

REVIEW OF CROSS-GOVERNMENT HORIZON SCANNING

Aim

1. To be effective, government today must be strategic, agile and relentless in its focus on delivery. Civil Service reform is intended to help public servants throughout government balance these priorities at a time of constrained resources. Improving our capability for horizon scanning is part of that process and should ensure that policy makers are better informed and able to set out real choices and trade offs more effectively. It will better prepare us to take advantage of the opportunities and mitigate the roles of a world that continues to change profoundly and rapidly.
2. This review has been commissioned by the Cabinet Secretary to consider how Departments make use of horizon scanning, to assess the capabilities and structures used by the Civil Service to anticipate risk and identify opportunities over the medium-to-long term, and to make recommendations on how best to enable effective, shared strategic analysis across Government on the future challenges facing the UK. Its focus is on the Civil Service but it presumes that horizon scanning will often be undertaken in partnership with others in the public and private sectors.

Background and issues

3. The Civil Service has a strong tradition of conducting valuable horizon scanning activity. This has been recognised on many occasions and efforts have been made to ensure that, as an organisation, we do not lose the capability. Currently horizon scanning occurs in a wide range of departments¹ and a diverse variety of sources (academia, industry, international partners) are used during the consultation and challenge phases. There are strong networks of analysts at the working level, producing informative products internally, but there is weak integration between Departments and with the policy agenda, particularly at the senior level. The UK does not lack the resources to conduct horizon scanning, but needs to improve upon and formalise the structures for directing work and making use of the end product.
4. Horizon scanning is widely regarded to be of use to strategic decision making, if correctly presented and coordinated. It does not predict the future, but by using its findings to inform policy, we can improve operational preparedness, resilience, develop more robust strategies, and decrease our risk exposure.
5. Previous reviews have attempted to embed cross-cutting horizon scanning into government structures without enduring success. A history of work undertaken to date is at Annex A. There is no set, cross-government agreed definition of horizon scanning. This is

¹ **Departments and Agencies conducting horizon scanning on a regular basis:** FCO, SEPA, NERC, Natural England, CAMERAS, CERF, Environment Agency, HPA, BIS (Foresight), HMT, DT, Home Office, DCLG, DEFRA, MOD (DCDC, DSTL, DI), HSL, SOCA, HMRC, Cabinet Office, DECC, DWP. **Networks:** Science Innovation Network, National Security Strategy (NSSL), National Strategy (NSN), Heads of Horizon Scanning (HOHS), Futures Security and Intelligence Organisations (FUSION), Chief Scientific Advisors (CSA), Home Office (CAST)

confusing, for both the practitioner and the customer. For the practitioner, horizon scanning is part of the Futures tool kit, for the strategic customer, it is an umbrella term describing the analytical activity of looking beyond the here and now. This difference in terminology, in conjunction with the view of some that horizon scanning activity is too intangible to be useful in supporting policy making, may be a factor in why previous attempts to embed horizon scanning into decision making have failed. For the purposes of this Review, and going forward, UK government horizon scanning is defined as:

A systematic examination of information to identify potential threats, risks, emerging issues and opportunities, beyond the Parliamentary term, allowing for better preparedness and the incorporation of mitigation and exploitation into the policy making process.

6. Horizon scanning activity currently occurs to differing degrees across Departments, and whilst there is an appetite for horizon scanning output, the degree to which it is utilised by senior leaders differs. Barriers to its use lie at multiple levels. Horizon scanning activity is often self tasked or commissioned with a limited understanding of what it might be used to inform. This has led to more generic pieces of work which do not translate well if used to answer specific questions on completion. Ministers and senior officials are often accused of being too focused on tactical issues and it can be a challenge to find time to engage them on issues which might not impact for anything up to 50 years, if at all. Horizon scanning products are often lengthy, and poorly presented, making them harder to digest and easier to ignore. It is also rare for them to include policy implications or an analysis of how the information presented could be used to inform decision making. While some horizon scanning networks coordinate and share best practice, a lack of truly cross-governmental oversight and coordination has prevented cross-cutting horizon scanning work reaching the relevant audiences. This has led to duplication of effort, with narrow, stove piped working which limits the relevance and impact of the output. In addition, there is a belief that horizon scanning is ignored when the strategic level is not open to challenge.

Consultation

7. Senior officials, policy makers and horizon scanning practitioners were consulted at throughout this Review, through workshops, questionnaires and meetings. Summaries of the workshops can be found at Annex B and C. The key themes are summarised below.

