

Focus

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OECD Best Practice Guidelines for Fiscal Transparency

Fiscal transparency is defined as the public disclosure of all relevant fiscal information on a systematic and timely basis. The meeting of Senior Budget Officials considered the preliminary results of the OECD survey on fiscal transparency practices. OECD Member countries are at the forefront of fiscal transparency and can therefore assume a leadership role in the world-wide movement toward better fiscal transparency. Delegates called on the OECD to assemble information on country practices in this area in a set of best practice guidelines for fiscal transparency. The OECD has already launched work in this area, and will prepare a set of draft guidelines by early next year.

Budgeting is central to a robust economy

The OECD's work on public sector budgeting and financial management issues centres around the annual meeting of Senior Budget Officials. This two-day meeting is held each June in Paris and is attended by budget directors and other senior budget officials from OECD Member countries. The 20th annual meeting was held on 3-4 June 1999; all 29 OECD Member countries participated in the meeting. Brazil and Chile took part as observers, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Commission were also represented. Discussions at the meeting included the following topics.

Fiscal position

There have been significant improvements in the fiscal positions of many OECD countries over the last five years. A number of Member countries have moved (or are moving) from a situation of budget deficit to near balance or budget surplus. The average fiscal deficit for 9 countries as a whole has reduced from 3.6% of GDP in 1994 to 1.2% of GDP in 1999. This process of fiscal consolidation has been made easier by strong economic growth in a number of OECD countries. However, a great deal of progress has been made in reducing structural fiscal deficits over this time period as well. Although there is a slight fiscal loosening seen in some Member countries for the current year, the process of adjustment is still continuing, and has resulted in significant reductions in gross and net debt levels in many OECD countries.

Risks to fiscal position

There are two main risks to the sustainability of the fiscal improvements that have been achieved. The first is that the existence of surpluses will generate increased spending commitments – as has often been observed in the past – which will erode the fiscal

gains over time. The second is that these fiscal improvements may be vulnerable to a slow-down in economic growth. These negative effects will be particularly acute where spending commitments have been made on the basis of continued economic growth.

Establishing particular institutional arrangements that foster fiscal responsibility can help governments manage these risks successfully. The meeting considered country experience with different forms of rules for supporting fiscal prudence. There was general consensus that such rules are necessary in reinforcing spending control and managing the

fiscal position in times of both fiscal deficits and surpluses. They are an essential complement to economic growth in achieving fiscal consolidation.

Performance management


Member countries reported progress in integrating financial and performance management systems although the level of integration varied. They noted that this was more easily achieved at lower levels of decision-making (within programmes, agencies and ministries) and for more standardised-type outputs.

For more information on the meeting, including the Statement by the Chair, see <http://www.oecd.org/puma/mgmtres/budget/sbo99.htm>. ■

Sound budgetary management is central to a well-performing economy, providing greater economic stability with ensuing benefits for productivity, growth, and job creation. But sound budgetary management is about more than managing aggregates. It is also about achieving effective policy results through seeing resources flow to where they are most valuable, and having the technical operations of government performed in an efficient manner. Achieving spending control, allocative and technical efficiency results in better decision making within the economy and generally more efficient allocation of resources.

Joachim Schwarzer, Director of the Budget, Germany
Chairman, 20th Annual Meeting of Senior Budget Officials


●Administrative restructuring

Spain is restructuring its national administration in accordance with a 1997 law. It has eliminated the civil governments (prefectures) and created government subdelegations in the provinces. The peripheral services of a number of ministries have been integrated with this new network of subdelegations. A net reduction of 104 bodies has been achieved, and over 7000 employees, both official and contracted staff, have been transferred to the Ministry of Public Administration. 

Contact:

Dirección General de Organización Administrativa
Subdirección General de Planificación y Evaluación
de Administración Periférica
María de Molina 50 / 28071, Madrid
E-mail: mercedes.garcia@dgopti.map.es


●New public management in Berne

Since 1994, the **Swiss** canton of Berne has been experimenting with results-oriented administrative management in a project known as NOG 2000. New tools were designed and tested in pilot projects, and a 4-year trial period was launched in 1996. In September 1998, after 2 years of experimentation, the canton government perceived three main positive effects: increased transparency, a growing sense of accountability and greater cost-awareness. The government therefore plans to continue work on NOG 2000. Once the experimentation period is over, the canton's Great Council will decide whether to introduce results-oriented management on a larger scale. 



