CABINET OFFICE

INVOLVING THE FRONT-LINE IN POLICY-MAKING

*Transforming Public Services
A Civil Service that delivers*

Contents

Introduction

The NAO report *Modern Policy-Making* highlighted the importance of involving those that implement policy in its design, noting that:

"*Departments should make arrangements to engage implementers early so that the practicability of policies can be assessed. …. Involving implementers closely as policies are designed can help identify and manage risks of their effectiveness, secure ownership and commitment from staff, and identify practical solutions…. ".*

OPM were commissioned by the Centre for Management and Policy Studies (CMPS) (now the Strategy Unit) of the Cabinet Office to address the question of the involvement of the 'front line' in policy making as a part of the *Better Policy Making* agenda. In doing so, OPM were asked to consider examples of good practice. The characteristics and processes of each case study were explored in order to identify and disseminate effective practice in the involvement of 'front-line' staff in the development of policy.

This report presents:

- ♣ The approach taken by OPM
- ♣ A resume of each case study
- ♣ The findings from the qualitative interviews
- ♣ Feedback from a workshop that was conducted as part of the research
- ♣ Our conclusions and recommendations
- ♣ Feedback from policy makers to further refine our recommendations

We would like to thank the Policy Research team at the Strategy Unit for their advice and support throughout this project.   More particularly, we are grateful to those policy and front-line staff who gave their time, ideas and consideration to this work, without whom the work would not have been possible. It is clear that in each case there was a highly committed workforce with a strong results driven public service ethos.

This report is intended to support the work of policy makers, to enhance their ability to ensure that the policies they develop have a greater likelihood of working first time, with the support and insight offered by the contribution of the front line. As such, the findings of this report offer principles and practice through which the risks associated with policy development can be managed and reduced.

Main Findings

Front-line staff offer an effective route to meaningful evidence of the implementation and effectiveness of policy proposals. Given early involvement they offer a rich and sophisticated understanding of how their areas of work can be developed. As such, their input is an effective resource in ensuring that policies work first time.

Their early involvement will provide informative evidence and give considerable insight to the development of policy, acknowledging a need to balance this view with those of other appropriate stakeholders.

However, front-line staff do not necessarily understand the 'givens' or the purpose of new policy. The effective combination of the operational expertise of the front line with the contextual overview of policy makers offers a powerful synergy of knowledge and understanding that will inform all areas of policy development.

Effective involvement is a positive tool in the rollout of policy. It allows scope for buy in, opportunities for comment, robust 'testing' and initiating learning in the field before a policy is finally launched.

There is a case for the overlap of roles within the work of both front-line and policy practitioners, which would blur the traditional distinction between policy and delivery, or at the very least have both types of practitioner experience the role of the other. In practice this might equate to operational service for policy practitioners and access to policy 'time' for front-line staff to give the time and space for policy consideration. In a number of examples policy and front-line staff were rotated over time, helping renew and develop expertise in both environments.

For new policy areas or during review the balance between centralised and decentralised policy making should be reviewed, with a clear statement of the principles by which the ownership of policy making and delivery mechanisms is determined.

Further exploration should be given to the value of whole systems approaches to policy making, and developing project planning approaches that build this in, where relevant, from the beginning of a policy process.

There are few areas of policy development that could not benefit from the involvement of the front line. Effective involvement of front-line staff requires:

- ♣ Clear objectives for the policy development and policy process
- ♣ Consideration of the front line as relevant to the policy in question
- ♣ A whole system approach to the involvement of the front line (and others)
- ♣ Proper resourcing and planning, an up front investment

Our Approach

In carrying out this work we have used the term 'front-line' to reflect and include staff that work directly with customers, clients or beneficiaries of public services, often as part of wider delivery or operational groups of staff. We recognise the term has some limitations as a descriptor of these groups of staff.