- a. **Benefits of long term analysis.** The Civil Service needs to meet both the challenges of the day and be mindful of the longer term. It is a Civil Service responsibility to look beyond the parliamentary term and so day to day issues and short term politics should not drive the horizon scanning agenda. The horizon scan needs to remain objective and independent, but, where relevant, policy implications need to be developed from it that take into account current planning. There is a balance to be struck.
- b. **Commissioning.** The current commissioning process depends on the Department, is largely done within the analytical community and can be quite ad hoc. Internal departmental horizon scanning often has more traction than cross-cutting products because it has usually been commissioned directly to support specific objectives. Cross-cutting products tend to have less clarity over what they might be

used for and have less focus on specific areas. Engaging potential policy customers early so that practitioners understand their requirements, and continuing to work with them at appropriate intervals throughout the process, would make the output more relevant without compromising the integrity of the product. This will ensure that policy makers are part of the process and prevent horizon scanning from being too much of an isolated discipline.

- c. Increased coordination/oversight.** Currently there is some co-ordination of horizon scanning activity through networks run by the Horizon Scanning Centre, but it is limited in scope. Without central coordination there is no way to ensure genuinely cross-cutting horizon scanning output is robust, reaches the right people and informs policy areas. Coordination would encourage the spread of best practice and reduce duplication of effort whilst ensuring that the entire community is aware of priorities in this area. It will make better use of existing resources within Departments and improve long term planning. However, the co-ordination function should not also be used to produce horizon scans. Their role is to facilitate, manage and communicate.
- d. Culture change.** Improving coordination alone is not enough. Horizon scanning needs to be embedded into the Civil Service mindset as a useful tool in decision making. Currently it can be seen as irrelevant to wider analysis and as such, is easy to ignore. Horizon scanning needs to be owned and led by a senior 'champion' who uses it to inform and determine strategic priorities, and encourages others to do the same.
- e. Presentation.** Senior customers have finite time available to them and documents that are too lengthy and whose relevance is not immediately obvious are likely to go unread. There isn't a one-size-fits-all answer, but horizon scanners need to consider more carefully the way they present findings and adapt the messages to suit the audience. Robust challenge of findings needs to take place to ensure credibility and enable the development of implications for policy and strategy. This allows findings to remain independent whilst providing a more beneficial tool for policy makers.
- f. Outsourcing.** Horizon scanning practitioners use a wide range of external institutions, academia, industry specialists and foreign governments' analysis to inform their judgements. This interaction, which is largely informal, also tends to be specific to the Department with individual networks and contracts developed independently. Sharing networks across Departments and using formal contracts more flexibly to meet multiple requirements should be explored. This would offer alternative perspectives and sources of knowledge, and provide robust external challenge, which would enhance the credibility of the overall product. Using these trusted contacts to inform both the initial scan and the development of the policy implications offers better value for money and a more robust final product. Completely outsourcing horizon scanning work requires a very clear commission and may be too far removed from Departmental reality to be useful as it then requires significant further work.

8. During the Review current government structures, particularly the Joint Intelligence Committee processes, and the interaction of horizon scanning networks such as the Heads of Horizon Scanning and the Foresight Community, were examined. Annex D sets out a number of governance structures considered.