This symbol indicates that detailed information on a news item exists in *Focus On-Line* (<http://www.oecd.org/pumafocus>)


●Supporting administrative policy

Sweden has established a National Council for Quality and Competence to stimulate and support administrative change. The Council's work will focus on total quality management (TQM), ethics and developing the public administration in strategically important areas. At first it will act as a "skills and competence broker", offering seminars, courses, conferences and skills development programmes; developing training and discussion material; and establishing close links with academics to promote research and information exchange. 

Contact:

Mr. Lars Ångström
National Council for Quality and Competence
Tel. +46-8-786.97.00 Fax +46-8-786.97.99
E-mail: kkr@kkr.se


●The Enabling State

The **German** government has adopted a guiding principle, "the enabling state", to achieve its goal of a modern state with fewer and less complex legal provisions. Duplication of responsibilities among the local, *Länder*, national and EU levels will be eliminated, and both new and existing regulations will be reviewed. Initiatives such as the introduction of control and management instruments and cost-to-performance accounting are helping modernise administrative structures. A Modern State Central Office in the Federal Ministry of the Interior will develop strategies and co-ordinate implementation across the public sector. 


Contact:

Klaus-Henning Rosen, Director-General
Federal Ministry of the Interior
Graurheindorferstrasse 198
53117 Bonn
Tel. +49-228-681.3610
Fax +49-228-681.4633

●Developing the public administration

The **Hungarian** government is drawing up a detailed programme for the development of the public administration in 1999-2000. Its goal is a service-oriented, efficient and transparent public administration that meets European Union standards, and a professional, stable public service. Where appropriate, tools such as deregulation, decentralisation and deconcentration will be used to streamline the administration. The central administration is to be restructured into a system of agencies under ministerial control. Procedures shall be reviewed, information and customer service systems improved, and a code of civil service ethics adopted. 


●Crown entities

Crown entities were created as a separate sphere of **New Zealand's** machinery of government in 1989. They number over 3000 and cover a range of functions, organisational types and governance arrangements. The State Services Commission is working on two aspects of these entities: 1) organisational design, i.e. when should an organisation be a Crown entity rather than a government department, and what sort should it be (e.g. a statutory corporation, company or trust); and 2) improving the operation of governance and accountability arrangements, including appointment processes and the roles of ministers and departments. The results of this work will be published in a series of occasional papers available via Internet at <http://www.ssc.govt.nz>. 


Contact:

Derek Gill, Branch Manager
Strategic Development Branch
State Services Commission
Tel. +64-4-495-66.63 Fax +64-4-495-66.99
E-mail: derek.gill@ssc.govt.nz

●National Evaluation Council

To streamline the evaluation of public policies, **France** has created a National Evaluation Council. The Council is made up of 14 members nominated by the Prime Minister for a 3-year term. Each year, it proposes an evaluation programme to the Prime Minister, which it then monitors. The programme focuses on particularly innovative policies of ministries or territorial governments. Both the annual programme and the Council's conclusions are published, along with the responses of the administrations concerned. 


●State of the Service Report

In December 1998, the **Australian** Public Service Commissioner presented the first annual report to Parliament on the state of the Australian public service (APS). The report evaluates the extent to which agencies incorporate APS values, as well as agencies' systems and procedures for ensuring compliance with the code of conduct. The State of the Service Report is available on the Internet at <http://www.psmpc.gov.au>. 

Contact:

David Waddell, PSMPC
Tel. +61-2-62.72.34.07
E-mail: david_waddell@psmpc.gov.au

●Modern management and evaluation


Spain's Ministry of Public Administration (MAP) is encouraging innovative management techniques in the public administration, paying particular attention to the evaluation of results and the efficiency of administrative units. A self-evaluation methodology, known as Sistevea, helps managers determine which evaluation techniques best suit their particular units. For more information, see <http://www.igsap.mpa.es/igsap/sistevea/infor.htm>. 

Forthcoming PUMA publications

These papers were presented at the June 1999 meeting of Senior Budget Officials, and will soon be available on the PUMA web site (<http://www.oecd.org/puma/online.htm>):

- Budgeting in a Surplus Environment
- Budgeting in Canada
- Integrating Financial Management and Performance Management
- Voucher Programmes and Their Role in Distributing Public Services


●Advice from the private sector

Last year, the **Korean** government asked management analysis teams from the private and academic sectors to develop reform programmes to improve the government's operational systems. These teams have submitted recommendations to the government in areas ranging from recruitment to financial management. The government will review these recommendations and decide what action to take. 

