communication Service (GICS)

We found structural and systems weaknesses that diminished the work of many able staff within GICS. These weaknesses made GICS no longer fit for purpose.

We recommend that the government adopt a new approach and structures, replacing the existing network with a wider definition of communications professionals encompassing all those involved in communication activity and led by the new Permanent Secretary, Government Communications (page 17).

R.5 Greater emphasis on regional communication

Research told us the public want information that is more relevant to them and where they live.

We recommend that more investment should be made in communicating at a local and regional level and more communication activity should be devolved into relevant regional government or public service units (page 18).

R.6 Recruitment and training to raise professional standards and maintain Civil Service impartiality

We found inconsistency in recruitment and inequality in training opportunities.

We recommend that all communication specialists should be recruited to the same high standards. All those involved in communications should have training that allows them to perform in a professional and effective manner. Ministers should not be involved in the selection process for communications professionals during open, external competitions (page 19).

R.7 New rules governing the conduct of special advisers and defining more clearly the boundaries with the Civil Service

We accept the role of special advisers but found a lack of clarity in their relationship with civil servants.

We recommend that new propriety guidelines and induction training should be developed by the Permanent Secretary, Government Communications to cover all those involved in communication, including special advisers. The principle of Civil Service impartiality must underpin these guidelines (page 21).

R.8 Effective implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000

We found a culture of secrecy and partial disclosure of information which is at the root of many of the problems we have examined.

We recommend that, when implementing the main provisions of the Freedom of Information Act, the overriding presumption should be to disclose (page 23).

R.9 Clearer rules for the release of statistical information

We found cases of selective release of information and lack of clear timetables as to when information was to be released.

We recommend that core central government statistical information should be automatically, routinely and systematically made available, with schedules published in advance and strictly observed. There should be a new statute to define a clear remit for the National Statistician and the Statistics Commission (page 24).

R.10 A new approach to briefing the media

We found that the lobby system is no longer working effectively for either the government or the media.

We recommend that all major government media briefings should be on the record, live on television and radio and with full transcripts available promptly online. Ministers should deliver announcements and briefings relevant to their department at the daily lobby briefings, which should also be televised, and respond to questions of the day on behalf of the government (page 25).

R.11 Customer-driven online communication

We found that, although significant resources are being devoted to government websites, the impact has been diluted by a lack of integration within departments and across government.

We recommend that the central government website should be redesigned to meet the needs and perceptions of users, with individual departments only becoming “visible” when this makes sense to the users. Information on local public services should be prominent and easily found. There should be increased investment in websites to reflect the increasing importance of this method of communication (page 26).

R.12 A reappraisal of the relationship between politicians and the media

We found a three-way breakdown of trust between politicians, the media and the general public.

We recommend that politicians and the media should consider the extent to which their behaviour might support or undermine the objective of these recommendations – to help restore public trust in legitimate government communication (page 26).

Subsidiary recommendations under each of the headings are detailed in Section 5 of the Report.

4. Context and Evidence

Breakdown in Trust

Trust in government and politicians is at its lowest, at least in modern times. Thirty years ago, in 1974, 39 per cent of the population believed that the government, of whatever political persuasion, would put the national good above party political gain. Today the figure is 16 per cent.¹ Opinion polls repeatedly show that politicians and journalists are the least trusted professions.² Turnout has fallen at successive general elections and the level of trust in politicians is lower than comparative figures from both Europe and the USA.³ It has become commonplace for commentators to say that the government is no longer believed and media coverage throughout the period of this Review has referred constantly to this being an era of spin.

“The approach to publicity known as ‘spin’ is associated with a partisan form of communication, which is highly tactical in its use of media channels. The result has been an increasingly adversarial relationship between government communications [and the media] and potentially reduced trust in government messages received via the media.” Demos

In the week we first met, troops were sent into Heathrow. Nothing could better illustrate the breakdown in trust than media reports that some people apparently believed this to be a “publicity stunt” rather than a response to a genuine terrorist threat.

Our own qualitative research suggests that people are generally detached from the political process and mistrustful both of politicians and of the media’s reporting of politics. Their interest in government communications is low, unless it concerns a personal issue such as a local school or hospital or crime in their community. When asked which sources of information were most trusted, people saw direct information – letters, leaflets and paid-for advertising – as more trustworthy than anything they receive through a media “filter”. For them, government communication works most effectively when it engages members of the public in a two-way conversation. Well-known brands, such as the NHS or the Inland Revenue, are more trusted. But they are perceived to be separate from government.

“Media, government and voters need a common currency in which they can trade. That currency is factual information.” BBC written submission

Diminishing Trust in the Media

This disturbing lack of trust in government and politicians is accompanied by a diminishing trust in the media and the press in particular. Recent research shows that only 6 per cent of respondents regard any newspaper as the most fair and unbiased source of news, compared with 14 per cent for radio and 70 per cent for television.⁴ Research carried out after the Iraq war showed that television was overwhelmingly the most trusted source of information about the war – chosen by 72 per cent. Ninety-two per cent thought that television news should try to be objective and

¹ British Social Attitude Survey conducted by the National Centre for Social Research

² Mori/BMA report on professions, February 2002

³ Eurobarometer, June 2002 and MORII/Harris, 1998

⁴ The Public’s View for ITC/BSC BMRB, 2002

impartial when covering war, but a surprising 88 per cent thought that the press too should try to be objective and impartial when covering war.⁵

The background to our Report is that when the Labour Government took office in 1997, it placed great emphasis on the need for better news management, a skill the party had honed in opposition. Ministers rapidly formed the view that the Civil Service lacked sufficient skills in this area, and a large number of Directors or Heads of Communication resigned, moved or were dismissed. Additional powers were given to up to three special advisers based in Number 10 to manage permanent civil servants, one of whom was Alastair Campbell, the then Press Secretary.

An internal review of government communications (the Mountfield Review) was set up in November 1997. Its main proposals were:

- to bring the standard of all government press offices up to that of the best;
- improved co-ordination across government;
- improved co-ordination within departments;
- closer and better working relations between policy civil servants and press officers;
- better leadership, training, development and personnel management; and
- retention of a politically impartial information service.

Our work has taken that report into account, along with the recommendations from the Ninth Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (the Committee) that relate to our subject matter.

Unlike Mountfield, however, we have looked at the full range of ways in which the government communicates – with the public, the media, its own employees and others it needs to influence and hear from. This is not a narrow review of departmental press offices. The issues bear upon the entire Civil Service.

Our appointment followed the Jo Moore/Martin Sixsmith affair and criticism of the government communications team at 10 Downing Street following the controversy surrounding the Prime Minister's wife in her dealings with Peter Foster. While we were at work, there were substantiated accusations of plagiarism against one government dossier about the threat from Iraq, deep controversy about another, the death of Dr David Kelly and the Hutton Inquiry.

Background to the Breakdown

We were told that three major factors have contributed to the breakdown in the relationship between government, the media and the public:

- the communications strategy adopted by the Labour administration on coming into power in 1997;
- the reaction of the media and the press in particular to that; and
- the response of the Civil Service to the new demands that were placed on it.

Labour's past experience of handling the media, and its belief that government communications staff were not up to the mark, saw a rise in the media handling role of politically appointed, unelected special advisers. Their more aggressive approach and their increased use of selective briefing of media outlets, in which government information was seen to be being used to political advantage, led to a reaction from the media that has produced a far more adversarial relationship with government.

⁵ Cardiff University, September 2003

"This distrust is not simply of the current Labour administration, but there seems little doubt that the public mistrust of politicians and thus the executive was exacerbated during the early years of the Labour Government because of the perception of spin." First Division Association

"... quite a lot of political journalism chasing itself in a downward spiral of propaganda, innuendo and competitive truth-stretching, in a context that assumes the worst motive for every political act or speech or alliance..." Hugo Young, former *Guardian* political commentator

We received much evidence on the insatiable appetite of the media for facts, interpretation, speculation, observation and political comment, driven both by the rapid growth in the number of media outlets and by the resulting competitive pressure. At the same time, there has been an explosion in the many different ways in which the government might communicate. This has put extraordinary strain on a communications system designed in a less frenzied media age.

"As public interest in formal partisan politics has diminished, so the raucousness of the press has grown... they tend to exaggerate stories and push up the temperature in order to justify their increasingly precarious existence." David Walker, journalist

Communications Not Core Function

What we found was a narrow view of communications which is often limited to media handling, rather than an ability to communicate effectively with many different audiences, which is an integral part of modern government.

Citizens rely upon the information government supplies to judge the performance of schools and hospitals, make benefit claims, travel abroad, fill in tax forms, deal with the courts, understand levels of crime, and much else. Good communication is essential for consultation, which informs policy-making and leads to better legislation. The evidence we received, however, is that the current model is failing.

We found a government information machine that in some areas is under-resourced. Journalists complained to us that departmental press offices too often lack a sufficient knowledge of the differing needs of different parts of the media. Some departments deal with thousands of calls a year but lack the resources to handle them effectively.

"Our impression is that, currently, the Government Information and Communication Service (GICS) is neither limber enough nor sufficient in number to meet the new demand, though we recognise the efforts to bring it up to date. The public demand for greater openness and accountability in the way that government works needs to be matched by a GICS that is adequately staffed to provide the service demanded of it." Civil Service Commissioners

There is poor co-ordination between departments and agencies, the COI, the Cabinet Office and Number 10, which shows up most starkly when there are government-wide crises such as the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in 2001. Although the government has improved its ability to pull together a communications team in such cases, as witnessed by the response to the firefighters' dispute, more needs to be done.

The sample of departments that we visited showed wide differences in their understanding of communications. Some saw it covering little more than news handling. Others included internal communications, marketing and paid-for publicity, research and website design and outside consultation, but in some departments these were managed as separate units.