Assumptions

9. The key assumptions that have informed the review are:

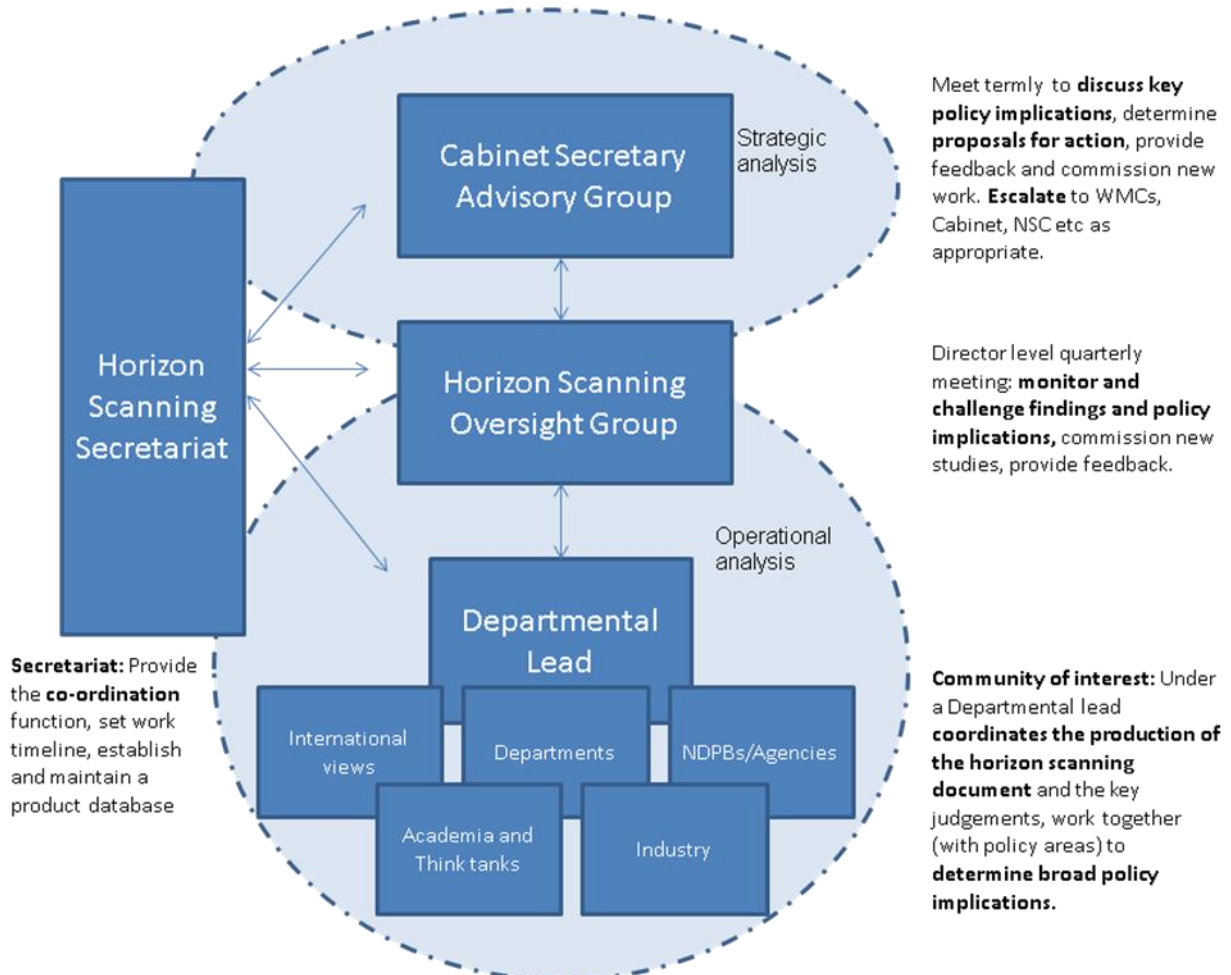
- a) The benefits of conducting horizon scanning outweigh the negatives when it is used to add value to strategic decision making. It is a wasted resource if it is not ultimately used to inform the policy agenda in a coherent way.
- b) Strong networks and structures exist but we need to build on them.
- c) Short-termism is often cited as a barrier to traction with horizon scanning outcomes. If horizon scanning activity is to be successfully embedded in the policy making process, it must be championed by the Civil Service, who should use it to inform the longer term strategic context.
- d) Horizon scanning should be seen as complementary to current analysis and policy thinking, not as an isolated discipline.
- e) Horizon scanning is a valuable tool for ensuring robust policy through contestability testing, but it is not the only tool.
- f) Government would benefit from creating a common base line of assumptions, and shared views about the nature of plausible futures, that can be used as a common starting point for planning.
- g) Horizon scanning commissioned internally by Departments, without cross-cutting implications, should remain the strategic responsibility of Departments and has not been considered by this Review.

Recommendations

10. **Senior Champion.** The implications for the UK flowing from horizon scanning cover both the domestic and the security areas of interest. As the only senior post considering the entirety of strategic policy making across Whitehall, the post of Cabinet Secretary should formally own horizon scanning and act as a champion for it. Embedding horizon scanning in the culture of the Civil Service needs to be both a bottom up and a top down process led by the Cabinet Secretary.

11. **Commissioning.** The horizon scanning commissioning process must be a consultative one with ongoing engagement between the departmental lead, and relevant policy and strategy areas. This will increase understanding throughout the process of what the strengths and weaknesses of horizon scanning are, highlight any areas not previously considered by policy makers, reduce duplication of effort and ensure that the end product has practical utility.

