

# Measure it if you want to manage it

On Tuesday I raised the issue of management information with the Chancellor of the Duchy, the Minister in charge of the Cabinet Office. It's an unusual subject for Parliament, as it is sadly neglected. Political argument often proceeds based on a few statistics. The numbers become friends and enemies to the disputants, and may be imperfectly understood or even misleading.

Large departments of government like big companies need managing. The CEO or Permanent Secretary needs a few general figures to monitor the main trends and outcomes. The numbers need to be accurate, consistent and informative. In the Benefits department figures on delays and error rates for example matter and should trigger action from the top when they wander too far from decency. In the NHS success rates for treatments and waiting times are an obvious couple of concerns. Value for money also should figure with a way of capturing unit costs.

This high level information is also important for the Cabinet Minister in overall charge. Government produces masses of numerical information. The art is finding within it the relevant information for any person's level of responsibility.