A previous report of the Cabinet Office, 'Better Policy-Making', identified a number of instances where Departments and other organisations sought to involve front-line staff in policy making. As a result, a number of departments were asked to identify examples of good practice in the involvement of front-line staff, so that each example might be examined in some detail through qualitative means (i.e. semi structured interviews). This generated four case studies for our examination, which are described in some detail below.

In each case telephone interviews were held with a number of participants ranging from a senior policy lead to front-line staff who had been involved in the policy development concerned. Policy and front-line staff were asked about their roles and contributions, the benefits the contribution of front-line staff brought to the table, and how to get the maximum value from the policy/front-line relationship.

In broad terms we looked at:

- Who to involve?

- How to involve them?

- When to involve them?

- What works well, when and why?

- What hinders their involvement?

- How does their involvement relate to the involvement of others?

- How does their involvement relate to the development process of the policy itself?

- How to encourage the policy maker to involve?

- How to encourage the best input from operational staff?

In addressing this piece of work one of the more significant issues was defining the front line. This is picked up in more detail as a part of our findings.

Twenty-four interviews were carried out in all. Feedback was presented to a group of interviewees to confirm the immediate analysis and to develop our understanding of the common issues and principles that influenced the involvement and contribution of front-line staff. Further feedback was obtained from members of the "Excellence in Policy Making Network", the membership of which includes policy makers from across government.

The Case Studies

We interviewed policy makers and front-line staff in four case studies, as follows:

♣ Department of Health – Coronary Heart Disease Collaborative Programme

♣ Ministry of Defence – Skill Force

♣ Department for Work and Pensions – The Model Office

♣ Department for Trade and Industry – Small Business Service business start- up policy

These case studies cover a range of policy development settings including project- and pilot-based activities as well as mainstream service provision. A summary of each case study follows. Much of the learning from the case studies, both individually and collectively, is reflected in later stages of the report. The summary is intended to give a picture of the policy and practice that makes up the case studies in question.

Review Workshop

In order to test our initial interview findings and further develop our understanding of the case studies and the role of front-line staff within them, a workshop of interviewees was held to consider the following:

♣ How do we effectively involve 'front-line' staff?

♣ What does success look like?

♣ What works

In the workshop we identified a number of key questions and common principles that applied to each of the approaches of the case studies and a range of ways of working to effectively involve front-line staff.   The findings of the workshop build upon the interviews and are collated as a set of common principles, combined with a number of ways of working, as described below.

Distinctive features and Common principles

In developing good practice it is important to consider what elements of practice make up each case study and which of these elements are generic and transferable to other examples of involving the front line in policy making. In considering and contrasting each of the case studies and their approach to policy making it is possible to see a number of distinctive features to each, as well as a number of common principles that were broadly applied to the engagement of front-line staff. Both are identified below, with the latter explored in some detail in order to identify transferable learning points.

For each case study a number of distinctive features were identified, as follows:

Coronary Heart Disease

- Specific methodology employed

- Competitive process for initial involvement

- Centrally organised process

- Significant investment in the development process (£ '000s)

Skill Force

- Collaboration of distinct education and military cultures between DfES and MOD

- The clear culture of respect for practitioners that exists in the Armed Services, in part developed through training and shared operational experience

- Clear central goals and broad guidance on how to achieve them, rather than detailed guidance and specific instruction

The Model Office

- Rigorous and specific recruitment process to determine which front-line staff to involve

- Distinct process management team supporting the involvement and input of the front line

- Structured timetable and plan for the management and testing of each policy and its products

- Difficulties in accessing/'recruiting' enough front-line staff of the right type

SBS Start up policy

- Invitation to be involved in clear contrast to previous policy making in this area

- Operational staff as a stakeholder group within a wider consultation audience

- Semi-structured process for involvement

- Overarching consultation moderated the views and suggestions of operational staff.

Common principles

In examining the case studies and testing our findings through the workshop, it has been possible to discern a number of elements that have been generally applied in the involvement of front-line staff in the policy making process. These are considered in some detail below.

