



Public Chairs' Forum Seminar

Sir Mark Sedwill, Cabinet Secretary & Head of the Civil Service

July 2019

The Public Chairs' Forum was delighted to welcome the Cabinet Secretary Sir Mark Sedwill to a private seminar. In his opening remarks, Sir Mark covered the importance of increasing diversity in public appointments; the UK's departure from the European Union; and the forthcoming spending review and government priorities. PCF members explored these issues further with Sir Mark in the following discussion, which was chaired by PCF Chair David Ereira OBE.

Diversity in public appointments



Sir Mark began by commending the Government's newly published [Public Appointments Diversity Action Plan](#) to PCF members. Increasing diversity and building an inclusive public service requires relentless leadership and he believes that leaders of public bodies can, and should, play a key

role in achieving the targets set. He added that increasing diversity was part of making the public service more inclusive in a broader sense, including by ensuring that government services can reach the most vulnerable.

Members welcomed the Cabinet Secretary's commitment to increasing diversity in the public sector and highlighted what they had been doing within their own organisations to make their appointments processes more inclusive. They discussed how the public appointments process could be improved and could attract a wider range of candidates, for example by making the [public appointments website](#) easier to find, and to support them once in post.

Sir Mark said it was important to build a wider public service culture beyond the Civil Service. He had enjoyed the recent [Civil Service Leadership Group](#) event and was keen to widen this groups' membership, looking beyond Whitehall to include local authority and other public

body leaders. He was also keen to extend the [Civil Service Live programme](#) to include the wider public service from next year.

UK's Departure from the European Union

The Civil Service would continue to support the incoming Prime Minister in any negotiations. Work is ongoing to ensure the UK is ready for a no-deal exit at the end of October, with organisations being advised to review their no-deal contingency plans prepared for March 2019 to ensure that they are still fit for purpose. The readiness of business and other EU countries is also an important factor in mitigating the impact of no-deal.

The importance of government departments working closely with public bodies to prepare for EU Exit was highlighted, as was the role which networks such as PCF could play in support of this.

The Comprehensive Spending Review and government priorities

Decisions on the timing of the next Queen's Speech and the Comprehensive Spending Review would rest with the new Prime Minister. It was observed that, in terms of priorities, the key commitment for [net zero carbon emissions](#) by 2050, would have an impact on every area of national activity.

In response to a question on the digital transformation of services, Sir Mark drew attention to the support that HM Treasury and the Government Digital Service could provide to smaller organisations. He also suggested members explore options for partnering with other bodies working in the same space who had already developed digital infrastructure.

Sir Mark concluded by encouraging members, and all public servants, to continue to build the public's trust in their work by getting on with the job and delivering for citizens.