

# REPORTER

The electronic magazine of the United Kingdom Agency Chief Executives' Association



ACE Reporter

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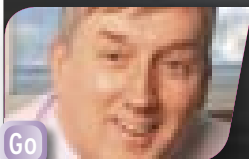
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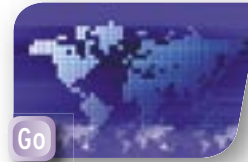
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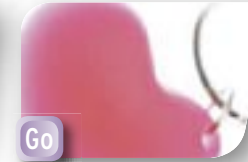
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# REPORTER

The electronic magazine of the United Kingdom Agency Chief Executives' Association



Around world  
NI GeoHub



At the heart of  
procurement



Efficiency is not  
going away

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Find out more at  
[www.ace.gov.uk](http://www.ace.gov.uk)



## Living in interesting times

Welcome to the first edition of ACE Reporter. This will be my first and last issue as editor – I will be moving on from my role as chief executive of OGCbuying. solutions in October. Hopefully the articles here will inform you about developments across central government.

We seem to be living in interesting times for senior civil servants – the publication of capability reviews ([page 5](#)), continued NAO and parliamentary scrutiny ([page 14](#)) and the continued drive to improve efficiency in government ([page 11](#)) are all covered in this quarter's publication.

There are also articles from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland on topics of particular interest to members in those parts of the UK.

However, there are more contentious issues not explored here which may be worthy of debate in the future – the recent IPPR [www.ippr.org](http://www.ippr.org) report – the Black Box – Accountability and Performance in the

Senior Civil Service has some interesting proposals for reforming the senior civil service and particularly the interaction with Ministers. A debate “behind closed doors” at our conference in November ([page 15](#)) might be stimulating.

Talking of closed doors – how has FOI impacted your organisation's ability to deliver? Has it seriously hampered you or been a bit of a damp squib – an article or two on this might make interesting reading.

Finally has anyone experience of implementing shared services without curtailing the operational freedoms that in many ways are at the heart of agencies' success. Once again if you feel you can, please put finger to keyboard and share your experiences with your colleagues.

Hugh Barrett



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# Rapidly growing network

ACE in its new guise only began to recruit members this summer and already we have members in the following organisations with more joining each day.

We would encourage you to recruit a chief executive in another agency or a senior manager who reports direct to you to join the growing network that is ACE.

[\(Click here for online application\)](#)



- People, Pay & Pensions Agency
- OGCbuying.solutions
- Culture North East
- Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA)
- Government Decontamination Service
- Central Office of Information
- Scottish Prison Service
- Royal Parks
- The National Archives
- Companies House
- Land Registry
- Home Grown Cereals Authority
- British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTA)
- Her Majesty's Courts Service
- Veterinary Medicines Directorate
- HM Inspectorate of Education
- Defence Estates
- Assets Recovery Agency
- Scottish Court Service
- Office of Rail Regulation
- The Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS)
- Communities Scotland
- Crown Prosecution Service
- Criminal Records Bureau
- Strategic Investment Board (SIB Northern Ireland)
- Child Support Agency
- Marine Fisheries Agency
- Historic Scotland
- Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland
- Northwest Development Agency
- Charity Commission for England and Wales
- Valuation Office Agency
- Met Office
- Sports Council for Wales
- Ordnance Survey
- National Weights and Measures Laboratory
- Postwatch
- Northern Ireland Prison Service
- Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland
- Office of Fair Trading
- Registers of Scotland
- East Midlands Development Agency
- The Fire Service College
- Wilton Park
- Transport Scotland
- Defence Vetting Agency
- Highways Agency
- UK Hydrographic Office
- Student Loans Company Limited
- The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE)
- Heritage Lottery Fund
- Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency (AFPAA)
- Planning Inspectorate
- Student Awards Agency for Scotland
- UK Debt Management Office
- Scottish Building Standards Agency
- Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS National)
- Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA)
- Driving Standards Agency
- Defence Communication Services Agency
- Gambling Commission
- Pesticides Safety Directorate
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# GeoHub for Northern Ireland

We live in the Information Age – but what is not always realised is that around 80% of information – including Government’s – has an important or even critical spatial element.

