

CHAPTER 2

THE TASKS OF THE MODERN CIVIL SERVICE AND THE MEN AND WOMEN THEY NEED

26. The tasks of modern government make heavy demands on civil servants at every level. Their jobs are immensely various. We thought it necessary, both for our own guidance and to help general understanding to investigate and report in detail on the work that civil servants do. We therefore commissioned a special investigation of the work of the Service. It was carried out by a group led by a member of the Committee, Dr. Norman Hunt, and including management consultants, an executive from a business firm and a civil servant from the Organisation and Methods Division of the Treasury. Their report, which we publish as Volume 2, contains a description of the work of those areas of the Service that they studied. We do not propose to summarise it here. But it is important at least to outline the general scope of the work of civil servants before considering what skills and kinds of men and women are needed.

27. Civil servants work in support of Ministers in their public and parliamentary duties. Some of them prepare plans and advise on policy, assembling and interpreting all the data required, e.g. for a decision on a new social security policy, a change in defence policy, a new national transport policy or a new international joint project in the technical field—whether Ministers, individually or collectively, place greater or lesser reliance on direct government intervention. They prepare legislation and assist Ministers with its passage through Parliament. They draft regulations and answer to Parliamentary Questions. They produce briefs for debates and the mass of information which the constitutional principle of parliamentary and public accountability requires. Increasingly, senior civil servants now appear before Parliamentary Committees. Some of this varied work has no counterpart in business or, indeed, anywhere outside the government service.

28. Operating policies embodied in existing legislation and implementing policy decisions take up most of the time of most civil servants. There are taxes to be collected, employment and social security offices to be run. There is a mass of individual case-work both in local offices and in the central departments of state. New policy may require the creation of a new administrative framework. There are major programmes to be managed and controlled, such as the planning and engineering of motorways from their initial location and design to the finished construction; the design of Polarix installations and other military works; the management of international programmes like Concorde; the vast range of scientific research and development and of government procurement; the central responsibility for the nationalised industries and for the state of the economy.

29. Some of the work involves the Civil Service in complex relationships with other bodies which are partners in the execution of government policy or are directly affected by it. They include local authorities and nationalised industries in the first category and a multitude of organised interests in the second. This work calls for practical judgement and negotiating skill. It also calls for a thorough knowledge of the subject under negotiation and of the problems and interests of the bodies concerned. In the economic field, for example, many civil servants need a knowledge of industry and an understanding of market forces.

30. Technical progress has a major impact on both the making and the implementation of policy, whether the tasks are traditional or new to government. Computers are a good example of this; they offer prospects of sophisticated administration hitherto impossible by permitting much more comprehensive approaches to problems and the use of more, and vastly more complex, data. This trend greatly enhances the importance of numeracy. Skill in the use of numbers is needed in addition to the qualities of judgement and foresight.

31. Even this brief and impressionistic description is perhaps enough to make it clear that, as a body, civil servants today have to be equipped to tackle the political, scientific, social, economic and technical problems of our time. They have to be aware of interests and opinions throughout the country and of many developments abroad. They have to keep up with the rapid growth of new knowledge and acquire new techniques to apply it. In short the Civil Service is no place for the amateur. It must be staffed by men and women who are truly professional.

32. We use the word "professional" in this context to include two main attributes which in our view are essential in varying combinations for work in the government service. One is being skilled in one's job—skill which comes from training and sustained experience. The other is having the fundamental knowledge of and deep familiarity with a subject that enable a man to move with ease among its concepts. Both spring from and reinforce a constant striving for higher standards. The work of government demands these qualities not only in the members of the generally recognised professions, but at all levels and in all parts of the Service. We use "professional" in this comprehensive sense.

33. These attributes of professionalism are already present in the Civil Service in some measure. But today's tasks require them to be much further developed than hitherto. The Service must also be quicker to recognise the contribution new professional skills can make to its work.

34. There are two broad types of professionalism that we believe the Service needs.

35. The first is the professionalism of those whose work in government is just one of a number of career opportunities for the exercise of their qualifications and skills. In this category are the architects, lawyers, doctors, engineers, scientists, accountants, economists, draughtsmen, technicians and so on. Some of these, like doctors and scientists, have acquired their professionalism or specialism by recognised training outside the Service. Others, like some draughtsmen and technicians, may acquire and develop their skills after joining the Service. In either event in their early years they do much

the same type of work in the public service as if they had gone into private practice, business, the universities or local government. In the rest of this report we shall normally refer to these men and women as "specialists", not to denote any narrow sub-division of some professional field, but solely as a convenient label for this broad category of Civil Service staff.

