

Annex A - Report of scoping workshops, May 2012

On 2 and 3 May 2012 the Government Office for Science (GO-Science) organised two workshops to discuss some of the changes taking place in the Civil Service, explore the current challenges facing scientists and engineers, and consider implications for the science and engineering professional community.

Participants included members of the government science and engineering community (GSE), representatives from other professions in the civil service and representatives from the wider science and engineering community, including professional bodies. Prospect union and sector skills councils also participated.

Starter topics

Four 'starter' topics (based on issues known or believed to be current) were presented to stakeholders in the form of questions.

How can scientists and engineers in the civil service build their reputation and effectiveness?

This was about keeping professional knowledge and networks up-to-date, remaining externally credible as practitioners and accessing external expertise (for example by gaining recognized accreditations, completing appropriate CPD or useful benchmarking). It was also about ways of working, ability to apply professional know-how and expertise within civil service contexts, and the standing of the GSE profession.

How can we ensure the Civil Service offers positive career pathways to scientists and engineers?

This was about how scientists and engineers might feel about their career prospects working in the civil service, and the support available for personal development. For example, by perceiving clear and credible career pathways and helpful networks and communities.

How can we ensure science and engineering advice is available in timely fashion?

This was about more systematic and creative ways of commissioning and supplying science and engineering advice to decision-makers, with particular concern for visibility, ease-of-access, timeliness, and working across disciplines and government organisations.

How can scientists and engineers have greater impact and influence on decision making?

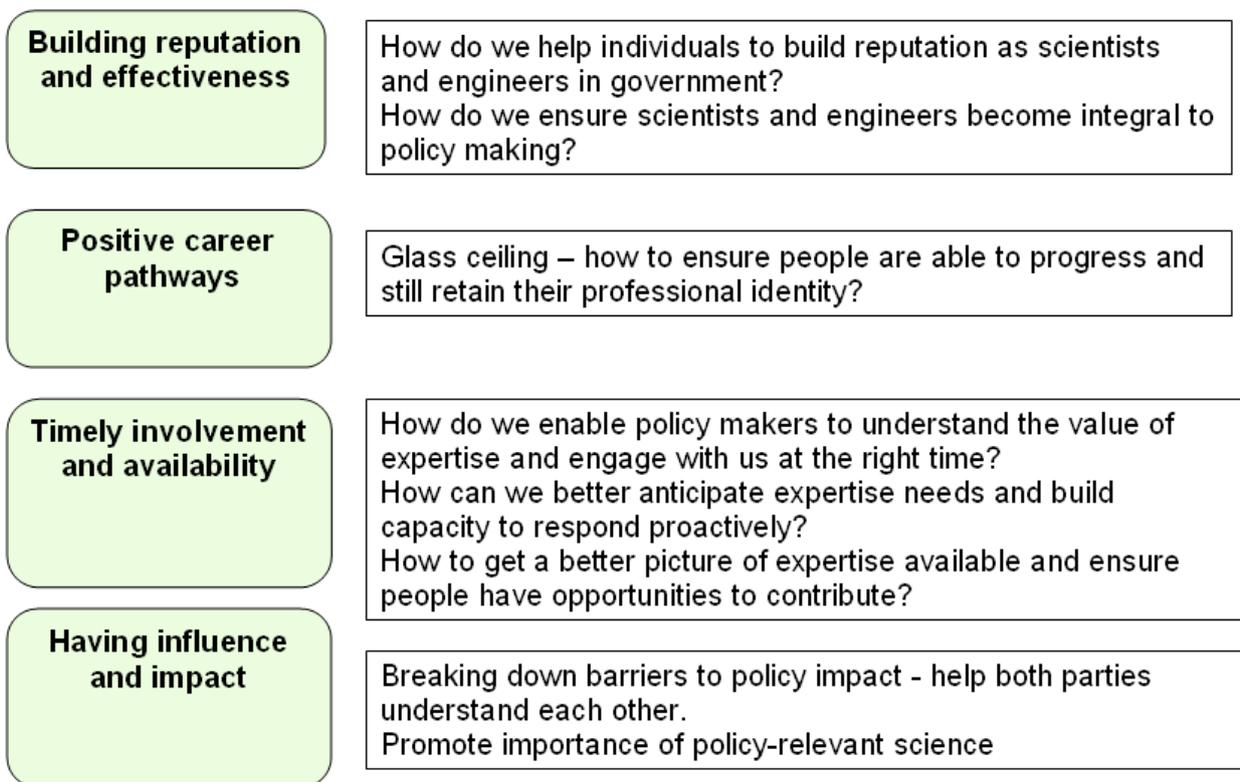
There were thought to be two aspects to this. As a professional community, how can scientists and engineers make a greater strategic contribution to major programmes? As