This information relates to locations, addresses or features within the natural or built environments. Organisations can very usefully link their information assets and those of other organisations through a common geographical framework to assist in policy development and appraisal, operational efficiencies and citizen-centric communication. Obvious examples include planning the provision of schools or health care to match demographics, examining the environmental impact of a new road development or analysing the flood risk to individual properties. The list is virtually endless.

Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland, an Executive Agency within the N.I. devolved administration, is constructing a GeoHub for Mosaic – the Geographical Information (GI) Strategy for N.I. This will allow users from across the public service, and the wider economy,



to provide, find, share, collate, interrogate, analyse, license, download and manipulate the wide array of GI that is held and maintained by individual organisations. The GeoHub, representing an investment of over £1.5m, is the first in UK and will use thin client web mapping and feature services, linked by a

metadata search engine and fronted by a Geoportal. This means that considerable functionality is available using only an Internet browser, which, together with the data hosting and maintenance capabilities of the GeoHub, will lower the cost barriers to holding and exploiting GI.

# Capability reviews – What next?

The Cabinet Secretary, Sir Gus O'Donnell, has published the first four Capability Reviews for the Home Office and Departments for Constitutional Affairs, Education and Skills, and Work and Pensions, together with a summary of the key themes emerging from them. [www.civilservice.gov.uk](http://www.civilservice.gov.uk)

And the programme continues. We are already reviewing the Cabinet Office, DTI and DCLG. We recently announced that we will be reviewing DCMS, MOD, DEFRA, FCO and DfID in the autumn. The remaining departments will be completed by the summer of 2007.

When he launched the review programme in October 2005, the Cabinet Secretary recognised that delivering public services in the future will require better professional skills and increased flexibility to meet the needs of a diverse population with higher expectations of public services. So this has not been the Civil Service reviewing itself. Each review team included leaders from the private and public sectors. The reports are based on robust, evidence based assessments of Departments' capabilities to

meet future challenges. Each report includes an assessment of departmental capability in ten key areas using a traffic light system ranging from Serious Concerns to Strong.

As part of each report, the permanent secretaries outlined what action they intend to take in response to the Review. Over the next eighteen months the Cabinet Secretary will hold permanent secretaries to account for the progress of their action plans. The Prime Minister's Delivery Unit will conduct and publish a full re-assessment after two years.

While departments are working on their action plans, we will be looking at the cross-government themes that emerged from the reviews: strengthening the centre of departments, developing stronger, strategic Departmental boards, improving the way departments engage with individuals and communities, looking closely at what models of delivery work best and strengthening professional skills within departments.

Copies of the Capability Review reports can be found at [www.civilservice.gov.uk](http://www.civilservice.gov.uk)



**Ian Watmore is Head of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit in the Cabinet Office.**

# Suffolk gets switched on to IT

John Suffolk is the new Government Chief Information Officer (CIO).

He will lead the work of the CIO Council in delivering the Government's strategy for the transformation of public services, enabled by technology. In this role, John Suffolk will provide leadership to the IT profession across the wider public sector, enable public service transformation through the strategic deployment of technology, drive the development of shared services and act as the face of UK Government IT both home and abroad.

Jim Murphy, the Cabinet Office Minister said, "The Government CIO is a high profile post at the centre of Government.

"I am delighted to announce John Suffolk has been appointed to this post as I believe he has the necessary drive, experience and leadership qualities to fill this pivotal role – a role in which he will be expected to play an important part in realising the government's vision for public service reform."

He will move up from his current position as Director General of Criminal Justice IT



(CJIT). He was appointed to this post in February 2004. He has a background of over 25 years' experience in IT and major transformation programmes and has worked in the financial service industries and has extensive experience in delivering IT-enabled change.

He will report to Ian Watmore, the Head of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit and former Government CIO.

Ian Watmore said, "I am very pleased to welcome John into this role. After a successful career in the financial services

sector, he has been an influential member of the CIO Council from its inception, through his leadership role on Criminal Justice IT. This combination of public and private sector experience makes him ideally equipped to lead the implementation of the Transformational Government strategy to enable the delivery of better, more efficient, public services."