Contact:

Mankyu Lim, Deputy Director
Administrative System Division
Administrative Management Bureau
Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs
Tel. +82-2-37.03.46.64 Fax +82-2-37.03.55.31
E-mail: jangsuwan@hanmail.net@netian.com


●Agency banking

The **Australian** Commonwealth government is restructuring the banking arrangements for its agencies. These new arrangements will give agencies greater flexibility in managing departmental resources, including cash. As of July 1999, agencies will be able to choose between private sector banks and the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) for banking services, although the RBA will continue to maintain the Commonwealth's central accounts. In addition, agencies will receive interest on their accounts for operational expenses, meet overdraft charges and have access to term deposits at the RBA. For more information, see <http://www.dofa.gov.au/abp/faqs/agency%20banking.html>. 

Contact:

Richard Bontjer, Dept. of Finance and Administration
Tel. +61-2-62.75.35.29
E-mail: richard.bontjer@dofa.gov.au

●Accrual-based budgeting

With its 1999-2000 budget, the **Australian** Commonwealth government completed its move to an accrual-based, outcome- and output-focused resource management framework. Resources will be allocated to agencies based on the full price of their outputs -- what they produce to contribute to desired government outcomes. This price includes costs such as depreciation, employee leave entitlements and an appropriate return on equity. An agency's performance will be measured based on the price, quantity and quality of an agency's outputs and services. For more information, see <http://www.dofa.gov.au/abp/>. 

Contact:

Irene Krauss, Dept. of Finance and Administration
Tel. +61-2-62.15.36.46
E-mail: irene.krauss@dofa.gov.au

Intergovernmental partnerships: a challenge to traditional accountability

Forces of globalisation and devolution are inducing national governments to shift many tasks upward to international organisations and similar fora as well as downward to subnational levels of government. As a result, a new trend towards shared decision-making between different levels of government can be observed. Partnership implies two (or more) autonomous partners, which means that policy competencies must always be shared to a certain degree. Traditionally, intergovernmental partnerships have tended to be cost-sharing arrangements of some sort.

Emerging performance partnerships go beyond the specification of financial contributions, since they involve the joint definition of performance targets as well as joint evaluations within a framework of shared decision-making.

In intergovernmental partnerships there are three kinds of accountability relationships:

- Accountability among partners;
- Accountability between each partner and its own governing body; and
- Accountability to the public.

Overview of Transfers of Policy, Management and Financing Competencies		
Cases of Partnerships	Delegation of Policy, Management and Financing Competencies	Example (*)
Shared policy, management and financing competencies	Joint management decisions within a common policy framework; activity is financed through grant provided by central government	Partnerships between the central government and municipalities for specific labour market programmes in Sweden
Shared policy and management competencies	Joint management decisions within a common policy framework; activity is financed with income raised by each partner	“National Environmental Performance Partnership System” in the United States
Shared policy and financing competencies	Joint decision on strategic objectives of fund-raising activity	Large cross-border infrastructure projects of the Euroregion Neisse-Nisa-Nysa Partnership

* All of these case studies will be available shortly on PUMA's web site (<http://www.oecd.org/puma/online.htm>), as will the full analytical report — see opposite.

Performance partnerships reduce the risk of diffusing accountability in joint policies or service delivery by:


- Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the parties involved in the partnership, including the identification of risks;
- Jointly specifying expectations of performance, including balancing expectations and capacities;
- Reporting of valid and reliable information on what was achieved;
- Jointly evaluating whether pre-determined expectations have been met;
- Following-up on the results of the evaluations and making adjustments if necessary;
- Establishing conflict resolution mechanisms. ■

●Electronic Government

Norway has launched a three-year action plan known as Electronic Government. It covers the period 1999-2001 and includes eight lines of action or priority areas:

- Year 2000 security;
- Establishing a coherent national IT infrastructure for the public service; services will include digital signatures and trusted third parties (TTP);
- Ensuring a satisfactory level of IT security;
- Providing information services on the Internet;
- Electronic administrative procedures;
- Electronic data interchange;
- Electronic commerce for public procurement;
- Management and organisation of IT activities.