36. The Civil Service already employs large numbers of men and women of this type. But it has not always recognised the need for new kinds of specialism quickly enough or recruited enough specialists of the high quality that the public interest demands. In particular, it has been slow to recognise the benefits that would flow from a much larger recruitment of particular categories such as accountants, statisticians, economists and Research Officers and their employment in positions of greater responsibility. For example, while there were 106 economists in the Civil Service in 1967, there were only 19 in 1963. We discuss the specific problems of accountants and Research Officers* in Appendix D. Here we think it right to draw special attention to the position of accountants.

37. Present practice in the Civil Service severely restricts the role of the Accountant Class and excludes its members from responsibility for financial control. They are limited to the relatively narrow field in which departments themselves keep commercial accounts or are concerned with the financial operations of commercial organisations. Their outlets into other kinds of work and into posts of higher management are severely limited. At present the Service employs only 309 accountants of whom 64 are temporary; no post carries a salary of more than £4,500 and there are only six accountants' posts with salaries above £3,650. In our view, qualified accountants could make a valuable contribution to the management of several areas of civil service work: for example, in financial forecasting and control, in the whole field of government procurement and in reviewing the financial performance of nationalised industries. These are areas of work similar to those in which accountants are prominent in industry; but they are generally excluded from them in the Civil Service. Further, the skills of the modern management accountant appear to us to be increasingly needed at high levels of policy-making and management. He is trained to evaluate policy options in financial terms, to compare the costs and benefits arising from different uses of resources, and to apply quantitative techniques to the control of expenditure and the measurement of efficiency.

38. In addition to employing specialists in the right numbers and of the right type and quality, the Service should also allow them to carry more responsibility. Their organisation in separate hierarchies, with the policy and financial aspects of their work reserved to a parallel group of "generalist" administrators, has manifest disadvantages. It slows down the processes of decision and management, leads to inefficiency, frequently means that no individual has clear managerial authority, and prevents the specialists from exercising the full range of responsibilities normally associated with their professions and exercised by their counterparts outside the Service. In addition, the obstacles at present preventing them from reaching top management must be removed. The need for wider outlets also generally applies

*A class engaged on research mainly in the field of the social sciences. A fuller description is given in Appendix D.

to specialists whose work is peculiar to government, such as Tax Inspectors. For specialists who are to carry these greater responsibilities there will need to be a deliberate policy of training in administration and management. Our proposals to achieve these ends are contained in later chapters.

39. The second kind of professionalism which needs to be much more fully developed is the professionalism of those members of the Administrative and Executive Classes who are now treated, and regard themselves, as "generalists". In the rest of this report we shall refer to members of both these classes and their future counterparts as "administrators". Parts of their work closely resemble management in industry and commerce; other parts do not. We use "administrator", like "specialist", as the most generally convenient label.

40. Frequent moves from job to job within the Service or within a department give "generalist" administrators proficiency in operating the government machine, and in serving Ministers and Parliament. But many lack the fully developed professionalism that their work now demands. They do not develop adequate knowledge in depth in any one aspect of the department's work and frequently not even in the general area of activity in which the department operates. Often they are required to give advice on subjects they do not sufficiently understand or to take decisions whose significance they do not fully grasp. This has serious consequences. It can lead to bad policy-making; it prevents a fundamental evaluation of the policies being administered; it often leads to the adoption of inefficient methods for implementing these policies—methods which are sometimes baffling to those outside the Service who are affected by them; and it obstructs the establishment of fruitful contacts with sources of expert advice both inside and outside the Service.

41. The fuller professionalism now required from all administrators (including by our definition those now classified as "Executive") in turn calls for new principles to be applied to their selection, training and deployment. It must be accepted that for the administrator to be expert in running the government machine is not in itself enough. He must in future also have or acquire the basic concepts and knowledge, whether social, economic, industrial or financial, relevant to his area of administration and appropriate to his level of responsibility. He must have a real understanding of, and familiarity with, the principles, techniques and trends of development in the subject-matter of the field in which he is operating.

42. As we see it, the application of this principle means that an administrator must specialise, particularly in his early years, in one of the various areas of administration. At the same time, since modern administration requires men to have breadth as well as depth, and since civil servants operate in a political environment, it seems to us important that such specialisation should not be too narrowly conceived. We considered two possible ways of achieving these objectives.

43. We considered whether we should recommend a grouping of departments on the basis of their main areas of activity. Thus, some departments are mainly concerned with social problems, others with economic, financial, commercial and industrial problems and others with scientific or technical problems. It seemed attractive to believe that if departments were broadly

grouped in this way an administrator might best develop his professionalism and in particular his knowledge of the subject-matter of his area of administration, by spending most of his career within one group of departments. We rejected this solution. It is possible broadly to group departments in this way, yet almost every department has its own mixture of social, scientific economic and financial work. The Department of Education and Science is a good example. While predominantly a social department, with branches dealing with schools, teachers, further education and so on, nevertheless:—

- (a) administrators also staff the Accountant General's Branch which deals mainly with financial and economic questions;
- (b) there are administrators in its Architects and Buildings Branch concerned largely with the technical and financial aspects of school building programmes and projects;
- (c) administrators staff its Establishment and Organisation Branch which is concerned with individual career management and the promotion of efficiency and economy in the organisation of the department;
- (d) there is a large proportion of administrators among the staff of the General Science Branch and of the Council for Scientific Policy.