The Transformational Government Strategy was launched in November 2005. It sets out the Government's vision for a long-term transformation of public services to provide efficient, effective services designed around the needs of citizens and businesses.

- The Transformational Government Strategy and the implementation plan are available at [www.cio.gov.uk](http://www.cio.gov.uk)
- The CIO Council acts as a focus for partnership between IT professionals across government and the wider public sector and is charged with creating and delivering a government-wide CIO agenda. The Government CIO is Chair of the Council.

# At the heart of procurement

The Office of Government Commerce (OGC) is keeping a finger on the procurement pulse.

OGC [www.ogc.gov.uk](http://www.ogc.gov.uk) leads on the UK's procurement policy and is responsible for implementing EU Procurement Directives by way of UK regulations.

Many policy developments that will impact on the UK start at EU and international level. OGC negotiates with the EU Commission and other member states on these policy issues and informs public sector procurers of their impact.

In July, a Procurement Policy Note was sent out by OGC explaining the Commission's view on how public authorities should award contracts of low monetary value (PPN03/06). The main concerns of the Commission in this area were that despite not being subject to the Directives, low value contract awards should still comply with EU Treaty principles of transparency and non discrimination so that the contract award is fair and open to all.

OGC has a training programme on the new Consolidated procurement



Directives, which has already started and they are working on detailed guidance on a new award procedure – Competitive Dialogue (PPN/04/06 was issued on this subject in July).

This area also advises a range of departments and authorities wishing

to promote policy objectives such as sustainability, race and disability through procurement by providing guidance on how this can be achieved at each stage of the procurement process within the legal and policy framework.

# New NI is taking shape

The government has been taking steps to rationalise the administration of Northern Ireland with its Review of Public Administration (RPA).

The country – with a land area similar to Yorkshire’s and a population of 1.7 million – is seen as over-governed in terms of the number of public bodies. The public sector represents a disproportionately large part of the economy.

The province has been enjoying an economic boom in this last decade of peace, and despite the current suspension of the N.I. Assembly, there is general consensus that major changes in public administration are needed.

The Secretary of State, Peter Hain, accelerated the pace in recent announcements. Key decisions include:

- Local councils reducing from 26 to seven (controversy continues on the exact number), with the new larger councils having increased powers, some devolved from Departments.
- A new Education and Skills Authority to replace the current four Educational and Library Boards.
- A Health and Social Services Authority to replace the four Health and Social Services Boards and 18 HSS Trusts reduced to five.
- The remaining 81 public bodies reducing to 54 by mergers or transfer of functions.
- A new Land & Property Services agency created from the merger of Ordnance Survey (OSNI), Land Registers (LRNI), Valuation and Lands Agency (VLA) and the Rates Collection Agency (RCA).

One theme of the RPA is co-terminosity, meaning that the various bodies should share common geographical boundaries (or nest within them) to boost collaboration, information exchange and accountability can be optimised.



# Transforming Scotland

Public services in Scotland are set to brave the challenges of reform.

Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform Tom McCabe recently published the discussion document on reform – Transforming Public Services – the next phase of reform.

