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TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

International Series

UK Civil Service and the Policy Profession | Sir Chris Wormald KCB

Thursday 20 June 2019

Hotel Realm, Canberra

- Alison Larkins: Now, it's my pleasure to introduce our keynote speaker. Sir Chris Wormald was appointed Permanent Secretary of the Department of Health, now the Department of Health and Social Care, in May 2016. And prior to joining the Department of Health and Social Care, he was the Permanent Secretary at the Department of Education. He joined the Civil Service in 1991 as a fast dreamer at the then Department of Education and Science and went on to work in a range of posts in education policy, including spells as the Principal Private Secretary to Estelle Morris and Charles Clark who were both cabinet ministers with a responsibility for education.
- Alison Larkins: He then took on the role of Director General for local government and regeneration at the then Department of Communications and local government. He's held senior roles in the cabinet office in the UK, including Director General of Public Service Reform, headed the economic and domestic secretariat and Director General in the Deputy PM's office. And importantly, for today's proceedings, Sir Chris is also head of the UK's Policy Profession board who have just produced a summary review of progress on their 12 actions to professionalise policy making in the UK report.
- Alison Larkins: So, if you could please join with me in welcoming Sir Chris to the lectern.
- Sir Chris: Thank you very much and it's a pleasure to be here, thank you Alison, thank you to the Institute for hosting this. I'm going to pace up and down as I do this. I mainly do this to make it difficult for the photographers. I hate photos of myself, I turn out to be much shorter, rounder and balder than I think I actually am. But anyway.
- Sir Chris: Right, what I thought I would do is basically just tell the story of what we have done in the Policy Profession in the UK with the hope that we can then contrast it with what you all are doing here. Two giant caveats to what I say. One is, we do not in the slightest believe we have corrected all these issues. We do think we have made quite a lot of progress but I'll try and be reasonably blunt about where we think we've done well and where we think we've done badly. But we are certainly not in the position that we think this is a done deal.
- Sir Chris: And secondly, there's quite a lot on the retrospective in what I'm about to say. So quite a lot of the things we did, because we thought they were a good idea at the time, and we have subsequently put them into a framework that sort of makes sense. And I'd make almost no attempt to apply it to your position. Now, I don't know that much about how the Australian system works. I've watched both series of Secret City. But, I understand it's not always exactly like that.
- Sir Chris: So we've already done a bit of my career. That's the sort of summary of it. Basically, I do social policy and microeconomics, that's my background. So most of the examples I will use will be drawn from those two things. I don't really do national security or big macroeconomics, happy to have a go at questions around those or indeed anything else.
- Sir Chris: Just for contrast and to illustrate some of our challenges. That's my, whatever it is, 27 year career or something. Those are the same years in public policy reform. We, on our side of the planet, have done really rather a remarkable number of different types of approach to public services. And simply looking at the list of different things we have tried, first observation is quite clearly, it's far too many. That jumps out at everyone.
- Sir Chris: But secondly, they're almost all structural solutions. They're almost all starting from the principle that the way we improve things is to muck around with the structure of how government works and where power sits in the system and all those sorts of things. A lot of them really interesting, a lot of them do lead to useful changes. But

they're all actually, or even though there is a large number of them, they're actually the same types of reform.

Sir Chris: And what we were trying to do in the civil service, looking at both the Policy Profession but also the functional agenda that it sits within, was actually to try and look much more at what the people do and what are the skills of the people and how do they work together as opposed to what are the structures that they sit within, as it were.

Sir Chris: So that was the sort of underlying philosophy of why we got into this business at all. Just to say a bit about what we actually think the Profession is: there are about 20,000 of us in the UK Civil Service who self-identify as being policy professionals. But the important thing is the inclusive bit. We are not attempting to establish a cadre of policy makers and only they are allowed to make a policy. So we're strictly not a profession.

Sir Chris: Now, in my day job, running health, professions are very specific things where you have a licence to practise. We categorically don't want that. We do want to focus on the people who think they are policy professionals but we also want to focus on everyone who is making policy, be they an economist or statistician or a lawyer. We want lots of people working to the same frameworks, some of whom think they are formally part of the Policy Profession but others who will recognise the technique. So the idea is it's inclusive.

Sir Chris: We've also run it as a cooperative. We have not attempted to do a giant top down, here is the UK government's approach to policy, everyone get on with it. We're basically a cooperative of policy departments, we all chuck some money into a levy pot which is how we fund it and we run it very definitely as an alliance of departments who are cooperating because they want to. So voluntarism is a big principle of what we do.

Sir Chris: We focus on how we advise and how we train and develop. We do not get into the substance of policy at all. Absolute red line for us. We talk about how policy is made and how we make that better. I, as head of profession, would never comment on the substance of policy, that is rightly a matter for ministers and for individual departments. We look at the how policy is made, not the what.

Sir Chris: And this, I won't talk through all of it, but this is the basic sort of story of what we did. The big starting point was the Civil Service Reform Plan, published by what was then a new government, coming in after a very long period of Labour Party government. And it had an agenda to reform the Civil Service. And we had a look at, okay, what's the Policy Profession contribution to that when we published our 12 actions to professionalised policy in 2013 which I'll say a bit more about in a moment.

Sir Chris: Though the fact that we did it, the fact that we actually sat down and said, "We don't think we're good enough at making policy, even though it's something the UK Civil Service has always been tremendously proud of, but we don't think we're good enough and we're going to do something about it," was more important than the substance of the 12 actions as it were. That public statement that we needed to professionalise, more important than the individual components.

