

REPORTER

The electronic magazine of the United Kingdom ACE Association

Cover

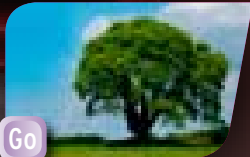
Contents

News

Briefing

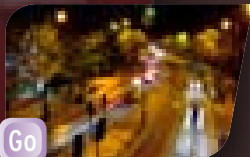
Feedback

About ACE



Go

Tree-mendous tests



Go

Eye on traffic



Go

UFOs online



Making headlines

Life in the public eye by
Alan Cook – ACE Conference

Go

REPORTER

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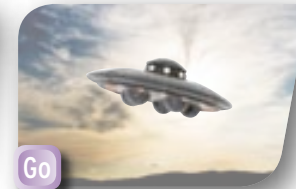
Go

Tree-mendous tests



Go

Eye on traffic



Go

UFOs online

Contents

News:

- On-site tests save time and money
- Navy building sails away with award
- Third success for MOT computerisation
- From motors to motoring offences
- ACE update

Briefing

ACE Conference 2008

CONFERENCE SPECIAL: DELIVERING IN THE PUBLIC EYE

- Making headlines** – Alan Cook
- Government without departments** – Sir John Elvidge
- BBC goes regional** – Caroline Thomson
- Who should decide?** – Rachel Lomax
- Better ways to deliver value** – Jim Fitzpatrick
- Massive clean-up job** – Robert Bettley-Smith
- From low key to the front page** – Stephen Speed
- Fascinating conversations** – Viewpoint

[Click here](#)
to visit the ACE website

ACE is strong

The year 2009 brings a new set of challenges for ACE and its members. From the unprecedented economic environment, to budgetary pressure, to the prospect of an election by mid 2010, we are all making plans to deliver services through a period of uncertainty and rapid change.

As the incoming vice chair of ACE, I am looking forward to working with our new chair Andrew Hudson and the Board to deliver to you a focused, relevant and engaging agenda for ACE this year. We will be sending out details of events shortly.

Acting as guest editor of this ACE Reporter has been fun. The summaries of the key speeches from the conference in November, together with reports of ACE successes, show just how strong the Association is.

In fact there were so many articles that I have not taken the opportunity to include one about my own organisation - NS&I (National Savings and Investments). We

too have had a very busy year looking after some £88bn for our 27m customers during an exceptionally turbulent time for financial markets.

I am pleased that we have continued to deliver very high levels of customer service during unprecedented conditions, contributing to financial stability by staying open for business and being a reliable, unexciting and reassuring presence for savers.

Happy reading and all good wishes for success in 2009!



Guest Editor
Jane Platt
CEX National Savings & Investments

On-site tests save time and money

Novel field-based testing kits for Sudden Oak Death (*Phytophthora ramorum*), which work like home pregnancy testing kits, have earned the Central Science Laboratory (CSL) and Defra's Plant Health & Seeds Inspectorate (PHSI) a top award.

The test kits have seen a cost saving of £400,000 and a 70% reduction in the need to send suspect plant samples for analysis to CSL's laboratory near York.

CSL mycologist Charles Lane said: 'More than 150 scientists have been involved in this work throughout the laboratory over the last five years, from people receiving samples, to laboratory workers and policy makers. It's a great achievement encompassing the whole range of CSL's scientific capabilities.'

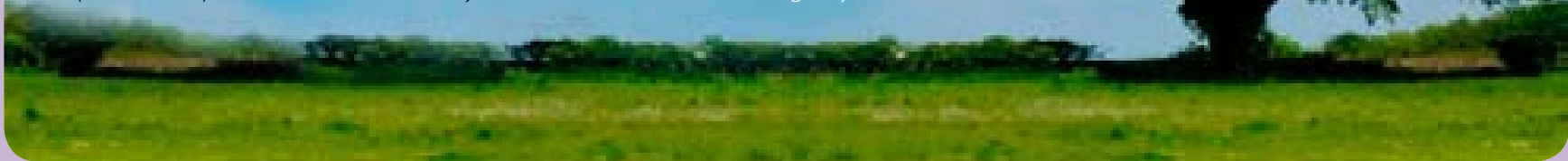
By using a piece of equipment called a Smartcycler and lateral flow devices (LFDs), which resemble and work in a similar way to home pregnancy testing kits, plant health inspectors can determine if the disease strains are present in a plant on site, at the nursery or

the port of entry, and only need send infected samples for further analysis.

The previous time-consuming process meant a high degree of disruption to plant nurseries and importers, as trade in suspect plants had to stop until results were received from the laboratory test. Since 2002, PHSI has submitted around 33,000 plant samples to CSL in its campaign against two devastating strains of *Phytophthora*.

The 2008 Whitehall & Westminster World Civil Service Award for Science and Technology was presented at the Civil Service Awards ceremony last November by Sir Gus O'Donnell, Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Civil Service.

■ In April 2009, CSL is merging with Defra's Plant Health Division (which incorporates PHSI) and the Plant Variety Rights Office and Seeds Division, to form a new Agency called The Food and Environment Research Agency.