We have also considered how best to determine when each principle has been addressed. In each case a question has been offered as a test of the principle in action. Policy makers can use this to reflect on their approach to each principle. By their nature they are qualitative, and subject to refinement over time.

Be clear about the purpose of the policy - focus on outcomes, not processes and outputs

The policy may be intended to find answers to new or existing problems, or it may be to test ideas and policies that have already been developed elsewhere to see if they would work to address a particular issue or problem. Each context requires an understanding of who can contribute what to the policy and how that contribution can most effectively be made.

To be effective in involving front-line staff (as well as in itself) the policy task must have clear objectives, which cover the issues to be addressed and what success would be like, without defining the way in which success will be achieved. Without such clarity it will be difficult to gain the commitment of front-line staff, as well as the commitment of their managers who may need to be convinced of the value of releasing staff when under pressure to deliver.

Qu. Have you tested whether those involved have the same understanding of the policy as you? For example, can those you have involved give you an equivalent description of the purpose in their own words?

Be clear about the balance between centralised and decentralised decision making

It is clear that the front line generally has a sophisticated understanding of the issues that inform and guide their work, and of the environment within which their area of delivery might improve. As such, they are well placed to inform the development of much of the policy (and practice) that guides or directs their work. But they may not be aware of the wider context within which their area of delivery can improve, as they are not connected to the wider system or the development of interrelated policies and practice.

In some cases, centrally determined policy making has accumulated greater and further responsibility for policy (and practice) making, reducing the scope for active involvement and input of the front line. In a few other areas the trend has been to decentralise policy making and giving the front-line more responsibility. In the main, our case studies described situations where the engagement of the front line was defined, directed or allowed from the centre for relatively centralised policy development, rather than situations where the front line was empowered and led bottom up approaches to policy development.

There are increasing pressures for policies to recognise spatial or geographical difference, with regions and others taking a greater role in policy development, and in some cases the introduction of regional policy making where that fits the requirements of the area concerned. With this in mind, there is a need to prevent 'over-engineering' the solution at the centre, for the centre to be more strategic, and to accommodate what is sometimes described as 'street level' bureaucracy where the front-line decides the application of a strategic framework. For example, in the case of the Coronary Heart Disease example, the standards for delivery were centrally set while the how of their implementation was open for the local players to determine.

In determining the approach to policy development it should be clear at what level the framework for a policy and the detail of a policy will be made. There will always be some cases where policy will need to be defined at high levels of detail from the centre (e.g. for nationally applied tax rates). However, in many other cases a framework (of intent) with a menu of possibilities may be created from which the front line can choose with advice and guidance. (It should be clear that advice and guidance are just that, and do not become a proxy instruction or direction).

Qu. Are you clear who has to decide the policy, or different elements of the policy, and is that judgement based on the consensus view of those involved?

Use a whole system approach

There is a need to invest more broadly in what we would call a 'whole systems approach' to policy making.

The front line is one of the most important sources of expert evidence that contributes to evidence-based policy-making. However, it does not, and cannot, represent the breadth of interests and views that could be contributed to the development of a policy when the full range of stakeholders is taken into account. These stakeholders are also, of course, sources of expertise and user input, which should also have a place in the development of policy, e.g. children, patients, businesses and claimants, many of whom were involved as contributors in our different case study examples.

In order to ensure that all of these stakeholders are appropriately and effectively involved, policy development needs to be set in an holistic view of the policy area and the impacts and interactions that relate to it. This will require analysis of the policy environment and of the activities, processes and interactions that relate to it, sufficient to give a complete picture of the context within which changes might be considered and where unintended consequences might take place.
Some of the case examples show how this can be done in practice, through large workshops, involving people from all levels of policy making and implementation, through to interactive events, simulations, role plays and process 'dry runs'. Several interviewees stressed the need to make sure all the key players were engaged, and to ensure that they interacted with each other, rather than the dry process traditionally used where the front line was consulted and their views were recorded and 'fed in' at higher levels. It is important that the whole system is mapped out

to ensure all those that have a contribution are included, or acknowledged, in the policy process and the project-plan (below).

