



Ministerial Symposium on the Future of Public Services

Introduction by Donald Johnston, Secretary-General

The success of OECD's first ministerial-level meeting on public management showed that a coherent, strategic view of public management in Member countries was possible, and that many public management reform concepts are robust enough to apply reasonably well across the diverse political traditions and diverse cultures of OECD Member countries.



From the work done under the auspices of the Public Management Committee (PUMA) since it was established in 1990, there was considerable reason to be optimistic about the outcome of a ministerial meeting. Nevertheless, when Ministers gathered at the OECD headquarters in March 1996 it was not certain how they would respond. National representatives did not, in general, know each other from previous associations. Moreover, most were accustomed to viewing public management in the context of their own national settings. In the event there was a remarkable degree of recognition of common issues and problems that transcended both national barriers and differences in political philosophy.

It became clear from the discussion at the meeting that effective systems of governance are essential to both the social progress and economic prosperity of Member countries. The Symposium reinforced the Organisation's commitment to its multidisciplinary approach to problems. Governance relies on more than efficient and effective public management. It also relies on the ability of democratic institutions to function well in the modern environment of rapid economic change, global communications, and well-developed interest groups. Finally, it depends on the capacity of public administrations to attract and retain first-class talent. Despite the extensive efforts at reform discussed at the Symposium, the process clearly needs continued improvement.

The Ministerial Symposium marked an important step in developing a useful set of ideas on public management reform drawn from the experience of political leaders of OECD Member countries. The next step is to build effectively on this event.

Several areas were highlighted as ones for further ministerial-level consideration in the immediate

future. These included regulatory reform, an activity that is high on our list of cross-cutting, OECD-wide efforts. Ethics, improved policy-making systems, and better budgeting processes that are more responsive to long-term issues and sensitive to investment needs in both physical and human capital are also candidates for future high-level consultation.

Working with the Public Management Committee of the OECD, we are committed to supporting Member countries in bringing the necessary political attention to bear on the key issues of governance and public management.

Donald Johnston, Secretary-General

[Table of Contents](#)

[Statement of the Chair](#)

[Top of First Page](#)

[Executive Summary](#)

OECD home Search Feedback Links Site map Publications PUMA home

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