



Office of the Information Commissioner
Queensland



the Australia and New Zealand
School of Government

Transparency and Public Sector Performance

Occasional Paper No. 1

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The Queensland Office of the Information Commissioner and the Australia and New Zealand School of Government are collaborating on a partnership to identify the ways in which transparency can augment quality public administration. The Occasional Paper series is part of the partnership program.

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The key services of the Office are:

- Foster improvements in the quality of practice in right to information and information privacy in Queensland public sector agencies;
- Promote the principles and practices of right to information and information privacy in the community and within government;
- Independent, timely and fair review of decisions made under right to information and information privacy legislation;
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About the series

The Queensland Office of the Information Commissioner and the Australia and New Zealand School of Government are collaborating on a partnership that draws together a broad network of policy-makers, practitioners and leading academics.

The partnership is designed to build awareness of the impact of transparency and its utility as a public sector management tool. Drawing the connections between the new approach to information management brought about by the right to information reforms, research and practice we hope that the series will foster a more open public sector culture.

The Occasional Papers explore the available evidence base, point to areas that would benefit from more research and study, draw new insights and begin to define what transparency looks like as a tool. They also provide practical tips about when, where and how transparency can best be applied to current public administration challenges.

Written by academics, public servants or other experts, the papers bring together research and practice. All the papers have been critically appraised by a group formed for that purpose. The authors of the papers were included. Particular acknowledgement for their contributions go to Professor John Wanna, Professor Michael Di Francesco, and Office of the Information Commissioner staff Ms Rachael Rangihaeata, Mr Justin Toohey, and Mr Steve Haigh, who kept this project on track with great care and skill.

We trust that you find the Occasional Papers stimulating and thought provoking. All papers in the series are published on the ANZSOG and OIC websites.



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Professor Mulgan has specialised in the area of accountability, which includes transparency and performance information. This area of expertise has led to consultancy work with a number of mainly government organisations, including New Zealand Treasury; New Zealand Law Commission; Australian Local Government Association; South Australian Auditor-General; Metropolitan Ambulance Service Royal Commission (Victoria); AusAID; and the Business Council of Australia. Professor Mulgan has also published a number of books on the topic of accountability and related fields.

Information Commissioner's foreword

This paper is part of a series examining the impact of transparency and how it can be used as a strategic management tool. The utility of transparency has not been clearly articulated as part of the public sector manager's tool-kit. This is hardly surprising when confidentiality and anonymity have been ingrained in the public service culture. This series is aimed at objectively evaluating the available evidence as to whether openness can be a far more powerful tool than secrecy in serving the public interest. Where transparency can be used as a tool, the series also identifies the practical application and the lessons learnt so far. For the purpose of this paper transparency consists of openness, volunteering information, publication of performance data and benchmarks; use of websites to inform and allow public fora/dialogues/blogs.

One of the objectives of Freedom of Information legislation was to 'democratise' information held by government. FOI was an end in itself. The effective exercise of the entitlement to vote is dependent upon there being a free flow of information to the electorate about government decisions and activity. The Independent FOI Review Panel, chaired by Dr David Solomon found that a major barrier to effective FOI implementation was the public sector's culture of secrecy. Recent national and international FOI reforms are designed to shift the public sector information management culture from 'closed' to 'open'. Public sector information is now commonly legislated as open to the public unless contrary to the public interest.

Public sector information is increasingly recognised in legislation to be a community asset or national resource. Public sector information can also be a strategic asset. Public sector managers are charged with achieving important economic, social and environmental goals effectively, efficiently, economically and ethically. This series of papers is designed to show how transparency can be used as a means to the end: effective policy implementation while minimising costs to the taxpayer. In the series there are papers that show the impact of transparency in improving public sector performance, productivity, implementation, integrity, and innovation.

This paper evaluates the evidence about the impact of transparency on public sector performance. While there are few empirical studies, there are many case studies which show that in particular settings, the publishing of performance statistics does improve performance. The paper discusses the mechanisms through which this is achieved and the barriers including the dynamics associated with vested interests and some of the genuine concerns which can be addressed if appropriate planning and consultation takes place.

In 2012 it is sometimes asked, “What is the next big thing in public administration?” I hope the answer will be “Transparency”.

Julie Kinross
Information Commissioner (Qld)

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1. Introduction

The aim of this report is to establish the current state of evidence concerning the effect of transparency on the performance of government services. Its context lies in the function of the Queensland Office of the Information Commissioner (OIC) to promote transparency in the sense of public access to government-held information. In exercising this function, the OIC advocates the legislated 'push model' of open, transparent government where government information is available to the public as a matter of course, unless there are good reasons for keeping it confidential. Such a model marks a move away from a more traditional approach to freedom of information (FOI) in which information is presumed to remain unavailable unless specifically requested by a member of the public. FOI requests are now to be seen only as a 'last resort' for obtaining government information, rather than as the main mechanism for securing publication.

This new approach to government information is fast becoming international 'best practice' as governments establish broader information agencies charged with making government information more available, especially through the internet and various e-government initiatives (Darbishire 2010). It is being championed, for instance, by the Public Sector Transparency Board set up within the Cabinet Office by the new United Kingdom Coalition government. It is also a major theme of information policy in most Australian jurisdictions, state as well as federal.

Moving towards a 'push model' of transparency requires a major change in political and bureaucratic culture, away from traditional practices of caution and confidentiality and towards a more confident and open approach to communication with the public. The necessary cultural change would be facilitated by both politicians and public servants becoming convinced of the positive value of government transparency, not only to the wider public but also to governments themselves in the discharge of their duties. This change of values and culture provides the greatest challenge to public information policy.

Transparency is valued for a variety of related reasons which are well discussed in the two documents published by the Queensland's FOI Independent Review Panel, the Discussion paper *Enhancing Open and Accountable Government* (Freedom of Information Independent Review Panel 2008a) and the final report *The Right to Information* (Freedom of Information Independent Review Panel 2008b), chapter 6. At its core, transparency is an essential feature of accountable representative government. Only if people have access to what government is doing in their name can they hold their government to account. In this sense, transparency as access to information, is the essential first stage in accountability, necessary for the successful achievement of two other stages, discussion and rectification (Mulgan 2003, 9-10). In a democratic society, citizens also have the right not only to question their government but also to participate in various political processes for which they need to be well informed. At a most fundamental level, because the government belongs to its citizens so too does the information it collects and holds. Such information should therefore be available to its owners unless it is in their interest (literally 'the public's interest') for it to be withheld.