Qu: Can you describe, draw, mind map or otherwise represent the context within which the policy objective sits? And have others confirmed it is a comprehensive picture of the arena within which it must work?

Consider who the 'front-line' is/are

In order to involve the front-line there needs to be a consideration of who they are and how they will be reached. In any policy area the definition of the front-line is important. As we have already indicated there is no absolute definition, and that in many cases the front-line will involve a variety of groups of practitioners as the front-line is often a multi practitioner community.

The variety can be categorised in a number of ways. The most significant way may be in the relationship the front-line has with the policy and its implementation. In some environments the front-line is a formal part of the body that sets and implements policy (e.g. the Inland Revenue), and can be directed to deliver. In others they are removed from the policy (e.g. Health Service consultants), and will need to be engaged and persuaded to deliver.

However, the very fact of the variety (of role, and of relationship) means that policy practitioners must consider different ways in which to effectively engage them in the process, as well as the appropriate time and place for their involvement.

In effect there may be several 'front lines' for the policy under consideration. For example, in the Skill Force case study the front-line included staff of Skill Force, head teachers and teachers, social services staff and others involved in the care and education of the children targeted by the service. They will all be able to contribute from their different perspectives, recognising that their input may be best gathered in more than one way.

Qu. Have you defined the front-lines as appropriate to the policy area (and as informed by the mapping of the whole system)?

Maximise opportunities to make the most of the front line contribution

Whatever the purpose of the policy process, there will be policy givens defined by the history and politics of the policy area in question. These givens provide boundaries and sometimes constraints to future development. However, the influence of such constraining factors should be managed so as to have as little effect as possible on the contribution of the front line and on the potential impact such contributions might have. "Gold-plating" specific policy features (or even predetermined solutions) should be avoided if the most constructive and innovative ideas are to be generated from the front line. In at least two of our case study examples the front-line contribution proved to be more radical and innovative than had initially been expected from the centre.

The development of the policy should, therefore, be kept as open as possible, for as long as possible, to encourage creativity and innovation, and the generation of a broad range of possible options, which can then be compared against success criteria before the most appropriate option is determined. It is clear from our case studies that front-line staff have the capacity and understanding to offer a range of views from the incremental to the radical.

Consideration should be given to the environment within which the front-line contributes to ensure it is conducive to a full and frank contribution. This "space" should not be constrained by perceptions of status or role and which is comfortable for the relatively creative task in hand, e.g. there should be opportunities to meet in small groups, to vary agendas, to draw, write and capture contributions in varied form.

It is the policy maker's job to ensure that the framework of givens (including the political overview) is known and understood without stifling the opportunity to contribute and develop solutions that will address the core issues. Where possible, scope should also be given to challenge the givens of a specific policy framework to ensure they are appropriate and robust.

It is likely that the involvement of the front-line will have to be incentivised in some way, so as to ensure the commitment and interest of sufficient appropriate front-line staff. Many of the elements of the approach we describe here will add to their feeling of worth and involvement and may well be sufficient. In other cases, support that recognises their contribution and effort will also be appreciated, (for example, the resource available in the CHD Collaborative that allows locum cover while front-line staff are working on policy and practice).

Care should also be taken to ensure that the front-line is properly 'represented' in the process. Enthused interested participants are important, but the input of those least likely to change should also be sought, as their perspective will be an important one to address.

Given the potential value of the input of the front-line, it is difficult to imagine a policy area or development that would not benefit from front-line involvement. It is recognised that in a few specialist and sensitive areas, such as the Budget or national defence, there may be risks associated with the involvement of front-line staff that would prejudice the policy in question. However, the value of the input of the front-line is such that ways to engage them should be considered, even if indirectly or hypothetically.

Qu: What proportion of the effort and input to the policy making can be assigned to the front-line contributors? Would they recognise their contribution to the final policy?