Cover

Contents

News

Briefing

Feedback

About ACE

Navy building sails away with award

An iconic part of Britain's industrial history has won Defence Estates (DE) a top architectural award – the first in four years for a Government project.

Restoration of the 19th century Grade 1 listed Block Mills at Portsmouth Naval Base has been recognised as an exemplary restoration project by the Georgian Group Architectural Awards.

The building was built in 1802 to manufacture wooden rigging blocks for the Royal Navy. The £2.5m project, which took 18 months to complete, won restoration of a Georgian Building in an Urban Setting category.

Malcolm Ives, DE Area Project Manager South - Portsmouth, said: 'This is terrific and well-deserved recognition for Graeme Wildridge, DE Project Manager, and the whole of the Block Mills team. This project is a clear indicator that DE, on behalf of MOD, takes its estate responsibilities seriously, not just with operational requirements in mind, but also when it comes to maintaining sites of historical significance.'

The Block Mills were opened in 1803, inspired by the innovative thinking of Samuel Bentham. The block making machinery, invented by Marc Brunel (father of Isambard Kingdom) and

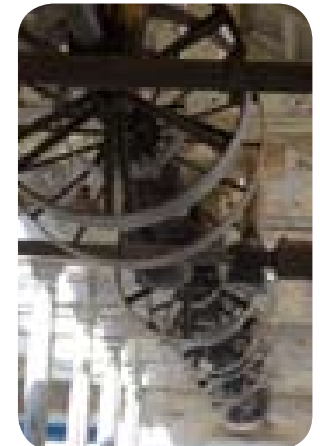
manufactured by Henry Maudslay, used steam power to drive a system of multiple lathes in order to mass produce 130,000 pulley blocks a year for the rigging of ships like HMS Victory. This revolutionary concept gave the building its iconic status in industrial history.

Block Mills was one of four projects nominated in the Urban Setting category and the only Government project nominated across the seven categories. It is the first time in four years that a Government project has received an award from this body. The award was presented by the Archbishop of York at Christie's in November.

The judging panel praised the Block Mills Team

for their 'lightness of touch', stating: 'Much of the conservation work here is visually unspectacular but is no less solid for that, and those undertaking it have done well to remember that this is a robust industrial building whose hard-edged roughness needs to be carefully and deliberately preserved.'

Vice-Admiral Tim Laurence, Defence Estates Chief Executive, said: 'Many congratulations to the whole team. It is an outstanding piece of work and thoroughly deserved recognition by the Georgian Society. The challenge now is to link Block Mills to the nearby Mary Rose and Victory sites so as to allow greater public access.'



Cover

Contents

News

Briefing

Feedback

About ACE

Third award for MOT Computerisation

The computerisation of the administration of the British MOT scheme by the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) has won a third national award.

The new computer system, introduced into all 19,100 privately owned MOT garages in Great Britain, was established via a PFI contract with Siemens IT Solutions and Services to finance, design, build, operate and support a computer system linking MOT garages with a central database of MOT results.

The initiative has delivered significant benefits for the Department for Transport (DfT), Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, Police, VOSA, MOT garages and the owners of approx 24 million vehicles in GB covered by the MOT Scheme. To date, the results of more than 115 million MOT tests have been recorded on the database.

The latest award, presented at the annual Civil Service awards, was for Operational Delivery. It recognises good practice in operational delivery where customer needs have been placed at the heart of the design and services to citizens have been demonstrably improved.

Stephen Tetlow, VOSA chief executive, collected the award from Sir Gus O'Donnell, Cabinet

Secretary, and was joined by DfT Permanent Secretary Robert Devereux. Tetlow said: 'VOSA is extremely proud to have won a third national award. The Operational Delivery award is a very special one for us. It recognises how we have been striving hard to deliver real benefits for the motor and transport industries and for private citizens.

'The award reflects the close working relationships we have established with our partners and our customers. It's been a genuine team effort. We will be keeping up the momentum and building on this success together to ensure we keep on innovating and improving our service in the future.'

Prime Minister Gordon Brown, who acts as Minister for the Civil Service, said: 'The Civil Service awards are a showcase for the achievements of people who work hard every day to serve the public. I am delighted to have the opportunity to add my personal thanks to all those civil servants who work so diligently, often behind the scenes, to provide effective services across

the country. The winners remind us why the UK Civil Service has a world class reputation and it's right that we recognise and reward their hard work. I congratulate all the winners.'

This is the third high profile national award won by MOT Computerisation. The other two were Best Project Business to Business at the British Computer Society IT Industry Awards and the e-Government National Awards for Central e-Government excellence: Take-up and usage growth.



Cover

Contents

News

Briefing

Feedback

About ACE

VCA moves into traffic control

From motors to motoring offences. The Vehicle Certification Agency (VCA) is using its high level of technical expertise to approve traffic surveillance systems on behalf of local authorities.

In a move to reduce poor or inconsiderate driving, local authorities are starting to take on their own traffic enforcement, a role traditionally dealt with by the police. Once they've been granted civil enforcement powers, councils can directly issue fines for infringements such as bus lane use, failure to observe parking restrictions and certain other moving traffic contraventions. Councils must back up detection with CCTV evidence and this is where VCA fits in.