The central justifications of transparency (and accountability) concentrate on the *processes* of democratic government, on the need for public officials to be open to public scrutiny and the rights of citizens to be involved and informed. Other reasons, which are also very important, point to the beneficial *consequences* of transparency in terms of its impact on the quality of government. In the words of the FOI Independent Review Panel, as part of its list of reasons for enacting a new FOI Act, ‘freedom of information can improve public administration and the quality of government-decision making’ (Freedom of Information Independent Review Panel 2008b, 77). In other words, transparency is valuable not only *intrinsically* as part of a free democratic society but also *instrumentally* for the contribution it can make to improving government performance.

These latter, instrumental reasons, are of particular importance in bringing about a change in government attitudes towards openness of information. Politicians and public officials may sometimes be tempted to pay only lip service to constitutional principles. But they often have a more direct and practical interest in providing efficient and effective government, on which their reputations (and, in the case of politicians, their livelihoods) may depend. They are much more likely to embrace transparency if it can be shown to lead to better government performance. It is to this question that the present report is directed.

2. Links between transparency and government performance

A supposed causal link between transparency and good (or better) government can operate at a number of levels, depending on what aspect of good (or better) government is being considered. At a very basic level, transparency is often seen as an essential factor for keeping governments honest and for reducing the extent of government corruption. Indeed, through the work of the international anti-corruption NGO, Transparency International, ‘transparency’ is almost equated with an absence of corruption. Strictly speaking, however, the two sets of phenomena should be kept distinct. It is an open question, to be decided on empirical evidence, whether transparency, in the general sense of open government, does in fact lead to reduction in government corruption. Another, related question at a general, basic level, is how far transparency and open government are necessary conditions for securing economic development and growth. These questions are the subject of ongoing discussion in international comparative politics and development theory (Larmour 2007).

Such questions relate to important, indeed fundamental, elements of good government, namely the absence of corruption and serving the material needs of citizens. In that sense they should form part of a general study of the impact of transparency on government performance. However, these questions will be treated as ancillary to the current inquiry. The main focus is centred on improving the performance of the Queensland government, a state government that is part of a stable democracy in a developed economy. Here, as in other similarly placed countries, the basic elements of a stable law-abiding democracy and an effective market economy may be taken for granted. Improvements to government performance are being sought against this assumed background.

However, even within this restricted focus, the notion of improving government performance through transparency can be approached from a number of different perspectives. In the first place, the concept of government transparency itself, like that of

open government, has a number of connotations. It can refer generally to the openness of government to public scrutiny which includes not only public access to government documents and other data, but also the right of the public to attend meetings of public bodies, such as parliaments and courts, as well as the right to participate in various public fora, such as meetings of concerned citizens or online interaction with officials.

More specifically, however, transparency refers mainly to the documentary aspects of open government, to the right of access to government 'information' understood as documents and data collected and held by government agencies. Such information is the focus of FOI laws and of the OIC and, implicitly, the desired focus for this project. The project will therefore concentrate on the impact of information rather than that of other procedures and processes associated with open government.

Secondly, government performance itself, which is the object of such impact, is a complex process with a number of distinct elements. For instance, it may include the policy making process itself, the formulation of general government directions and objectives. Here the impact of public information on policy is most likely to be found through the use made of it by interested groups outside the government, whether by opposition parties, stakeholders with a direct interest in the policy, community groups in civil society, or think tanks and other similar organisations focused on policy. The news media can also play an important intermediary role in publicising policy-relevant information.

Alternatively, government performance may refer to the implementation of given policies and the extent to which government agencies succeed in achieving the objectives set for them. Indeed, in the current public management discourse, the term 'performance' is most commonly associated with questions of the efficient and effective administration of government policies. For instance, the 'performance audits' conducted by government auditors typically avoid discussion of the merits of government policy, which they take as given. Instead they focus on the implementation of particular policies and whether taxpayers are getting value for money in how public servants are administering the policy.

Similarly, the term 'performance information', often linked with 'performance indicators' in quantitative form, typically refers to information about how successfully given policies or programs are being administered. It is this latter type of performance and performance information that is implicit in the terms of reference for this project and which will receive the most detailed investigation. Nonetheless, it may be worthwhile briefly discussing the impact of public access to government information on government policymaking.

3. Public information and policy-making

The potential beneficial impact of access to government information on government policy is part of the broader impact that greater access to information can be expected to bring to society at large. In the words of the FOI Independent Review Panel, 'routinely publishing government information' can help 'nongovernment players [to] collaborate in often unpredictably positive ways delivering better social, economic, environmental and *even government outcomes*'[emphasis added] (Freedom of Information Independent Review Panel 2008b, 32). While much of the transparency agenda emphasises the benefits to civil

society and community participation, these benefits can also flow back to government in terms of valuable policy input from the non-government sector or government reaction to expressed public opinion. Almost all the organised groups that seek to influence government policy rely to some extent on published government information to make their particular cases. Such information may simply be government statistics published according to longstanding practice by statistics bureaus as well as by relevant government departments. It may also be information gained under freedom of information legislation or through new initiatives in e-government.

The impact of such information-based advocacy on government policy has not been the topic of formal research, perhaps because it is so pervasive in all aspects of government and cannot be measured in the aggregate. Instead, we need to make do with plausible generalisations, grounded in the observed reliance of such organisations on government information, and backed by relevant examples where their influence appears to have been decisive on government policy. An example of government information being used by an advocacy group to induce a change of policy can be found in the recent discussions over a mining tax. The mining lobby used economic modelling provided by the Commonwealth Treasury to support its case and was successful in persuading the government to alter its policy.

An example where the release of government information directly shaped public opinion which in turn forced a change of policy is provided by the United Kingdom scandal about MPs' parliamentary expenses. The scandal, which erupted in 2009 was the direct result of information about such expenses gained by a freelance journalist, Heather Brooke. The information, published in a major newspaper, created such a public backlash that the government was forced into major changes in the administration of expenses, through the creation of an Independent Standards Authority and the office of Commissioner of Parliamentary Investigations (Parliamentary Standards Act 2009).

Policy changes brought about by government information, it should be remembered, are not invariably benign or beneficial. Opinions are divided, for example, on the merits of the mining tax and of the changes agreed to by the government. Depending on one's political point of view, the publication of information has the capacity to do harm as well as good. For the most part, however, the transparency of information is generally seen as beneficial, being both empowering to non-government groups and individuals and a force for better government.