Sir Chris: And I'll say this again on another slide. An awful lot of what we put in the original action plan, we have subsequently concluded we were aiming at slightly the wrong targets. Doesn't matter actually, the point was to provoke a debate about how we made policy and say our old way of doing it which was basically to recruit a huge number of exceptionally bright people from Oxford and Cambridge or UCL or

Imperial, top universities, stick them in rooms and say, "You're so clever, get on with it." And I only stereotype a little.

Sir Chris: But that model of how you make policy might have been good enough for the 19th century, certainly not good enough for the 21st. And it was that statement that was more important than the detail. And we've done a whole series of things a lot of which I will talk through in more detail to get us to 2019. And now is the point when we are stepping back one and say, "Okay, what's the future agenda?" We finished the 12 actions, we've reviewed them, we've concluded which ones we think are good and bad and as a point to move on.

Sir Chris: And one of the reasons we're here is actually looking at what other jurisdictions do. We've been in New Zealand before here, we also do quite a lot of work with the Canadians and others. To hear what other people do is very good for us in saying, "Okay, what's the next iteration of this?"

Sir Chris: What we actually do is basically these sorts of activities. Almost all in the how do we create frameworks for good policy. I won't talk through them but if you are actually ask what those ... Richard, which wave, Richard, runs my policy profession support unit and actually does all the work for which I take credit. What does he actually do is basically these things.

Sir Chris: And we have some rankings, I don't know if you know the International Civil Service Effectiveness rankings. So, we came third in the latest iteration. We are very irritated to be below Finland and Denmark. But we remain better than both of them at both Snooker and darts. So we are not finished as a country, yet. I probably shouldn't say that, should I?

Sir Chris: Actually, most of the people at the top of these rankings, the scores are very, very close, actually, and the subdivisions are more important than the ranking. So this is how it came out overall. When we looked at the UK Civil Service as a whole which, policy making lives over here, it was one of our better scores. What were we weakest at? By miles, digital services. That's a by miles. Interesting, though, because we put a lot of effort into digital services but clearly not as much as a lot of other countries. So if we're looking at areas where we need to improve our government overall, that bit stands out really quite big.

Sir Chris: And then on policy specifically, this is the breakdown on scores and actually quite an interesting picture which we found we entirely agreed with. So on the right hand side of this chart, the policy coordinations, strategic planning, central expertise, use of academics, basically we scored very, very highly. All the IQ things. All the things we have traditionally focused on in the UK Civil Service were all our high scores.

Sir Chris: On the other side of the chart over here, this side, where we scored comparatively lower is all about how we reach out into our system. National standards is actually about some national governance and monitoring and managing agencies. For us the agencies are the things that actually go out and deliver things. So it gives us this picture of the central thinking bit being very, very powerful, which it is. We're highly centralised statement on those centralised states in the OECD of our size.

Sir Chris: But then, it's reach out into the system and actually turning all that policy thinking into action, we are comparatively weaker at. And we basically agree with that assessment. What they played back to us was basically what we think.

Sir Chris: So, turning to the 12 actions. These are the 12 that we originally set with some nice little symbols which got tick, we think we did it. And the other ones is a work in

progress symbol i.e. we didn't. It's a reasonably mixed picture. I pick up a number of these as we go through.

Sir Chris: We are overall pretty pleased with how we did when we actually did the assessment. We did a lot of the assessment by peer review which some people in this room contributed to. But, there are some really interesting things which we definitely need to work on further.

Sir Chris: Some particularly big ones may, and I'll say a bit more about some of these later, the fourth one, we have definitely had more of a challenge than we expected to have. But how do you really measure the progress of all this? How do you actually tell if your policy making is any good? So we've done a lot of good stuff which we think has made a difference. Could I, hand on heart, say policy making in the Department of Health that I run is better this year than it was last year? No, I can't as it were.

Sir Chris: So one of our big focuses going forward, and we're doing some work with the London School of Economics on and we would like to do more work internationally on. I think peer reviewing is a really interesting way into this is how do you actually measure whether you are good at it? Whether the end product of the advice is actually a really good thing. So there's that area.

Sir Chris: And some of the training and development ones. And again, I'll say a bit more later. We have made a lot of progress here but quite asymmetrically. So we are very pleased with what we have done around induction training, we've got a new policy of apprenticeship that we are very happy with. We've revamped all our graduate training, that's worked really well. We've also done really well for our senior civil service. We've got Masters in Public Policy that we do as a joint venture with the LSE that we're extremely pleased with. We want to go considerably further on that.

Sir Chris: We do much worse in the gap between the two. We have a sort of missing middle of what is the right training and development offer for what we would call team leaders, grade sevens, principals, whatever, not sure what they're called here. But that bit where you're not a new graduate anymore but you haven't reached senior management. We've struggled much more with how do you set the right standard and what's the right training and development offer.

Sir Chris: And in our system, that's when we lose really good people. Now, the graduate schemes always get benchmarked brilliantly. If you get to the senior civil service, you tend to stay. The point where we tend to lose people is in that middle bit where we haven't quite cracked the what's that layer of management really for? So that's the thing we'll need to look at going forward as well.

Sir Chris: So, this just summarises, and I won't talk through it, what we think we've done well and those areas where we think we have further to go. We did think it was important to be quite blunt about what we think has worked and what hasn't. Because this is not a ministerial thing, this is what we, as a Civil Service, decided to do. We can actually be really open and honest about we got it wrong in some areas. So, we try to be very, very blunt about that.