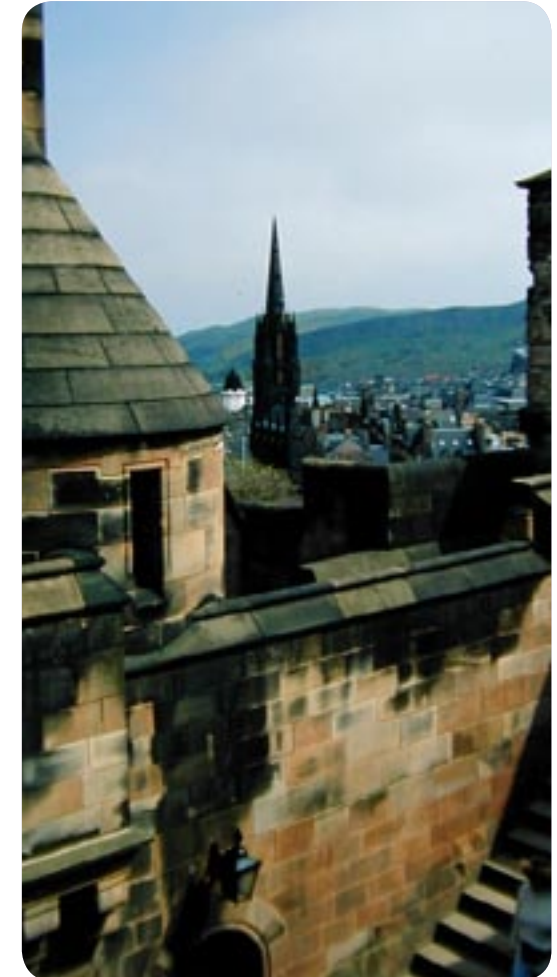
The Minister has emphasised many times that public services in Scotland face a number of significant domestic and international challenges in the coming years. He wants reform to be a bottom up, not a top down process – however the status quo is not an option. Although much has already been achieved, by standing still now public services will get left behind.

The discussion document sets out the fundamental aims and principles of public service reform, and highlights what is already happening or in the planning stages on reform across the public sector. Its primary purpose is to stimulate discussion and establish consensus around the fundamental aims and principles and to generate discussion and develop ideas for national and local reform initiatives.

The document is underpinned by a wide ranging dialogue that will draw in leaders from across the public, private and voluntary sector over the course of the next few months, and also members of the public. The backbone of the dialogue is a series of nine geographical events organised on a cross-sectoral basis at locations across Scotland taking place between July and September.

The dialogue also includes focused engagement with members of the public on reform, discussions with the academic community and an open written consultation (posted on the consultation section of the Scottish Executive website and closing at the end of September). The formal conclusion of the dialogue will be published early in the new year and will inform post-election policy formulation.

You can find the document and details of the dialogue process on the Scottish Executive website at : [www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/06/15110925/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/06/15110925/0)



# Ace WAG and HOGs

The establishment of a new Welsh forum for ACE hinges on a new recruitment drive.

Invitations have already been sent out in Wales to join ACE and establish the level of interest in a new Welsh forum. This forum would inherit the role of the Heads of Government in Wales (HOG) and would boost co-operation between Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) and Welsh agencies. The aim would also be to enhance the network of the agencies themselves and provide opportunities for exchanges and local benchmarking.

Ownership of these meetings would move from WAG to the ACE forum in the same way as the Cabinet Office transferred its responsibility to ACE on a UK wide basis.

A meeting with new ACE members and HOG is already being planned before the ACE conference in November. It will be held in the DVLA Innovation Centre in Swansea and will review the new DfT Shared Services Centre (being run by DVLA for the Department) and the Innovation Centre itself.



But this plan will only succeed if enough ACE members are recruited in the meantime.

So if you lead an agency in Wales join ACE today and encourage others to do the same by going straight to the online registration page on the ACE website:

<http://www.ace.gov.uk/application.htm>

# Efficiency is not going away

That's the big message to take onboard as the Government's SR04 Efficiency Programme nears its halfway mark.

This autumn there will be attempts to increase awareness and credibility of efficiency efforts, in addition to the Chancellor's July announcement of that 45,000 head count, annual efficiency gains of £9.8bn, and 7,800 relocations have been achieved. While this news came ahead of the halfway mark of the programme when those sorts of numbers were expected, much work is needed to ensure a legacy beyond monetary and headcount targets – in short an efficiency culture.

With a tough HM Treasury line being taken in preliminary 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review documents\*, a key question for Agency Chief Executives is 'what are you doing to embed an efficiency culture in your organisation?'

Recent polling conducted for the Office of Government Commerce demonstrates that while 91 per cent of public sector staff want to create efficiencies, only 30 per cent feel



they can make a difference, and only 30 per cent say they know what their leader thinks about efficiency. You can help bridge the gap between these figures by:

- Talking about efficiency and value for money
- Making it clear that everyone needs to do their bit, and
- Setting a personal example

The next update on efficiency figures will be in November's Pre-budget Report.