4. The performance movement

The main focus of this study is on the publication of information that is relevant to government performance in the sense of how far the stated objectives of government policy are being achieved. While governments have always been interested in the results of their policies, the specific concentration on performance and its measurement is relatively recent, dating from the mid-1980s. It is part of the international movement in public administration known variously as 'managerialism' or the 'new public management'.

The key thrust of this movement was to bring the running of public organisations more into line with the practices of private sector management. It sought to replace older concepts of public administration and the duties of public office, which concentrated on following due process and administering rules and guidelines. Instead, senior public service officials (now known as 'managers') were to focus more on results and objectives, in much the same way as commercial managers seek to achieve production targets and maximise profit. Managers were to be given more discretion in deciding how to run their agencies or divisions, with their main accountability coming from the extent to which they met the performance targets set for them.

Performance management is thus the activity of managing an organisation to achieve certain results, while being accountable for the extent to which these results have been met. The performance management movement began in the English-speaking developed world, particularly the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. Since the late 1990s, it has spread to all developed countries, and many developing countries as well, though the extent of uptake and the details of its implementation naturally vary according to constitutional traditions and national priorities (OECD 1994; OECD 1997; Bouckaert and Halligan 2008).

In spite of differences, the core feature remains the formal identification of organisational objectives, in terms of desired outputs (goods or services produced) and/ or outcomes (long-term impacts), followed by assessment in terms of how far these objectives have been met. Performance information, in this context, refers specifically to the second aspect of performance management, to the information about the achievement of desired outputs and outcomes, in particular information relating to issues of efficiency (the ratio of inputs to outputs) and effectiveness (the contribution of outputs to desired outcomes). Such information may also include information about inputs and processes but only in so far as it is relevant to determining matters of efficiency and effectiveness (Hatry 2006, 14-15). Performance information often comes in measurable quantitative form, though it may also consist of qualitative assessments.

5. Performance information: organisational objectives and budgeting

One of the main sites for performance management in government has been in the setting of objectives in relation to financial management. Traditional public sector budgeting and accounting allocated funds to particular 'line items' or types of input (buildings, salaries etc) without explicitly linking such expenditure to the achievement of government purposes. Under performance budgeting, however, agencies are now allocated certain sums to achieve particular outputs and/or outcomes. They are also typically required to specify measures or indicators which will yield information about how far the funds have achieved the stated outputs or outcomes. The Service Delivery Statements, which form part of the Queensland government budget papers, are a typical example of this format. In the United Kingdom, such a structure of agreed objectives underpinned by performance targets has become particularly relevant in controlling the arms-length organisations, such as executive agencies and private contractors, which play an increasing role in the provision of government services.

The OECD, in particular, has made a major effort to encourage the development of performance budgeting including budget-linked performance information (eg OECD 1994; OECD 1997). The intention is that government decision-makers, in formulating their budgets and allocating government funds, will be able to direct funds to areas of greatest need and away from less effective policies. Information about past performance can thus become a key resource in determining future priorities. In almost all OECD countries, such performance information, framed in terms of outputs and outcomes, is also included in agencies' regular reports to the legislature and the public (OECD 2007, 62). It thus contributes to government transparency and forms an important element in the public accountability of the executive.

The desired impact of the performance information is intended to come primarily from its use internally within the executive rather than from the fact that it is publicly available and transparent. The analogy is more with a commercial organisation in which the prime users of performance information are company directors, who consult the information as they determine the company's strategic direction behind closed doors, as well as senior management, who advise the directors and are in charge of implementing company policy. In the public sector, the task of setting of desired objectives is performed by democratically elected political leaders, with senior public service managers playing both an advisory role on policy and an implementing role for agreed policy. Clarifying objectives and measuring performance is thus intended both to strengthen democratic control of government while also increasing managerial efficiency and effectiveness.

In addition, performance information may be used by senior management as a means of placing pressure on junior managers and rank-and-file staff to perform more efficiently and effectively. A performance culture can be encouraged, either through personal incentives, such as performance bonuses for achieving certain targets, or through more group oriented awards or commendation for collective achievement, again measured in terms of stated targets or objectives. Such pressure, however, remains internal to the organisation and does not depend on the external publication of performance information (Bouckaert and Halligan 2008, 54-5).

For the most part, the publication of performance information associated with financial reporting is seen as contributing to accountability as a separate goal, valuable in itself, and not as a means to encouraging improved performance (eg OECD 2007 44). At the same time, supporters of performance- based budgeting and reporting hope that publication will have a beneficial impact on the quality of government performance, through pressure of publicity in the legislature and the media (eg OECD 2007 52). In addition, publication of reliable information about government achievements should improve the quality of political debate by providing evidence to undermine biased and inaccurate accounts of government actions and expenditure (OECD 2007 61-3). In so far as government objectives are set by politicians participating in public dialogue, the availability of accurate information about government performance should help to inform such dialogue.

How far the publication of system-wide performance information has actually led to improved government performance is difficult to judge. In the first place, one needs evidence that government performance has improved as a result of the introduction of

performance management. Secondly, one needs to identify how far any such improvements are due to the *publication* of performance information, as distinct from the effects of the internal use of such information by managers within the organisation.

On the first issue of possible general improvement, as the OECD admits (OECD 2007, 58), there is a gap in the literature in terms of evaluating the impact of reforms. In part this is due to methodological difficulties associated with separating out the possible effects of specific management reforms from those of the wider economic and governance environment (Pollitt 2000; Robinson and Brumby 2005). In addition, governments themselves are notably uninterested in evaluating their own reforms and would usually prefer to press on with new initiatives rather than pause to examine the success or failure of past attempts. Nonetheless, some assessments can be made, based mainly on the reports of those involved in particular jurisdictions (eg Boyne and Chen 2007; Downe et al 2010). On the basis of such admittedly tenuous and possibly biased evidence, the OECD reports some significant advances in public management, notably improved setting of objectives, better monitoring, greater emphasis on planning and improved transparency. These changes have led to limited (though contested) improvements in efficiency and fiscal discipline (OECD 2007, 59-67).

As for the second issue, how far transparency has contributed to any improvements (the main focus of the present study), the evidence is even more patchy. Availability of performance information to legislatures appears to have had little direct impact. Politicians tend to have their own specific political priorities which do not usually coincide with the over-general (and often bland) objectives espoused by public agencies. Indeed, in the internal aspects of performance management, where the objectives are supposedly set by elected ministers, political leaders (and their political advisers) have proved remarkably uninterested in the performance information delivered by their systems of performance management.

