PUBLIC GOVERNANCE AND TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE
PUBLIC MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ANNOTATED AGENDA

Meeting of Senior Officials from Centres of Government on Public Sector Modernisation: the Role of the Central Agencies
Madrid, 6-7 November 2003

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MEETING OF SENIOR OFFICIALS FROM CENTRES OF GOVERNMENT
ON PUBLIC SECTOR MODERNISATION: THE ROLE OF THE CENTRAL AGENCIES

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Madrid, Spain

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OBJECTIVES OF THE MEETING

1. The meeting of Senior Officials from Centres of Government offers a unique opportunity for the former to meet with their opposite numbers from the OECD member countries.

2. The 2003 meeting, in Madrid, has three main objectives:
   
   • To multiply the opportunities for informal exchanges between participants and strengthen ties between the members of this network of colleagues with similar responsibilities in their respective countries.
   
   • To determine what, from the point of view of those who ensure the link between the political and administrative levels, are the results of a decade of modernisation of the public sector in particular with regard to relations between central agencies and the capacity of the Centre of Government to fulfil its mission of support to decision-making.
   
   • To make an initial selection of the issues to be discussed in detail in 2004 in relation to “The use and impact of information and communication technologies (ICT) for decision-making at the Centre of Government”.

3. In addition, the meeting will provide an opportunity for a mutual exchange of information between participants and the Public Governance and Territorial Development Directorate (GOV): participants will be informed about GOV’s work, and particularly that which has benefited directly from the discussions held by Senior Officials from Centres of Government in the past; the participants will indicate their priorities for the coming years, in terms of public management and governance.
ANNOTATED AGENDA

Wednesday 5 November

19.00   OECD Welcome Cocktail, in the Salón Rosales I of the Hotel Husa Princesa, Princesa 40, Madrid

Thursday 6 November

MODERNISATION OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR: THE ROLE OF THE CENTRAL AGENCIES

08.45 Meeting point for all participants in the lobby of the Hotel Husa Princesa, Princesa 40
09.00 Departure by bus from the Hotel Husa Princesa to the meeting place
09.30-10.00 Opening of the meeting by Mr. Julio Gomez Pomar, Secretary of State for the Civil Service, and Mr. Richard E. Hecklinger, OECD Deputy Secretary General, in the Reception Hall, Palace of La Quinta de El Pardo (Carretera Madrid a El Pardo M 605, Km. 2)
10.00-11.00 Session 1: Steering versus Rowing: a Decade of Modernisation

Over the past two decades, many governments have undertaken major internal reforms. In an effort to make the public sector more productive, efficient and service-oriented, countries have streamlined, reordered, restructured and decentralized. The reforms introduced under the impetus of new public management require central agencies to act as a core group of strategic planners and have highlighted the importance of “steering” over “rowing”.

This session will review OECD countries’ experience of reform as seen from the Centre of government. It will also explore, from the viewpoint of the Centre of Government, what the future directions for public management are following this period of reform. How have these reforms impacted on the structure and functions of the Centre of Government and how have they changed its role as the main actor in decision-making? This raises the broader question of the capacity of Centres of Government to support the achievement of government programmes.

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1 The term ‘central agencies’ is used here to refer to the Prime Minister’s Office/Cabinet Office, Finance/Budget/Treasury Ministries or agencies, and the Civil Service/Public Administration/State Reform Ministries.
11.00-11.15 (approx.) Coffee break

11.15-13.20 Session 2: Modernisation, Performance and the Role of the Centre
[Reference document: GOV/PUMA/MPM(A2003)2]

Modernisation changes have been motivated by the need to improve the performance of the public sector. By focusing on performance, central agencies give up control over inputs in favour of a longer term, more strategic and less detailed, view of performance. The convergence of information towards the Centre of government endows it with a key role in monitoring government performance. At the same time, it struggles to dedicate sufficient time and attention to such strategic issues, given the pressures of daily demands.

This session will seek to identify the main barriers to using, and acting upon, performance information received by the Centre. The session will include a discussion on how accountability arrangements between the central agencies and the spending Ministries have changed. Finally, it will review the challenges for Centres of Government in the future.