“The mindset of the [Government Communications] Service needs shifting from one of a provision of a reactive largely ‘on-demand’ driven service which is very much media dominated, to one that is more strategic in its approach. There are patches of excellence within the service, but there seems to be no capability to share good practice and no requirement for consistency of approach within the various departments.” Centre for Public Relations Studies, Leeds Metropolitan University

More fundamentally, we found a culture in which communication is not seen as a core function of the mainstream Civil Service. In theory, communications staff are a part of the Civil Service like any other. But we too often found a “them and us” attitude between policy civil servants and communications staff.

“Compared with other specialist professional groups in the Civil Service such as lawyers, statisticians and economists, those working within the GICS often feel like the poor relations with little recognition given to the skills, competencies and professional standards they uphold.” Prospect

We found a culture where the way in which policies will be perceived by the public, and how these policies are to be communicated, are issues that still tend to be tagged on to the end of policy formulation, not treated as an integral part of it.

Service Not Fit For Purpose

Our work was made harder by the lack of readily available statistics on the scale of the government’s communications effort – an illustration, perhaps, of its current status. The best estimate we can make is that around £230 million a year is spent on advertising, direct marketing and other paid-for publicity.⁶ Some 2,600 people work directly in communications directorates at an annual cost of £90 million.

Of these, however, according to the numbers supplied to us, only 850 are members of the GICS, which is a body that we regard as no longer fit for purpose because of a number of structural and systems weaknesses:

- It does not cover all of those involved in communications. Some departments do not belong to it at all. Those departments with GICS staff often have their own communication people as well. As well as the “them and us” culture we have identified between policy officials and communications staff, there is even a “them and us” between GICS and non-GICS communication staff.
- Its lack of operational role in day-to-day communication activity limits its ability to engage and influence across the Civil Service. It does not consistently have a voice at the table in senior discussions as to how communications should be handled and developed.
- As a voluntary network it has no formal role with departments in terms of how they recruit and develop their communication teams.

⁶ GCRG estimates based on survey of main Ministerial departments, the Scottish Executive and the Welsh Assembly Government

Role of Special Advisers

In general, we found special advisers and professional communications staff working well together. However, there was some evidence of tensions between their respective roles, although nothing on the scale of the difficulties that exploded in the former DTLR. Special advisers have come to be a valued part of the government machine. They can be involved in political issues and party debate in a way that is debarred to civil servants, and where their role is clear and relations are good they enhance government communications.

Many of them concentrate their limited time on the political reporters in the “lobby” and on a handful of specialists. We have been told that this has created an “inner circle” of reporters who have good access, but a disenfranchised majority who do not. This can leave reporters dealing with a sometimes poorly informed and demoralised press operation. The way some have operated has also led to a blurring of information and comment.

“The present elision of political and Civil Service information is benefiting no-one. In the short term it gives the government more ‘wobble room’ because no-one knows where they stand. But in the long run it has damaged the credibility of government statements, including denials of allegations against it.” Adam Boulton, Sky News

“Government is ‘political’, and is entitled to promote and stand by its political beliefs. Communities, equally, want to understand clearly what is a ‘political’ statement, and what is indisputable fact. Whilst there is of course a grey area between the two, government should try to keep the two forms of communication separate, as consistently as possible.” Fred Perkins, previously Chief Executive of the Stationery Office

COI Praised; Government News Network Underused

We examined the work of the Central Office of Information (COI), which undertakes paid-for communications activity on behalf of government departments and agencies. In the main it was praised by its customers and those outside government for its expertise in marketing and bulk media buying for government advertising campaigns.

However, we found the Government News Network (GNN) to be an underused resource. GNN acts as the regional arm of GICS. Some departments use it, while others use their own regional offices. GNN, however, lacks its own budget and has to charge departments the full cost of its services. Its ability actively to promote cross-government initiatives is severely restricted, and we received evidence from many quarters which criticised the London-centric focus of government communications activities. In our own research, respondents told us they considered local media to be more trustworthy than their national counterparts, a view supported in the desk research we carried out.

“There must be a recognition that the local press can have a highly important role in informing people about government policies and initiatives because we are more trusted and neutral than, say, national newspapers.” Leicester Mercury Group

We examined the government's use of the internet. We found that, while the government has recognised the opportunities it offers to speak directly to, and to hear directly from, the general public, it has been slow to take advantage of them. The government has over 2,000 web addresses, but many sites are no more than a translation of existing paper-based systems and few offer transaction-based services or offer the public the ability to communicate directly with government. This needs to change.

Need For Culture Change

Finally, we received much criticism of a continuing "culture of secrecy" in government. Jon Snow, of Channel 4 News, compared the UK system with the American system, which is based on a "right to know". Peter Riddell, of *The Times*, felt there had been a "welcome" opening-up in the UK since the 1980s, with the internet and, more recently, the introduction of monthly Prime Minister's press conferences. The Group was particularly struck by the evidence from the Secretary of the Defence, Press and Broadcasting Advisory Committee, one of the officials charged with helping keep the secrets that need to be kept.

"Whereas media and public attitudes to official secrecy have changed markedly since the end of the Cold War, government and official attitudes have changed very little... The Official Secrets Act 1989 continues to exert a pernicious influence on the dialogue between officials and the public (including the media)... it induces in officials an attitude of 'how little can I get away with saying?' rather than 'what must I really not say at the present?'... Without a change in this cultural attitude, no amount of organisational change will improve the quality of government communications, nor the public trust in them." Nick Wilkinson, Secretary of the Defence, Press and Broadcasting Advisory Committee

Several people commented on the likely impact of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, which is due to take effect in 2005. Maurice Frankel, Director of the Campaign for Freedom of Information, welcomed its positive aspects, but said there were a number of serious weaknesses that threatened to undermine the original purpose of the Act, which we believe the government must address.

In summary, we met many dedicated and professional people working in communication across government. Their efforts have been hampered by a lack of effective co-ordination, excessive departmentalism, short-termism and the lack of a strategic and measurable approach to communications. The system should be based on principles of political impartiality and public service values, but there is a mismatch between the codes and guidance of various kinds and actual practice. There is no systematic audit of communications effectiveness, no focused reward and promotion structure for communications staff, a lack of some skills, insufficient resources devoted to communications, and an over-emphasis on news media. The role of communications is frequently either misunderstood or underestimated by those working in policy, delivery and senior management. The end result is that, in a cynical and distrustful world, there is a communications machine working well below the levels of performance that could be achieved. Whilst we cannot immediately change this, we can consider what model of government communications can best work in this particularly challenging environment.

"Whilst there are examples of good practice across government, all too often these remain within the 'smoke stacks' of departments and agencies and we have some distance to go in terms of 'joined up' government and the dissemination and sharing of best practice." Prospect

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

As we said at the outset, we believe that modern government communications should be based on seven key principles:

- Openness, not secrecy.
- More direct, unmediated communications to the public.
- Genuine engagement with the public as part of policy formation and delivery, not communication as an afterthought.
- Positive presentation of government policies and achievements, not misleading spin.
- Use of all relevant channels of communication, not excessive emphasis on national press and broadcasters.
- Co-ordinated communication of issues that cut across departments, not conflicting or duplicated departmental messages.
- Reinforcement of the Civil Service's political neutrality, rather than a blurring of government and party communications.

Our recommendations flow from these and are intended to help improve the consistency, credibility, reliability and accuracy of all government communications. We believe that if the government adopts and implements this new approach, there is a chance that a greater degree of trust can be built between government, the general public and the media. All would have much to gain from that.

R.1 A redefinition of the role and scope of government communications

As a whole, the government has not grasped the potential of modern communications as a service provided for citizens. This starts with identifying who needs to know what and how best to get that message or information to them, and then measures the resultant attitudes and views to feed back into the processes of policy development and service delivery. It involves listening as much as talking. Its focus is on the public, not the Minister or the party or the media.

A large part of government is concerned with the supply of information – communication in the widest possible sense. Policy development cannot take place in a vacuum – it depends upon a dialogue with all the interested and affected parties. The delivery of public services relies upon effective communication between those delivering and those receiving services. More effective communication will lead to more effective government.

R.2 A strong central communications structure

Our Interim Report, published in September 2003, set out our recommendations for a stronger communications structure at the centre, headed by a new Permanent Secretary, together with new reporting arrangements in Number 10 and a clearer definition of the roles of the Prime Minister's official spokesperson – a Civil Service appointment – and that of his politically appointed Communication Director. Our recommendations were accepted and the Interim Report is set out in Appendix B.

Some read our Interim Report as highly centralising. That was not, and is not, our intention. We believe a stronger centre needs to be matched by stronger performance in individual departments, and needs also to recognise the Cabinet and departmental nature of government.

We identified the following roles for the centre of government communications:

- Leading and influencing communication across government via a Head of Profession.
- Providing leadership for the recruitment, training and career development of communications staff in government.
- Developing professional standards and spreading best practice.
- Developing and ensuring the implementation of a medium-term communications strategy across government.
- Providing co-ordination on issues that cut across departments, such as anti-drugs policies or support for low-income families.
- Acting as the focal point for co-ordination of communications in crises.
- Providing support for the Prime Minister in Number 10's communications, including the co-ordination of shorter-term, day-to-day media handling across government.
- Measuring the effectiveness of communications expenditure and activity across government.
- Co-ordinating marketing activity across government.
- Ensuring guidelines of propriety are both drawn up and observed, and acting as a high-level arbitrator in any disputes that cannot be resolved within departments.

These roles imply the need for a more effective, authoritative centre, comprising two separate but complementary communications teams. The first of these should be a strong Civil Service-led communications unit, based in the Cabinet Office, which will be a centre of excellence for communications across the Civil Service. The second requirement is for a well-resourced communications team supporting the Prime Minister and based at Number 10, which would include civil servants and political appointees.