Similarly, in legislatures and legislative committees scrutinising government performance, elected members have taken little notice of performance-based elements in government reporting (Mulgan 2008; Talbot 2010, 200-1; Pollitt 2006). By the same token, if the politicians ignore the information, so too do the media, with the result that public servants have little reason to fear adverse consequences from publicity. This is not to discount the broader arguments that publication of performance information may help to inform public debate and lead eventually to better policy outcomes. But, the great bulk of performance based reporting by government agencies appears to fall on deaf ears.

6. Performance information: services to citizens

In some areas of government activity, however, performance information and its publication can become particularly salient and influential. These are areas where the government provides services directly to individual citizens, for instance hospital care and schooling, as distinct from more generalised and diffuse functions such as economic management or environmental protection. Here, the publicity of performance information is often central to the purpose of collecting the information rather than an incidental by-product of its intended use by policy-makers.

The new public management encourages a focus on the quality of service to individual citizens who are looked on as clients or customers of government and who need to be adequately informed about the service they are likely to receive from particular providers. Publication of performance measures indicating the quality of service given by individual providers, such as schools and hospitals, helps in this process of public information. At the same time, publication is also intended to offer public service providers an incentive to improve their efficiency and effectiveness.

The beneficial effects of publication come in a variety of ways. In the first place, publication can help to inform consumer choice. One preferred mechanism of the reformers has been to empower individual citizens by allowing them to choose between alternative providers who would then be funded in terms of the number of clients they attracted. Such market-style choice has always been available in some public services, such as public schools or general medical practitioners, in population centres large enough to offer choice. But opportunities for extending such choice have been sought in both the education and medical areas, as well as in the provision of social assistance and employment training (for instance the network of employment service providers in Australia's Job Search). Asymmetry of information between providers and consumers means that individual consumers often have little reliable knowledge on which to base an informed choice.

In private sector contexts, the need to inform consumers is used to justify compulsory disclosure for a range of occupations such as financial advisers and restaurateurs, as well as for purchasable products, such as foods and cosmetics (Fung et al 2007). Similarly, where governments are offering a choice between alternative providers of public service, they need to make sure that the providers give citizens access to accurate information about their performance. In this way, citizens can choose to deal with the more successful providers who can then attract more clients and more public funds. The providers who offer what citizens want will then expand and flourish, on the analogy of successful competitors in a commercial market.

In the case of many public services, however, effective consumer choice is often impracticable. Citizen consumers in a particular locality are usually obliged to patronise a single local secondary school or a single local hospital. There may even be only one general medical practitioner or primary school within a practicable distance. Moreover, in the case of some services, such as policing or revenue collection, a local monopoly is imposed by law.

But even where consumers may not choose between alternative providers, some elements of market-style competition between providers can still apply. In particular, performance information that allows comparison between different providers serving different localities or different sets of clients can still be used to stimulate improved performance. For instance, league tables that rank the comparative performance of service providers in a given category offer incentives for managers and organisations to 'lift their game' and to seek to learn from the example of more highly performing colleagues. They offer a form of 'benchmarking', the assessment of performance by comparison with other similar organisations or individuals. Even without explicit ranking or comparison with other providers, public assessment of performance against a given standard allows the public to

make a judgment of service quality which can then be compared with that of other providers.

The mechanism for improvement is assumed to come through the fact of publication and consequent publicity, on the ground that providers will respond positively to public commendation and will seek to avoid being publicly 'named and shamed', especially in the media which find league tables and other comparative performance data particularly newsworthy. In the words of the OECD,

The approach of making public the performance results of agencies and programmes seeks to recognise good performance and/or name and shame underperformers. The hope is that pressure to improve performance will be brought to bear via the media, the public and the legislature...The name-and-shame approach often seeks to compare and score the performance of one agency against another, or an agency against its own historical record. This can be done through scorecards and/or benchmarking, or via league tables (OECD 2007 52).(see also Jung 2010).

Alternatively, the motivation may come more directly, from an appeal to providers' professional *amour propre* and from their desire to rank well among their peers and in the eyes of their employers, regardless of how much public attention the performance information has received (Werner and Asch 2005). Such peer effects assume that the information is at least available to the professional community involved. If a given person or organisation knows where they stand in relation to their peers, they can assume that their peers also have access to the same comparative information.

How successful is such comparative or bench-marking information in improving government performance? Again, as with performance management in general, systematic empirical study of the general question is lacking (Talbot 2010, 121). There are, however, a number of detailed specific studies in particular areas which provide some suggestive evidence. The following sections outline the international use of published performance information in three service areas (health, education and policing) and summarise the research on the effects of publication.

7. Performance information: health

Health services, particularly hospital services, is the area in which the collection and publication of performance information has been most extensively developed, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom, though most OECD countries, including Australia, are now following suit with an increasing reliance on performance information for funding and assessing hospitals and health professionals. Health is also the area in which the effect of publishing performance information has been the subject of the most intensive academic research.

In the United States, public reporting of health performance is largely driven by the need for employers to purchase health plans for their employees. Health plans are regulated by the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), which as well as protecting portability and privacy also requires the development of standards for health

information. This has encouraged published assessments of the comparative performance of health plans, by organisations such as the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) Health Plan and the Consumer Assessment of Health Plans Study (CAHPS) (OECD 2002, ch 5). These assessments include performance data and report cards on the treatment of a range of medical conditions, concentrating on hospitals. In most cases, published performance information is based on objective data taken from hospital or nursing home records, though some reports also include surveys of patient satisfaction.

Similar reports are also published on nursing homes. For instance, the Center for Medicare and Medicaid, a federal government agency, provides a report card on nursing homes on its website (www.medicare.gov/NHCompare) which includes information on nineteen clinical measures and an overall star rating (Zinn et al 2010, 1-5). Other assessment schemes are more locally based, such as the Cleveland Health Quality Choice program which monitors the performance of hospitals in the Cleveland area and the 'Quality Counts' survey of Wisconsin hospitals, conducted by the Alliance, an employer purchasing cooperative.