\*Ref [http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/spending\\_review/spend\\_csr07/spend\\_crs07\\_resources.cfm](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/spending_review/spend_csr07/spend_crs07_resources.cfm) and Gus O'Donnell outlining that "there is more pressure than ever to release resources to front-line public services" ([http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/news/060606\\_speech.asp](http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/news/060606_speech.asp))

# New agency planned

*As new agencies are formed ACE Reporter will keep you up to date with their roles, their senior officials and purpose.*

Here we look at the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) of the Home Office which the Home Secretary recently announced will become an agency shortly.

The management of our borders is fundamental to the interests of the United Kingdom. Our immigration system must allow us to manage properly who comes here and ensure people leave when they are no longer entitled to be here. We also want to welcome holiday makers, visitors, investors, business people and students who come here, add to our economy and enrich our society.

Above all, we need a system which protects the security of this country, prevents abuse of our laws, is fair to lawful migrants and the British public, and in which people have confidence.

Increasing globalisation, changing patterns



of travel and migration, and international crime and terrorism, all pose challenges for our country, as they do for all advanced, industrialised countries.

Within this context, IND's work is founded on four objectives.

- Strengthen our borders, use tougher checks abroad so that only those with permission can travel to the UK, and ensure we know who leaves so that we can take action against those who break the rules
- Fast track asylum decisions, remove those whose claims fail and integrate those who need our protection.
- Ensure and enforce compliance with our immigration laws, removing the most harmful people first and denying the privileges of Britain to those here illegally.
- Boost Britain's economy by bringing the right skills here from around the world, and ensuring this country is easy to visit legally.

# On a roll

*A major programme aimed at enhancing skills and expertise in the civil service is surveying the success of the scheme.*

In 2005, Permanent Secretaries launched Professional Skills for Government (PSG). PSG is a major, long-term change programme designed to ensure that civil servants, wherever they work, have the right mix of skills and expertise to enable Departments and Agencies to deliver effective services. Coordination across the Civil Service is being managed on behalf of Permanent Secretaries by Government Skills, the new Sector Skills Council for Central Government.

Communications have generally been via Departments, who have then been asked to communicate with their Agencies.

Departments and Agencies were asked to roll out PSG at Grade 7 and above from September last year, and for staff below Grade 7 from April 2006. The Permanent Secretaries' Management Group was particularly interested in progressing



staff below Grade 7. Government Skills wants to collect information on what Agencies have been doing in this area especially:

- Whether PSG has started being rolled out for staff below Grade 7
- How it is being communicated
- To what extent has PSG been integrated in the main HR processes (recruitment, promotion, appraisal, L&D arrangements)
- Future plans

Government Skills will be contacting a selection of Agencies by phone over the next

couple of weeks to talk through these points. The PSG is also encouraging all Agencies to contact us to share your experiences of PSG – so please could you email or call Midi Zeroual (020 7276 1589; [Midi.zeroual@government-skills.x.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Midi.zeroual@government-skills.x.gsi.gov.uk)). Bullet-point responses on the questions are what we are looking for, but we are happy to talk through other issues.

■ More information about PSG can be found at [www.government-skills.gov.uk/professional\\_skills/index.asp](http://www.government-skills.gov.uk/professional_skills/index.asp)

# An account of auditing

*The National Audit Office scrutinises public spending on behalf of Parliament writes Mark Davies, Director of Cross-Government Studies, NAO.*

We perform this duty with our financial audit work on around 500 government accounts and by producing 60 value for money reports each year. But in addition to this well-established role we are keen to help departments – and agencies – improve and consolidate their performance too.

