

The rise of the civil service

In the three years to March 2023 there was an increase of 63,000 civil servants, or 64,000 full time equivalents. Over the 3 years 2020 to 2023 there was a substantial fall in public sector productivity. There are now more than 4000 senior civil servants in Director level and above jobs.

Whilst it is understandable that the NHS and the civil service needed extra temporary help to deal with the special needs and extra government direction which covid controls and lockdowns brought, it is surprising that extra recruitment has continued well after lockdown was lifted.

At the same time there has been expansion in numbers at various quangos and so called independent bodies. Far from slimming the centre as more is done outside core government, the advent of more and more powerful independent government bodies seems to have increased the need for staff. Maybe the need or wish for cooperation, coordination and communications between the external body and the government department has required more people to talk to each other.

It is time for Ministers to set out their plans to get productivity back up to 2019 levels. It is time for them to ask civil service senior managers and quango chiefs how come productivity has slumped? What action is being taken to put it right?

Poor productivity can come with bad service. Get things right first time and productivity and quality rise. Do things promptly and spare yourself the need to respond to enquiries and complaints about delays. Have easy and friendly systems and requirements and have fewer complaints or need to help people access your services.