13.20-13.30 Conclusions of the morning’s discussions by the Chair

14.00-15.15 Buffet lunch hosted by the Spanish authorities at the Palace of La Quinta de El Pardo

15.30-16.30 Session 3: Managing Public Expenditures and the Role of the Centre
[Reference document: GOV/PUMA/MPM(A2003)3]

Modernisation reforms in many OECD countries have been driven by fiscal constraints and the need to reduce public spending. Even in those countries with a budget surplus, the pressure to maintain a lean public sector remains strong. This has had two major consequences for reform. First, tight fiscal limits have impeded, rather than aided, allocating scarce resources to efficient uses or political priorities. Second, the budget has become one of the key instruments for setting government policy and a powerful tool in the hands of the Central Budget Agency. This has led to changes in the relations between, as well as roles and responsibilities of, the main central agencies.

The session will examine whether the potential for modernisation is limited by tight fiscal constraints, or, on the contrary, whether it has served to better focus attention on the key areas for reform. It will also explore how the Centre of Government has fared in the shifting balance of power among central agencies, the impact of that shift and lessons learned.

16.30-16.45 (approx.) Coffee break
16.45-18.20  Session 4:  Balancing Devolution and Decentralisation with the Strategic Needs of the Centre

Devolution and decentralisation of decision-making authority and service provision are key elements of many modernisation reforms underway in OECD member countries. This concept takes many forms including devolving more decision-making power to Ministries, delegating power to semi-autonomous agencies or giving more authority to other levels of government. The objective of decentralisation is to allow those who are more closely identified with policy implementation make more of the decisions. But it also raises the problem of ensuring policy coherence and achieving the Prime Minister’s policy objectives. Some countries have realised that they have gone too far, and have sought to recentralise control.

This session will build upon the experience of countries that have undertaken the redesign of government – including the formal and planned devolution of decision-making authority away from the Centre. The discussion will focus on lessons learned for countries that are contemplating similar reforms and on the key capacities and needs of the Centre in helping to steer government.

18.20-18.30  Conclusions of the day’s discussions by the Chair

20.30  Departure by bus from the Hotel Husa Princesa for the official dinner

21.00  Dinner hosted by Mrs. Julia García-Valdecasas Salgado, Minister of the Civil Service, at the restaurant “El Café de Oriente” (Carlos III, no. 3, Plaza de Oriente)

22.30  Return by bus to the Hotel Husa Princesa
Friday 7 November

DISCUSSION ON A TOPIC OF COMMON INTEREST

08.15 Meeting point for all participants in the lobby of the Hotel Husa Princesa

08.30 Departure by bus from the Hotel Husa Princesa

09.00-09.45 Information on OECD by Mr. Richard E. Hecklinger (OECD Deputy Secretary-General) Discussion.

09.45-10.45 Session 5: The Use and Impact of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for Decision-making at the Centre of Government

The discussion will contribute to identifying the questions to be debated at the 2004 Centres of Government meeting, which will be devoted to the use and impact of information and communication technologies for decision-making at the Centre of Government. The speed, volume and scope of interactions made possible by ICT have major implications for decision-making at the Centre of Government. The convergence of information towards the Centre, the elaboration of decisions and their communication internally and externally are all facilitated by the use of ICT. At the same time, these tools also raise new challenges in terms of information management, priority-setting and transparency.

This session will examine the impact of ICT on the role, functions and procedures of Centres of Government. Has ICT helped to improve co-ordination and consultation when preparing and communicating government decisions? How have Centres of Government adapted to meet the twin challenges of an increasing volume of information and an acceleration of exchanges raised by ICT? Finally, the session will explore how ICT has influenced decision-making both in the preparatory stages and within the Council of Ministers.

10.45-11.00 (approx.) Coffee break

11.00-12.20 The Use and Impact of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for Decision-making at the Centre of Government
Continuation of the discussion

Other topics of common interest proposed by participants could be discussed.

12.20-12.30 Conclusions of the morning’s discussions and general conclusions of the meeting by the Chair

12.45 Departure by bus to the Palace of La Moncloa (residence of the Prime Minister)
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<th>Time</th>
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<tr>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>Meeting with Mr. Javier Arenas Bocanegra, Vice-President of the Spanish Government and Minister of the Presidency, and closing of the meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>Buffet lunch hosted by Mr. Javier Arenas Bocanegra at the Council of Ministers (Palace of La Moncloa)</td>
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<td>15.00</td>
<td>Departure by bus for the Hotel Husa Princesa</td>
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