Sir Chris: Now, this is our basic model of what we think we're doing, that we have developed what we actually think policy is. And the way we describe it to policy makers is what we're really trying to do is live in that thing there. Being the people who can balance all that great analysis, fit it with the democratic system and politics and actually make it happen.

Sir Chris: Now, the way we describe it, and therefore the way we structure our programmes is you're not necessarily the expert in any of those things. So what's the role of the

policy maker? It's actually to be the coraller of other expertise and the person who can put all that apples and pears information together in a way in which you can make public policy. And I'll come back to the importance of that in our system in a bit.

- Sir Chris: But that's what we basically think we're trying to achieve. And then, what we have done is we took the 12 actions and we said, "Basically, we need to simplify this. Twelve is too many." That was one of the mistakes we made. So we now talk about an agenda that is in these three blocks. So everything we do around the policy profession is basically about being more open, more professional and more consistent. And I will say a bit more about those in a bit more detail of what we're doing and why.
- Sir Chris: So I start with the open bit. This is basically the message that if you're a civil service policy maker, or any sort of policy maker, you have to look outwards not inwards. It is that saying taking a load of bright people and sticking them in a room, getting to the answer and then declaring it to an expectant world is not the way that we should make policy. We need to be looking out to other jurisdictions, to our international relationships, to universities, think-tanks and all those sorts of things. But also, at the bottom of this chart, to real people.
- Sir Chris: So it is all the work we do around behavioural insights that I know you do a lot of here, a lot of our digital engagement works, policy lab there is in fact a set of ethnographic approaches to policy making. So opening up in that way, too.
- Sir Chris: Now, if I'm honest, we're better at the top half than the bottom half and when we were in New Zealand earlier this week who don't have the grand policy hinterland that we have or think-tanks and world-class universities and all those sorts of things, actually, they do a lot more than we do on reaching out to real communities.
- Sir Chris: We've had a really interesting contrast and things we can bring to each other is they do a lot, lot more of putting policy makers in rooms with difficult communities to actually have the debate. Whereas we are probably more at home at the university seminar, a really interesting set of a contrast. So, open in all those aspects of the word open.
- Sir Chris: The consistent bit. This one is probably our minister's biggest criticism of us when I talk to ministers, actually, of all political parties. Basically, what they say is a lot of the policy advice I get, absolutely top notch, as good as you get from Goldman's or McKinsey's or any professional we have. They're absolutely world-class. And then, I get stuff that I don't want to read.
- Sir Chris: And interestingly, they say they get very, very little as mediocre. It's either what they want or it's not good enough. We're not very good at mediocre. Now, that is not the standard that we apply here. Whether that's a good thing or a bad thing, I'll leave you to decide. That's not the standard we apply when we buy things. Now, if we buy a bit of legal advice, we expect a consistent standard, based on the professional standards of that organisation. So that's what we're really looking at in policies. Can we do policy consistently well?
- Sir Chris: And we do things like this. We develop things like policy tests. These are the ones from the Department of Education which were wrongly attributed to me. They were actually created by a man called Paul Kissack who currently works in the New Zealand government. And the idea was, and we were discussing some of these yesterday, to get away from the sort of policy by titles in a submission or a policy paper. And say, "What are the questions you really want policy to work?" So we in education used these five.

- Sir Chris: And the idea was to be able to say, when you were looking at a piece of policy going, "Does it actually answer the question of what's it got to do with us?" Why government actually is needed in this case, why doesn't the problem not sort itself out? And deal with policy questions on those sorts of level, as it were.
- Sir Chris: And we have them in most departments, absolutely, this was the one we use in health. When I got there, I discovered this which, usefully, makes a sort of word, IGEARS. But anyways, it's the same sort of framework. And we got different frameworks for different departments. But every department now has one of these. It has a way of saying what are the tests we apply to policy to say whether it is good or not?
- Sir Chris: So that's the consistent bit. And then the professional bit is all about the training and development of individual civil servants. And I've said a bit about this already. We're very pleased, as I say, with what we have done in the induction space and at the other end of the spectrum. Much more hit and miss in the middle. And absolutely key to this is probably the biggest single thing we've been doing over the last two years is actually to try and create a set of professional standards for policy making.
- Sir Chris: So we did a giant bottom up exercise. We did not write this sitting around the table. We went out to the profession and did an enormous amount of consultations about what are the things that we actually think a policy maker ought to know or be good at? And we came up with these 18 blocks, against our three dynamics of policy. The evidence, the politics and democracy and the delivery bit. I'm going to talk about the individual blocks in a bit more detail.
- Sir Chris: But, two important things about this framework. One was the message was not you have to be an expert at everything as it were. It was not a back to generalism thing. The standard we set was you're probably going to be an expert in one or two of these things but we expect you to have a working knowledge of all of them to the extent of being able to ask the right question, understand the answer and built it into your policy making.
- Sir Chris: So, if I took myself, I have a very nice MBA from Imperial College, I have done my 16 weeks of micro and macroeconomics, no one is ever going to ask me to do a piece of economic analysis. But I do think I can sit down with the government chief economist and know what question to ask him about health economics as it were and then to be able to build that into my advice. So it's that level of can you have a conversation and know when to have that conversation across all those 18 blocks. That's one thing.
- Sir Chris: And the second thing is this is not a linear process. You do not start at the left hand side, look at the evidence, then add democracy and then ask is it going to work? The idea is that this an iterative thing which is why we've done the diagram as it is.
- Sir Chris: Looking at the individual blocks. Evidence, we do think we are good at. The bit we are probably worst at it the horizon scanning bit, certainly on the domestic side. We do a lot of really interesting horizon scanning work, but we're not that good at embedding it in day to day policy. So that's the bit of that framework we think we want to do a lot more of.
- Sir Chris: When we go around the world, a lot of people have done a lot more than us, actually Canada does a lot in this space. How do you actually turn that really interesting horizon scanning into actual day to day policy?
- Sir Chris: Second bit, the politics and democracy bit. We probably got a bit more to learn about exiting the European Union in that block. Maybe. Moving on to actually working with