The value of synergy

Clearly the most useful processes were seen as those when the different elements of the policy making process were brought together, where the knowledge held by those close to government about policy objectives combined with the knowledge held by those in the field about what works. Events or processes that brought a wide cross-section of people together added particular value.

We see processes that combine different knowledge and understanding as adding value, not simply in the implementation stage, but throughout the policy process: in the definition of problems to be solved, in the identification of possible solutions, the selection of solutions and in planning the implementation of the identified solution(s). It was the creative dialogue and interaction between different sets of knowledge and understanding that added most value. This also allows opportunities for 'borrowing' creativity as all the parties will be able to bring different experience to the table.

It is important to ensure that both policy makers and front-line staff share opportunities to work closely together throughout the policy process and that this is built into the project plan.

Qu.   Have you created opportunities for front-line and policy staff to actually work together as colleagues on the policy in hand?

Project-plan the engagement process

The roles and relationships of the front line are hugely varied. Having considered who and where they are, and the context within which their involvement is beneficial to the policy concerned, (i.e. the whole system approach) there is also a need to plan the process of their involvement. This would be set within the broader plan for the whole policy process, which would describe the timetable, resourcing and linkages between this policy work and the policy purpose (e.g. improvements in operational practice, responses to Ministerial direction, etc). For each policy development there should be a clear project plan, which details the whole process by which the policy issue will be addressed and indicates the outcome of the process (i.e. new or improved policy submitted to the Minister) in a defined timetable.

As we have described, the policy framework should be as open as possible to maximise the benefit from front-line expertise. This approach will also enhance front-line buy in to the changes the new policy will bring, which is an additional benefit when the policy comes to be delivered. Such buy in is engendered when people see that things have changed and that their input has value and impact. This requires a cycle of involvement for feedback and revisions. In practical terms participants will generally need to be taken away from the workplace so that they are free from distraction, which also helps build social links and networks for the sharing and discussion of ideas and issues.

In planning the process of involvement, policy makers should also be clear about their expectations of contributors and the investment (of time and energy) they are planning for, some of which may require incentives. At the very least contributors should know how their contribution is to be used and how will it be valued within the process.

The involvement of front-line staff will be supported or constrained by a variety of factors, which must be taken into account in the design of the policy process, not least of which is the time available to them in which to contribute.

Qu.   Do you have a plan and does it recognise the whole system, and the particular characteristics of the front-line you intend to involve?

Allocate enough time to involve the front line

It is clear from our research that, while managers and professionals in the field have a lot to contribute to the policy process, what they do not have is time, time both to contribute to a process and often the time to sufficiently reflect on and learn from their practice.

Where possible, front-line staff should be involved in ways that give them time and space within which to apply their knowledge and understanding to the issues under consideration. Sufficient time in which to gather and engage front-line contributions is an important element of their effective involvement. In the case of the Coronary Programme, this issue was directly addressed through additional resourcing that provided for 'back filling', where locum staff covered for those staff involved in the process, and allowed them the time and space away from the workplace, without adversely affecting delivery.

In practice, involvement will involve time away from the front-line environment, as well as allowing a meaningful amount of time within which to engage with the policy under consideration (recognising that this would be more difficult in the environment of "emergency" initiatives).

Qu.   In preparing the project-plan, do front-line staff have as much time to participate and contribute as policy makers?

Links to other aspects of Policy Making

A related piece of work with the Strategy Unit has considered the role of the Regions in policy making. This has also highlighted issues related to timing and the constraints affecting policy-making initiatives.

Where policy making has to be very fast it often proves impossible to involve the front line adequately. However, our research on involving regions suggests that, as long as the shared knowledge systems and the underlying relationships with the front line are sound, it is possible to draw on the front line in emergency situations. It is not, however, possible to build them rapidly to respond to emergencies. Similarly, if a long-term policy project has been set up well and all the key players, including the front line, understand the objectives and 'givens' and are engaged in the early stages of thinking, it becomes possible to 'speed up' the process without risking effective implementation. The lesson is that it is worth investing in good relationships across the system from policy making to delivery while developing effective policy project plans.