R.2.1 A new Permanent Secretary, Government Communications should lead the central Civil Service communications unit and provide strategic leadership for communications across government. This role will be the focus for change, redefining communications as integral to and integrated within modern government. He or she would be the Head of Profession for this redefined communications function.

This new post should have five main functions:

- Strategic development and planning, looking longer term at the communications needed to support and deliver the government's key policies.
- Media and press, responsible via the Senior Prime Minister's Official Spokesperson and the civil servants employed within the Number 10 communications team for daily and weekly cross-governmental co-ordination.
- Cross-government co-ordination of research, marketing and campaigns.
- Recruitment, training and career development, covering all Civil Service communication posts and concentrating on raising professionalism and standards.
- Measuring performance and effectiveness of communications activity by regular departmental reviews of cost effectiveness and professionalism, and an annual report to the Public Administration Select Committee (PASC). Adequate resources must be made available if the Permanent Secretary is to undertake these functions effectively.

R.2.2 The new centre headed by the Permanent Secretary should become the "centre for excellence" for government communications, in the same way that centres for excellence are being identified for human resources and finance. This centre should

support departments and enable them to deliver the highest professional standards. Working alongside this central Civil Service-led unit will be a communications team based at Number 10,

R.2.3 supporting the Prime Minister. **This will have two key appointments: one political, one governmental. They will be jointly responsible for implementing Number 10's overall communications strategy, with a particular focus on shorter-term media and news handling, including cross-government co-ordination of the media response to crises.**

The political role is the Prime Minister's Director of Communication, and the Civil Service role is the Prime Minister's Senior Official Spokesperson, who will report to the Permanent Secretary, Government Communications. The Prime Minister accepted our interim recommendation that the Order in Council should not apply to the political role. The Prime Minister's Senior Official Spokesperson will take management responsibility for all the other civil servants within the Number 10 communications unit.

R.2.4 **We recommend that the Strategic Communications Unit should be renamed the Prime Minister's Communications Planning and Support Unit, to avoid confusion with the Strategic Planning and Development function reporting to the Permanent Secretary, Government Communications,** and that its functions should be focused on developing and managing the Prime Minister's programme of major announcements and visits, determining the priorities that underlie that programme and harnessing the necessary level of support and co-ordination across government to ensure its successful delivery. As now, this unit will be populated both by civil servants and by special advisers – the former will report to the Prime Minister's Senior Official Spokesperson and the latter to the Prime Minister's Director of Communication.

The Committee on Standards in Public Life (the Committee) in its Ninth Report recommended that the "Guidance on the Work of the Government Information Service" should deal specifically with the issue of media work in the Prime Minister's office. The government's initial view was that such advice, while helpful, should be set out in the *GICS Handbook*. We believe that the clear structural separation of the political and Civil Service roles we have recommended should set the framework for

R.2.5 how media work is carried out. **We recommend that the code of practice guiding the behaviour of both special advisers and permanent civil servants (that we recommend in section R.7.5) would be the right place to address any particular issues arising in the Prime Minister's office.**

Appraisal

The appraisal role will be one of the ways in which the Permanent Secretary, Government Communications ensures consistency and high standards across government. Performance assessments from the departmental appraisals will enable the Permanent Secretary, Government Communications to report to the Head of the Civil Service, and more publicly,

R.2.6 on the overall quality and performance of government communications. **The Permanent Secretary, Government Communications will provide the framework against which departments assess their communications performance.** The resulting consistency in reporting will provide much greater transparency, enabling people to compare and contrast performance in a way that is currently impossible. Increasing the transparency of government communications is an important strand in helping to improve public trust.

The Permanent Secretary, Government Communications will not have direct line management authority over communications staff in departments and will not be in a position to manage by command and control. Nor would it be appropriate to adopt such an approach. Real

change will only be achieved when all departments understand and believe in the importance of good communication. **R.2.7 Communications should be built into the personal objectives of all senior civil servants.**

R.3 Strong, integrated departmental communications structures

Evidence submitted to the Group suggests that more needs to be done to increase the professionalism and effectiveness of communication within individual government departments and agencies. The implementation of the Mountfield recommendations has been patchy.

We recognise, however, that departments differ both in the communication tasks and in the challenges they face, and in their overall sizes and structures. Rather than putting forward specific and detailed recommendations that all departments must follow, we recommend several key principles and guidelines. It will be up to individual departments to decide how to structure themselves to apply these principles and uphold these guidelines. An important role for the new centre of government communications will be to assist in their development and ensure that they are upheld in practice.

Integrated Communications

All departments need close integration between policy development, service delivery and communications. To make this possible, all civil servants in a department, from the Permanent Secretary downwards, must appreciate that communications should be taken into account in the process of policy development and delivery, not tacked on as an afterthought. This will happen only if there is a change in attitude and culture throughout the Civil Service, as well as in communications directorates, and the Permanent Secretaries will have a major role and responsibility for leading this change.

Communications Strategy

In some cases, departments have already drawn up detailed communications strategies, but we recommend that:

R.3.1 Each department should develop or review its communications strategy to identify how communications will contribute to the achievement of the department's overall policy aims and objectives. It should identify the key audiences for the department and its services, what main messages the department has for them, and how to listen to their views and needs. The strategy should describe the different ways in which the department plans to communicate with each group and the expected outcome of each type of activity, such as media handling, paid-for campaigns, speeches and articles. The strategy should encompass branding and e-communications and consider the views and needs of those in the different regions and nations. The strategy should also cover recruitment and skills development for those working on communications within the department.

The strategy should describe the department's medium and long-term objectives, as well as how to react to short-term news stories. It should be drawn up in close consultation with the department's directorates, showing how the department's communications expertise and resources will be used to support policy and delivery in a coherent way. The strategy should also take account of overall government policies and priorities, and the Permanent Secretary,

R.3.2 Government Communications will have an important input on these issues. **The strategy should be reviewed and endorsed by the department's board of directors and by the Secretary of State.**

Communications Structure

We recognise that the details of the structure and the emphasis placed on different roles and responsibilities will differ between departments. For example, the emphasis placed on campaigns and marketing will clearly be much greater in departments such as the Department for Work and Pensions, which needs to use extensive paid-for advertising and publicity to communicate its services to its customers. In less public-facing departments, such as the Treasury, the priority is on media issues.

However, the autonomy of individual departments must not be used as an excuse for failing to take action. Structures must be renewed with the objective of achieving an integrated approach to communications, using media and all other forms of modern communications

R.3.3 in a co-ordinated way. A key role for the new Permanent Secretary, Government Communications and the Head of the Home Civil Service will be to ensure that effective structures are put in place.

Job titles are inconsistent across departments and expectations therefore become muddled and confused. To help resolve this, we have identified several key roles that need to be covered within each department. In addition to a Director of Communication, these include: Head of News, often operating as the official spokesperson for the Secretary of State; Head of Press Office, managing the Press Office; and Head of Marketing and Campaigns.

Director of Communication

The role of the Director of Communication in each department will be pivotal. He or she needs to have the status, skills and influence to shape the department's communications strategy and to oversee its implementation. It follows that this person will be a close adviser both of the Minister and of the Permanent Secretary, and also a member of the department's board or senior management team.

Although the focus for the Directors of Communication will be on the broader communication picture, it is vital that they, in conjunction with the Permanent Secretary of the department, deliver media handling in which the Minister has confidence. They must have active oversight of media relations, especially in times of crisis, to ensure that the approach fits within the overall communication culture and strategy. In smaller departments, it may be appropriate for Directors of Communication to act as the department's senior official spokesperson from time to time, but they must not be overwhelmed by the all-consuming daily media-handling role at the expense of the important strategic role.

Head of News/Head of Press Office

These two titles are used to mean different things in different departments. One is the operational role of spokesperson for the department or Minister, and the other is a managerial role covering the press officers. In many instances, the same person is expected to be the Secretary of State's main media adviser and the manager of the team. Against the demands of 24-hour news, one person may not be able to perform both these roles, but both are vital to the professional health of the Press Office. Some departments have already separated out the two roles, recognising that the demands of one can eclipse the effective delivery of the other. It is important that both sets of responsibilities are adequately covered.

Resourcing

R.3.4 The communication activities in each department need to be appropriately resourced. The strategy should identify the overall level of resources required, both financial and human. The Director of Communication should have a central budget under his or her direct control, and should also have sign-off responsibilities for communications expenditure proposed by other directorates. In the current situation, communication budgets are often held within the policy departments and, when this is the case, there seems to be very limited opportunity to align resources to strategic priorities. This can lead to a plethora of campaigns that are not necessarily in line with key departmental objectives. It also makes it difficult to get an accurate picture of the level of resources being devoted to communications across a department.

Appraisal

R.3.5 There should be an annual review of the effectiveness of communications in the department, feeding into the annual report on effectiveness produced by the Permanent Secretary, Government Communications. The appraisal should cover:

- how well and how fully the strategy has been implemented, including, where possible, quantitative measures;
- value for money assessments of the department's communications expenditure;
- professionalism and competence across the department;
- contributions to overall government communications strategy, and to objectives that cut across departments;
- observance of propriety guidelines; and
- reactions of customers, staff and others involved.

This appraisal should be carried out by the Director of Communication and reviewed by the Minister, the Permanent Secretary and the board or senior management team of the department. The Director of Communication should involve a communications professional from another department to ensure the integrity of the process. The results will also be reviewed by the Permanent Secretary, Government Communications who would make his or her own assessment of the conclusions reached and would make this assessment available to the department. These assessments will enable the Permanent Secretary, Government Communications to identify obvious examples of best practice that should be spread quickly across departments and highlight common development needs.