parliament. Interestingly, we used to be better than we are. We got very stable long-term governments. Thatcher, Major government, Blair, Brown, and actually a very stable coalition where agreeing what the policy was in government was the challenge, not getting it through the parliament. That's now reversed for us. Parliament is now a huge thing. So we're probably actually a bit off the pace on parliamentary skills, compared to where we need to be.

Sir Chris: And then, delivery is our traditional weakness. And you used to hear this thing in the UK Civil Service, "It was a great policy, it just couldn't be delivered." In what sense was it a great policy? So we've got quite a lot to do in this, in particular the two I'd pick out here, commercial skills, we're quite short of. We have very good commercial departments but your average policy maker is probably not as commercially savvy as we want them to be. And likewise digital, as I said earlier, is a big thing.

Sir Chris: So, getting to the end now. We're reviewing all this right now to ask ourselves where does the policy profession need to be in another six years, in 2025? And we're basically looking at these four things with diversity and inclusion as a big cost-cutting thing. It doesn't really fit with the rest of the frameworks but it's also one of the things we are very conscious of and diversity, inclusion, all senses of the word. So not just protected characteristics although that is incredibly important.

Sir Chris: But, do we have diversity of thought as it were? Or do we actually recruit a load of people who are very similar to each other who therefore come up with very similar solutions? So diversity in all senses of the word we're going to look at going forward. And one of the reasons why we're doing these sorts of events is we wanted to contribute to this. Where are we going next? Let's look at what the rest of the world's doing, see what's interesting and build it into our thinking.

Sir Chris: So, to finish. These are some of the things we are going to be working on going forward. I've mentioned quite a lot of them already. So I'm not going to talk in detail. But, probably a mix of finishing off the things that we have started but haven't got there on and building new things for the future, for the new context. The one I'd add, which we're talking a lot about at the moment, my new boss, Mark Sedwill, he's very, very keen on the question of how do we deal with those big cost-cutting issues. He has a concept, some of you may have come across a fusion as a way into these things of how do we actually join up public services much more around the individual. So that will be a big thing going forward as well.

Sir Chris: And that's basically where we are. So that's basically our story. What will be fascinating will be to compare it with yours and see what we can learn from each other. So thank you very much.

Alison Larkins: All right. So we thought it might be interesting at this point to poll the audience. This is the more forward learning modern part of our participation and open feedback, we're going to do a traditional question and answer session a bit later. So I think the first question is, do you see policy as a distinct profession? Or, you're already well on to it. Within the broader public sector. Well, I think that's a very resounding answer.

Alison Larkins: All right. And move to the second question. So it might be interesting as we go into the panel conversation and in the questions and answer session to think about what are the elements. So clearly, most of us are seeing that model as very applicable. But it'd be interesting to explore where people think the differences are between the Australian environment and the UK environment and what might change our approach to policy making.

Alison Larkins: I'd now like to introduce Renée Leon. Renée joined the Department of Human Services as Secretary in September 2017 and prior to this, she was the Secretary of the

Department of Employment from 2013 with responsibility for work place relations, policy and employment services. She previously served as a Deputy Secretary in the Attorney General's Department and in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

- Alison Larkins: And prior to her time with the APS, so actually in between her time with the APS, she was Head of the Department of Justice and Community Safety in the ACT government. Renée is a fellow of IPAA and so is always especially welcome to speak at our events. I'll invite Renée to join us on the stage.
- Alison Larkins: And Renée, I thought it might be useful if you could start by giving us a bit of an update on what we're doing in Australia and perhaps your response to Sir Chris' presentation.
- Renée Leon: Thanks Alison and thanks for having me here. As always, I'm always very happy to be at an IPAA event which is kind of our beginning of having a policy profession, really, is having, long before we started doing it in the APS formally.
- Renée Leon: Chris, it's really good to see what you're doing in the UK and I know that we will get a lot of value out of both what's gone well and what's still a work in progress. I thought I'd share with the audience what we've been doing in the APS to develop policy and policy skills across the public service. This work's been commissioned by the Secretary's board and carried forward by the APS reform committee that Rosemary Huxtable leads and which has a lot of involvement in buy-in of secretaries across the public service.
- Renée Leon: And there's quite a few similarities with the work that the UK's been doing. So, Doctor Heather Smith, who couldn't be here today, is the lead of that stream also with Stephanie Foster from PM&C. And the things that I see as common to our approaches are very much it's a collaborative and voluntary approach across our departments. We're not having the public service commission or PM&C come in and kind of impose a whole lot of rules on us. It's something that secretaries and teams within our departments are working along collaboratively as a way of sharing expertise and developing ideas that are going to work for all of us.
- Renée Leon: Very much a focus on investing in the skills and the capability of people in the public service and seeking to systematise what does good policy look like. I don't think we've got those really cut through questions, the policy tests, that you've set and I know that secretaries who met with Chris yesterday busily took down notes about those tests because I think we tend to express what we're trying to do in language that's perhaps a bit less accessible. And a bit less cut through. And I think having those really cut through tests about what does good policy look like will be a great input for us.
- Renée Leon: And, some of the elements of what good policy looks like that we've already identified and that we're building into our own policy project, that piece that you mentioned, Chris, about being more open to outside input, and especially starting with the voice of the citizen. And being open to hearing that about what the policy should be, not just here, we've already devised this policy and now we're going to consult with you at the end about how you feel about that. Actually getting the citizen and the people with exposure to the citizen in at the beginning to design policy.
- Renée Leon: And, of course, as the main delivery agency in the federal government, I particularly like how your building blocks include will this work? What is the length with delivery? And that's certainly been something that the APS policy project is building into its thinking. So, how are we doing all of this in the APS?

