

Government appointments

Paul Dacre gave up on his application to become a public sector regulator, reporting how impossible it would be with conservative attitudes to get through the civil service screening. Press reports imply some Ministers were sympathetic to his candidature but are apparently prisoners to the system of public appointment.

Talking to Ministers who are appointing people to public posts they mainly sound resigned to being asked to select from a limited choice of centre left establishment figures well known to the civil service who will not manage or challenge the quangos and boards they are asked to lead in any new way. Where Blair and Brown used their powers to populate quangoland with people who shared their outlook, Conservative Ministers are bamboozled or threatened into continuing such outlooks for fear of accusations that they are appointing cronies or friends to Boards. There are also a good number of talented and experienced people who have Conservative sympathies who do not fancy being straightjacketed into public sector ways of thinking in such Roles.

If Conservative Ministers cannot find a way of getting good people into quangos willing to follow a Conservative agenda then they need to take back control of what the quangos do. Time to slim the numbers of these bodies and limit their activities. Time also to place them under more regular guidance and review.

When I was responsible for the NHS in Wales I abolished the post and office of the Chief Executive and ran the service through the two top health officials already in the department.