There have also been a number more specialised local initiatives, driven by state government departments of health. One such initiative is the New York State Cardiac Surgery Reporting System. Since 1987, the New York State Department of Health has collected data associated with coronary-artery bypass grafting in the state, focusing in particular on mortality rates. Data from each hospital and individual surgeon are compared, taking into account a number of variables such as the severity of each patient's condition. Since 1990 the data have been made public (Chassin et al 1996; Epstein 2000). This initiative has also been followed in Pennsylvania (Schneider and Epstein 1996).

The United Kingdom, with its centrally funded and controlled National Health Service (NHS), has been committed to the publication of performance information about health providers since the beginning of the performance management movement. In the early 1990s, the government published Health Service Indicators which covered a range of information, including hospital mortality rates. These ratings were then incorporated, in the mid-1990s, into the Patients' Charter standards (Mason and Street 2005) and then into the Blair government's system of headline performance targets. From 2001 the Department of Health published star ratings of public hospitals and other health-delivery organisations in England. These ratings were based on a range of performance data, including surveys as well as clinical outcomes. In 2004, the government introduced a Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF) as a voluntary annual reward and incentive program for general practice surgeries. Clinicians have been scored against 146 performance indicators in four general domains, clinical, organisational, patient care experience and additional services.

Report cards on United Kingdom hospitals are also published through the Dr Foster organisation, an independent, non-profit organisation that collects and analyses information on the availability and quality of health services and information on hospital consultants (www.drfoosterhealth.co.uk). Since 2006, the United Kingdom Healthcare Commission (now the Care Quality Commission) has published on its website (www.cqc.org.uk) data showing risk-adjusted surgeon-specific survival rates for coronary artery bypass grafting and aortic valve replacements. The new Coalition government, elected in 2010, is planning to cut back on some of the more cumbersome aspects of health-related reporting as part of major

reforms of the NHS. But it remains committed to the principles of patient choice and published information.

Other OECD countries also publish various forms of health information (OECD 2002, ch 5). For instance, the Netherlands government forced the National Association of Hospitals to set up a data base with information on hospital waiting lists and to make the information public through its internet website (Meijer 2007, 177-9). In Australia, the reporting of hospital performance began with state governments, which carry primary responsibility for hospitals, with the Queensland department of health (Queensland health) being an acknowledged innovator in this area (www.health.qld.gov.au/hospitalperformance). In addition, state and territory governments have supplied information to a My Hospitals Website, which was set up under the Council of Australian Governments (www.myhospitals.gov.au). The federal government's proposed new National Health Performance Authority will also publish detailed information on the performance of individual hospitals. The pros and cons of publishing performance data in health are well summarised in a recent exchange in the Medical Journal of Australia (Jorm and Frommer 2011; Braithwaite and Mannion 2011) The impact of publishing performance information on the actual level of medical performance has been most extensively studied in relation to the New York State Cardiac Surgery Reporting System.

The results remain contested. Particularly in the early years of the scheme, physicians criticised the data for being over-simplified and for discouraging the treatment of high-risk patients where the risk of mortality is higher (Chassin et al 1996; Epstein 2000, 1885). However, there is no firm evidence of systematic avoidance of high-risk cases. Most studies (though not all) report a comparatively higher reduction in mortality rates in New York State since publication began (Marshall et al 2000; Fung et al 2008). Mortality rates may have decreased as a result of other factors, such as improved skills among surgeons or greater willingness of high-risk patients to seek treatment interstate. But the weight of academic opinion favours publication as a significant factor. In addition, apart from measureable outcomes, there is clear evidence that publication has led to greater commitment on the part of both hospitals and individual surgeons to improving the quality of patient care, particularly in hospitals reported to be performing worse than average.

Interestingly, though the performance data is made available to the public with the clear intention of informing current and prospective patients and assisting their choice of health providers, patients and the public at large appear to have made little direct use of this information. Initially, when the data first began to be published and was the subject of sensational media reporting, the better performing hospital and surgeons reported an increase in patient choices. But the effect soon levelled off and the comparative performance statistics appear to have little direct effect on patient selection of hospital or choice.

The most assiduous users of the information have been hospital managers who see adverse results as a reason for improvement and good results as a reason for self congratulation. Individual surgeons, though professionally sceptical of the results, have probably taken more notice of them than they cared to report. Thus improvement effects do not come about as the result of actual public pressure and community feedback, as the theory of

consumer empowerment would suggest. Rather, the benefits come from managers anticipating the bad effects of adverse patient outcomes on their own organisations and through professional peer pressure on both management and clinicians (OECD 2002, 101).

Other instances of the publishing of health performance information in the United States have also been the subject of careful academic research, including Pennsylvania's adoption of New York initiatives in relation to coronary bypass surgery (Bentley and Nash 1998), Cleveland's survey of patients' experience in hospital (Rosenthal et al 1997), Missouri's survey of obstetrics services (Longo et al 1997), and the 'Quality Counts' survey of Wisconsin hospitals (Hibbard et al 2003). The impact of the federal report cards on nursing homes has also been investigated (Zinn et al 2010)

Such research generally confirms the results of studies of the New York heart surgery. Some scepticism remains about the reliability of the data as indicators of overall quality along with suspicion of possible distortion and 'creaming' of easy cases (Mukumel et al 2008) and doubts about the level of impact on medical practitioners (Rainwater et al 1998). However, certain improvements can be detected as a result of publication, to some extent in actual health outcomes but more particularly in greater efforts directed by providers at improving their performance as measured. These effects are not driven by patient feedback or choice, as publication has little impact on the selection of providers. Instead, the main causal mechanism appears to be the consequences of naming and shaming, as perceived by hospital managers and medical professionals.

Similar results have been found for the publication of health information in the Netherlands. Members of the public remain largely uninformed, but publication itself, particularly when backed up by media publicity, is sufficient to stimulate positive responses from health professionals (Meijer 2007, 177-9). In the United Kingdom, research on the overall effects of publishing medical performance information has been comparatively scant. Publication of star ratings has been followed by an improvement in terms of reported performance, which is prima facie evidence of improvement in actual performance (Hood 2006). Experience with the Quality and Outcomes Framework suggests that it was accompanied by significant improvement in the incidence of a number of major diseases and conditions (eg Khunti et al 2007; OECD 2009, 141-2), though the influence of other factors cannot be altogether ruled out. The publication of coronary surgery statistics, following the New York model, produced beneficial outcomes, similar to those reported in the United States (Bridgwater et al 2007).