Today the pattern in the Department of Education and Science, as in any other department, is for an administrator to move from job to job between these widely differing branches within the department. It is this pattern of movement that we have criticised as an obstacle to the development of the required professionalism. If the Department of Education and Science were simply grouped with other social departments, this would only multiply the number of different kinds of job to which a man would be liable to be moved. This would defeat our aims rather than promote them. We recommend, therefore, a different solution.

44. Although the tasks that fall to administrators are immensely varied, we believe that they fall into broad categories which are identifiable on the basis of the subject-matter of the work rather than on the basis of the particular department in which the work is done. It is on this categorisation by subject-matter that administrative specialisation should be based.

45. We have not been able to survey all the administrative jobs in the Service. It is for the Civil Service Department* to analyse them and to identify groups of jobs which provide a field for specialisation on the basis of their common subject-matter. We believe, however, that we can identify two such groups at present.

46. First, we think that a broad group of administrative jobs in different departments is concerned with a subject-matter that is primarily economic and financial. Within this broad group the emphasis in some areas of government may be on general economic planning and control; in others, on the problems of international trade or of particular industries; in others, on the financial control of major programmes of capital and current expenditure;

*We recommend in Chapter 7 that the central management of the Civil Service should be transferred from the Treasury to a new Civil Service Department. From this point onwards in our report we refer to this new department by name when we discuss the part to be played by central management in running the Service.

in others (mainly in technical and scientific departments) on the economic and financial aspects of large technological projects. Thus, from a general economic and financial basis, the work develops its own internal specialisms. We think that this pattern should be reflected in the training and deployment of individual administrators for this work.

47. There is a second broad group of administrative jobs where the basis is essentially social; for example, housing, town and country planning, education, race relations, social security, industrial relations, personnel management, crime and delinquency. Again, within a common framework of knowledge and experience, the work develops its own specialisms. Here too the training and deployment of individual administrators should reflect this pattern.

48. Each of these two main categories of work has its own substantial and broadly based body of knowledge. We believe that a civil servant needs to draw on this to supplement his skills as an administrator if he is to develop the professionalism now needed. So the Service must ensure that its administrators acquire and develop the appropriate body of knowledge together with its associated conceptual framework and analytical tools. This means that an administrator, at least in his early years, should specialise in one or other of these main categories of work—the economic, industrial and financial, or the social. In consequence, for basic training and career management administrators should be distinguished into these two broad groups. We emphasise that this should not preclude further groupings if these are found necessary or desirable.

49. The economic and financial administrators should be men and women who, in addition to their skill in administration, also have appropriate qualifications, experience and training in such subjects as economics, finance, business administration and statistics, especially as applied to government work. Their deployment should not be limited only to the main economic departments of government. They should be employed in any department in posts that are mainly financial or concerned with economic administration and management. They should, as we have said, add to their basic knowledge of their field any further specialisation that particular areas of government work require. Thus, the career pattern of the economic and financial administrator may involve movement between departments; it should involve a steady broadening of an individual's responsibility as he moves upwards, but he should normally move between posts appropriate to members of the group. These administrators will not replace specialist economists; we discuss their relationship below.

50. We have proposed that within the economic and financial group of administrators there should be different branches of further specialisation. One of these to which we wish to draw special attention is work in the predominantly scientific and technical areas of the Service. These areas will be largely staffed by specialists, for example, scientists and engineers. Some of these—we hope an increasing number—will eventually come to be managers or administrators in the field of their specialism. But we see a continuing need in some departments for economic and financial administrators who have been specially trained to apply their skills to work of a high scientific and technological content, for example to the economic aspects of research and to the financial control of advanced technological projects. Some of them,

and we hope their number will grow, will have had scientific or technical training before they enter the Service; and this will be of value to the understanding of the language and problems of their specialist colleagues. However, the primary function of the administrator in this field is not to duplicate the specialist knowledge of the scientist or engineer, but to apply his economic and financial skills in a scientific and technological context.