individuals, how can scientists and engineers be more influential within their own organisations?

Eight key themes developed by participants in discussions

The opening topics proved to be resonant with a wide range of stakeholder concerns, and provided a basis across the two workshops to elicit eight themes or questions for further enquiry.

Figure 1 – Key themes identified in discussions



Extended discussions that took place round these headings, where participants considered questions such as:

What will help address these issues?

What will get in the way?

What can be learnt from other professions or organisations outside the civil service?

The following issues arose:

(i) **Supply side** encompasses issues such as approaches for or barriers to the GSE profession recruiting and developing talent, supporting progression and harnessing available expertise better. This includes encouraging proactive self-management of development

and the profession providing guidance on realistic career pathways. Individuals should also be encouraged to develop behaviours and skills (particularly communication and knowledge of wider context) to improve relevance and impact of advice. Scientists and engineers have a valuable role to play in appraising and communicating risks and uncertainties relevant to decisions. Training is required to maintain and realise the full value of these presentational skills.

There was strong support for taking steps to build a better picture of the 'map of expertise' across the civil service' and ensure knowledge and know-how is visible, traceable, available and can be accessed quickly by the use of appropriate IT platforms, directories and other usable tools.

An important part of supply capability was felt to be a need for ongoing 'GSE' workforce planning to help 'future proof' the civil service's ability to access science and engineering expertise.

(ii) **Demand side** encompasses mechanisms for identifying the need for science and engineering advice and the commissioning of contributions by policy officials in purposeful and skilful ways, and for the profession to better understand and address limiting perceptions (e.g., that scientists or engineers 'don't understand' policy or are only able to make narrow technical contributions). It was vital to ensure that scientists and engineers have opportunities to develop awareness and experience of the wider context for science or engineering advice (including policy and operational spheres) and be able to engage effectively with these colleagues in other professions.

(iii) **Interface** issues encompass questions such as the roles of scientists and engineers as 'facilitators' to source expertise, translate policy issues into research questions and translate science and engineering evidence into implications for decision makers. Multidisciplinary working was felt to be important: scientists and engineers have a valuable role to play in promoting understanding and communication across different disciplines and professional functions. Concrete measures were needed to raise the profile of the value of science and engineering advice. Suggestions included the introduction of an obligation across the civil service for all submissions to have a 'sign-off box' for science or engineering advice.

Some specific issues arose relating to the structure of the civil service, For example:

Getting better at working across departmental boundaries

Making career progression possible without abandoning credibility as a scientist or engineer

Ensuring terms and conditions of service are comparable with outside employers and parity across the civil service with similar grades).

These would need further discussion with departments and in the context of Civil Service reform.

Next steps

The initial workshops were well attended and supported with numerous offers to assist the review. The issues raised at the workshops will form the framework for further analysis and discussion with the science and engineering community in government and with other key partners in and outside the civil service. These issues also form an important part of the contribution from the science and engineering profession to contribute to dialogue around Civil Service Reform.

The conversational nature of review process is likely to be useful in itself in understanding how early interventions such as short learning seminars might be helpful in improving 'science-policy' dialogue. It is also expected the review process will help identify steps that individual scientists and engineers, the professions, departments and the civil service as a whole can take to realise the full value that science and engineering contributions can provide if they are appropriately integrated into decision making.

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