

YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO A DISCUSSION SEMINAR

Official Performance Data: Made to Break?

Friday 17 April 2015, 2:30 – 4:30 pm.

Room B.07, 32 Lincoln's Inn Fields, London School of Economics, London WC2A 3PH.

Note change of venue from previous advertisements

Organizers: Tony Travers (Director of LSE London and Professor, Department of Government, LSE), Ruth Dixon (Department of Politics and International Relations, Oxford) and Christopher Hood (Emeritus Fellow, All Souls College, Oxford)

Seminar Topic: There is a striking contradiction between the demand for quantitative evidence in public management policy in the UK and the apparently increasingly frequent breaks and discontinuities in the data series that are meant to provide that evidence. How does this disjunction come about and what are its effects? This seminar aims to explore the impacts, causes and theoretical explanations of such performance data breaks and examine the implications for those producing and evaluating performance data, inside and outside government.

Format: Brief presentations from a panel to be followed by general discussion. The Panel will include Tony Travers, Ruth Dixon and Christopher Hood (and others to be announced).

Possible discussion questions:

- 1) What are the causes and consequences of performance data breaks?
- 2) What are the implications of such data breaks for evaluating government performance over time?
- 3) What do such data breaks tell us about government processes?
- 4) What is the optimum amount of 'churn' in performance indicators?
- 5) How can performance data breaks be supplemented or worked around by other means (for example experiments, crowd-sourcing or web-crawling)?
- 6) How can policy be improved to improve the usability of government performance data (for example by requiring stepped overlapping series to accompany every data break) and what should government and other key users of performance data (e.g. audit bodies, think-tanks, media and academics) do to make official data more usable?

Book and Briefing Paper: A new book by Christopher Hood and Ruth Dixon entitled *A Government that Worked Better and Cost Less? Evaluating Three Decades of Reform and Change in UK Central Government* will be published by OUP in April 2015 and, we hope, available at the seminar. A briefing paper about their findings on data discontinuities, based on a chapter from the book, will be available at the meeting and afterwards online.

We would be grateful if you could reply to ruth.dixon@politics.ox.ac.uk if you plan to attend