On a less frequent basis, say every three years, it may also be useful to undertake a wider review of different aspects of a department's communications. The purpose of this review, which would be led by an independent team, would be to encourage a wider sharing of good practice across government and provide an assessment of the professionalism of individual operations. Such a review could also draw upon an external body such as the Advisory Committee on Advertising.

R.4 Disband the Government Information and Communication Service (GICS)

It follows from our recommendations on the centre and departments that GICS, in its present form, will cease, with the professional leadership of the function being taken over by the new Permanent Secretary, Government Communications. This post has a clear remit over the much wider community of all those working in government communications, with a

clear role embracing strategic communications and co-ordination across all departments.

A specific task will be to ensure that communications are integrated more fully into the policy

- R.4.1** development and delivery processes. **The Permanent Secretary should be tasked with forging a new communications function across government pulling together current members of the GICS and other departmental communication staff into a fully functioning communications operation. At its heart should be the principle that communications are a professional function that is core to the Civil Service.**

R.5 Greater emphasis on regional communication

The research carried out by the Group showed that much can be done to improve the relevance and appeal of communication from government by tailoring it to the different communities of the United Kingdom. Such an approach to communications was outlined in the visit by the Group to the Northern Ireland Office and described in evidence from the Scottish Executive. A more localised approach has two benefits in communication terms:

- it can harness the greater trust often placed in local media; and
- it can engage the audiences who are most interested in how government policy affects them directly, either through the delivery of public services in their community or through personal experiences, such as how a policy on asylum seekers might affect those living in particular regions.

The current arrangements for handling regional communications in England are managed by the Cabinet Office through the Government News Network. Comprehensive communication on a regional and local basis requires a new approach. Communication needs to be as much a partner and senior player in the regions as in Whitehall. Each region should and could do much more than regurgitate press releases from Whitehall and can add value by supplying information on the local or regional impact of the message coming from central government. The ability of each region to listen to views and opinions within their local communities and reflect these views back to the central departments is a valuable part of an overall communications strategy.

- R.5.1 The government should involve local and regional newspapers and regional radio and TV to a much greater extent in testing, consulting on and communicating policies on issues such as regeneration and planning, where projects costing large amounts would benefit from public engagement at an early stage.**

It is important that regional activity is planned and resourced properly, and we do not think the current “pay as you use” approach to the GNN is encouraging a strategic approach. It has been suggested that the network of Government Offices in England could provide the basis for this communications expertise, which would need leadership at a senior level in each region. But it is also important to recognise that “regional” communication is only shorthand for a wide range of communications activity at local level. In health, for example, while regional directors of public health are co-located in the Government Offices, the NHS is run through a network of Strategic Health Authorities.

There is no one tidy structural solution to encourage this strategic approach due to the multiplicity of providers and resources. But it is not enough for everyone to cite this complexity as the reason to do nothing. All parties – departments, regional offices, the GNN, local public service providers – need to work together to ensure that the public gets the communication it needs from government. For example, an NHS patient may well be in

R.5.2 need of support from DWP and advice on education or childcare. **A better regional communications service should seek to overcome traditional departmental boundaries and practices to deliver a service that is customer focused and responsive to the public's needs.**

The strategy for regional communications across government will be jointly held by each central department and the Permanent Secretary, Government Communications. The former will focus on how their departmental communications can be delivered at regional and local level, while the centre will look at how regional and local communications activity can contribute to the key cross-governmental themes and priorities.

The importance of senior Ministers trying to redress their remoteness from the people they serve by more direct communication outside London cannot be overstated. More frequent visits to the regions by Cabinet Ministers are important, particularly when there is a controversial live issue to address such as a major road or airport development.

R.5.3 We recommend that the COI monitors and reports on the use made of regional media in government advertising. We were told by the Newspaper Society and some regional and local newspapers that the lion's share of the expenditure goes to national media, despite evidence to suggest that people are more likely to take note of a message if it is delivered to them locally.

R.6 Recruitment and training to raise professional standards and maintain Civil Service impartiality

Improved recruitment and training will help raise standards across all areas of communication and give the government a complete range of skills and resources.

Recruitment

R.6.1 The Permanent Secretary, Government Communications should set the standards, define the process and evaluate the results. The standards for entry should be at least as rigorous as those in other areas of the Civil Service.

We want communications staff to become what they already are in theory – part of the mainstream Civil Service. We believe it is vital that the Permanent Secretary encourages movement between public and private sectors to facilitate wider skill development. Terms of employment should enable this movement, with appropriate entry and exit terms. We also want to see much more interchange between those in communication and those in policy and service delivery jobs. Two-way traffic should be commonplace, both as a means of spreading communication skills through the wider Civil Service and as a way of breaking down the “them and us” attitude that we have witnessed.

Some departments, such as the Treasury and the Foreign Office, routinely recruit mainstream civil servants into press office roles. This can bring knowledge of the department's policies to its communications with journalists and raise the understanding of the importance of good communications. This is one example of the sort of integration and cross-fertilisation which we are recommending.

While the Permanent Secretary should set the standards for the recruitment of all communications staff, most will be appointed by departments, partly because of the sheer volume of appointments and partly because, if interchange between communications, policy and service delivery jobs is to be encouraged, it is departments that are best placed to make

R.6.2 those appointments. **We believe, however, that the Permanent Secretary, Government Communications should be directly involved in the recruitment of Directors of Communication and those in senior supporting roles in order to ensure that they meet the professional and ethical standards required.**

This raises the question of the role to be played by Ministers in the recruitment for senior communications roles. Under the current rules, Ministers are given a choice between two or three candidates when a post falls vacant and is filled internally from within the Civil Service. Different rules apply, however, when such appointments are made under open competition, which opens up the field to candidates from outside the Civil Service. An interview panel, which includes outside assessors, recommends a single “best” candidate to the Minister – regardless of whether that candidate is an existing civil servant or an outsider. If the Minister rejects the candidate, either the whole process has to be re-run or, in exceptional circumstances, the panel may decide to offer the Minister the second candidate. Ministers have a veto, but no choice.

In the current context, ministerial choice in the appointment of senior communications staff could be perceived as jeopardising the principles of impartiality and independence, even when the post is filled through internal appointment procedures.

It is obviously essential that Directors of Communication and Ministers’ spokespeople have a good working relationship with their Minister. Without that, the risk remains that Ministers will rely over-heavily on their special advisers for advice on media handling, recreating and reinforcing the issues we wish to tackle, such as the blurring of comment and information.

Directors of Communication must feel able to stand back and object if Ministers’ personal agendas ever lead them to press for communications that would be politically biased or misleading. And we would not expect to see senior communications staff changing simply as a consequence of a ministerial change. Denying the Minister a choice between candidates would reinforce the fact that the key criterion for appointment to a senior communications

R.6.3 post is competence to do the job. **We therefore support the status quo whereby Ministers are given no choice over external candidates and we agree with the Committee recommendation that “the overriding principle of selection on merit after fair and open competition should be maintained”.**

We are told that appointments to the post of Director of Communication are almost always open, external competitions, and we would encourage this to continue, as it demonstrates that a candidate has been chosen on merit.

We see it as a key management task for Directors of Communication and Permanent Secretaries, including the Permanent Secretary, Government Communications, to ensure that Ministers have the media-handling support they need. If the relationship is not working, it is a management task to make the personnel changes necessary to achieve harmonious working relationships.

Training and Development

The training and development strategy produced by the Permanent Secretary, Government Communications will have to meet the needs of a more mixed economy:

- professionals who see government communications as a career choice;
- professionals who see government communications as one stage within a career that will continue outside the Civil Service;
- special advisers;
- policy civil servants who are gaining short-term experience;
- policy civil servants who wish to move into the communications profession; and
- policy officials who need to understand and appreciate the role of communications in policy development and delivery.

This does not mean that we envisage the creation of a whole new training and development empire. As with recruitment, the centre should be the strategic driver and guardian of standards supporting and empowering the departments but also will be in a position to

R.6.4 identify the current skill and capability gaps. The Permanent Secretary, Government Communications should set out the skills framework and instigate a comprehensive development programme encompassing the full range of communication skills.

R.6.5 All policy officials identified as having the potential to reach the very top levels of the Civil Service (SASC level) should have appropriate communications knowledge or experience. Those entering the senior levels of the Civil Service should be able to demonstrate good understanding of the wider role of communications within government and where they have successfully applied those skills in previous jobs.

"A posting within a communications directorate should be seen as an important component of training and development in a similar way that a posting in a Minister's or Permanent Secretary's office would also be." First Division Association

R.7 New rules governing the conduct of special advisers and defining more clearly the boundaries with the Civil Service

Members of the duly constituted government have a right to make arrangements with which they are comfortable to help them represent (and protect) themselves in a highly adversarial and increasingly intrusive culture. We believe special advisers to be an integral part of modern government, and their political affiliation is both welcomed by Ministers and an important buttress to the impartiality of the Civil Service. However, we did receive a great deal of evidence on the role that special advisers have and should have in support of government communications.

Our recommendations are focused on rebalancing the respective contributions made by special advisers and civil servants and providing clear guidelines for each that describe their respective roles and responsibilities.

In our interim report on communications at the centre, we recommended, and the Prime Minister accepted, that the Order in Council powers that enable special advisers to manage civil servants should not apply to the role of Director of Communication. The new structure under the Permanent Secretary, Government Communications provides the necessary

executive powers at the centre. Special advisers in the departments do not have executive powers to instruct civil servants, a principle that we endorse and expect to be upheld.