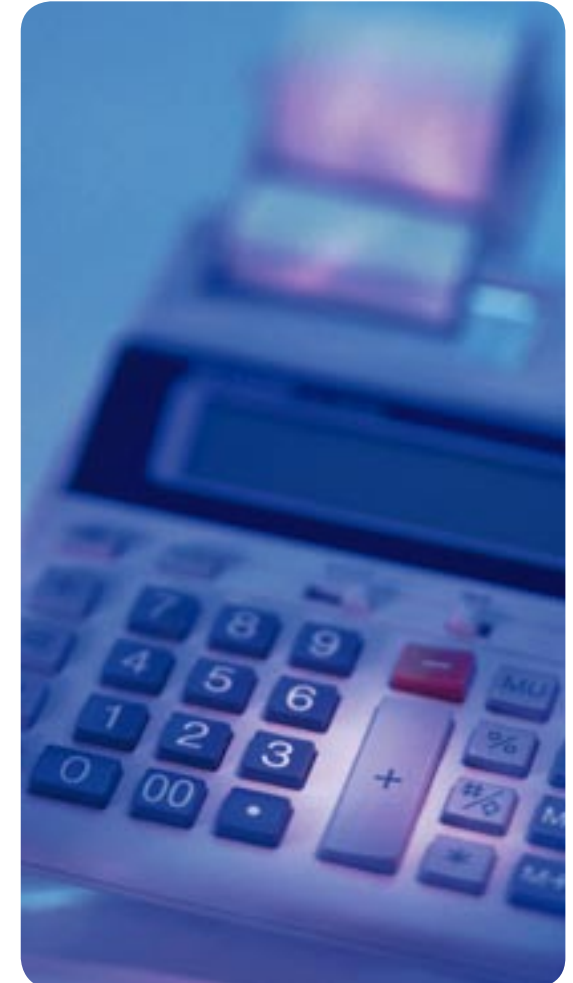
Using our breadth of experience in monitoring public spending, we have been able to identify areas of good practice and common difficulties. From this we have identified key lessons which we hope will assist agencies and departments to secure better value for money and improved service delivery.

To this end in recent months we have produced a number of guides and toolkits which build upon some of our cross-

government value for money reports. These include an Efficiency Toolkit, identifying opportunities for improvement in organisations’ efficiency; a leaflet on postal services containing some clear practical ways in which agencies and departments can secure financial savings and improved performance; and a report - Getting the best from public sector office accommodation – which seeks to challenge conventional thinking about how office space is used and property portfolios are managed in the public sector, and highlights new strategies for departments and agencies to consider. Later this year we’ll also be publishing a procurement toolkit, presenting a range of self-assessment questions for bodies to gauge the performance and value secured from their procurement activities.

We hope that these tools will prove useful, helping to address common challenges, improve efficiency and secure better value.

All our reports and publications are available on our website [www.nao.org.uk](http://www.nao.org.uk)



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# More about ACE

ACE is the UK Agency Chief Executives' Association and is an inclusive organisation open to Chief Executives and senior managers who report to Chief Executives, working in central government Executive Agencies, Non-Departmental Public Bodies, Non-Ministerial Departments and Trading Funds. Other Chief Executives of public sector organisations will be able to apply for membership, but approval of membership will be subject to the agreement of the Board.

ACE promotes effective government and provides networking and learning opportunities for its members.

ACE was formed in May 2006 and exists to promote excellent working relationships throughout all aspects of government. It will seek, on an annual basis, to:

- Generate the opportunity for networking on the basis of an up to date database of contact details and specialisms.
- Produce regular newsletters for the purpose of promoting and sharing good practice, experience and knowledge.
- Organise an annual conference.

- Organise two events which:
  - Highlight priority areas of action for government; and
  - Offer specific opportunities for networking across the public and private sector
  - Provide a point of contact between the Civil Service Management Board (CSMB) and the Association and its members.

In undertaking the above ACE will neither seek to involve itself in policy development nor representative lobbying. Neither will ACE have the power to make decisions that would bind one, any or all of the members.

ACE is funded from member subscriptions.

The ACE London headquarters is located in the heart of Westminster and provides a range of facilities for members. This quiet and private location is ideal for relaxing, reading the current journals, meeting a colleague or simply having a cuppa. You can use the dedicated computer terminal to access the internet and read your emails.

For a location map click [here](#).