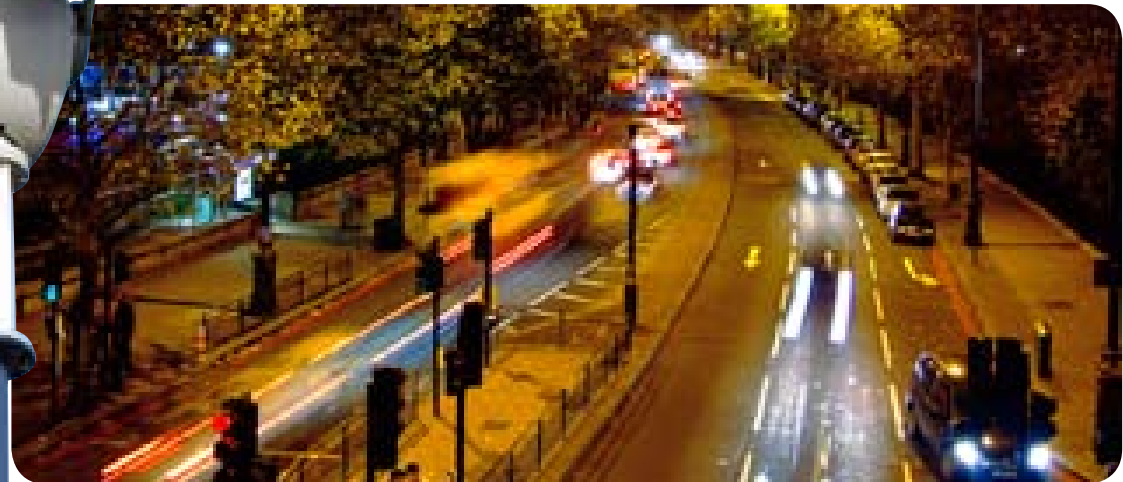
Each piece of recording equipment used to catch unlawful drivers must be certified as an 'approved device'. VCA is the authority designated to issue these approvals. This can be a difficult job, however, with a vast and constantly developing range of equipment on the market.

VCA CEX Paul Markwick said: 'The vehicle type approval field is a specialist area, backed by complex legislation. It follows that our engineering staff are required to have a high level of technical expertise to understand and apply standards in an appropriate way. Often this expertise is transferable to other areas and our work in approving traffic surveillance systems on behalf of local authorities is just one example of this. 'The VCA approval team carry out a number of checks on recording systems before

issuing certification. The process requires applicants to produce a technical construction file providing evidence of design requirements and testing carried out. Ultimately, the aim is to ensure footage stands up in adjudication as fair evidence.'

VCA recently issued Ealing Council with a certificate of approval for its CCTV traffic surveillance system. Ealing is now the seventh local authority to gain approval for bus lane surveillance and the fifth for parking surveillance devices.

■ For more information see the VCA website or email civil-enforcement@vca.gov.uk



Cover

Contents

News

Briefing

Feedback

About ACE

An ACE five years

ACE celebrated five years as an association by launching an online secure community where members can share information and knowledge and by establishing a new regional strategy. Retiring ACE chair Vanessa Lawrence said she was delighted at how the association had burgeoned. 'It has been a fantastic journey,' she said.

She told Conference the idea for ACE had started five years ago when then Cabinet Secretary Sir Andrew Turnbull asked her in for a cup of tea. She said: 'He wanted to know if I had understood the messages he had been giving recently to the Civil Service. Very, very embarrassingly, I had to ask what messages they were. I have to admit, I felt a bit like an ostrich with my head in the sand. It turned out I wasn't alone.

'After that meeting I rang 13 other chief executives and they all said the same thing. Based on those initial conversations, we got together and within about a week I went back to Sir Andrew and explained that the 14 of us had found it very, very helpful to talk to each other. Within a few months we had organised our first conference – all about delivery. It's unbelievable

that we are now here for our fifth conference.'

Today ACE has 160 active members and is financially self-sufficient. Its objective is to stimulate effective operational delivery.

Access to peer learning is one of the strengths of ACE. It is now available through the new ACE Wiki – an online, confidential arena where ACE members can talk to each other about a particular issue. 'I urge you to use the ACE Wiki as much as possible, to make it our community,' said Lawrence.

'As the management board, we have used it for about a month now and we have found it

an easy way to communicate. You don't have to look at it every day. It will post you an email telling you if there is something to look at. We hope you will adopt it and start to use it.'

Another new approach was a more regional focus. A map at Conference showed members where they were based geographically. Lawrence said: 'We recognise that with the credit crunch people will need and benefit from a more regional focus. We encourage people to make links with members that are close to them.'