12. **Structure.** The Cabinet Office should provide the strategic coordination of horizon scanning activity. The Cabinet Secretary, with a group of key advisors, should meet to discuss strategic policy implications as a result of futures work on a termly basis. A proposed structure for this is below. One of the aims of the structure is to remove departmental compartmentalisation and generate an agreed view on cross cutting issues.



Senior engagement is necessary for horizon scanning to be taken seriously and included in the policy agenda. The process is very much a fluid one requiring feedback and information push and pull at all levels.

- i. To give direction and leadership to horizon scanning across-Government, the Cabinet Secretary should be supported by a group of Permanent Secretaries, known as the **Cabinet Secretary Advisory Group (CSAG)**. The role of this group is to challenge and consider key judgements with strategic implications for the UK, determine what action needs to be taken and incorporate horizon scanning output into the work agenda. The group will also commission further horizon scanning or policy implications work. The CSAG should consist of a core of five-six PUSs from across Government, including the Government Chief Scientific Adviser and the Cabinet Secretary. I recommend that the Cabinet Secretary appoints a non-executive director to provide external views and challenge. The Cabinet Secretary will also appoint the members of the group, who will be expected to act in a

corporate, rather than a Departmental, capacity. Senior departmental reps will be invited to attend when the agenda is relevant to them. The meeting will be chaired by the Cabinet Secretary, aided by the chair of the Horizon Scanning Oversight Group. The CSAG should meet on a termly basis and escalate issues to Cabinet, National Security Council or Permanent Secretaries as appropriate.

- ii. The **Horizon Scanning Oversight Group (HSOG)** should be established to ensure relevant judgements and implications are drawn from horizon scanning activity and consist largely of Director level representation from five-six Departments, including Government Office for Science (GO-Science) and Cabinet Office. The chair should be appointed by the Cabinet Secretary and should be a member of the CSAG. The HSOG will provide a strategic level of challenge to the findings provided by the Departmental lead and the community of interest. The HSOG will commission new work, appoint departmental leads for cross government work, and filter the highest priority implications for the PUS group. They will also provide advice on publication of horizon scanning documents or summaries. The HSOG will meet on a quarterly basis.
- iii. Analysis of cross government horizon scanning work will be undertaken by communities of interest, led and coordinated by an appointed department. Policy makers, SMEs and academia should be engaged to gain the widest view of the implications of the horizon scan. This Review does not make a recommendation on the tools used to conduct horizon scanning which should still be at the discretion of the practitioner.
- iv. The whole process will be supported by a **Horizon Scanning Secretariat (HSS)**, within the Cabinet Office. The HSS will be the conduit of information to the CSAG, the HSOG and to the community of interest. The HSS will provide coordination of cross government horizon scanning, determine the work programme in line with the wider agenda set by the Cabinet Secretary, and will maintain a database of horizon scanning products to prevent duplication of effort and to encourage knowledge sharing.

13. **Networks.** There are good networks in place which provide useful knowledge sharing but which can be quite ad hoc in nature in some areas. The maintenance and development of these networks should become a formal part of the remit for the Horizon Scanning Centre in GO-Science, working with the HSS.

14. **Outsourcing.** Completely outsourcing horizon scanning work requires a very clear commission and may be too far removed from Departmental reality to be useful. However, outsourcing of defined aspects of horizon scanning work is recommended where it is viewed to be value for money and where the commission is bounded clearly.

15. **Future work.** In line with the aspiration to embed horizon scanning into the Civil Service, training and knowledge sharing of horizon scanning tools and techniques should be encouraged across the Civil service community. This Review has not looked in detail at training and therefore makes no recommendation on the current provision of training or the additional quantity required.

Implementation

16. The Cabinet Secretary should appoint a Director to oversee the implementation of this Review and to run horizon scanning on his behalf. The Director should be a member of HSOG and be the secretary for CSAG.

17. The first priorities for the CSAG should be to establish the immediate work programme for the next 12 months and test the robustness of the recommended structure through pilots.

18. Horizon Scanning Secretariat should consist of three-four people. These are new full-time posts which should be found from within existing Departmental resources.

Conclusion

19. The structure recommended by this review aims to embed the practice of using cross-cutting horizon scanning in the policy making process. Increased oversight of the process will ensure implications for policy are highlighted, a common base line is established, duplication of effort is mineralised and best practice is shared.