However, it is clear that, given the close working relationship of a Minister and his or her special adviser, they may well be asked by the Minister to relay his or her wishes. In the great majority of cases, where there is a good working relationship between the special adviser

- R.7.1** and the senior civil servants in the department, this will not be problematic. **However, if problems arise in the passing on of ministerial wishes, it must be made clear to all civil servants that they must notify the Director of Communication, the Permanent Secretary or the Private Office of the issue.**

The Committee in its Ninth Report recommended that the government should establish a register of departmental nominated officers to whom any civil servant may refer if he or she believes that he or she is being asked to act in a way that is inconsistent with the Civil Service Code, a recommendation which government has accepted and is putting into place. These officers will be an obvious point of referral for any civil servant working in communications who is in any doubt about what they have been asked to do.

- R.7.2** Special advisers may request information from civil servants in preparing their own work for the Minister. **If civil servants believe requests from special advisers are becoming too onerous or problematic, they should bring the matter to the attention of the Director of Communication or the Private Office.**

- R.7.3** Special advisers should not become an independent “gateway”, channelling instructions out and government work back into the Minister. In the event of a change of government, to ensure a smooth handover, **we recommend that the induction process be made available to the opposition party nominated advisers in the run-up to a General Election, to ensure that they are clear about what might be expected of them as special advisers.**

- R.7.4** **We also recommend that Directors of Communication are able to meet with opposition party communications staff during the same period.**

Propriety Guidelines

In a mixed system in which permanent civil servants and special advisers work together, there must be a clearer delineation of roles and lines of accountability and an explicit statement of who should be allowed to do what and why, and what should happen when anyone oversteps the mark. While there are codes governing the behaviour both of special advisers and of Civil Service communications practitioners, at the moment the guidance on the working relationship of these two groups is contained in several different documents. The Committee, in its Ninth Report, suggested that the relationship should be addressed within the existing *Guidance on the Work of the Government Information Service*.

- R.7.5** **To bring the guidance together in one place, we recommend that a new self-standing code of guidance should be prepared to cover all the players and that this is sent out to all new recruits with their contracts. This should be freely available to anyone else who wishes to read it.** We believe that an early task for the Permanent Secretary, Government Communications, in conjunction with the Civil Service Commissioners and the

Head of the Home Civil Service, should be the preparation of this code, which should also form the basis for a new induction programme for both special advisers and civil servants.

The code should cover induction, training, mentoring and monitoring arrangements and should lay out the basis on which both permanent civil servants and special advisers may engage in communication work. It should outline the procedures to be followed if either group is unsure about the propriety of what they have been asked to do and the mechanisms for monitoring the application of the new code.

- R.7.6 There should be a clear procedure for resolving any dispute between a permanent civil servant and a special adviser which escalates up to the Permanent Secretary, Government Communications and, in the case of special advisers, to the Director of Communication and the appropriate Minister.** This is consistent with the recommendation in the Ninth Report of the Committee, accepted by government, that Ministers are personally responsible for the management and discipline of their special advisers and should investigate any allegation that their special adviser is in breach of their Code of Conduct. The aim should be to ensure that the vast majority of disputes are resolved at departmental level
- R.7.7** without recourse to the Permanent Secretary, Government Communications. **The annual review should examine how well guidelines are working in the department, and any significant propriety issues that have arisen.**

R.8 Effective implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000

One of our key principles is that there should be openness and transparency in the work of government. The Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, which comes fully into force in January 2005, offers a real opportunity to make government at every level more accountable, breaking the current culture of secrecy and partial disclosure of information which is at the root of many of the problems we have examined.

We believe a culture of openness will bring great benefits. It will help rebuild trust at central government level and address weaknesses in the way that local authorities relate to the public. It will also underpin the government's desire to encourage active citizenship by providing the public with the necessary information and data. The Hutton Inquiry demonstrated the speed and thoroughness with which information can be made available through the imaginative use of its website.

There are some in government who fear that an effective FOI regime would worsen relations with the media by providing the national press with more ammunition with which to attack it. We do not think this argument can be sustained. Full disclosure allows context. It is a disincentive to spin (by both sides) as the public itself will have access to the material and will be able to form its own view of the accuracy of reporting.

If politicians are concerned about what they see as selective or partisan reporting, the best antidote is openness rather than the current system where the use of information as a political weapon has contributed to the atmosphere of mutual suspicion between the government and the national media.

We support the liberal regime originally proposed by the government itself in its FOI White Paper. There is a danger that the changes introduced between the White Paper and the Act have the potential to rob FOI of most of its benefits and worse, accentuate some of the problems of trust and credibility that are at the root of the crisis of public confidence. Fresh

legislation is clearly impractical between now and 2005, when the existing Act comes into force. However, the changes introduced by the government in the 2000 Act have put in place a series of class exemptions and a ministerial veto which allows information to be withheld despite the theoretical presumption that public information will be disclosed.

We see the potential for the Act to be turned into a powerful tool to help rebuild public trust. To achieve this, the government should:

- R.8.1 Announce publicly that Ministers will not use the right of veto.** The government's own FOI White Paper stated that a governmental veto would "undermine the authority of the Information Commissioner and erode public confidence in the Act".
- R.8.2 As far as possible replace the class exemptions, including the exemption which restricts disclosure of the analyses on which policy is built, with a harm test.** Actual policy advice, we accept, needs to remain confidential, at least for a time, to allow free debate within government. But the information and analysis on which policy is built should be in the public domain.
- R.8.3 In practice, apply the same level of harm test that features within the Scottish FOI Act and the Open Government Code of the Welsh Assembly.** This will permit disclosure of information to be withheld only when it is likely to cause "substantial harm".
- R.8.4 Adopt an all-purpose limit that replies to requests for information under the Act should be met within 20 days.**
- R.8.5 In complex cases involving significant issues of public interest, remove the £600 limit on the cost of providing information.** The Information Commissioner could act as the judge of whether an application involves a significant issue of public interest.

These measures would make the Act part of the solution to the problem of trust and disenchantment. They would send a clear message to civil servants and others in public service who look on the Act as an administrative burden and a source of potential embarrassment, rather than an important foundation of a healthier political system.

R.9 Clearer rules for the release of statistical information

Accurate statistics are part of the lifeblood of political debate. As Jack Straw observed when he was Labour's Home Affairs spokesperson in the 1990s, "Democratic debate is disabled without them".

The government has taken some important steps to reinforce the independence of the statistical service with the creation of a Statistics Commission and a code covering the publication of what are now known as "National Statistics" – chiefly key economic indicators.

These are released to a rigidly set timetable which is published well in advance, with ministerial comment clearly separated from publication of the statistics themselves.

Departments are increasingly adopting a similar approach to publication of departmental data, from waiting lists to crime figures. We believe this approach should be reinforced.

R.9.1 Clear timetables as to when such data will be released should be published and adhered to. The timing should not be altered by the content of the figures – whether good news or bad news for the government. And the statistical service itself should prepare the figures in ways that provide the public with a clear understanding of trends. We acknowledge that much of the material produced by departments, as opposed to National Statistics, is managerial and financial data which can reach Ministers by a variety of routes other than the formal preparation of departmental statistics.

R.9.2 If Ministers choose to use such data in speeches or argument, ahead of publication of the official statistics, they should be under an obligation to release all the relevant data, not just quote selectively from it to make a case. This would be an equivalent discipline on Ministers to the legislation which requires formal disclosure of material information to the stock market by companies – in this case by Ministers to the public. We argue this case on the grounds that statistics about crime, or the performance of the police, schools, hospitals and the like, belong in essence to the public, not to government or the party in government.

R.9.3 We endorse the principle of an independent statistical service set out in Labour’s 1997 manifesto but believe the government should go further and put National Statistics on a statutory basis, as is the case in many other countries. This would underline the independence from political interference of the Statistics Commission and the National Statistician and provide an opportunity to make it accountable to Parliament rather than to Ministers.

R.9.4 We see no need for the 40 hours of advance notice of National Statistics that Ministers receive. While there is no evidence that this right has been abused, it is open to the perception of abuse, and is far longer than the period of notice that the executive in the United States receives of such key economic data.

R.10 A new approach to briefing the media

We were asked to comment specifically on the current system of twice daily government briefings known as the lobby system. The evidence we received is that the lobby system is no longer working for either the government or the media – with the understandable exception of the Chairman of the Lobby, no one we heard from argued for the status quo. Both government and the media have seen their credibility damaged by the impression that they are involved in a closed, secretive and opaque insider process.

Editors and journalists have complained about public information, which should be available to all, being used as the currency in a system of favouritism, selective release and partisan spinning. For their part, Ministers and officials have complained about the way they believe much of the media offers a partial and distorted version of events, often with little relationship to what was said at lobby briefings and relying on off-the-record sources or, as some have alleged, deliberate misrepresentation.

Our views in this area are driven by two of our guiding principles: openness and increasingly unmediated communications to the public. We agree with the recommendation of the Committee in its Ninth Report that “wherever possible, GICS press officers should speak on the record as ‘the department’s spokesperson’”, but would suggest that these principles apply to any civil servant when briefing the media.”

R.10.1 We recommend that the lobby briefings should be televised, open, as now, to any journalist, with full transcripts made available promptly online and, as the technology allows, with proceedings webcast. These changes, however, must not be introduced in a way that prevents journalists from pursuing a consistent line of questioning.

R.10.2 We recommend that Ministers play a bigger part in the daily briefings, particularly when their departments have announcements to make. Elected representatives can be accountable in a way that spokespeople cannot. We envisage Ministers taking the lead role at the daily briefings and the Prime Minister's Official Spokesperson attending these meetings, with the Prime Minister's Director of Communication as appropriate. This would bring the daily meetings closer to the model of the Prime Minister's monthly press briefings.

R.10.3 Government websites should make all relevant background material available to anyone who wants it.

R.11 Customer-driven online communication

The internet enables the government to talk directly to the general public and for the public to find the information it needs quickly. The challenge is to harness the many outputs of different government departments and turn them into consumer-friendly and easily navigable sites.