What works

During the course of the interviews and the workshop itself a variety of elements of good practice were identified, as captured below:

Develop clarity about the purpose of the policy

- ♣ Be clear about the objective – what issue(s) is/are being addressed

- ♣ Give clarity as to why this is/they are being addressed and what difference is intended

- ♣ Provide useable guidance that sets the scene for both the policy and the process

Clarify the balance between centralised and decentralised decision making

- ♣ Use a framework to describe the policy direction to clarify decision making and support the involvement of front-line staff

- ♣ Be clear about the givens or absolutes, and create an opportunity for them to be tested and confirmed by those involved

- ♣ Be clear about the expectations of all involved in the process

Employ a whole system approach

- ♣ Understand the whole picture – which is likely to require the mapping of end to end processes to build the picture, which in itself will undoubtedly create some new understanding

- ♣ Involve a cross section of individuals

- ♣ Bring together the whole (system) community and all its stakeholders

- ♣ Have leaders participate (to see and feel the contributions being made, and take them seriously)

- ♣ Refresh the core policy unit – bring people in from the front line on a longer term basis, and also put expertise back into the field

Identify the 'front lines'

- ♣ Recognise the different front-line audiences that could be involved or relevant to the policy

- ♣ Involve the right people, ignore hierarchy and go to those people who need to be involved

- ♣ Get out to people on the 'floor' to ensure understanding of who the right people are or should be

- ♣ Expect to involve more than one 'type' or category of front-line person

Optimise the front-line contribution

- ♣ Take people out of their normal environment to reduce operational distraction

- Be informal – providing a relaxed and mutually supportive atmosphere for discussion and debate, BUT focused with a framework of clear objectives

- Allow for flexibility knowing what the constraints are (or are likely to be)

- Be balanced, allow as much scope within these constraints to develop and challenge ideas and options, and especially ensure that additional constraints are not created

- Provide scope for the development of solutions which are fit for local circumstances or customers, but within a national framework [i.e. minimal prescription]

- Adopt and adapt products – 'borrow' creativity

- Ensure that feedback about the policy can be taken on board, both immediately and over time, so as to support constant improvement and learning from 'active' testing of the policy

- Senior front line and policy staff should demonstrate their commitment to inclusive processes through participation

- Get and support the investment of people's time

- Develop staff ownership of the issues and potential solutions through a clear presentation of the issues and developing their recognition of the problem

- Build working relationships with, and between, the formal and informal networks at the front line

- Manage their involvement in light of the potential benefits (e.g. kudos, development) available to those participating

- Involve creative and energetic people – who are skilled and motivated, who will champion the policy

- Recognise the need to test the contribution and views of the uninterested as well

Creating synergy

- Front-line staff and policy developers must be able to spend time working together on the policy and its issues

- Create or develop existing networks between the front line and policy developers to allow more effective information dissemination and feedback, which may then cope with the time constraints of some policy development at a later stage

Project Planning

- Identify outcomes for the policy and policy process – in terms of what will be done when and by who, which may include both hard or soft outcomes - but not defining the policy results

- Objective process mapping – how are we going to address these objectives, what steps is the process going to have, and to agree and define these in advance

- Involve other departments (and regions) early

- Ensure up front investment in the process, i.e. proper resourcing of the plan

- ♣ Define how the policy improvement will be assessed

- ♣ Identify how and when good practice will be identified and shared

Build in time

- Consider the need to reward or compensate front-line staff (or their colleagues who cover), given the potential for a considerable time contribution, or where there are operational or ministerial pressures for results which put pressure their involvement; this could include recognition, ownership, additional resources for their service, etc

- Cleary state the expected involvement of front-line contributors

- Ensure there is an explicit opportunity and the necessary time for feedback to be received in the process of refining the policy. An allowance should be made for reflection, and for the policy to be tested as it develops

Appendix: The Case Studies

Case Study One: DH – Coronary Heart Disease Collaborative Programme

The Coronary Heart Disease (CHD) Collaborative Programme is a national collaborative process, initiated in late 2000. In the first 'round' (of a competitive process to bid for resource and 'status' within the programme) the process identified ten local CHD networks from across the NHS, each involving six local clinical teams with the project from one of six specified by the co-ordinating team (these related to the National Service Framework for CHD).