Page 1 of 2

Cover

Contents

News

Briefing

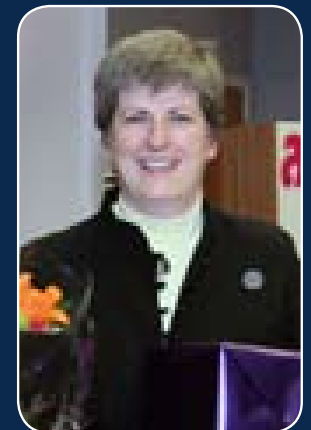
Feedback

About ACE

Thank you Vanessa:

New ACE chair Andrew Hudson thanked retiring chair Vanessa Lawrence for her work in setting up ACE. He said: 'On behalf of the membership I would like to thank you for all your efforts. It has been hugely beneficial to all of us. You have also made it fun and enjoyable. Thank you.'

Permanent Secretary to HM Treasury Sir Nicholas Macpherson presented Lawrence with a gift. He said: 'You have achieved a huge amount in putting ACE on the map. It is an excellent organisation and has become a real force across government.'





Success stories designed to inspire

Reported sightings of UFOs kept on file by the Ministry of Defence released through the use of online technology by The National Archives; work by the Driving Standards Agency to reduce the number of people impersonating others to take a driving test; and a climate change festival organised by the Commission for Architecture and Built Environment.

These are just three new successful stories of delivery being promoted by ACE.

Delivering Successful Services for Citizens, published annually by ACE, showcases a selection of outstanding work carried out by government organisations to improve performance and deliver excellent services. This year's edition features 90 new success stories. Now in its fourth edition, the publication

aims to share information on the many ways government organisations from across the country are achieving results. To date, it has compiled an impressive 214 success stories.

■ To read this year's publication, Delivering Successful Services for Citizens go to: **www.ace.gov.uk/success.htm**

Page 2 of 2

Cover

Contents

News

Briefing

Feedback

About ACE

ACE new chair

New ACE chair Andrew Hudson is looking forward to his year in office. He said: 'I am really proud to take on the chair of ACE.

Vanessa Lawrence did a great job in setting the organisation up and making it valued both by its members and by senior people within government and beyond.

'ACE vice chair Jane Platt and ACE treasurer Iain Greenway, the other Board members and I are committed to building on this, across all three aspects of the remit which members approved at the Conference: advancing work within government to achieve the highest standard of service to every customer;



promoting the work done by delivery bodies; and providing opportunities for networking and personal development.

'And I am equally committed to making the events fun, so that they are both productive and enjoyable in what will be a testing year for all of us in lots of ways. The Board will be meeting early in 2009 to firm up the plans for

the year. I'm always keen to hear from members about what you would like to see more of (or less of), and if people want to find a colleague to talk to about particular issues.'

Other members of the ACE management board include: Natalie Ceeney (National Archives) John Graham (Historic Scotland) Simon Hodgson (Forestry Commission, England) Gareth Jones (Companies House) Alison Littlely (OGC Buying Solutions) Paul Markwick (Vehicle Certification Agency) and Stephen Speed (Insolvency Service).

■ Andrew Hudson is CEX Valuation Office Agency. Contact him by tel: 020 7506 1900 or email: **andrew.hudson@voa.gsi.gov.uk**

Making headlines

Post Office MD Alan Cook has had journalists 'doorstepping' his home, quizzing people at his local Post Office and his wife challenged about his role in the network change programme to close 2,500 Post Offices.

Cook, who joined Post Office Ltd two years ago when it was losing £3.5 million a week, told Conference that the closure programme, agreed by Government as part of the refunding and refinancing of the Post Office, had been very public and that both he and the Post Office had suffered at the hands of the national press.

He said: 'Press interest does influence the way we all have to approach our agendas. All of the things we have done at the Post Office have inevitably been affected by being in the public eye. I spent all of my early career in the private sector and completely different considerations apply there. Putting it bluntly, in the private sector, public opinion is often not as influential. It is a consequence of delivering in the public eye.'

Once Government formally agreed the network change programme in November 2006, the agenda changed. 'Instead of people

All of the things we have done at the Post Office have inevitably been affected by being in the public eye

– Alan Cook



asking us why we are closing Post Offices the question became, why are you closing this Post Office as opposed to that Post Office? That is where all the tension has been,' said Cook.

'We have received 189,000 pieces of correspondence, attended 826 meetings with MPs, 385 meetings with local authorities and 429 meetings with other stakeholders. It is

clear that the country didn't like this in a big way! They have a strong sense of association with the Post Office and the press responded accordingly with a whole variety of headlines.

'We have been called blackmailers – everything you could imagine. It started in August 2006 and it has run for 18 months.

Making headlines

It can get quite distressing and personal at times but you can't let it affect your behaviour.'

The Mail On Sunday ran a two-page spread on Cook not shutting his local post office. He said: 'You just can't win! There were journalists outside the branch all day asking customers what they thought of the local head of the Post Office keeping his own local Post Office open.'

Earlier in the year, as Cook was about to begin a presentation at his office, he was told that the Mail On Sunday was at his front door trying to interview his wife. He said: 'They, complete with photographer, wanted to know what my wife thought about what I was doing.'

'That for me is what delivering in the public eye can be like but you can't allow it to deflect you from what you are trying to achieve. However it does mean you have to be very clear about what you are trying to achieve and aim for the highest possible standards at all times.'