R.11.1 We endorse the recommendation of the e-Envoy that there should be one central government website, within which the output of the various different departments and agencies can be found. The current UK online portal helps by providing navigation for the maze of government websites, but this falls a long way short of providing a single site for all government services. It is critical that the design of such a site be driven by the needs and perceptions of the users, and that individual departments are only "visible" when this makes sense to the users. Our research suggests that information on local public services is most important to individuals, which would invert the usual pyramid of information offered by departments.

The internet is also an opportunity to listen to the views, needs and ideas of a whole variety of the public. **R.11.2 Chatrooms and e-mail are common ways for visitors to websites to talk to the providers of the sites, and we would expect to see them feature frequently across government websites.**

The departmental structure of government does not lend itself to this sort of highly consumer-centric approach. We are concerned that the total resources devoted to websites across the departments may be very large indeed, but the impact of such investment is **R.11.3 diluted by a many-headed approach. We were not able to assess the total expenditure across government on web communication, but recommend that this analysis be carried out, followed by a cross-governmental assessment of this sum as a percentage of all communication expenditure.**

R.12 A reappraisal of the relationship between politicians and the media

We have commented earlier in the Report on the adversarial nature of the relationship between government, politicians and the media. We recognise that Britain's political system is, by its nature, adversarial. It is part of the role of a free press and media constantly to question and challenge government, but the media is not the government's opposition, and this illusion is potentially

dangerous to the democratic process. An unfettered, vigorous, partisan and even at times mischievous political debate is part of a healthy democracy. A well informed population is more likely to feel confident to engage in the political process. However, it is clear from the declining audiences for television and radio news, decreasing newspaper circulation and falling turnout at elections that increasing numbers of the electorate are disillusioned with politics and politicians and are withdrawing from active participation in the political process.

Our research tells us that the population at large has little time for either politicians or the media. But are those two parties now locked into an introspective cycle of mutual distrust from which it has become impossible for either to escape?

Andrew Marr of the BBC told us in evidence:

“Senior politicians have to look in the mirror and realise that many of the stratagems they evolved in the Nineties to deal with the more intrusive media have become degraded and futile... The prepared sound bite which politicians stick to has become a complete barrier to communication. The net result is people do not believe what they are saying even when what they are saying is true.”

The media argues that politics is run by spin doctors and that politicians, when they can get to them, stick rigidly to a rehearsed script, speak in meaningless sound bites and will only tell the truth when they are safely off the record. Vigorous questioning is just the journalist doing their job and holding politicians to account.

Politicians, on the other hand, express frustration that the media refuses to report them and Parliament in a responsible and worthwhile fashion. The obsession with personalities, the search for conflict, the desire to tell the story in 15 seconds and a cavalier approach to the truth all stand in the way of politicians communicating with the country at large.

The effect of the negative aspects of the relationship and its impact on the general public is a cause for concern. The Group received, as part of the evidence submitted by Alan Rusbridger, Editor of *The Guardian*, a speech delivered to Stirling University in November 2001, which addresses these concerns. He says:

“... the relationship between the press and politicians has become rather destructive, sterile and self-referential. Many would consider that we have now reached a point where this relationship rather dangerously excludes readers as well as viewers and voters.

It is a vicious circle in which both sides blame each other, both convinced that they are the moral guardians, and neither can see a way of breaking out of it. I’m not alone in thinking that this has serious consequences for the democratic process.”

We have been guided throughout the Review by the need to address the breakdown of trust between the public, the media and the government. We have made a number of recommendations to government that, if accepted, could contribute to a rebuilding of trust. This rebuilding will, however, be influenced by the reaction both of politicians and of the media.

If this vicious circle is to be broken and the current relationship between politicians and the media is to change, one of the parties needs to take a lead. Much of what we have recommended, and on which the government can act, provides the basis for such a lead.

The impact of these changes on re-engaging the public and contributing to the long and slow process of rebuilding trust between the public, the media and the government could be significantly enhanced by the response of the media itself. It is not the task of this Review to suggest to either politicians or the media how they should interact. However, their behaviour and the reaction to the recommendations in this Report and the principles on which they are based will impact considerably on the pace of change.

In the conclusion to the Eighth Report of the Public Administration Select Committee in July 2002, the hope was expressed that “governments should play it straight and the media should play it fair”.

We believe that whilst this is a laudable aspiration, as things stand it is an unrealistic and unachievable objective. The government of the day will always strive to present their policies, plans and achievements in the best possible way. This is an inevitable and permanent feature of modern political life. The media in a modern democracy is under no obligation to be “fair”, but must act within the boundaries of regulation, whether that be statutory, in the case of the broadcast media, or effective voluntary self-regulation, in the case of the press.

R.12.1 However, the media itself might wish to reflect on some of the issues stemming from this report:

- **the impact of two-way communications and dialogue with readers, viewers and listeners, and the growing ability of the citizen to access source material to inform and check on accuracy;**
- **the impact of the Freedom of Information Act, and their response to the spirit in which government may choose to apply the legislation;**
- **the attribution and verification of quotes across all media;**
- **a clearer separation of fact from news, comment and entertainment; and**
- **a greater willingness to admit and to correct mistakes and inaccuracies.**

If the principles we have suggested for government – openness and a genuine desire to engage with the public – are seen as worthwhile both by politicians and by the media, we believe that the breakdown in trust can be arrested and rebuilt over time. If neither the media nor politicians are able or willing to break out of their current relationship, we fear that it may be a very slow process. The evidence is that the decline in electoral turnout, television news ratings and newspaper circulation figures would then continue to tell the depressing and troubling story of public disenchantment and disengagement.

6. The Way Forward

Government needs to be at least as good as any other sector in communication, and arguably should set new standards. It ought to be a sensitive and comprehensive listener. It must be an efficient and prompt disseminator of information. It has to answer questions accurately, honestly and completely. It must be accountable for what it does, prepared to explain and defend its decisions but also admit its mistakes.

We found two major stumbling blocks to realising this vision of modern government communication. The first is a deep distrust amongst the general public of much of what it is told by government. The second is a failure of government to develop and implement professional, modern and integrated communication.

Our recommendations are designed to tackle that failure and, eventually, to remedy that mistrust. Against a background of inertia and scepticism, it will not be easy. As we have pointed out, the media too needs to reflect on a range of issues that relate to its own performance.

We believe it is important that our report is now considered in a constructive and positive manner, because it is profoundly in the public interest that a fractured faith in government should begin to be mended.

Appendix A

Terms of Reference and Membership of the Review Group

The terms of reference of the Review were set by Douglas Alexander, Minister for the Cabinet Office:

“In the light of the Eighth Report of the House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee, to conduct a radical review of government communications. This will include the examination of different models for organising and managing the government’s communication effort, the effectiveness of the current model based on the Government Information and Communication Service, and the roles played by other civil servants, including those special advisers who have a responsibility for communications.”

Membership of the Review Group was as follows:

Chairman:

Robert Phillis, Chief Executive, Guardian Media Group plc

Assistant to the Chairman:

Paula Carter, independent consultant

Members:

Colin Browne, Partner, The Maitland Consultancy

Michael Goold, Director, Ashridge Strategic Management Centre

David Hill, Managing Director, Good Relations Political Communications (until September 2003)

John Hipwood, London Editor, *Wolverhampton Express and Star/Shropshire Star*

Rupert Howell, President, EMEA; Chairman, UK and Ireland Group, McCann-Erickson

Howell James, Director, Brown, Lloyd James Ltd

Sian Jarvis, Communications Director, Department of Health

Sue Jenkins, Deputy Head of the Government Information and Communication Service

Tom Kelly/Godric Smith, Number 10 Downing Street

Charles Reiss, Political Editor, *Evening Standard*

Richard Tait, Director, Centre for Journalism Studies, Cardiff University

Nicholas Timmins, Public Policy Editor, *Financial Times*

Secretary:

David Wilkinson, Cabinet Office

Appendix B

Interim Report

GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATIONS REVIEW GROUP

INTERIM REPORT – 27 August 2003

1 Introduction

This review is addressing the issue of how government should communicate in the widest sense. It aims to bring forward and justify radical recommendations that, if implemented, would help to improve the consistency, honesty, credibility, reliability, accuracy and professional effectiveness of all government communications. The review is not due to report until later in the year, but we have taken a considerable amount of evidence to date, including commissioning some original research, and have started to develop a number of ideas, including thoughts on the structure of the centre. Whilst this is a strictly interim report, it includes our thinking to date on the role of the centre, which the Prime Minister may wish to consider as he reflects on the sort of communications structure he needs at the centre, in the light of recent events.

2 A Breakdown in Trust

Our own research and other evidence to date point to a three-way breakdown in trust between government and politicians, the media and the general public. In our research, respondents were able to recognise and describe trustworthy and untrustworthy styles of communication and associated these styles with a variety of different public sector and commercial organisations. The response of the media to a rigorous and proactive government news management strategy has been to match claim with counterclaim in a challenging and adversarial way, making it difficult for any accurate communication of real achievement to pass unchallenged. Our research suggests that this adversarial relationship between government and the media has resulted in all information being mistrusted when it is believed to have come from "political" sources. The public now expects and believes the worst of politicians and government, even when there is strong objective evidence in favour of the government's position. We consider it vital for the health of our democratic institutions that trust between the government, the media and the public is rebuilt. This will require culture and behaviour change from all parties: politicians, the Civil Service and the media. Our remit does not cover the role of the media, but they need to recognise that their attitude and behaviour is a vital part of the process. So, the first test for any recommendation we make will therefore be:

- i) Will it, over time, help to restore public trust in government and the credibility of government communications?**

3 Professional Approach to Communications across Government

The importance of communications to modern government and modern society means that it cannot be approached in an ad-hoc or amateur fashion. Communications must be strategic and integrated into the policy and delivery strategies, both within departments and across government. Plans for communications in each department and across government should identify the aims of each piece of communication across the cycle of policy development, policy delivery and policy refinement, and choose the channels best suited to that message, deploying the full range of communication techniques and tools. Communications should be an equal and equally respected third in the trinity of government policy-making, public service delivery and communications. A culture within Whitehall that accepts and values communication both departmentally and across government is imperative.