Our work considered the development and implementation of this first phase of the programme, covering two of the networks and the national team.

The members of the local networks, i.e. front-line staff consisting of doctors and nurses and other staff, developed their own joint working across their services with support from the national programme team. This was typically based on a project approach to issues identified by front-line staff. For example, one team reviewed the whole patient journey, from the 999 call to their going home after treatment.

Each network developed its own proposals for service or process improvement appropriate to their local network, i.e. each had a specific area of interest. Each potential improvement and its expected impact were defined and then implemented. After an appropriate period of time the impact was assessed. If a change gave rise to an improvement, it was continued; if not, it was discarded. These findings were fed into the national team (based at the NHS Modernisation Agency) on a monthly basis for wider dissemination to the other networks. There have also been regular learning events held over 2 days for further sharing and dissemination. To date over 1,600 improvements have been identified, demonstrated and implemented across the networks. Specific improvements range over the whole gamut of Coronary Care, from improved response times to more effective post-operative care.

Locally, networks were encouraged to create opportunities for analysis and reflection on their services, giving time to learn more about the service elements and their interactions and to test approaches to delivery. This was an intensive process, against a background of external pressures to demonstrate success. Networks received significant funds, with the opportunity to use the programme resource to provide 'back fill' cover at institutions while network members worked on service and process improvement. In effect, learning 'space' has been created that allows practitioners time to understand their service and address performance, quality and process issues. Learning events were also held involving c 400 people at an event.

The approach to the Programme was developed from that for Cancer Care and based upon the application of 'Improvement Science'; an evidence based approach taken from work in health care in the USA. This approach 'required' the involvement of the front-line as a part of the development and implementation process.

Case Study Two: MOD – Skill Force

This initiative is the result of the MoD taking a more active role in the community and co-operating with other departments as part of the Government's social inclusion agenda. The programme is intended to target youngsters, aged 14 to 16, identified as being more likely to respond to a vocational education, who have been allowed to drop elements of the National Curriculum. The aim is to enhance the pupils' employment opportunities by improving their attitudes and by reducing truancy, juvenile crime and disaffection.

Two Pilot schemes started in September 2000 in Newcastle and West Norfolk as local initiatives. Following the success of the initial pilot schemes, further projects were started in September 2001 in Leicester, Great Yarmouth, Islington, Birmingham, Nottinghamshire, Rochdale, Knowsley, Coatbridge and Bristol, with the programme being extended to a total of 22 sites for autumn 2002.

Our work considered the interaction between two sites (Bristol & Newcastle) and the centre.

The first pilots involved the bringing together the Head teacher, the LEA and the local TEC, and subsequently the Education Business Partnership (EBP) manager to develop the case for each pilot and the context within which they would operate.

In developing the policy, the initial direction and objectives for the programme were set by the policy lead for the work, following discussions between MOD and DfES (which were initially sceptical of the potential of the project). Within this broad vision, front-line staff (i.e. the Skill Force staff, teachers and other local practitioners) were given significant scope to design and manage the operational interventions they were responsible for, to ensure that they would meet local need. This local delivery includes programme staff; local partners who are often line managers for the specific projects (e.g. New Deal for Communities activity) and teaching staff. Some of these groups initially required some persuasion to participate.

There is a relatively informal relationship between the centre and the projects, allowing local team leaders scope to interact with partners to design delivery to meet local needs. In support of this, the programme team leaders meet termly for at least 48 hours to consider practice and share ideas and issues. More formal communications are limited, in part due to limited resource for the programme as a whole and at the centre (much funding is locally accessed).