The Mail On Sunday was at his front door trying to interview his wife

The four key areas where the Post Office will now continue to focus its business include mail; Government related services (ie benefit card account); financial services; and telephony (the Post Office currently has half-a-million phone service users).

The Post Office, which will still have 12,000 outlets by the end of the closure programme, is the largest retail network in the UK and one of the largest in Europe. Cook said: 'We are working on a new identity product with various different parts of Government that utilises our unparalleled face-to-face contact with the British public. There are 24 million people in our Post Offices every single week. We can identify them. We can photograph them and, going forward, we could take their finger-prints and capture their electronic signature.'

'We are talking to DVLA in the context of driving licences, to the UK Borders Agency in terms of ID cards and to the Identity and Passport Services in terms of ID-cards and passports. We could also think about ID-ing people for other organisations such as internet banks. There are lots of opportunities in just this one idea. We have other ideas on the way, too.'

He said: 'Delivering in the public eye does not need to be a barrier – indeed it can be a catalyst for raising standards. In the public sector we are all accountable to, and trusted by, our customers and the nation as a whole. We must not abuse that accountability and trust.'

Government without departments

The first thing we did was abolish departments. The concept of a department is no longer our fundamental building block

– Sir John Elvidge



A radical rethink of how to deliver Scottish public services has seen the abolition of government departments and a very public and open system of performance indicators. Permanent Secretary to the Scottish Government Sir John Elvidge told Conference that the Scottish civil service chose to make itself feel 'uncomfortable' in a bid to rethink how to deliver services.

There was a distinction to be made between delivery of targets and delivery of fundamental social and economic change. He said: 'Despite the Scottish Government's 97% delivery record on 460 targets it was voted out in May 2007. It was a slight contradiction of conventional theory that said you promise a lot of things, you deliver a lot of things, the public re-elect you. Something went wrong with the model and the coalition was voted out.'

'Clearly something about that delivery model wasn't quite getting there. It caused us to do some pretty radical rethinking. Never mind the politicians, this was our reputation going down the pan, as well. We developed

Government without departments

a narrative in the Civil Service that said, some of us have been here a long time and the fundamental problems of Scotland haven't changed.

'We have long-term lack of economic growth; our education system still does not deliver successful outcomes for about one in five young people; health inequalities are getting wider not narrower, despite massive rises in overall quality of health expectations; and physical, geographical concentrations of poor and disadvantage people are essentially as they were 30 years ago, despite massive efforts.

'Our conclusion was that we needed to make ourselves feel a bit more uncomfortable about what constituted delivery. We needed to set ourselves the challenge of addressing these core issues that had remained resistant to efforts, intellectually and financially, over a long period of time.

'We needed to move away from a model that delivered everything in a conventional way and didn't do any good. In 2007 our line of thinking collided with the political thinking that had seen the Scottish National Party,

Clearly something about that delivery model wasn't quite getting there. It caused us to do some pretty radical rethinking

– *Sir John Elvidge*

elected as a minority administration in May 2007, pin everything onto an overarching purpose for everything that government does: making Scotland more successful economically. Below that were five broad, strategic objectives, two of which flowed directly from that single purpose (wealthier and fairer). The other three are healthier and smarter, greener and safer.

'The first thing we did was abolish departments. The concept of a department is no longer our fundamental building block. We are trying to design government as a

single entity. People who had been heads of departments were realigned to drive one of the five sets of objectives. They could go anywhere they needed to go within the structure of government: they became facilitators, energisers and connectors. They were not the apex.'

The public accountability framework adopted by the Government was borrowed from a model used by the State of Virginia. It puts the outcomes of its work on a public website where the aggregate performance is published in real time. 'Citizens can go online and see a set of indices that show whether government is getting better, worse or hasn't moved,' said Sir John. 'There are 45 performance indicators that can be looked at. But on the front end is that very uncomfortable arrow that is either going up or down.'

Cover

Contents

News

Briefing

Feedback

About ACE

BBC goes regional

The Jonathan Ross and Russell Brand row showed the BBC cannot afford to ignore its audiences. Chief operating officer of the BBC Caroline Thomson told Conference that the BBC was first and foremost about great programmes that delight audiences. 'That is our raison d'être,' she said. 'We forget it at our peril. As we saw in the Brand and Ross row – audiences get very cross when we get it wrong.'