## Conference bound for Sunningdale

The third ACE Annual Conference is again being held on 29/30 November at the National School for Government at Sunningdale Park. Several very senior civil servants and ministers have been invited to address the conference and we already have a number of acceptances. The conference booking system will be online by September and will enable you to book your accommodation and your conference place at the same time. If you have ideas for workshops please send any suggestions to [james.jeynes@ace.gov.uk](mailto:james.jeynes@ace.gov.uk)

Last year's event built on the success of the inaugural event two years ago and we hope the upward trajectory will continue. This year there will be an opportunity to elect members for the ACE steering group so look out for some exciting hustings.

# Feedback

Read something that interests you?  
Concerns you? Annoys you? Want a chance  
to put your view? Want to find out more?  
Whatever your view, please share it with us.

ACE Reporter is only as good as the  
contributions it gets. It is your  
e-magazine, meant to reflect ACE. Let  
us know if it is (or isn't) doing the job.

## Editor ACE Reporter

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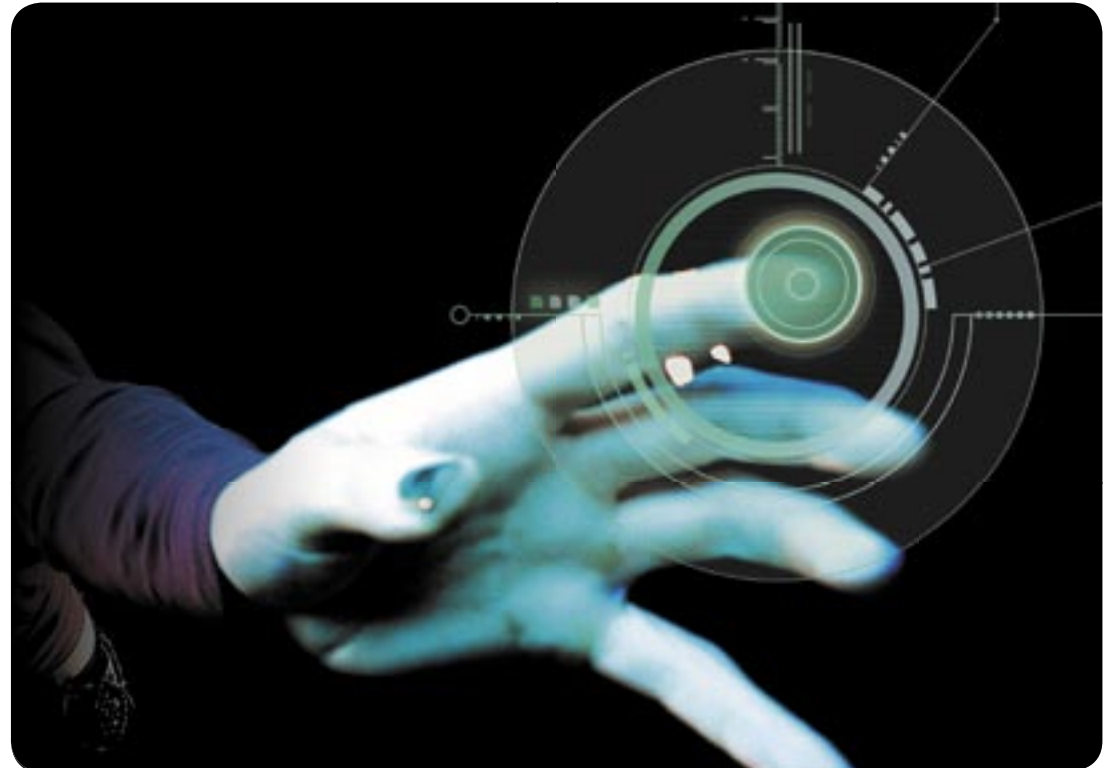
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A pdf file such as this offers screen-based information. Our contents page flags up all the stories in ACE Reporter. Just click on the story's title to go to that page. It's a fast way for busy readers to get to the information they want, as soon as they want it.

What's more, we recognise that some readers will want minute detail on certain topics while others will have different requirements.

Navigation tabs are provided on every page to guide you easily through the document.

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On the contents page is an option to get to the ACE website, to find out more about

the organisation. This pdf file is completely self-contained and operates on or off-line. Wherever you see an email address, click on it to activate your email software and respond.