Further information is available on the website of the Ministry of Labour and Government Administration:

<http://odin.dep.no/aad/publ/1999/eforvalt/en/>. 

Contact:

Ottar Ostnes, Deputy Director General

Tel. +47-22-24.26.45

E-mail: ottar.ostnes@aad.dep.telemax.no, or


Rolf Borgerud, Senior Adviser

E-mail: rolf.borgerud@aad.dep.telemax.no

●Centralising property registration

Iceland is developing a national property database that will eliminate duplicate work and offer improved data accessibility and accuracy. Previously, various official and private bodies collected data on land and property, often the same data. Now the data will be gathered in a central database consisting of four parts:

- Basic information necessary for the definition of a property;
- Constructional specifications;
- Information necessary for property surveying and evaluation;
- Information on ownership and mortgage listings.

Methods for registering property data have been harmonised, and users can now combine data from various sources. 


Contact:

Jon Vilberg Gudjonsson, Project Manager

c/o Ministry of Finance

Fax: +354-562.82.80

●Using IT for administrative reform

To reduce the “compartmentalisation” of the Luxembourg administration, the Ministry of the Civil Service and Administrative Reform has launched a research project, RACE, in conjunction with the public research centre CRP-CU. After studying co-operation among administrative staff to identify needs and obstacles, the project now focuses on developing administrative tools using electronic networks and other information technologies. 

Contact:

Tom Weisgerber

Ministry of the Civil Service and Administrative Reform

BP 106


L-2011 Luxembourg

Tel. +352-478.31.16 Fax +352-478.31.22

E-mail: tom.weisgerber@mfp.etat.lu

●Retaining IT staff for Y2K work

In Ireland, measures to facilitate the retention of skilled information technology (IT) staff essential to achieving Year 2000 compliance were introduced at end 1998.

The measures include arrangements to retain staff who might otherwise transfer, and to pay a once-off “loyalty bonus” in April 2000. 

Contact:

Tim Duggan, CMOD,

Department of Finance

Lansdowne House, Dublin 4

Tel. +353-1-604.50.65

Fax +353-1-668.21.82

E-mail: tim_duggan@cmof.finance.irlgov.ie


Forthcoming PUMA publication

Accountability Management in Intergovernmental Partnerships

This study explores the nature of different kinds of partnerships between levels of government, and considers the strengths and weaknesses of these contracting arrangements in addressing issues of performance accountability. Based on the analysis of five intergovernmental case studies, the report highlights the specific characteristics of different kinds of resource management partnerships. The current enthusiasm for partnership as a tool to deal with restricted resources often overlooks the negative incentives of shared responsibilities to blur accountability. Nevertheless, governments are experimenting with performance contracting between different levels of government, and the report further advocates the use of performance partnerships. As the report shows, performance partnerships are very different from classical contracting arrangements, since partnership agreements always involve sharing power or decision-making.

The report and case studies will soon be available free on the PUMA website (<http://www.oecd.org/puma/online.htm>). If you wish to receive a paper copy of the report free of charge, please contact *Focus* at pum.contact@oecd.org.


●New personnel policy

The **Danish** Ministry of Finance has issued a new personnel policy for the 200,000 employees of the central government. New requirements are set for central government institutions in support of three themes: management development, human resources development, and a holistic approach to the employee -- combining work and family life. Emphasis is placed on adapting these objectives to local conditions in each agency. An English summary of the policy will be available on the Internet at <http://www.fm.dk>. 

Contact:


Dorte Aurig, Head of Section
Ministry of Finance
Fax +45-33-92.40.55
E-mail: dau@fm.dk

●New civil service code

Greece has instituted a new civil service code that has been adapted to the demands of modern society. It includes civil servants' rights and obligations; a code of conduct; control and anti-corruption mechanisms; rules governing recruitment, training and leave; provisions for family or personal matters; a new grade scale; recognition of collective bargaining; a new promotion system; and disciplinary law. 

For more information on public management in OECD countries, see the PUMA website:
<http://www.oecd.org/puma/country/>

●Surveying federal employees


In the **United States**, the National Partnership for Reinventing Government sent a survey to 34,000 randomly selected federal employees, and received almost 14,000 responses. The survey questioned employees on how well their organisations applied the principles of government reinvention. One third of those surveyed said their agency made reinvention a priority, and there was strong agreement that such agencies are putting customers first and empowering employees. However, other areas -- such as co-operation between management and unions -- could be improved. For more information, see <http://www.npr.gov/library/misc/survey-full.htm>. 