51. The group of social administrators would be broader and more heterogeneous than its economic and financial counterpart. In addition to their administrative skills, social administrators should also have training and experience in the social studies relevant to modern government. They should include a knowledge of the social structure, organisation and planning of communities and regions; methods of social investigation and the techniques of collecting and analysing information commonly used in public and private inquiries into social problems; and of social administration, especially the structure of the publicly provided social services and the policy problems which arise from their development. The emphasis in this training should vary, depending very much on the particular social area of government concerned. Clearly, most social administrators will be concentrated in the main social departments of government. But many will also be employed throughout the Service. For example, we would expect the personnel and organisation divisions of all departments to contain a proportion of social administrators. There will also be jobs in the economic departments for which social administrators will be needed. As with the economic and financial administrators, the career pattern may involve service in more than one department but normally within the area of the social administrator's expertise.

52. Though in each department there should be a suitable blend of administrators from both groups, they should not replace those specialists in their departments (e.g. engineers, accountants, economists, sociologists) whose primary concern is the practice of their specialism. Thus the economic administrators in an economic department would not, for example, generally replace those who are economists by profession. The economic administrators will not have the same depth of expertise, and will be immersed in the day-to-day operations of the department in a way that would be inappropriate for the specialist economist. On the other hand, the employment of specialist economists in a department will not duplicate or make unnecessary the work of economic administrators. Besides making their contribution to policy-making, the economic administrators will be providing a great deal of explanatory information for Ministers, Parliament and the public; they will also be engaged in negotiation with outside interests; many will be involved in the administration of existing economic policies, for example policies for the distribution of industry. Jobs of this kind do not need to be done by specialist economists. Indeed, a specialist economist who became immersed in these day-to-day problems of administration could not maintain the high degree of economic expertise his work demands. Similar considerations apply to the relationships between social administrators and the specialists with whom they work. Our aim is not to replace specialists by administrators, or vice versa. They should be complementary to one another. It is, rather, that the administrator, trained and experienced in his subject-matter, should enjoy a more fruitful relation

ship with the specialist than in the past, and that the Service should harness the best contribution from each.

53. The policy of grouping administrators which we have proposed is necessary to enable them to gain the knowledge and experience their work requires. Within each group the depth of understanding, skill, knowledge and experience demanded will vary with the level of responsibility. The higher the responsibility of the post, the greater the understanding required of its occupant. It is therefore important that those who have entered the Service direct from school and have the ability to rise to positions of high responsibility should be given the kind of experience, and encouraged to gain the qualifications, that they will need for this purpose. We are convinced however that professionalism, as we have described it, is not limited in its conception to work at senior levels. It means the ability and the sustained effort needed to ensure that each job, whatever its level, is performed to a constantly improving standard. The principle that every civil servant should be equipped to pursue this aim applies throughout.

54. This grouping will also provide the necessary basis of knowledge for a dynamic Service. Civil servants who are more at home with the machinery of administration than with its content tend to be cautious—sometimes, even negative; a few, reacting the other way to what they do not fully understand, may well be rash. Either because they lack training or have moved too frequently between jobs, they are often not equipped to conduct a fruitful dialogue with experts both inside and outside the Service. Well-prepared innovation is more likely to come from those whose grasp of their subject gives them a sure awareness of its possibilities as well as its limitations and from those able to talk with experts in their own language. This is what our proposed grouping of administrators is designed to produce.

55. We do not wish that these two groups of administrators should be frozen into a rigid pattern for the rest of the century. They represent what we see as the present application of the guiding principle set out in paragraph 41: that those engaged in administration and management must not only be skilled in running the government machine, but must also have the basic concepts and knowledge relevant to their area of administration. We propose these groups as a starting-point. It should be the task of the central management of the Service to develop and refine them and to keep them up to date as the tasks of the Service change and develop. But we are confident that the continuous application of this principle will provide for the Service the necessary reservoir of trained talent and expertise.

56. From these groups and from the specialists (as defined in paragraph 35) will also come men and women to specialise in the kinds of government work for which many different kinds of background and experience can be appropriate. Examples are contracts work, computers, O and M, personnel work and so on. Such further specialisation should be encouraged and it should be possible where appropriate for some people to make their careers in one or other of these areas of further specialisation. For example, a social administrator or an accountant might go on to specialise in O and M work, moving in this field between departments to jobs of higher responsibility and eventually, perhaps after appropriate experience outside government, rising to the most responsible jobs in this field in the Service.

57. From all these professionals, administrators and specialists alike, will come the future top management of the Service. They will be men and women experienced in running the government machine; they will have a basic expertise in one or more aspects of a department's work; and they will have been broadened by increasing responsibilities and experience to become the fully professional advisers of Ministers and managers of their policies.

58. The pattern of professionalism which we propose for the future will thus be based upon training and specialisation in the early years of a civil servant's career. Some twenty years will pass before the Service is predominantly staffed by men and women whose careers have been formed in this way. We believe, however, that greatly improved standards of professionalism can be achieved in a much shorter time by the present generation of civil servants. This will need carefully planned posting and specially devised training courses. We revert to this in the section on training in the next chapter.