At the same time, United Kingdom health professionals have persistently criticised the quality of the information on which star ratings and other measures are based, as well as the alleged over-simplification involved in reducing a multiplicity of complex variables to a single aggregate score. While some of this criticism can be discounted as due to the natural defensiveness of expert professionals under lay scrutiny, some scepticism appears justified (Mannion and Goddard 2003; Mason and Street 2005). A number of studies have criticised the extent of self-interested distortion of figures ('gaming') in the system (Bevan and Hood 2006, Hood 2006), as uncovered by a number of audits (eg United Kingdom National Audit Office 2001; United Kingdom Healthcare Commission 2005). The 'high-stakes' nature of the NHS reporting, whereby performance indicators have a direct impact on institutional funding and managers' careers, has made it particularly susceptible to distortion.

Nonetheless, the extent of gaming can easily be exaggerated, with most public sector professionals being motivated more by professional values and ethics than by personal self-interest (Talbot 2010, 190-5).

Overall, then, research on the effects of publishing health information in the United States and the United Kingdom suggests that publication leads to improvements in the performance of hospitals, nursing homes and individual health professionals, provided the information is reliable and relevant and the opportunities or incentives to distort it remain low. The main mechanism of improvement is likely to be the desire of managers and practitioners to avoid the reputational effects of being named and shamed, rather than feedback from patients and the public at large. Indeed, evidence suggests that the members of the general public not only are unaware of much health information but also, when faced with such information, have difficulty in understanding its implications (Hibbard et al 2002).

8. Performance information: education

Education is another area in which performance information is regularly published. Here the unit of performance is usually the particular institution, such as individual schools and universities, rather than the individual teachers within these institutions (though performance information about individuals is regularly used internally as a management tool in decisions about appointment, promotion and performance-based bonuses). Internationally, like the performance movement generally, performance measurement in schools has developed furthest in the Anglo-American developed world, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom. Other OECD countries have been more cautious, particularly in the publication of school results, though most have involved some element of standardised performance assessment (Mueller and Hernandez 2010).

The movement began with a drive to improve the educational levels of pupils, which were thought to have fallen behind, particularly in numeracy and literacy, as a result of mistaken educational priorities of education experts and teachers. Governments began to require compulsory testing of basic literacy and numeracy skills in standardised tests. They also compared the performance of individual schools by aggregating and averaging their pupils' scores on the tests and by making this information publicly available through 'league tables'. Again, as with health information, the official rationale has been to provide evidence to support parents' choice of school for their children and thus give rise to incentives for schools and teachers to improve their own performance. In addition, in a form of 'high stakes' testing, schools face rewards or penalties depending on their scores.

One of the leaders in high stakes educational testing has been the United Kingdom, particularly England (Scotland and Wales, which have separately administered school systems, have been somewhat more cautious). The trend began under the Thatcher-Major Conservative government (1979-97), which was critical of the anti-competitive assumptions supposedly dominant amongst professional educators. The government introduced standardised testing at various stages of primary and secondary schooling and the publication of league tables of comparative performance based on these assessments.

The Blair Labour government continued with the main framework of national testing as part of a policy of educational improvement, linked to key performance targets for each school. Schools seen as failing were subject to rigorous intervention and threatened with closure. The basis of the comparative assessments was subject to substantial revision over the years, in response to criticism about the oversimplification implicit in the original league tables. A new 'value-added' measure, introduced from 2006, attempted to discount the prior educational achievement of pupils and to identify the progress that could be attributed to the school (Wilson and Piebalga 2008).

In the United States, similar practices began in the 1990s in individual states (which hold prime responsibility for public education) (Carnoy et al 2003). For instance, the New York State Department of Education implemented standardised examinations in maths, English, science and social studies, for grades 4-8 and published the aggregated results in the media. Texas acted similarly, also adding material incentives such as cash awards for schools that produced high scores and possible closure for the poor performers. In 2002, the Federal government introduced the No Child Left Behind scheme (NCLB) which extended what many states had begun, mandating standardised tests in reading, maths and science, and requiring the publication of aggregated results. Schools face severe penalties if they fail to increase their average test scores over time.

Other countries have also adopted similar policies of publishing performance information about schools, largely as a means of facilitating parental choice of schools. For instance, the Schools Inspection Service in the Netherlands publishes quantitative information concerning the quality of schools in the form of 'Quality Cards'. This information is then used by a national newspaper to calculate comparative rankings for different schools. Australia, explicitly using overseas models (Lingard 2010), has recently adopted a similar scheme, the MySchool website (www.myschool.edu.au) which provides a range of relevant information about each school including performance in the national assessment program in literacy and numeracy (NAPLAN). In deference to opposition from teachers' unions and other educational interests, the government does not officially calculate comparative league tables (though, as in the Netherlands, such tables are quickly constructed by the media).

Has the publication of school performance on test scores improved the education levels of pupils? The most detailed research comes from studies in the United States which have compared performance before and after the publication of results. For instance, introduction of the Texas school accountability system produced improved performance on standard tests in all the basic subjects, particularly for children of Afro-American background and children from low-income homes (Fuller and Johnson 2001). Similarly, publication of school results in Chicago also produced significant improvements in most student cohorts (Jacob 2004). A careful survey of the first five years of the federal No Child Left Behind program found significant improvements in reading and mathematics since the program had been introduced (Kober et al 2008). Overall, test-based accountability of schools seems to have had a positive effect (Supovitz 2009).

In England, evidence is more inconclusive. High-stakes league tables have been in operation for longer and there appears to be little reliable before and after research. Comparison with Scotland, which has a less comprehensive reporting regimes without league tables, does not

suggest any major benefit (eg Wiggins and Tymms 2002). The new 'value-added' measures do not necessarily rule out the overwhelming effects of socio economic status on school performance (Gorard 2006; Power and Frandji 2010).

In general, in so far as performance does improve, parent choice is not the main causal factor. Indeed, parents are generally not well informed about the published details of school performance. They tend to choose schools on the basis of personal advice and the experience of other parents rather than through perusal of internet-based assessments and rankings (Meijer 2007, 176). As with health performance, the main effect is through the impact of publication on the behaviour of professional service providers, both at the managerial level and in the classroom. School principals know that their school's future, and their own careers, depend on their school's ranking. Teachers regularly report that they are made very conscious of the need for their pupils to perform well on the standardised assessments and that this influences their teaching strategies (Meijer 2007, 176; Supovitz 2009, 221; Mueller and Hernandez 2010, 315).