- Renée Leon: Well, the first thing that we've done is, because we are a very digital mob and use technology to enable our collaboration and our input across the APS, so we have created a beta version of a policy hub which I think I can give you a bit of a sneak peak of now if the AV people can help us. And it's a place where we are bringing together tools and resources and ideas for capability that will be able to be accessed across the APS and to provide a collaborative platform on which we can work together to share our knowledge and insights about what good policy looks like.
- Renée Leon: So, this is a beta at this stage, more to come. And the policy stream of the APS reform committee will be reaching out and getting your input and ideas for it. And then the next thing that we'll be doing is the deputy secretaries across a range of departments over the next 18 months will be leading a series of sprints that are designed to flesh out in more detail the elements of good policy and they include trying to define what good policy looks like, practising how to breach that policy implementation gap, looking at what mobility we might need to foster across the public service to grow people's policy capability and what skills we ought to invest in more formally.
- Renée Leon: So, I think that it will be really invaluable to get the experience from the UK and other jurisdictions about what's been done elsewhere. But you can be pleased to know that the APS is already embarking upon this journey and keen to work with people across departments to make it a reality. So, it's probably all I needed to say by way of introduction.
- Alison Larkins: Okay, thank you Renée. So, I'm interested, Sir Chris, in you mentioned the political environment in which you're operating and I think we would think that we're now in an oasis of calm and order after many years of-
- Sir Chris: Here we go.
- Alison Larkins: Well, I'm interested in both of your views about whether context changes practise? Because clearly, the context, or certainly in Australia, the context over the last 12 years has been quite different to the years before. You're obviously in the middle of your own significant debates and challenges. So do you think the practise of policy making is essentially the same or how do you see it needing to respond to the context in which it's done?
- Sir Chris: Yeah. I think actually the more uncertain the world is, the more important actually classic policy making is. And it's actually at the times when the world is a bit strange that you do ... It is even more important that you are producing classic, evidence-based, neutral, well-argued advice because that is what allows the politicians to do their job best.
- Sir Chris: I was very struck when we had our coalition in 2010, the first peace time coalition for decades and decades in our system. It was very, very striking. That sort of classic advice was what the PM and DPM actually wanted. They wanted to know what the options were and what the arguments for and against were so that they could do the politics. So that they could ask themselves the question, well, okay, where can the coalition stand together and is it option three or is it option four, whatever.
- Sir Chris: And what they really, really hated was civil servants, trying to do the politics for them because they were very clear, we better at this than you. We've made our life doing politics as it were, we don't need your advice on how to do the politics. We need to know what the option appraisal looks like and then we will do the politics on top of that.
- Sir Chris: And actually, our various debates around leaving the Union are a bit the same, actually. Now, as policy makers, we need to do the classic things. So in my particular

case in health, we have three big issues around medicine supply, around workforce and around reciprocal healthcare and what my ministers want is classic advice on how to solve those problems. And then they will go and do the debates and the arguments and the politics in the parliament.

Sir Chris: So actually, I think it's even more important in those things. And while I've got the floor, I'll say a bit just because it struck me while you were talking, the policy test thing and the bluntness of them, that was something we got from ministers as well, actually. And it's why we got to the sort of language we got to.

Sir Chris: But, we had a tendency to write down things like have you set objectives and key performance indicators as it were. And what a minister would write on a submission was, "Yeah, but what's the point?" What is the point of this policy? By which they meant, if I was standing at the dispatch box, how would I actually explain why we're doing it to a normal person?

Sir Chris: And actually, the bluntness of the language is really important actually to make us think, yeah, how would we explain this to a tax payer actually who tends not to be, "We set our KPI at 64.2%." Or whatever. We're trying to solve this problem. So the bluntness was very important to it, actually.

Renée Leon: I entirely agree with Sir Chris that classic, good policy and evidence-based advice is more important than ever if you're in circumstances of political instability. I think part of the skills of policy that we probably have neglected a little over the years and that become even more important when dealing, for example, with a parliament that's got a much greater diversity of views that need to be on board than we've experienced when we've had classic, major party dominance in the parliament, is actually the piece about the voice of the citizen.

Renée Leon: So quite often, those minor parties who have been elected and have balance of power in especially the Upper House but also sometimes the Lower House, they often are channelling a voice of the citizen in ways that major parties may have, and that the public service, may have become out of touch with. And that more outreach to a broader range of views in the community will actually help us to do good policy better in environments of greater political uncertainty and diversity.

Renée Leon: And I hope that we won't lose that, simply because we've got a more malleable and manageable parliament, relatively speaking anyway, than we have had for the previous decade.

Alison Larkins: And you talked yesterday about some of the challenges about connecting more broadly in the UK with citizens. I just wondered if you wanted to reflect on who you are connecting with as part of open policy making and where you think you need to do greater work and Renée, you might take the same question.

