

Finance and Public Administration Committee - National Performance Framework Ambitions into Action

Dr Ian C. Elliott response to consultation

I am a Senior Lecturer in Public Leadership and Management at Northumbria University and current Honorary Chair of the UK Joint University Council. My research interests centre particularly on the concept of the strategic state.

I have been conducting research into the National Performance Framework since 2016 looking at the establishment, development and impact of the NPF over time. My research is qualitative and longitudinal in approach and has been conducted over two key stages.

The fieldwork for the first stage took place in 2016 and included 10 interviews with current and former leaders from the Scottish Government up to and including Permanent Secretary level. The focus of this stage was the initial development of the National Performance Framework including associated activities such as the restructuring of the Scottish Government and leadership development.

The second stage of fieldwork started in 2020 and is ongoing (delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic). To date I have completed 9 interviews with leaders both within and outwith the Scottish Government. The focus of this stage has been around developments since 2016 including the refresh in 2018.

The first stage of my research was published in *Public Money and Management* in 2020. In this article I explain the initial rationale for the NPF, how it was developed, and what impact it had. These impacts were found to be primarily in relation to the internal workings and organisational culture of the Scottish government. In particular, the significant investment in leadership development, centred around adaptive leadership and public value, helped to instil a commitment to a more strategic approach to government across directorates. I argue that this reflects the characteristics of a strategic state. Key success factors were found to be 1) a supportive political environment; 2) strong administrative leadership and 3) a clear vision for change.

The second stage of the research is ongoing. However, initial findings have identified some of the challenges inherent in developing a strategic state even in the context of a relatively small polity. In particular it is found that the moves to widen the scope of the strategic approach from a 'whole-of-government' to 'whole-of-society' approach without increased investment, particularly in learning and development activities, have placed greater pressure on the aspiration to be a strategic state. There are challenges around capacity and capability – in relation to workforce planning, talent management and broader education, training and development. The lack of learning

opportunities is no more evident than in the higher education sector where there is currently only one MPA program and one MPP program across Scotland. This is in comparison to around 6 MPA and MPP programs in both the US States of Minnesota and South Carolina (both with equivalent population sizes to Scotland). Finally, the administrative leadership and clear vision that were present in the initial development of the NPF have diminished over time.