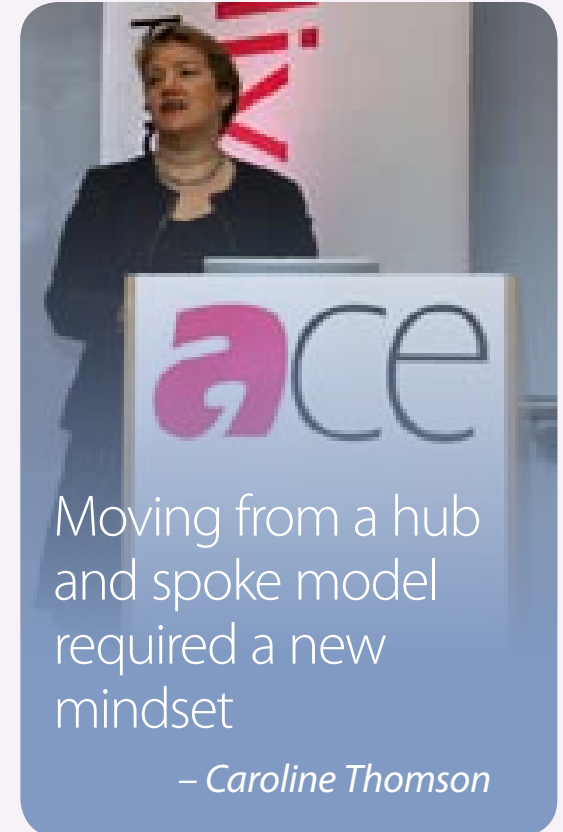
Thomson showed how the BBC was 'turning itself inside out' to move itself from being just a broadcaster to something that had a wider impact on the economy as a whole. Using the BBC orchestras as an example, she showed how they had moved beyond the performance or the broadcast and now had much wider connections with the wider community.

She said: 'We charge our orchestras with running all sorts of education and community outreach programmes that get people of all ages and ability engaged in making music. In other words we ask our orchestras to see themselves as having a role beyond the performance or beyond the broadcast.'

It required a new mindset, she said, in moving from a hub and spoke model with London as the centre to a vision of the BBC networked around a series of creative clusters. By 2016 more than half of BBC staff and 50% of its networked programmes would be out of London.

Making networked television programmes outside London could, she said, light the fuse to a whole region. Since BBC Wales started making Dr Who in Cardiff, the momentum had kept building through spin-offs like Torchwood, the Sarah Jane Adventures (a sci-fi adventure for BBC Children) and now Merlin, made by an independent company based in South Wales alongside Dr Who.

She said: 'In the four or five years BBC Wales has been producing Dr Who, it has grown from a tiny warehouse on the outskirts of Newport to big premises employing more than 400 people on a regular basis. With all the props and special effects that are needed to produce a show like Dr Who and associated online sites and games that spin-off, not all done by the BBC, all kinds of facilities spin up around it.'



'It brings work to the local economy, provides opportunity for local talent to develop thriving businesses and creates a long-term stake in the region, New shows can then tap into all those facilities so it becomes a virtuous circle and talent clusters form quite naturally. Work done by the UK film council show that for every £100 spent on television production in Wales another £80 is spent in Wales as a whole.'

Who should decide?

Is monetary policy too sensitive to be delegated to a group of experts? Discuss. This was the question raised by former deputy governor of the Bank of England Rachel Lomax, who told Conference that the current recession was the first real test for the Bank of England since it became independent in 1977.

The Bank had a huge amount going for it, she said: world renown, fantastic resources, huge respect and great success. But the 24-hour media coverage was quite unrelenting and could be brutal. Highly respected organisations could very quickly go from hero to zero.

She said: 'When push comes to shove, is accountability for monetary policy too sensitive to be delegated to a group of experts, as Mrs Thatcher and John Major thought, even though they are operating within a framework laid down by Parliament?'

'I think the question is still an open one. The 1997 constitutional arrangements are still relatively new and unfamiliar. We will have to see how the blame game is played out in the run-up to the next election.'

The 'new and unfamiliar constitutional

I was personally accountable for my decisions in a way I wasn't as a civil servant

– Rachel Lomax



arrangements' of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) had been 'uncomfortable' to her when she first joined the Bank after many years in the civil service. She said: 'I was personally accountable for my decisions in a

way I wasn't as a civil servant. Ultimately as a civil servant, even as a permanent secretary, it is a team effort. That is not the way it works in the Bank of England.

'The whole process by which the MPC takes decisions is very transparent. Minutes of meetings are published, forecasts are laid out in great detail and, crucially, the way in which each member votes is a matter of public record. It is one person, one vote. The Governor does not have any extra weight and he has been outvoted.'

'It was a very interesting dynamic and one I wasn't entirely comfortable with. I had spent my whole career having vigorous private debates but once a decision had been taken you all got behind it. I found this ability to disagree in public a bit uncomfortable.'

'I worried slightly that it made the private debate less vigorous, perversely, because you knew everyone would know that you hadn't voted for a decision you might regard as wrong headed.'

Cover

Contents

News

Briefing

Feedback

About ACE

Better ways to deliver value

The priority is to find ways to deliver better value services across the board

The challenge of meeting high expectations at a time of high demand and economic instability is one that Government is facing across the board. Transport minister Jim Fitzpatrick told Conference that government services had to address the impact of reduced funding and falling revenue, while continuing to invest in new technologies and infrastructure to support economic growth and protect the environment.

He said: 'After more than a decade of record economic growth, the priority now is to find ways to deliver better value services across the board. One way we can do that is to work more closely across departments, agencies, local authorities, stakeholders, and the private and third sectors. Part of the challenge is to provide the sort of access to government services that citizens and businesses enjoy from the private sector - whether it be booking a driving test, finding out how the roads or trains are running, or renewing their car tax.