Sir Chris: Yeah, and this is one of the criticism of us and it's an area we need to go further on. So, when the civil service, and particularly policy making, is criticised, it's frequently the metropolitan elite. You know, we all live in cities, mainly in our case in London, actually, which is a little different from the rest of the country. And yeah, you're very clever when you read a lot but do you actually understand what it's like to be in Lincolnshire, quite disconnected from a great international city that's connected across the world and all that.

Sir Chris: And when we're criticised for how we reach out, and that's why I say, I do think these are fair criticisms, we have become much, much better at going out into the world and talking to people who are a bit like us. We are very comfortable in the university

seminar or in the think-tank or et cetera, which are, again, that's all our metropolitan elite.

Sir Chris: And I think our great challenge is, we do want to keep that. We do have great universities and we do want to know what they think and what that world expert thinks. So we don't want to lose any of that. But, how do we balance it with some of the issues you've just been describing is one of our great challenges.

Sir Chris: And, an area I don't think we've done well enough is actually how we use the operational bits of government as our way of doing that. So, in my world, of course, we have a national health service that reaches into every corner of the country and basically every citizen connects with. So you've got this incredible source of information in that part of government about the world which we're not very good at using in the how you make policy as it were.

Sir Chris: So, clearly, it can't be individual policy makers meeting everybody. But, the question of how we use governments' wider networks and the delivery of services feed back into policy making. I think that's an area we need to develop a lot more as well.

Alison Larkins: And how are we going on that here?

Renée Leon: Well, I think we've had some really good initial experiments in Voice of the Citizen in policy making. But they are still really experiments at the margins rather than the way we do things around here. So, quite a number of departments have set up a co-design or a citizen human-centred design capabilities and we've used them for more of a niche range of projects so far.

Renée Leon: I think what we need to really amplify in the public service is making that much more our business as usual. And on the one hand, government actually wants us to listen to the voice of the citizen because the citizens, they are the people who are passing judgement on government all the time and they want to know that they're meeting the needs of, as our Prime Minister has put it, the quiet Australians.

Renée Leon: On the other hand, we've tended to develop policy in a very closed and secret environment where you can't possibly put any of it out into the world until you've nailed down everything to the nth degree and had it cleared by ministers and by cabinet. And by then, you can't really change anything.

Renée Leon: So a bringing together of those two desires, the desire to make the policy perfect before you expose it, but also the desire of government to make sure that it's a policy that's going to resonate, not only with the policy makers and the evidence base but with the evidence that's actually about what people's real life problems are and what they want, I think we've got more to do on that and getting that to happen at the beginning rather than almost at the end.

Sir Chris: Yeah, I do think ... One of the things we learned from the way digital works, I think the concept of iterated policy, where you publish a beta version and say, "Help us improve it," as opposed to that mentality of we create something perfect and then we announce it and consult on it. And the idea of policy making being a much more iterative thing in the way that digital development is. I think that's a big future of policy making.

Sir Chris: My colleague, Dr. David Halpern who does a lot about behavioural insights, I think he's coming ... He has this big thing about humble policy making, that the action of policy making ought to be a humble thing, not a sort of grand pronouncement. And I've been saying, while building on that, but in a way, policy making both has to be both more confident and more humble simultaneously. We need to be more

confident about going out and asking the question and picking up the phone to that world expert or going to that town hall meeting or whatever it is. And more confident of that. And then humbler listening to the answer as it were. And I think it's those two things interacting, I think there's a lot in that.

Renée Leon: And do you find that your ministers are starting to feel more interested in that kind of iterative policy making? Because ministers tend to like, "Tada, the big announcement. We've solved this problem for you." And it really de-risks it for them if they do it more iteratively so that by the time they get to the answer, they can be more confident that it is going to strike the right note.

Sir Chris: Yes. And I think there's a big thing about actually the analysing what sort of policy question is it. So some of them, they do have a yes no answer. Shall I put more power stations over there or over there? You can't really iterate, you can in the delivery of it. But being clear, where does the government actually just have to take a decision and it will do a classic investment appraisal and all those things.

Sir Chris: But where are the areas where you can make policy in a different way? I think we've tended to do the sort of one size fits all style of policy making, as opposed to different techniques for different solutions. And the other thing, in our system, actually ministers can frequently be better at this than we are. Because of our constituency system actually our politicians are probably talking to more people in more places than we are.

Sir Chris: So, actually, that thing of who's walked into my constituency surgery and raised this issue and I've had a conversation with them. Actually, our politicians are frequently doing that considerably more than we are. So when we are presenting these sorts of things, actually very frequently you're pushing at an open door because that's the way they've learned to do policy. They've learned to do it in debates with real people in real places in a constituency office you've never heard of as it were. Not in the grand hall with the think-tank and et cetera.

Alison Larkins: Let's go to audience questions. We've got a couple of microphones out there. It would be great if you could state your name and organisation when you ask a question. We've got a couple down the front here.

Heather: Hello, my question is for Renée. I'm Heather [Cochrane 00:48:49], Department of Human Services. How do you see the newly announced services as straight influencing policy design going forward?

Renée Leon: So, Human Services has been actually trying to influence policy design going forward, even apart from any rebranding. And having the minister for government services in cabinet now, I think will be a really important part of that journey. So quite often, we are involved with policy departments in working out how some things are going to be implemented.

Renée Leon: But, it tends to happen quite late in the piece and, up until now, it hasn't had a voice in cabinet so that when ministers are deciding on the key parts of the policy, they haven't had before them any advice about how is that actually going to work? And are there elements of the delivery that could in fact undermine the positive experience you were trying to create for the very people this policy is directed for?