Contact:

John Kamensky, National Partnership for Reinventing Government
750 17th St., NW, Washington, DC 20036
Tel. +1-202-694.00.09
Fax +1-202-694.00.02

●Recent trends in HRM


Portugal has implemented a range of human resources management measures in its public administration:

- New general principles on working hours and schedules, including provision for teleworking;
- New terms for part-time work, particularly for civil servants close to retirement;
- The optional four-day work week;
- A more coherent and equitable public service career system;
- Greater mobility between central and local administrations;
- Professional training programmes aimed at, among other things, the insertion of young people and the unemployed into the workforce and the creation of a labour exchange for temporary work needs. 

Contact:

Rogério Peixoto, Head of Division
Directorate-General of Public Administration
Labour Relations Department
Tel. +351-1-397.56.59
Fax +351-1-390.01.48
E-mail: dgap@esoterica.pt

●Performance-based pay for managers


Denmark is implementing a new performance-based pay system for central government managers that will provide greater flexibility. Under the new system, individual managers will be able to negotiate performance-related pay directly with their supervisors, instead of via a union representative. Also, the new system allows top management to offer managers individual allowances for special performance or extraordinary effort. 

Contact:

Carsten Holm, Assistant Head of Division
Ministry of Finance
Tel. +45-33-92.42.56 Fax +45-33-92.40.52
E-mail: cho@fm.dk

●Modern human resources management

In **Mexico**, the Civil Service Unit of the Ministry of Finance and Public Credit has developed the following new human resources management systems since 1995:

- A job evaluation system that assigns a value to each job based on the skills and education required;
- A performance evaluation system;
- A new pay system;
- Individual retirement insurance for public servants;
- The Integral System for the Administration of Human Resources (SIARH), which will help improve the planning of the personnel services budget. 

The use of performance indicators in the European Union: perspectives on international benchmarking

Ministry of Finance, Austria, November 1998 (41 pages)

The Austrian EU Presidency launched the project "Performance Indicators in Public Administrations in Europe" as a tool for improving the performance, efficiency and effectiveness of public services in EU Member States. This report covers approximately 780 performance indicators compiled by the participating EU Member States (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, United Kingdom). The survey clearly shows that in almost every EU Member State performance indicators are already playing an important role in the management of the public administration and/or that they will gain in importance in the future. Available in English, French and German from:

Federal Ministry of Finance
Division for Administration Development
Vienna, Austria
Tel. +43-1-514337143
E-mail: sylvia.archmann@bmf.gv.at

Public personnel policy in Europe: a comparative analysis of seven European countries

by Dr. M. Manzoor Alam, for the Ministry of Finance, Finland, November 1998 172 pages, ISBN 951-804-049-4

This comparative study on public personnel policies in Europe in 1998, commissioned by the Finnish Ministry of Finance, forms part of a large evaluation project on the impact of government employer and personnel policy. The study was conducted by Dr. Manzoor Alam in co-operation with a number of experts in Finland and six other countries (Denmark, France, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, United Kingdom). Available in English from:

Ari Holopainen, Personnel Department
Ministry of Finance
FIN-00170 Helsinki
Tel. +358-9-1604971
Fax +358-9-1604839
E-mail: ari.holopainen@vm.vn.fi
http://www.vn.fi/vm/english/public_management/

Code of Conduct

Ministry of Transport and Communications, Greece
April 1999, 22 pages

The Greek Ministry of Transport and Communications launched a co-operative process in 1998 to adopt guidelines of moral conduct for improving ethical behaviour in the public services. Ministry staff and labour unions participated. The resulting Code of Conduct has been distributed to all Ministry staff and to other public services. Available (in Greek only) at <http://www.yme.gr/news/kodikas.html> and from:

Ministry of Transport and Communications
13 Xenofontos Street
GR-101 91 Athens
Tel. +30-1-3251211

Performance budgeting: initial experiences under the Results Act in linking plans with budgets

United States General Accounting Office
April 1999, 57 pages, GAO/AIMD/GGD-99-67

The Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 requires that each year, starting with fiscal year 1999, agencies prepare performance plans containing annual performance goals covering the programme activities in their budget requests. Congress will thus gain a clearer understanding of what is being achieved in relation to what is being spent. This report to the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs assesses 35 performance plans for fiscal year 1999 that cover entire agencies or large subordinate bureaux, services or administrations. Available from:

US General Accounting Office
PO Box 37050
Washington, DC 20013
Tel. +1-202-5126000 Fax +1-202-5126061
E-mail: info@www.gao.gov
<http://www.gao.gov>

Developing management and leadership skills in Sweden's Government Offices

Office for Administrative Affairs, Sweden, 1999, 12 pages


The Government Offices of Sweden comprise the Prime Minister's Office, ten ministries, and an administrative services department. This short brochure describes the leadership policy and the development programme for managers in the Government Offices. Available in English and French from:

The Printing Works of the Cabinet Office and Ministries
Regeringskansliet
Stockholm


**For information on PUMA publications,
see our website:
<http://www.oecd.org/puma/pubs/>**

●Co-operating in reform

At a meeting in Vienna in late 1998, the following **European Union** initiatives were welcomed by ministers:

- The Use of Performance Indicators in the EU: Perspectives on International Benchmarking. The goal of this project is to achieve EU-wide performance comparisons between the individual states' public administrations using a set of commonly defined performance indicators (see page 7).
- The setting-up of a best-practice framework for assessing the quality of administrative organisations, allowing comparison and mutual learning.
- The introduction and application of guiding principles to raise standards of service in public administrations.
- Enhanced co-operation between the training institutes of the EU Member states and the European Commission (EC), in particular the management training programme for EC staff. 


●Freedom of information

The **Irish** Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, which came into effect in April 1998 for central government departments and offices, was extended to the local government and health sectors in October 1998. Under the Act, public service bodies are required to provide a range of information on their functions, activities, basis for decisions, precedents, etc., and to supply information requested by the public and other parties. By the end of 1998, some 3200 requests for information had been received by government departments and offices. 

Contact:

Gerry Kearney
Assistant Secretary
Central FOI Unit
Department of Finance
Dublin 2
Tel. +353-1-604.58.28
E-mail:
gerry_kearney@finance.irlgov.ie

●Better policies and service


The **United Kingdom** has created a Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU). The PIU aims to improve the effectiveness of government policies, their implementation and service delivery mechanisms by working with departments and others on cross-cutting and innovative projects. It reports directly to the Prime Minister through the Cabinet Secretary. The first areas to be reviewed are: developing electronic commerce, helping older people remain active, central government's role at regional and local level, accountability and incentives for co-operation among departments, objectives for rural economies. 

Contact:


Jane Halestrap, PIU
Cabinet Office
Horse Guards Road
London SW1P3AL
Tel. +44-171-270.15.33
Fax: +44-171-270.15.93
E-mail: PIU@cabinet-office.gov.uk

Every month, the Focus Hot File presents initiatives in OECD countries in the field of public management <http://www.oecd.org/puma/focus/hot.htm>

●Presenting results of reform

The **Austrian** government launched a major public relations campaign to communicate the results of its Administrative Reform Programme (known by its acronym in German, VIP) and to promote its Help web site (<http://www.help.gv.at>). It also presented the results of VIP and its plans for reform in 2000 at an Innovation Fair for the Public Sector held in May 1999. At the Fair, innovative organisations presented their projects under the general theme of "The Administration on its Way to the Citizen". 

●Fighting corruption

The **Czech Republic** has launched a government programme to fight corruption. The programme includes proposals for new legislative, organisational and educational arrangements to prevent corruption, including revising regulations on conflict of interest and witnesses protection, and redefining the system of state control. 

Contact:

Petr Solský
Management and Organisation Department, Ministry of the Interior
Tel. +420-2-61.43.22.43 Fax +420-2-61.43.35.07
E-mail: mmazel@mvcz.cz

Focus

Head of Communications, PUMA:

Geraldine Byrne-Nason

Editor-in-Chief:

Andrea Uhrhammer

Editor, "From the Bookshelf":

Deirdre Wolfender

Administrative Co-ordinator:

Marie Murphy

Copy Editors: Claude Jacqmin,

Liz Dacier

Contributors: Jon Blondal (page 1),

Elke Löffler (page 4)

Contact Focus at:

PUMA / OECD

2, rue André-Pascal

75775 Paris Cedex 16 France

Fax +33-1-45.24.87.96

E-mail: pum.contact@oecd.org

<http://www.oecd.org/puma/focus>

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