

New government needs a new consensus on public employment footprint

The role of direct public employment should be given more serious consideration by policy-makers, according to a report published today, which marks the launch of a research programme to measure the 'footprint' of public employment locally.

The report, ***'Towards A Future for Public Employment'***, is the start of joint research programme established by The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) with the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) and Dr Stephen Griggs from the Institute for Local Government Studies (INLOGOV) to explore issues relating to local public services and the role of public employment. Further research will map out the 'economic footprint' and 'governance footprint' of public services in a chosen neighbourhood.

APSE's Chief Executive, Paul O'Brien said: ***"This report was borne out of a sense of frustration with current thinking on public services, which fails to acknowledge the pivotal role direct employment plays in the UK's economy and society. It is intended to open up debate on a matter that has been neglected by policy-makers, government and public sector bodies. In APSE's opinion, it would be foolish for public bodies to divest themselves of their employment responsibilities and pursue a purely commissioning or enabling role. Brown's new government must help develop a new consensus on the value of public employment"***

The report challenges government and public organisations to consider the value of direct employment in the development of future policies. It argues that, with almost six million people currently employed in the public sector, direct public employment could set a benchmark of excellence for ethical employment standards and for the contribution of employment to holistic public sector policy aims. It suggests that the private and voluntary sectors could then be assessed against this benchmark.

Neil McInroy, Chief Executive of CLES said ***"It is not an attempt to justify certain employment practices in the public sector, but an attempt to redefine the role and purpose of public employment and provide a stimulus to progressive debate. For us, public employment is a key tool by which the public sector can shape place. As such it is vital that we explore the broad and deep value it brings to the local economy, civil society and the environment"***

'Towards A Future for Public Employment' argues that the prevailing perspective on public employment is too narrow, especially in light of demographic trends such as population growth and an increasing number of people of pensionable age, which place changing demands on public services. It builds up the strategic case for direct public employment by demonstrating its benefits in terms of: impact on the local economy; shaping places; cost and efficiency; local democratic accountability; and realising the potential of the local workforce. It also contains examples of how these benefits are achieved in practice by public bodies.

It addresses misconceptions commonly associated with public employment, charts progress in boosting efficiency and performance and highlights the importance of the values embodied in public employment, such as equality and diversity. Dr Steven Griggs

of INLOGOV commented "***Governance and accountability of our public services sits comfortably with the concept of the value of public employment. If we are to analyse the impact of public sector employment across society, the local economy, and the public sector ethos we can attribute much of this to the value of public employment***"

APSE, CLES and researchers from INLOGOV set out a hypothesis which will be tested out through two further pieces of detailed research in a particular neighbourhood. These will measure the impact of public employment on local economies and patterns of governance and accountability.

Notes for editors:

1) The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) has established a joint research programme with the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) and researchers from the Institute for Local Government Studies (INLOGOV) to explore the role of direct public employment in both service delivery and strategic terms. APSE has 300 members who provide front-line services in councils across the UK and brings expertise in front-line service delivery. CLES is a think-tank and consultancy specialising in economic development and regeneration and brings policy development grounded in practice in local communities. INLOGOV spans the boundaries between authoritative research and effective local governance and service provision.

2) Office of National Statistics' labour market statistics for April 2007 put the number of people employed in the public sector at 5.83 million. Quartile figures up to December 2006 show all sectors experiencing a growth in jobs overall but the largest annual increases in jobs by sector were in education, health and public administration which increased by some 96,000. A total of 2.5 m of these public sector workers are employed in local government

3) The number of people of age (male at aged 65 and female at 60) showed an increase from 2002- to mid 2005 of 3% whilst the overall population increase was at 1.6% (England). These trends are reflected in service planning for health and social care but also have an impact upon service delivery elements of local authority services such as refuse collection, parks and leisure services as well as social care responding to the needs of the growing older population.

4.) Direct public employment is where employees are engaged directly by public sector employers as opposed to employees working on public sector work through contractual or outsourcing arrangements.

5) To arrange for interview please contact Mo Baines at APSE on 0161 772 1810 or mobile (weekend number) 07971 843515.

6) Copies of the report for press purposes can be obtained from Mo Baines, at APSE, on 0161 772 1810 or email mbaines@apse.org.uk

Mo Baines
Principal Advisor