

## A new settlement for public services requires a new generation of public servants

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With thousands of public sector workers striking this week and the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister both speaking at the Local Government Conference in Birmingham the future of public services has rarely seemed a more divisive or topical issue.

From free schools to neighbourhood planning, service commissioning and the involvement of private and third sector providers – no citizen will be unaffected by the Coalition's agenda. Driven by Localism and the devolution of power the reform programme promises a dramatically different system of public services.

In the tit for tat exchanges about the levels of services that can be afforded, not enough is being said about supporting those required to deliver services. The Birmingham Policy Commission, which reports in early July, argues that reform of public services requires the training of a new generation of public servants to work in this changed environment.

It is ultimately unfair to look at reforming the system without empowering and training public servants to deliver these new services.

Over the last 30 years public service workers have been on the receiving end of numerous policy initiatives aimed at changing or improving their interactions with; citizens, the public, users, or customers. However, there remains a clear tension between how public service workers are trained, and how they have been required to practice in a changing environment.

In putting together proposals for the future of public services it became clear that a new generation of public services require a new kind of public servant. Crucial to this is the identification of all of those delivering public services whether in the public, private or third sectors as 'public servants'. Public servants need to be able to fulfil a variety of roles and to be equipped with a range of skills regardless of their professional identity.

Although specialist skills will always be important in the public sector, there should be a stronger emphasis on giving public sector workers transferable attributes and other skills relevant to all areas of work. In the 21st Century employment markets where people are likely to move between the public, private and third sectors these skills will become more important.

We believe the attributes of all 21st Century public servants are:

- Interpersonal skills specifically facilitation, empathy and political skills
- Synthesising skills, including sorting evidence from range of sources, analysing, making judgements, offering critique and being creative
- Organising skills for group work, collaboration, peer review
- Communication skills, making more and better use of new and multi – media resources

The persistence of the old silo mentality has been perpetuated by the way in which training, development and support for public service workers is provided. In higher education and elsewhere training, development and support continues to be offered along highly specialised professionalised pathways that lead to professional qualifications. Our post qualification training and development remains too sectorally focused and where we do create opportunities for cross sectoral development they tend to be leadership programmes. We continue to assume that people's careers in public service (or anywhere else) will be 'linear, definite, specialised and predictable'. In practice they are likely to be anything but.

To develop these new roles and skills 21st Century public servants will need appropriate and adequate support. Foremost among these is a government that publicly values and supports public service and promotes careers in public services.

Whatever settlement ultimately emerges from the Coalition's reform programme, we would hope to see public sector workers supported to develop the skills they need to work in an environment that will emphasise localism, enable user choice and encourage citizen co-production.

Simply put, we cannot expect a new generation of public services to function effectively, without a new generation of public servants