Over time networks between different delivery sites and the centre have built an effective environment for sharing and exchanging experience, allowing front-line participants to influence the policy and practice of Skill Force in what one respondent described as a 'flexible framework'. The programme also encourages the input of the children in to the programmes with each year group consulted each term.

Case Study Three: DWP – The Model Office

The Model Office was established in the mid 1990s as a 'test centre' for the development and refinement of policy and practice. The Office is an establishment in itself. It works with a variety of policy groups over time; in the last twelve months work has been carried out in support of Joint Claims for Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA), Child Support Reforms and the corporate move to Jobcentre Plus.

Our work explored the role of the Office in addressing the Joint Claims for JSA and Child Support policies, and involved staff at the Office, attendees from the front line and policy makers.

The Office consists of a facility (above a Jobcentre in Sheffield) staffed by a core team supported by other front-line staff on detachment for short (three months) or longer periods of time. The team is responsible for working with a policy 'client', who will have identified changes to policy. The team helps the client to test practice and/or products for operational suitability in a field environment through the Office.

The involvement of the Office typically follows activity to draft policy, and involves the "operationalisation" of product and policy proposals. These are tested and further developed with the Agencies (i.e. the Employment Service or the Benefits Agency, as they then were). The product or policy testing then involves the use of the Office, with a cycle of events described below.

The process typically begins with a high level meeting, which walks through the likely policy and its practical implications. This process involves front-line users acting 'in role' and reflecting on the process given their experience in a Job Centre. This gives an initial feedback to the policy and product design team. In due course, they return with a more developed policy, and the products, guidance and where possible the IT updates that have subsequently been developed.

The Office then manages a simulation process, which works through the policy in a real Office environment. Front-line staff are involved in their day roles to test the system and, where appropriate, to represent clients in the testing process. The test examines every aspect of a product or policy, covering guidance, promotional material, scripts for telephone responses, etc. The policy client then goes back and re-adjusts the policy where necessary.

The Office team is in effect process managing the policy test and the involvement of operational people on behalf of the policy lead.

Case Study Four:

DTI – Small Business Service business start- up policy

The SBS is a new business service created in 2000 to unify services to small businesses. As part of its work, a number of areas of policy needed to be developed anew or revised in the light of new delivery arrangements. One of these areas has been policy regarding the service's approach to supporting new-start up businesses. A Joint Treasury/DTI paper in June 2001 committed the SBS to the development of a '*comprehensive strategy for supporting business start-ups'.*

Following this, the team within the SBS set out to organise a developmental consultation that would help inform the policy, prior to a wider public consultation (which is currently under way, Summer 2002). This 'policy consultation' took place over a number of months. It involved a number of stakeholder groups, including front-line staff.

Our work concentrated on the process of involving the operational staff already working with start-ups, and included central policy makers and participants of the process.

The overall consultation mapped out a variety of stakeholders to the policy, including front-line staff, businesses, other service providers. Each was included separately in the consultation process. For front-line staff this meant an invitation to participate in a number of national workshops. Invitees included Business Link Chief Executives and operational managers, as well as representatives of other delivery organisations, such as Enterprise Agencies (who are contracted through Business Links).

The process of their involvement began with a workshop to consider the context and direction for the policy. Participants we invited to offer their views on the scope of the policy, and to help frame some of the issues and potential solutions. In doing so the front-line staff offered some challenging and radical views.

Following this initial front-line workshop a number of individuals volunteered to support the policy development work, which involved contributions of ideas, commenting on developing policy and a further workshop to test some of the ongoing findings.

Finally, the original group of front-line staff were invited back to a further workshop, which presented the developing policy back to the group to test and refine further where appropriate, prior to the policy being released for public consultation. At this stage the front-line participants were told to expect that many of their ideas and solutions had not 'survived' to this final draft, in part a reflection of the views expressed by the other stakeholder groups, which had cumulatively been moderated to reach the final draft.