The overall educational value of performance reporting, and especially of league tables and other such ranking devices, remains a matter of considerable controversy. In the United States and the United Kingdom, the general principle of performance accountability and high stakes testing remains very popular with the public and the media (Supovitz 2009, 222). Critics complain that standardised assessment narrows the curriculum and encourages teachers to 'teach to the test' (Jones and Egley, 2007; Supovitz 2009, 221; Ravitch 2010), though professionally responsible teachers can counteract such tendencies (Volante 2004). Distorting and narrowing effects may be greater for weaker students who need more test based coaching which can impoverish their educational experience and further widen the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged pupils (Hursh 2005, 611; Hanushek and Raymond 2005; Mintrop and Sunderman 2009).

Performance reporting allegedly devalues the professionalism of teachers who, it is assumed, are not to be trusted to consider the educational interests of their pupils unless they are subject to external inspection and incentives (Sahlberg 2010; Jensen 2010). Because league tables are based on the performance of previous cohorts of pupils they may be unreliable as predictors of future performance and therefore as guides to parental choice (Leckie and Goldstein 2009). League tables are blamed for entrenching class privilege and for stigmatising poor performing schools and their pupils whose alleged failure is a matter of social disadvantage not poor teaching (Easen and Bolden 2005). Many of these criticisms represent irreducible differences of ideological value and perspective. What, for some, is a narrowing of the curriculum is, for others, a welcome return to basics. Unwillingness to publicly recognise poor performance may be seen to reflect either a concern for social justice or a refusal to remedy social disadvantage.

On balance, the publication of results does appear likely to lead to some improvement in the level of the skills being tested, provided that the tests are well constructed and not too susceptible to coaching and gaming. However, the extent of such improvement should not be exaggerated. Evidence suggests that increases in skill levels start to level off after an initial burst of success associated with the introduction of publication (Sahlberg 2010, 52-3). Long-term advances in educational levels require multi-faceted approaches that rely on

trust-based partnerships with teachers. Some of the better performing OECD countries in terms of childhood literacy and numeracy, such as Finland, have not engaged in publishing results or the comparative assessment of schools.

9. Performance information: policing

Policing is a function from which most citizens benefit collectively, in the enjoyment of law and order, rather than as individuals, through direct use of police services. It lends itself to the collection and publication of quantitative performance information such as the frequency of particular crimes, number of arrests and successful prosecutions, rates of incident clearance and so on. While crime statistics have been collected and published for many decades as part of annual statistical surveys, the international performance management movement has intensified interest in such measures as a means of more tightly monitoring the efficiency and effectiveness of policing (Moore and Braga 2003). Particularly influential has been the New York Police Department's model of police management known as COMPSTAT (computer-statistics), introduced in 1994 and much copied elsewhere in the United States as well as in the United Kingdom and Australia.

COMPSTAT is essentially a four-step process involving timely and accurate intelligence, rapid deployment, effective tactics and immediate follow-up and assessment. Senior police officials meet frequently with precinct or district commanders who are responsible for producing effective results for their localities. The system makes key use of localised performance information, both in deciding strategies and in evaluating them, and is therefore a classic instance of performance-based management. Public reporting of performance information is not necessarily integral to COMPSTAT, which is primarily a system of internal management and accountability in which local managers are openly compared with each other. None the less, public interest in crime and crime statistics makes publicity a potentially important mechanism for improving performance. The New York Police Department, for instance, posts weekly COMPSTAT reports of crime statistics on the internet and sees publicity as an important additional spur to action.

Versions of COMPSTAT have been adopted in all Australian states, under various titles, such as Operational Performance Reviews (Queensland) and Operations Crime Reviews (NSW). Most states publish localised crime statistics but typically for a year at a time and not in the same time-frame as for the internal management process. The Netherlands, too, as the continental European country most influenced by Anglo-American models, has introduced its own performance-based reporting system based on annual targets (Terpstra and Trommel 2009)

Policing in the United Kingdom has also relied heavily on performance information. The approach to collecting and publishing statistical information has evolved over time, but with a common theme of commitment from each police authority to performance planning with quantitative targets. A central regulator (HM Inspectorate of Constabulary) assesses each authority's performance and publicly identifies those whose performance is substandard. One of the Inspectorate's stated aims is 'to provide authoritative information to allow the public to compare the performance of their force against others', allowing the evidence to

be 'used to drive improvements in the service to the public' (www.hmic.gov.uk). Again, the performance information is largely in terms of annual statistics and assessments.

As with performance-based systems for other services, the effects of COMPSTAT and other similar policing reporting regimes are the subject of controversy (eg Mazerolle et al 2007, 238; Cockcroft and Beattie 2009; Shane 2010, 8). Proponents of COMPSTAT claim that it has led to substantial improvements in police performance, including significant falls in the crime rate (eg Silverman and O'Connell 1997), conclusions that are supported by some academic research (eg Mazerolle et al 2011). However, in some cases, the reductions may be due to social and economic causes other than the introduction of COMPSTAT. Moreover, as COMPSTAT is primarily a new approach to police management and priorities, in which regular external reporting is only one aspect, any successes attributed to it cannot be unequivocally claimed as due to the publication of performance information.

The emphasis given to performance information by senior police and politicians has aroused considerable resistance among frontline police officers. Researchers report frequent complaints that the indicators do not adequately measure the complexities of police work (Cockcroft and Beattie 2006, Terpstra and Trommel 2009). Performance systems tend to empower managers at the expense of professionals and open up unhealthy divisions between senior and rank-and-file police. Overall, the practice of performance management in policing does not provide strong evidence of the general advantages of publishing quantitative results. Instead, it confirms some of the risks that need to be taken into account, particularly the need to maintain the confidence of the frontline professionals who are so critical to the quality of public services.

10. Publishing performance information: conclusions

In attempting to reach conclusions about the value of publishing performance information, caution is required for a number of reasons. In the first place, as already noted, research into the impact of publishing performance information has not been as extensive as one might expect. Indeed, more extensive research is urgently needed in this area as a means of further encouraging effective transparency in performance information. As government agencies embark on new initiatives in publishing information, they should be encouraged to sponsor concurrent research on the 'before-and-after' effects of such changes. This would help to build up a bank of useful data which could guide and support further transparency developments.