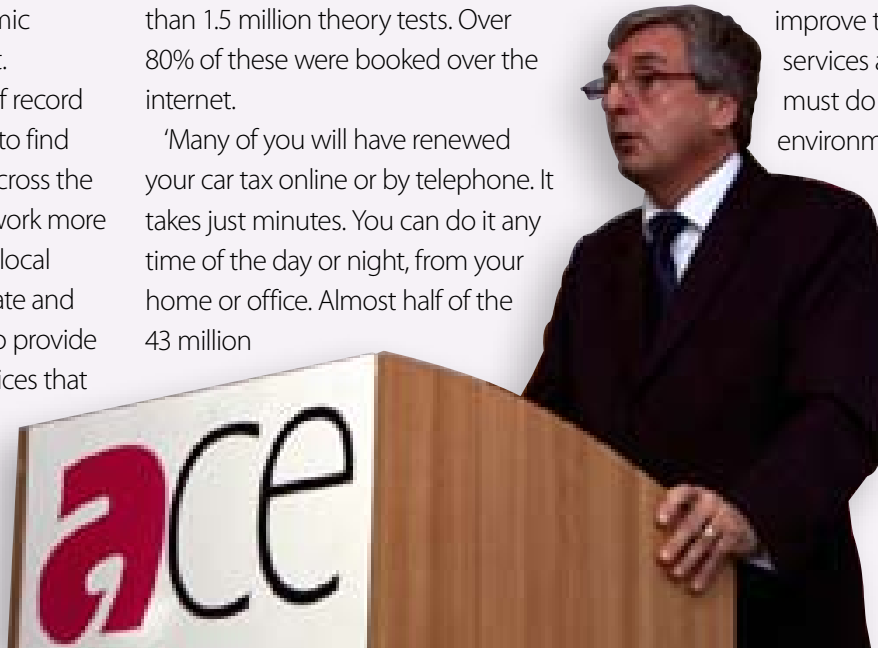
'In the Department for Transport we deliver huge quantities of these services. For example, DVLA processed more than 95 million vehicle and 17.5 million driver transactions last year. We have been at the forefront of developing easier ways for the public to carry out these transactions and access services. Last year, the Driving Standards Agency delivered more than 1.5 million theory tests. Over 80% of these were booked over the internet.

'Many of you will have renewed your car tax online or by telephone. It takes just minutes. You can do it any time of the day or night, from your home or office. Almost half of the 43 million

car tax renewals carried out each year are now done this way. This service relies on links to the VOSA and motor insurance industry database to ensure the vehicle has a current MOT and insurance. This is a hugely successful example of the public and private sector working together across boundaries to deliver improved services.

'We must continue to work together to improve the quality and choice of services available to customers and we must do so in an uncertain economic environment. It is likely that volumes

of fee-paying transactions will drop in the coming months. That will present a particular challenge to those Agencies funded through fees, including some within the DfT. We will need to work hard to ensure that we continue to deliver a high quality of service to the customer.'



Cover

Contents

News

Briefing

Feedback

About ACE

Massive clean-up job

If I had 1,000 strategies I can guarantee *How to move polonium from a west end restaurant*, would not have been there

The death of (alleged) former Russian agent Alexander Litvinenko from polonium poisoning in November 2006 presented the new UK Government Decontamination Service (GDS) with a significant challenge. GDS CEO Robert Bettley-Smith told Conference that it was the scale and complexity of the problem that was the challenge.

He said: 'At one time 4,802 police officers were involved on the cordon alone. That begins to give you an idea of the sheer logistics involved in dealing with an incident like polonium in London.'

Polonium could be left to decay naturally as it has a short half-life (138 days), which would mean sealing off an area and allowing it to decay. Conference heard that, in the majority of venues, intervention was required if the venue was to be returned to use in a timely manner and not pose a continued hazard.

'For these reasons', he said, 'public and commercial venues were actively decontaminated. The first challenge was

the scale of the problem – there were 47 contaminated venues.

'It took 19 days and a team of six to clear the rooms in a London hotel where Litvinenko had been. Generally, the aim was physically to remove the contamination from the location although in a few cases, for example on a wall, low-level contamination could be fixed and then covered.

'Certain surfaces such as the bath-tub enamel, tiled floors and marble-effect cladding in the bathroom, needed much more aggressive decontamination. The enamel on the bath was knocked off by hand using a hammer. The waste generated by the decontamination of the hotel amounted to 4.8 tonnes. When you look at the waste generated in the hotel you begin to see the scale of the operation.'

GDS was formed in the uncertainty that followed 9/11. 'It was a novel concept in a new area and there were no precedents to follow,' he said.



The Agency co-ordinates and facilitates the decontamination of places. It does not deal with people or animals. And it does not work to off-the-shelf specific strategies. Instead a generic approach is developed and then tailored to meet the specific needs of the incident.

He said: 'If I had 1,000 strategies I can guarantee that the 1001 *How to move polonium from a west end restaurant* would not have been there. When events occur we work very, very, closely with the key stakeholders to rapidly develop the decontamination strategy.'

