

Response to the Finance and Public Administration Committee, legacy issues and key themes – Public Administration.

Dr Ian C. Elliott, Centre for Public Policy, University of Glasgow.

I am a Senior Lecturer in Public Administration at the Centre for Public Policy, University of Glasgow. My research covers a range of public administration issues including the strategic state and mission-led government as well as the teaching of public administration. I am a member of the Scottish Government's Reform Advisory Group for the National Performance Framework.

Public Administration

The existence of a Finance and Public Administration Committee is an important feature of the Scottish Parliament and one that should continue over the next parliamentary term. Over the current parliamentary term, the FPAC have conducted valuable inquiries into the National Performance Framework (NPF), public service reform, decision making, the commissioner landscape and the cost effectiveness of public inquiries. All of these have provided valuable insights to inform better policymaking and public service delivery. Having a committee with a direct remit for public administration is important to support good governance.

My research has highlighted the need for more investment in knowledge and skills related to public administration in order to support better public service design and delivery. Professional development of public servants in many other countries is supported by national schools of government such as in France (École Nationale d'Administration), Canada (the Canada School of Public Service) and Australia and New Zealand (Australia and New Zealand School of Government [ANZSOG])¹. The announcement of a National School for Government and Public Services by the UK Government is a welcome move² but it is important that the Scottish Government engages with this initiative whilst at the same time providing it's own bespoke training and development for public servants in Scotland that is tailored to the national context and Scottish Government priorities³. The FPAC should consider how best to ensure that the Scottish Parliament has the knowledge and skills to fulfil it's duties in scrutinising legislation and holding the Scottish Government to account.

National Performance Framework

A key part of the Scottish Government's approach to policy making has been the National Performance Framework (NPF). This has provided a framework for long-

¹ Elliott, I. C., Bottom, K. A., Glennon, R., & O'Connor, K. (2025). Educating a civil service that is fit for purpose: perceptions from UK stakeholders. *Public Money & Management*, 45(2), 119–128.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09540962.2024.2343798>

² <https://theconversation.com/why-the-establishment-of-a-national-school-for-civil-servants-matters-273938>

³ https://www.gla.ac.uk/research/az/publicpolicy/news/headline_1242563_en.html

term, outcomes-focused, decision making since 2007. My research has shown that the development of the NPF provided some immediate benefits⁴ to the Scottish Government but that a lack of sustained focus and momentum have contributed to a growing implementation gap⁵.

There is a need for long-term and sustained investment in strategic capabilities, a connection from strategy to action through clear accountability processes, and effective collaboration between different levels of government⁶. The FPAC has an important role in scrutiny of the cross-cutting elements of the National Outcomes and the NPF review. Whilst the NPF and National Outcomes cut across all parliamentary committees, it is important to have a focal point for scrutiny and oversight of the functioning of the NPF and strategic decision making in government. Aligned to this is the scrutiny and oversight of public finances and how budgetary decisions can be used to facilitate more preventative policy making and progress towards the National Outcomes. Again, this highlights the benefit of having a parliamentary committee that is tasked with both public administration and finance.

Positive Public Policy

Finally, the FPAC have explored the role of commissioners and public inquiries. These both provide a crucial role in scrutiny and in identifying areas for improvement. Yet they are typically focused on matters of maladministration, failure, and redress. At the same time, the Permanent Secretary is right to note that “not everything is broken”⁷. There are important lessons that can also be learned from policy success. The FPAC could play a role in identifying and learning lessons from public policy and service delivery that are found to be effective. My research on Positive Public Policy has highlighted the NPF as one example of a range of approaches that have been used to facilitate effective government⁸. Examples of successful public service design and delivery can be found at all levels of government and across all parts of the UK. Gaining a better understanding of policy success can help to identify lessons for others and to provide a more balanced public debate about failure and success⁹.

⁴ Elliott, I. C. (2020). The implementation of a strategic state in a small country setting—the case of the ‘Scottish Approach.’ *Public Money & Management*, 40(4), 285–293. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540962.2020.1714206>

⁵ Elliott, I. C. (2023). "Chapter 6: The strategic state: a case study of devolved government in Scotland". In *Handbook on Strategic Public Management*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing. Retrieved Feb 11, 2026, from <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781789907193.00013>

⁶ Elliott, I. C., & Roberts, A. (2025). The concept of the strategic state: An assessment after 30 years. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 84, 558–569. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8500.12685>

⁷ <https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/snps-top-civil-servant-insists-not-everything-is-broken-amid-pressure-on-services-to-make-cuts-5481873>

⁸ <https://acss.org.uk/positive-public-policy-a-new-vision-for-uk-government/>

⁹ Cairney, P., Boswell, J., Ayres, S., Durose, C., Elliott, I.C., Flinders, M., Martin, S., Richardson, L. (2024) The state of British policymaking: How can UK government become more effective?, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 77 (4): 837–864, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsae019>