A sample of departments visited by the Review Group showed wide differences in the approach to communications and in the understanding of what communications actually mean. We have found no common approach to communications within government and little evidence of joined-up communications across government. Each department handles communications in their own way, some having wholeheartedly embraced the Mountfield recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of communications but others having paid them less attention. We see little evidence that being good or bad at communications has a significant bearing on prospects for advancement in the wider Civil Service. There are wide variations in the degrees of professionalism within the communications operations and an absence of any comprehensive mechanisms to raise standards across the board. The GICS network is a virtual and voluntary one, offering recruitment and training services that departments can take up or ignore as they see fit, and the GICS centre has neither the authority nor the capability to enforce standards in communications. Our second test for any recommendation is therefore:

ii) Will it increase the professionalism of communications within the Civil Service and foster a more strategic approach to communications?

4 Cross-government Communications

The current structures and processes make it difficult to co-ordinate communications effectively across government, whether that be in response to policies, such as reducing social exclusion, that involve several different departments or crises such as foot and mouth disease. The current “silo” approach of the departments and the fact that the GICS central unit has little or no role to play in developing cross-government communication strategies and may or may not be involved in crisis communications co-ordination seems to militate against effective co-ordination. This results in duplication of effort, contradictory messages and a damagingly slow response to crises. Hence our third test is:

iii) Will it enable better cross-government communications and a speedier and more effective response to crises and unforeseen events?

5 Roles of Special Advisers and Civil Servants

This government has relied heavily upon special advisers to deliver a proactive approach to communications. We believe that special advisers and civil servants both have important, but different, roles to play. Civil servants can and should do more than issue press releases. They can and should explain Ministers’ reasons and justifications for their decisions, actions and policies and their arguments for not taking other possible courses and why they do not accept the criticisms of their opponents. They also have a duty to make government information in the public domain available in an accessible manner and a timely fashion. However, when playing an advocacy role, a civil servant may find that the media wants, for example, to press on the Minister’s underlying political thinking and how the particular point at issue fits in with the Minister’s general approach to politics or the government’s overall political philosophy. This is the preserve of the special advisers. Such a role is welcomed by the media, valued by Ministers, and should take the pressure off civil servants to take advocacy to a point that would compromise the political neutrality of the service. However, there is potential for confusion over respective roles and responsibilities and for civil servants to depart from their neutral and impartial position if special advisers are able to put pressure upon them. This appeared to be the case in the Jo Moore/Martin Sixsmith situation. Hence our fourth and fifth tests:

iv) Does it clarify the differences between the roles of special advisers and Civil Service communications professionals?

v) Does it protect the impartiality of the Civil Service – is this a system that would be accepted on a change of administration?

6 Role of Press Spokespersons

In the current media climate, with many more outlets for news, an adversarial relationship between the media and the government, and the cult of the celebrity fuelling a focus on personalities in all walks of public life, press and media relationships are crucial for all Ministers. They need high personal confidence and trust in their media spokespersons, and they rely on them to have a complete understanding of policy as well as being able to speak for the Minister. We are considering the process whereby press spokespeople are recruited and trained, their movement into, through and out of the Civil Service, the skills and competences of the role and the role of Ministers in their appointment. In this context, our sixth test asks of any recommendation:

vi) Does it recognise the need for a close relationship between the Minister and his or her press spokesperson?

7 Engaging the Public

Government communications must be viewed as part of a dialogue – the system must engage with individuals at all levels and let them voice their views and opinions. This goes far beyond the day-to-day media handling function and means that government must deploy the full range of communications channels now available – especially those with a so-called “return path”. While news handling and daily communication is an important part of modern communications, it is only a part of a portfolio of skills which, in best practice private sector companies, will include research, marketing, website provision, internal communications, PR and paid-for advertising. Effective and efficient communications strategies should take an integrated approach to all communication, from speeches through advertising to public relations, so that, taken together, they make a strategic contribution to the policy and delivery aims and objectives of each government department. To re-engage the public, we believe that more emphasis also needs to be placed on local and regional communications (including the vital role of the public service employees interfacing directly with the public), as these are both more trusted and of greater relevance to individuals. It is important to recognise the role of the general public as customers and stakeholders in the services delivered by government. Hence our seventh test:

vii) Will it enable more regionalised and personalised information and promote a better dialogue with the general public?

8 Ideas under Consideration

Using the seven tests, we are developing a range of recommendations to address the cultural, structural and behavioural issues we have identified. These will be developed as a complete package – no one of them delivers the role for communications we have outlined above, but collectively they are designed to help reduce distrust and disbelief and increase the effectiveness, performance and value of government communications.

The ideas we are developing include:

- a strengthened and more effective central communications function;
- clearer guidelines on the respective responsibilities of civil servants and special advisers, and on propriety issues;
- clearer processes for resolving and arbitrating on disputes about the application of these guidelines;
- more direct, on-camera and on-the-record briefings by Ministers on important events;
- increasing the prevalence of on-the-record briefings for all those speaking to the media;
- a less secretive approach to government information, and a strong application of the Freedom of Information Act;
- clear and independently produced schedules for the publication of routine government information;
- a template for the management of communications within each department;

- a more systematic approach to the appraisal of communications effectiveness and the appraisal of those working within communications across government departments and agencies;
- processes to recruit communications staff both internally and externally that will attract appropriate candidates into both special adviser and civil servant roles;
- increased resources for the Government News Network and greater alignment with departments and the Government Offices in the regions;
- increased resources for government websites and for two-way communications;
- greater use of research to inform policy-making and assess the success of those policies; and
- guidance on styles of communication and language to ensure that meanings and messages are clear and comprehensible.

We have not yet completed our work, so we do not propose to elaborate on the ideas listed above. The list is not comprehensive and in some areas our thinking and recommendations are likely to be modified in light of the work that we are currently undertaking and any relevant findings that may emerge from the Hutton Inquiry. In response to the Prime Minister's request, we have, however, included more detailed thinking on the structures and roles at the centre, which is outlined in the following paragraphs.

9 The Role of the Centre

While we recognise that the formulation and execution of departmental communication strategies should be carried out by the departments, either individually or collectively, there are several important roles for the centre of government communications. These include:

- developing and ensuring the implementation of a communications strategy across government. This covers medium-term communications strategies and co-ordination on issues that cut across departments, such as anti-drugs policies or support for low-income families;
- acting as a centre of expertise for the development of professional standards. This is important in the context of our second test;
- providing support for the Prime Minister in Number 10's communications, including the co-ordination of day-to-day media handling across government;
- providing leadership for the recruitment, training and career development of communications staff in government;
- acting as the focal point for co-ordination of communications in crisis situations;
- appraising and measuring the effectiveness of communications expenditure and activity across government; and
- auditing the implementation of propriety guidelines, and acting as a high-level arbitrator in disputes about their application that cannot be resolved within departments.

These roles imply the need for a more powerful, authoritative centre than GICS currently provides. The current structures at the centre fall short of what is needed in several significant ways. The GICS centre is detached from the development of policy in Number 10, is not involved in the day-to-day thinking on communications issues at the centre, and has little influence on departmental communications activities. Its lack of authority and involvement means it is unable to carry out many of the roles listed above. The communications function at Number 10 is under-resourced, and, notwithstanding the executive powers granted by the Order in Council, has had difficulties in co-ordinating and mobilising resources when it needs to do so. The fact that the Director of Communication and Strategy is a political appointment, and the power and status attached to this role, have led to a perception, in some sections of the media and population at large, that, at the highest level, government communications are being driven by an overtly political agenda.

We considered whether the centre could work more effectively if the role and powers of the Director of Communication and Strategy were strengthened. Given this is the most influential role in government communications, and, by virtue of being a special adviser, the occupant is not required to be impartial

in the same way that civil servants are, we concluded that while this might pass our third test (**Will it enable better cross-government communications and a speedier and more effective response to crises and unforeseen events?**), it would, in the current climate, do little to satisfy the first test (**Will it, over time, help to restore public trust in government and the credibility of government communications?**).

In order to perform effectively, the centre needs two separate but complementary communications entities. The first of these should be a strong Civil Service-led communications unit, based in the Cabinet Office. This would work with the government of the day, irrespective of its political persuasion. It would be a centre of excellence for communications across the Civil Service and would work in close partnership with communications professionals in the departments and agencies but would also independently appraise and audit their performance. The second requirement is for a well resourced communications function supporting the Prime Minister and based at Number 10, which would include civil servants and political appointees.

A new Permanent Secretary, Government Communications should lead the central Civil Service communications unit. The Permanent Secretary, Government Communications would report to the Head of the Civil Service and would attend the weekly Permanent Secretaries meeting, as well as Cabinet meetings as and when required. He or she would work closely with the Prime Minister and his personally appointed communications adviser to agree a cross-government communications strategy, and would be responsible for overseeing its delivery across government. There would be five main functions reporting to the Permanent Secretary, Government Communications:

- strategic development and planning, looking longer term at the communications strategies needed to deliver the government's key policy priorities and the means whereby these might be achieved. This would also include responsibility for ensuring effective e-communications, stakeholder and customer relations, access to government and regional communications strategies;
- media and press, responsible for daily and weekly cross-governmental co-ordination, crisis news handling and the Prime Minister's Official Spokespersons;
- cross-government co-ordination of research, marketing and campaigns, including the work currently carried out by the COI;
- recruitment, training and career development, covering all Senior Civil Service communication posts and concentrating on raising professionalism and standards; and
- appraisal of the performance and effectiveness of communications activity, including departmental reviews of cost effectiveness and professionalism, and public accountability for the application of propriety guidelines via an annual report to the Public Administration Select Committee (PASC).