Renée Leon: So I think the most critical piece is having the minister for services in cabinet and having the kinds of relationships between the delivery arms of government and the policy arms of government that, of course, policy would want to talk to delivery from the beginning because, self-evidently, it's not a good policy, as you said, Sir Chris, if

you can't actually implement it. And getting the knowledge of the delivery arms of government involved at the policy stage is the really critical part of the puzzle.

Mark Sawers: Sir Chris, Mark Sawers, Foreign Affairs and Trade. I wanted to come in on a point you made just at the very end there about adapting the standards and skills that are required in that particular context. So, of course, I come from a particular context in terms of my professional life.

Mark Sawers: I'd be interested in how your policy community in the UK has dealt with bringing standards down to a practical level where it speaks to people working in particular contexts, whether that's an international one or an economic one or a social policy one? Those kinds of things.

Sir Chris: I think it comes back to the not taking of prescriptive approach about how we do this. So, if you take my policy tests example, I'm going to say pretty much every department has got them. But if you looked at them department by department, they'd be very different. So, at the Department of Transport, they did this absolutely fantastic one, based on a car. It's absolutely wonderful, is have you looked in the rear view mirror. And they've done ... But it's much more heavily influenced by investment appraisal than I would have in a social policy department.

Sir Chris: So, what we've tried to do, and I won't claim we've always been successful, is to say, "Here is the overall tool, now adapt it for your situation." So if you're a policy maker moving around government, you would see the same blocks of theme, you would know they were a policy test. But what they are in any individual context would be different.

Sir Chris: We have struggled more in some areas than others. Actually international, they feel slightly more disconnected from the policy profession than other departments. It's partly because they have a longer history actually of doing some of the things we've done, qualifications and things. But, actually, we haven't always made it as applicable to them and it's one of the things we need to work on.

Sir Chris: So there's definitely a thing about setting a general framework and then saying, "Bespoke it." But, we've also got some challenges in particular departments.

Jenny Stewart: Hello, I'm Jenny Stewart from UNSW Canberra. Sir Chris, I know you said that the policy profession wasn't a profession in the same sense as being a lawyer or a doctor. But still, when you talked about professional standards which came up in your presentation, you didn't mention values and ethics as part of that. And I wondered if you could say a bit more about that?

Sir Chris: Yeah, and again, a very fair challenge. And it struck me, the same point struck me very recently. I was doing a thing, I was a visiting fellow at the Blavatnik School and I was doing my end of fellowship presentation and I was doing health policy. And interestingly, when I was doing that, some of our colleagues from the Nordic countries, I think it was Sweden, said exactly the same thing. And all your policy making is very, very sort of logical, numbers-based as it were. We would start with what are the values and we'd build policy from there.

Sir Chris: And it was a really fair challenge, actually, that is our policy making culture. It is a very numbers-driven value for money-driven exercise. And we tend to do that first and add the values later. Whereas as I say, if you went to some of our Nordic colleagues, they would do it exactly the other way round. So I think it is a very, very fair challenge. And then the other thing, I would say, and it goes back to your question about how do you do this in a sort of contested area like leaving the Union.

- Sir Chris: I have found myself talking about civil service values considerably more than I normally do. That is not my natural home, I'm normally a what's the problem, how are we going to develop the solution, et cetera. In those circumstances, actually going back and starting from the what are our values as a public servant and we start from there is actually more important in those things. So you're absolutely right. We do have a very sort of logical approach to policy making. But there's definitely a place for the values bit as well.
- Lydia: Lydia Ross from the Department of Social Services. I think in Australia, we've become quite good at coming up with new ideas and we're reasonably good at fixing existing programmes, tweaking existing policies. I think we struggle quite a bit with stopping doing things that aren't working. Can you tell us a little bit about how you approach that in the UK? How do you step away from things that have had their day and you need to move on?
- Sir Chris: Yeah. I wouldn't say we've got much expertise. If you take in your question and put the words UK where you put Australia, it would be exactly the same. And I do think it is a perennial question. We've had quite a long period of austerity now that has forced us to confront this head-on. We have had to take a series of decisions about things we are not going to do anymore. But I wouldn't claim that we have done those prioritisation things particularly well, actually.
- Sir Chris: And again, going back to the previous question, it has tended to be numbers-driven. So, we have tended to start with the, well, we have to save x amount of money, where are we going to find that in programmes, as our way of doing it as opposed to other approaches of what is actually the social value of this thing. So, I'm not sure I've got any particular expertise to add to it other than it's really, really hard.
- Sir Chris: I will say one thing. It was one of the things that didn't work when I was at Education. We did do a formal stop exercise. And we did create a list of things that we went to ministers and got them to agree we were not going to do in future. The result of which was as soon as it became apparent, we got a vast number of questions, letters and inquiries about that area, creating a vast amount of new work in the areas we were trying to stop.
- Sir Chris: Actually we left the public opinion bit out of that question. But also, what we concluded was it was much better to think not in terms of what does government start and stop doing but what do you dial up and dial down. So saying the message that went it is not that we will never have any thoughts ever again on issue x, it's just not the right time for that at the moment. When we started doing it that way, that was a much easier conversation to have with the world than government does not care about x anymore.
- Sir Chris: So, I think that is one thing we learned. The style of doing it, of not that this is not important, it's just not top of the list right now. But we will come back to it and the resources will be somewhere else for the moment. That was a much easier conversation.
- Alison Larkins: I think as a chair, I've been showing a lot of right bias. I'd like to correct that. Is there anyone on the left side of the room who would like to ask a question?
- Jackie: Sir Chris, I'm Jackie from the Department of Human Services. I'm interested, I guess, in your accreditation or qualification framework approach. And what the entry and exit points are for people coming into the civil service. You've talked a bit about how you use that framework to develop people in the civil service. Is there also an idea that it's used at the recruitment phase and how do you use that with, I guess, attracting young people and people from other industries into the sector. And do you think

people see that kind of pathway of qualification as something valuable they can take when they leave the civil service?