Secondly, it is to be remembered that vigorous controversy over the interpretation of performance information is unavoidable. Assessments of performance involve judgments about social value and political priorities which are themselves often contested. Of the areas examined in this report, education offers a prime example of basic disagreement over goals which inevitably affects people's assessment of whether or not particular indicators are measuring desirable outcomes. Health policy is often less ambiguous in its objectives, making health indicators such as rates of disease and mortality less controversial. But even in health, value-based disagreement may arise, for instance over the need for hospital-based births or over the viability of remote communities, which can then thus cast doubt over the relevance of certain indicators.

Another reason for disagreement is that conflicting institutional interests are often at stake. Politicians and head office managers find performance indicators a useful means of asserting control over the service providers in their portfolios. Along with the media and the general public, they are often over-inclined to discount genuine problems in published performance information. Conversely, frontline professionals resent managerial attempts to constrain their practice by the imposition of quantitative targets. They therefore tend to exaggerate the distortion of professional standards implicit in predetermined performance measures. Thus, not only support for the publication of performance information, but also opposition to it, must always be interpreted against a background of vigorous ideological and institutional conflict.

Thirdly, it is apparent that the practice of performance management and performance measurement has evolved and matured over the last twenty years. Almost every individual system of performance information surveyed for this project has been subjected to substantial revision in the light of internal experience and in response to feedback from interested stakeholders. The vigorous discussion that surrounds such schemes, both internally within organisations and among external commentators, has led to considerable improvements in the types of data presented and the use to which they are put. For this reason, it is important not to place too much weight on criticisms that emerged in the early days of publishing particular types of data, given that many of the problems will have been subsequently reduced or removed.

Bearing these cautionary provisos in mind, some reasonably robust conclusions can be reached about the benefits and risks in publishing performance information and about the general principles that should govern such publication. First, the indicators themselves and the process of publication should be developed in close consultation not only with external stakeholders, such as politicians (Van Dooren et al 2007), but also with the professional providers who can help avoid many of the pitfalls in performance measurement (Smith 1995; Werner and Asch 2005; Bird 2005). Stakeholder and professional 'buy-in' is essential (United Kingdom National Audit Office 2006).

Complete agreement is unlikely, given the instinctive suspicion of all professionals to any mechanisms of external accountability other than to fellow members of their profession. Service providers, therefore, should not be extended a right of veto over performance information and its publication. Nonetheless, reporting systems must have a degree of endorsement among providers in order to avoid the level of alienation among frontline staff that has often bedevilled the measurement of performance. Without a degree of trust between politicians, management and frontline professionals, any performance management system is likely to be counter-productive.

Performance measurement, it should be remembered, was often introduced in a context of political hostility towards the professional providers, particularly towards their professional associations, such as teachers unions and police unions. Performance measurement systems still tend to carry a stigma of political and managerial distrust, as far as the frontline providers are concerned. Experience with the more successful performance systems,

however, suggests that providers should become heavily involved in the development and operation of such systems (Mason and Street, 2005; Moynihan and Ingraham, 2003).

Secondly, to be effective, performance information systems need to be reasonably proof against self-interested distortion ('gaming') by unscrupulous providers. In general, the incentives for gaming a particular measure tend to increase with the weight given to that measure in significant management decisions, such as budgeting or career advancement. Conversely, if the measure in question is only one among many indicators taken into account in major management decisions, the chances that it will attract gaming behaviour are much reduced. Thus, experience with performance measurement systems suggests the value of relying on a number of separate measures, rather than just one indicator, such as unqualified mortality rates or results in a single education test (OECD 2007, 76).

Thirdly, and more broadly, it may be more effective to loosen the connection between quantitative performance information as a whole and management decisions. The British approach of relying heavily on 'high stakes' indicators and targets as automatic triggers for rewards or penalties has come under increasing criticism. It is now often compared unfavourably with the more open-ended and flexible approach favoured in many continental European countries. There, performance information is taken into account by decision makers but does not determine decisions, leaving plenty of room for discussion with stakeholders as well as judgment by professionals (Van Dooren et al 2007, 6-8; Pollitt et al 2010). In the words of the United Kingdom House of Commons Public Administration Committee, public service agencies should not allow a 'measurement culture', focusing managers on external targets, to crowd out a 'performance culture', which concentrates on organisational capacity and leadership (United Kingdom House of Commons 2003).

The key issue is to strike a judicious balance between trust and accountability, between reliance on the genuine sense of public service which motivates most public service professionals most of the time and a more hard-headed cynicism about the self-serving motives to which all occupational groups are prone (Talbot 2010, 190-5). Admittedly, the practice of an earlier era may have left too much discretion and power in the hands of public professionals. However, some of the reforms associated with the performance management movement reflected an excessively jaundiced view of the motives of skilled professionals, along with over-confidence about the possibility of reducing the goals of professional performance to quantifiable, measurable targets. Any campaign to encourage the further publication of performance measurement must allow for significant input by professionals in the construction and interpretation of such measures.

At the same time, in a more open political environment, service providers need to be wary of attempting to retreat behind a wall of professional silence and confidentiality. When they see measures misleadingly quoted in the media or in political debate, their natural reaction may be to seek suppression of the data on which the slanted reports are based. However, the more enlightened response is to engage in public debate, not to seek to suppress it. If they think information is being quoted out of context or presented in a biased manner, they need to argue so publicly. They should have the confidence to realise that information, responsibly used and interpreted, has the potential not only to raise the level of public debate but also to improve their own performance.

In general, publication of performance information can definitely improve the quality of government performance, in the sense of encouraging greater efficiency and effectiveness in the achievement of agreed goals in service delivery. These beneficial effects are likely, in the first instance, to be due more to the attention given to the information by those professionally involved in providing the service than to feedback from the general public. At the same time, to be effective and gain the attention of providers, information should not only be meaningful and relevant (Darbishire 2010, 27-9) but should also have the potential to arouse the interest of external stakeholders and the media as well as members of the public. Much government information does not meet these requirements. For instance, the great bulk of general performance information that accompanies annual budgets and reports is too vague in meaning or too esoteric in expression to have any substantial public impact.

Individual clients and citizens who wish to inform themselves about what their government and its agencies are doing should not be discouraged by unnecessary levels of complexity or irrelevance in the data made available to them. Citizens, after all, are the ultimate owners of public information and have a right of reasonable access to it, which includes the right to have it conveyed to them in a readily understandable form. Conversely, governments have a democratic duty of transparency, which entails transparency of meaning. Well-constructed and intelligible information about government performance is both a democratic right and an instrument of more effective government.

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