Working alongside this central Civil Service-led unit would be a strengthened communications unit based at Number 10 and supporting the Prime Minister. This would have two key appointments: one political, one governmental. They would be responsible for implementing Number 10's overall communications strategy, with a particular focus on shorter-term media and news handling, including cross-government co-ordination and crisis response. We are still in the process of considering appropriate titles for these roles, but for ease of use have given the political role the working title of the Prime Minister's Director of Communication, and the Civil Service role the working title of Deputy to the Permanent Secretary, Government Communications and Prime Minister's Senior Official Spokesperson. This latter position would have special responsibility within Number 10 for the Civil Service communications operations.

The Number 10 operation would be led politically on a day-to-day basis on the Prime Minister's behalf by the Prime Minister's Director of Communication, who would be a political appointee. He or she would be the Prime Minister's senior political adviser on communications strategy and implementation, including acting as the Prime Minister's spokesperson on personal and political matters. He or she would work closely with the Permanent Secretary, Government Communications and the Deputy, providing the political perspective on behalf of the Prime Minister and assisting Cabinet Ministers with the political

context for departmental communications. He or she would attend Cabinet Meetings as and when required. In addition, the Prime Minister's Director of Communication should play a role in co-ordinating the communication activities of special advisers throughout government and arbitrating, with the Permanent Secretary, Government Communications, on any disputes between civil servants and special advisers that could not be resolved within departments.

The personal authority and influence of the Prime Minister's Director of Communication within Number 10 and across Whitehall would be based on his or her close political relationship with, and access to, the Prime Minister. The Group's view, after taking into account the current climate, is that formal line management powers over individual civil servants would be unnecessary and should not be vested in this role. The Order in Council should not apply in future to the position of Prime Minister's Director of Communication.

Civil Service leadership within the Number 10 communications unit should be the responsibility of the other key figure, a civil servant who should act as the Deputy to the Permanent Secretary, Government Communications with special responsibility for Number 10, as well as being the Prime Minister's Senior Official Spokesperson. He or she would be responsible for any other PMOSs and would attend Cabinet Meetings as appropriate and take day-to-day responsibility for news co-ordination across Whitehall.

The presence of a strengthened centre would provide for direction of civil servants on communications matters by both the Permanent Secretary, Government Communications and his or her Deputy, based in Number 10.

The Group believes that these arrangements recognise the reality that the Number 10 communications effort has to reflect the political context, while more clearly delineating the non-political role of civil servants.

We recommend that the Strategic Communications Unit should be renamed the Prime Minister's Communications Support Unit, to avoid confusion with the Strategic Planning and Development function reporting to the Permanent Secretary, Government Communications, and that its functions should be reviewed. As now, this unit would be populated by both civil servants and special advisers – the former would report to the Deputy to the Permanent Secretary, Government Communications and the latter to the Prime Minister's Director of Communication.

We are still considering the detail of how the roles of Permanent Secretary, Government Communications, his or her Deputy and the Prime Minister's Director of Communication will relate to each other, and would expect the Civil Service to take responsibility for the design of any resultant organisational structure. However, we wish to stress that the overwhelming priority for any organisational design will be the need for these three people to work together effectively as part of a central communications team.

10 Next Steps

During the remainder of our work, we expect to refine and develop these proposals and those listed in section 8. We plan to discuss their feasibility and detail with interested parties and those with experience of the centre, and no doubt the specifics of our thinking will change as a result of such discussions. While we have focused on changes needed within government, we are also taking evidence from the media and considering their role and responsibilities. However, we believe that the main points of our recommendations are now becoming reasonably clear and would like to emphasise the major change in structure, responsibilities, behaviour and culture across government implicit in our recommendations. We hope that this interim note will be of use to the Prime Minister as he considers the arrangements for communications in the centre of government during the coming weeks.

Appendix C

Methodology

At the time our Review started, we were able to draw upon oral evidence submitted to the Committee on Standards in Public Life (Committee) from June to September 2002 as part of its investigation into the relationship between Ministers, special advisers and permanent civil servants. The Committee made its report during our Review⁷ and we were able to consider its recommendations and the subsequent government response. We also were able to include evidence submitted to the Public Administration Select Committee, who were responsible for our genesis, and the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, who took evidence in June and July 2003. This wealth of existing oral evidence enabled us to focus our evidence-gathering on the views of the general public and those working within government communications.

At the outset of the Review, the Committee asked the COI to summarise any existing quantitative or qualitative research on the views of the general public on government communications in the widest sense. This was supplemented by our own qualitative research, carried out by Opinion Leader Research. We considered it essential to understand what the public thought about the issues and what influenced its views, in either a positive or a negative sense.

We issued a call for written evidence using our own website and letters sent to some 260 organisations and individuals, 19 of which represented the general public, 193 the media and 49 Westminster and Whitehall. In response we had 52 written submissions. We visited the Home Office, Department of Trade and Industry, Northern Ireland Office, Department for Work and Pensions, Department of Health and the Treasury to see how communications were managed in these departments. We also had discussions with DFID, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and DEFRA as well as the Government Office for the West Midlands and the Government News Network West Midlands Office. Beyond the London-based departments, we also considered the communications activity across England and in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

To aid our thinking on specific themes we held three seminars: one with journalists on the theme of direct or unmediated communications; one on the theme of alternative models for government communication, with British, American and French contributors; and one examining the relevance of the private sector, with communications experts from various private companies.

We took oral evidence from: Mike Granatt, Director General, GICS; Alastair Campbell, former Director of Strategy and Communications at Number 10; Baroness Prashar and the Civil Service Commissioners; Peter Hyman and Judith Thomas from the Number 10 Strategic Communications Unit; Dick Emery and Mel Williams of the Advisory Committee on Advertising; Sir Nigel Wicks, Chairman of the Committee on Standards in Public Life; the Rt Hon Alastair Darling MP, Secretary of State for Transport; Andrew Pinder, the e-Envoy and Paul Waller and Bill Edwards from the Office of the e-Envoy; Maurice Frankel, Director of the Campaign for Freedom of Information; Sir Bernard Ingham, previously Chief Press Secretary to Margaret Thatcher; Trevor Kavanagh, Political Editor, *The Sun*; David Hughes, Political Editor, the *Daily Mail*; Len Cook, Director of the Office for National Statistics; Alan Bishop, Chief Executive of the COI; Alan Rusbridger, Editor, *The Guardian*; Martin Sixsmith, previously Director of Communication at the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions; Ian McKenzie, Special Adviser to the Deputy Prime Minister; Jonathan Baume, General Secretary of the FDA; Gary Graham of Prospect; Lord Filkin, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State and Sir Hayden Phillips, Permanent Secretary, and others from the Department for Constitutional Affairs; Adam Boulton of Sky News; Andrew Marr of the BBC; Nick Robinson of ITV; Alice Perkins, Director General, Corporate Development Group, Cabinet Office; Professor David Rhind, Chairman and Richard Alldrit, Chief Executive of the Statistics Commission; David Newell and Lynne Anderson of the Newspaper Society; Sir Andrew Turnbull, Cabinet Secretary; Sir Robin Mountfield, former Permanent Secretary; Dr Tony Wright MP, Chairman and Philip Aylett,

⁷ *Committee on Standards in Public Life's Ninth Report Defining Boundaries within the Executive: Ministers, Special Advisers and the Permanent Civil Service. A copy can be obtained from their website at www.public-standards.gov.uk*

Clerk of the Public Administration Select Committee; Sir Christopher Meyer, Press Complaints Commission; David Turner, *Financial Times*; Judith Judd, *Times Educational Supplement*; Alan Travis, *The Guardian*; John Husband, *The Mirror*; John O'Leary, *Times Higher Educational Supplement*; Alexander McLenna, *Health Services Journal*. We also held a session with all Whitehall Directors of Communication.

We considered several case studies to look at how communications had been handled in a number of different scenarios – the outbreak of foot and mouth disease, the firefighters' dispute, armoured vehicles sent to Heathrow and the Iraq war. In these cases we spoke to those involved in the decision-making on how to handle communications and also considered any reviews that had already been carried out, including a specially commissioned analysis by the Cardiff University School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies of the credibility of official information during the Iraq war.

We reviewed a considerable amount of existing evidence and material, including: the Mountfield Report (November 1997); the first progress report on implementing Mountfield (June 1998); the Public Administration Select Committee Report on the Government Information and Communication Service (August 1998); Government Response to the Public Administration Select Committee Report (January 1999); second progress report on implementing Mountfield (January 1999); the Sixth Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life *Reinforcing Standards* (January 2000); Government Response to the Sixth Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (July 2000); the Public Administration Select Committee Report on Special Advisers *Boon or Bane?* (March 2001); Government Response to Public Administration Select Committee Report on Special Advisers (December 2001); Public Administration Select Committee Report *These Unfortunate Events: Lessons of Recent Events at the Former DTLR* (July 2002); Government Response to Public Administration Select Committee Report *These Unfortunate Events* (February 2003); transcript of the Prime Minister's appearance before the House of Commons Liaison Committee (16 July 2002); evidence given to Committee on Standards in Public Life in its inquiry into the relationship between Ministers, special advisers and permanent civil servants (June to September 2002); Ninth Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life *Defining Boundaries within the Executive* (April 2003); Government Response to the Ninth Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (September 2003); and the Centre for Policy Studies' pamphlet *The Erosion of Parliamentary Government* by John Major (October 2003).