- Sir Chris: Basically yes. And it's one of these areas where we've achieved things we never planned for in the first place. And some of the things you achieve accidentally are actually frequently more important than what you're aiming at. So we've done some pretty formal things. so our policy of apprenticeship which is mainly aimed at school leavers, so we've always had brilliant graduate schemes, that's always been one of our huge strengths. That was very explicitly to create a new root into policy making. And it's very early days when ... Richard, cohort two?
- Richard: Cohort two is about to start.
- Sir Chris: Yes. So, we're very pleased with it so far. We are getting a much more diverse range of applicants by having a new and different root that is not so Oxbridge, almost all Oxbridge, than we did before. What we haven't seen yet is can we retain those people, to your other point.
- Sir Chris: So the career pathway bit will be very important in there. And then our masters' programme which we developed as a thing for experienced policy makers, what's the next thing you're going to do? One of the things we've discovered, I'm going to say accidentally, is, I think it's about a third, about a third of the people who go on it are people from other professions who want a future career in policy. And actually, it's quite a good stepping stone in as it were.
- Sir Chris: So that thing where policy making is a sort of a thing you get by osmosis, by doing it for a long time, that, of course, is a very impenetrable thing from the outside. Whereas if you go out and say, "Actually, there is 18 things to know and here is a course that will help you," and that's what you say at your interview and put on your CV and whatever, so suddenly you've got somebody who brings vast operational experience for example and now has a policy qualification, too. Suddenly, they become a very attractive candidate for a policy job.
- Sir Chris: And actually, that thing where we're talking about professions and standards earlier. But a qualification can be a bridge into something as well as a barrier to it. And we've found that with some of our qualifications as well. I mean, they're clearly not the be all and end all of everything. But, we are generally, as a civil service, we are underqualified, compared to our international comparators. So it is an area we do want to do more for.
- Sir Chris: And Richard and I were looking at the numbers this morning. It's really interesting. When we surveyed it, about, what was it, Richard, 11% of the people who are not in the senior civil service think a qualification is important to getting on. And in the senior civil service, it's 95%.
- Richard: 95%.
- Sir Chris: Of people believe a qualification is important to getting on. So, we've got a bit to do in terms of getting the importance of this embedded.
- Alison Larkins: There was a question down the front here and I think that will need to be our last question.
- Meredith: Sir Chris and Renée. Yeah, I think you've both indicated ... I'm Meredith Whitten from the ACT Public Service. You've both indicated that co-design with citizens and digital skills are an area of focus for you. Have either of you looked at or can talk with us about engagement with a community through digital platforms?

- Renée Leon: Look, I might start. So, our co-design processes tended more to be face to face. So we've got a design lab, we bring people in from affected groups and we try out things on them and get their input to it. I should say some of those are sometimes digital. So for example, as we transform student payments for benefits for youth allowance and for students, we set up little popup kiosks at the University of Queensland where we put our latest iteration of what it would look like and students could pop in and try it out and give us feedback and tell us if it met their needs.
- Renée Leon: So, we used face to face as a means to improve our digital offering. And we found that incredibly valuable. I think we are at a pretty early stage of having the kind of collaborative, open-facing platforms that would enable citizen interaction with us. But, of course, I do want to mention that PM&C is leading the way in terms of using digital and other methods to get citizen opinions about things. So, we have started as a public service, using both digital and face to face as ways to get citizen input. I think I'd say we're at early stages on both but with a lot of appetite to go further.
- Sir Chris: Yeah, and for us, as I said at the beginning of my presentation, this is actually one of the areas where we don't score well, compared to other people. Where we've done it successfully, I think the big learning point is this is a complicated skill and you train for it as it were. So doing it as a sort of free for all. Have I got into a Twitter rant with various people? That is not helpful. I don't do Twitter, by the way.
- Sir Chris: Where we've done it, people have taken it as a really serious project. So it was actually prior to me being there. So nothing to do with me at all. But the Department of Health did a really, really successful thing around dementia carers where basically it created an online group of people who were caring for their relatives with dementia. And was having a realtime debate with those people about their daily life experience. But they took a lot of time about the setup. And then the people who were moderating the debate were seriously trained to do it.
- Sir Chris: So, and I'll say, the lesson we took, if you're going to do it, you take it as a very, very serious thing. And you train people to do it and really think about it as opposed to the sorts of, oh, I can get some things off the internet as it were. So, as I say, but it's not something we claim a wild expertise in.
- Alison Larkins: Sir Chris, thank you so much for your ideas which I think we're planning on shamelessly stealing.
- Sir Chris: No, do.
- Alison Larkins: In a good policy profession way. Really appreciate your frankness about where you've been able to make progress and where you haven't and I think that will feed well into the policy capability work that Renée and others are involved in.
- Alison Larkins: And I think this has been a wonderful place for us to start the international series for IPAA. So I'd just like to just thank you again for your contribution there and Renée, as always, it's very good to have your thoughts and suggestions. And also to have your experience from both the policy side and service delivery and bringing that service delivery perspective to the conversation.