Cover

Contents

News

Briefing

Feedback

About ACE

From low key to the front page

We may well end up with 100% growth ... delivered for the same amount of money

Redundancy payment claims, administered by the Insolvency Service are increasing rapidly as the economic climate deteriorates. Following the news that Woolworths had gone into administration, Conference heard the Insolvency Service had been asked to provide 27,000 redundancy payment claim forms. Chief executive Stephen Speed said The Service had never before been asked for so many forms from one employer.

The closest comparison he could make was for the 6,000 claims they were asked to process when Rover went into liquidation in 2005. He said: 'We have traditionally been a low key agency but now, because of the economic downturn, insolvency is front page news and the Service is in the public eye – which is novel for us!'

The Insolvency Service provides the redundancy payments service on a fixed administration budget of around £8 million

a year for HMRC. Speed said that at the beginning of the year they had budgeted for about 80,000 redundancy payments. 'The figures now look like being well in excess of 120,000,' he said, 'but my money is on 160,000. We may well end up with 100% growth in that area of our business in one year. And it will all have to be delivered for the same amount of money.'

He warned the challenge for the future would be to 'keep the plates spinning' while the economic downturn made the Insolvency Service front-page news. He advised colleagues to be flexible, to lead from the front and to engage. He said: 'Communicate till your teeth bleed! Show that nothing will get you down – every move you make is watched closely.'



Cover

Contents

News

Briefing

Feedback

About ACE

Fascinating conversations

A chance to question, a chance to meet and a chance to reflect – all bundled into the 36 hours that is ACE Conference. Peter Cardy of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency gives his verdict on his first ACE Conference



At last - the opportunity to question my own Minister! How, I wanted to know, do you manage the same tension that I have to live with: pursuing the operational goal of the Agency – in my case, the maintenance of safety at sea – and the political goal of avoiding embarrassment to the Government? This is a familiar dilemma to ACE members. My regular meetings with Jim Fitzpatrick, Minister for Transport, are taken up with the problems of the day: industrial relations, challenges from local stakeholders, legislative change, keeping the many sectors of the industry happy. But here, with Jim Fitzpatrick as a conference

speaker, was a chance for reflection.

Great value comes from time with ACE peers doing similar jobs in different settings. It can be lonely, sitting on the sharp pinnacle of an organisation, the meat in the sandwich between customers and owners, balancing the political and the practical, taking ultimate responsibility (and sometimes paying the ultimate price) for others' decisions, with too many demands for available resources. Many of us have moved to the public service from other sectors and find the transition strange: the oddities of government accounting compared with P&L, the concepts of governance, the business decisions driven by political or presentational imperatives, the woolliness of 'policy'.

Retail guru Alan Cook provided a graphic account of these pressures, describing how the 'Network Change Programme' (aka

closing 2,500 post offices), looks to someone accustomed to making decisions mainly driven by the bottom line and the interests of shareholders. The discovery that individuals and local communities believe 'their' outlets should be run as a subsidised (ie loss-making) public service has been faced by many ACE members, though not often on such a scale. He and Robert Devereux talked with feeling about decision-making under the floodlight of 24-hour instant news in the FOI environment, where every detail of every decision is subject to popular and populist scrutiny.

Appropriately, money loomed large in the conference. Stephen Speed who heads the Insolvency Service described an organisation with surprising echoes of the MCA. A bundle of disparate functions, some like the Official

Fascinating conversations

Receiver hallowed by time, others including services to individuals in financial adversity, information, regulation and enforcement. Nick Macpherson, Permanent Secretary at the Treasury, not at all the mandarin. His high altitude view gave us the great sweep of world finances in a few paragraphs. As the closing contributor, Nick echoed what Robert Devereux said at the outset: next year is going to be tough for the public services - and then it gets harder. Close by and looking like all three wise monkeys was ACE member Robert Stheeman, who manages the national debt, apparently doing billion-pound deals on his Blackberry.

My award for the most unexpectedly dazzling presentation goes to Robert Bettley-Smith, who runs the small Government Decontamination Unit and told us hair-curling stories of polonium and anthrax. Asking innocently about command and control of such situations where multiple authorities are involved, he unexpectedly replied that it was modelled on the MCA's system for managing maritime incidents.

My award for the most unexpectedly dazzling presentation goes to Robert Bettley-Smith, who runs the small Government Decontamination Unit and told us hair-curling stories of polonium and anthrax

–Peter Cardy

My first ACE conference was well worth a hard-won 36 hours and the National School of Government and the sponsors delivered great value for money. The eclectic spread of ACE members guaranteed fascinating conversations about apparent difference and actual similarity, underlying an extraordinary range of subject matter. I shall be working with some of them in the future, but without ACE I would never have met most of them.

Cover

Contents

News

Briefing

Feedback

About ACE

More about Ace

ACE is the UK ACE 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 are 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 2004 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
 - Offer specific opportunities for networking across the public and private sector
 - Provide a point of contact between the Civil Service Steering Board (CSSB) 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](#).

About ACE Reporter

You are reading an e-magazine. ACE Reporter is a Portable Document Format (pdf) file, which means it can be read on any personal computer that has Adobe Acrobat Reader installed. This is a free piece of software available for fast download from www.adobe.co.uk

Feedback

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

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