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PUMA COMMUNICATIONS GROUP: REPORT TO PUMA COMMITTEE

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**PUMA COMMUNICATIONS GROUP:
REPORT TO PUMA COMMITTEE**

1. At its March 1998 meeting, the Public Management Committee asked the Communications Group to report back on promising approaches for ensuring effective communication and co-ordination of PUMA-related work within Member country governments.

Internal communications and co-ordination

2. Effective communications and co-ordination is a two-part issue:

- The first part concerns how the members of the Committee communicate back to senior policy officials within central policy departments and others most directly concerned with the Public Management Committee, and how they obtain input from relevant bodies to ensure that PUMA's work programme and activities fully reflect real needs and high priorities.
- The second part concerns the dissemination of products, conclusions, lessons learned, etc., within public administration and the need to maximise the impact of PUMA's work, both at policy level and at a more technical level.

3. On the first issue, Member countries use different schemes that range from formal co-ordination bodies to ad hoc arrangements. The success of this effort seems to depend not on the approach adopted, but on the effectiveness of these mechanisms to build strong bridges between national agenda and PUMA's work, to obtain sound input from relevant government units and to provide effective feedback on PUMA activities and results.

4. On the second issue, Member countries tend to rely on PUMA's own communications efforts, such as *Focus*, Policy Briefs, free distribution documents and the Website. However, it is felt that more can be done in this area to support PUMA's efforts and give guidance to target specific audiences, etc.

Country examples

5. The following examples illustrate the variety of ways used by countries to organise their internal communications and co-ordination functions.

Australia

6. There is a PUMA Contact Group co-ordinated by the Prime Minister's Department. Members of the group include Departments and agencies with an interest in all aspects of public management - financial management including the Budget, policy co-ordination, regulation, human resources and industrial relations. The group used to meet before and after each PUMA meeting, but now conducts much of its business electronically. The Group provides input to PUMA and briefing on PUMA Committee agenda papers, and disseminates PUMA material within the Commonwealth Government. For example, the Group met recently to caucus prior to development of an Australian position on the OECD

budget cuts. Members developed a common understanding of the use that was made of PUMA material within the Commonwealth Government, and agreed on a position that subsequently became the Australian position. Papers for the forthcoming PUMA meeting were distributed electronically to members, who provided briefing on relevant items, as well as input for the country factsheets. The group will meet following the PUMA meeting to be debriefed on developments.

Norway

7. Co-ordination of PUMA-related matters is mainly handled in an ad hoc way. In some areas, such as "regulatory reform", relevant ministries directly participate in the work on a regular basis. However, the Directorate of Public Management (*Statskonsult*) is fully kept in the picture as a regular partner.

8. The PUMA mailing list used for the distribution of *Focus*, has been updated to ensure that all ministries and subordinate agencies have a "contact person" for the *Focus* and receive a copy of the newsletter.

United Kingdom

9. PUMA issues are firmly embedded into the work of the Cabinet Office, where much of the forward thinking on public management takes place. Those working in the policy divisions are expected to take account of matters reflected in PUMA publications -- and increasingly on the Website -- in developing and advancing domestic policy. In this context the distribution of *Focus* in hard copy format is seen as a useful tool for reminding those involved of the latest PUMA outputs. Recently, the circulation list of *Focus* was reviewed to ensure it remains appropriate and comprehensive.

10. All this is reinforced by regular liaison between the central PUMA contact point in the Cabinet Office and those who attend Working Party meetings. Attendees are encouraged to keep the central point in touch with the outcomes of these meetings so that an overview can be maintained.

11. A particular focus is the 6-monthly PUMA Committee meetings. Subject to sufficient time being available between the receipt of the papers and the meeting, all policy divisions are invited to contribute to the UK line. Consideration is currently being given to formalising this network with meetings before and after each meeting of the Committee as another way to reinforce the value of PUMA's work.

Finland

12. A PUMA co-ordination group meets at least twice a year. The group is co-ordinated by the Ministry of Finance's Public Management Department. Members include ministries, one agency (Statistics of Finland) and two members from the social sciences department of the University of Helsinki. Besides the meetings, the co-ordination group is regularly asked to comment on important issues like budget and priorities. The group has functioned similarly for almost ten years. During the last few years there has been some growing interest in the co-ordination group. So far, this has been solved by adding some people to the group's mailing list, but not by enlarging the group. At the moment the Public Management Department is studying whether there is a need to create a larger group.

13. In previous years the Ministry of Finance made some centralised efforts to make PUMA's work better known in Finland. This included translating PUMA's central documents into Finnish and publishing and distributing them. Since the launching of the Website there has not been a need for this kind of effort.

United States

14. A less formal way of preparation and feedback is followed. Co-ordination is ensured through a relatively select number of key policy officials who are responsible for the public management issues addressed at PUMA. They include the Director, Deputy Director, and Assistant Director for Budget Review of the Office of Management and Budget; the President's Cabinet Secretary; the Director of the Office of Personnel Management; the Deputy Director of the National Economic Council; the Director of the National Partnership for Reinventing Government; and the Director of the Office of Government Ethics. Each of them tends to be the US representative (or responsible for the staff) who represents the US on each of the working parties (Centres of Government, Senior Budget Officers, Human Resources Management, Regulatory Reform, Ethics, etc.). For the most part, they are asked to deal directly with the Secretariat on matters in their respective areas. While they are kept apprised of matters of general concern (i.e., budgetary developments, overall US Government policy from the Department of State and our Ambassador, etc.), the more specific flow of information (i.e., subject matter material in their particular area) is left for them to obtain through their working party, OLIS, fax or Internet.

15. Regarding the second part of the issue, in the US the central contact cannot attempt to be an all-purpose clearinghouse or switching station for PUMA information. The US Government is simply too large and too diverse to do that. In addition, there are 38,000 units of State and local government, over 3,000 universities and countless academics, and occasionally others outside Government in the private and non-profit sector who from time to time have interest in these matters. For these reasons, the general dissemination of information depends on PUMA's own means of distribution, which include PUMA itself, the OECD Washington Centre, *Focus* and Policy Briefs, and increasingly the Website.

Portugal

16. The Secretariat for Administrative Modernisation (SMA) represents Portugal at the PUMA Committee. Although SMA is the dynamising body of administrative modernisation and is in a favoured position to follow policy decisions and measures, this does not mean that it has access to full information needed to provide feedback to matters dealt with by the PUMA Committee. This underlines the need to establish close contacts with appropriate entities. For example, the establishment of a co-ordination group or commission for the regulatory work conducted by PUMA is under discussion.

17. There is also a need to operate effective mechanisms to gather and systematically disseminate information that emerges from PUMA's work. As an initiative of this nature, information on PUMA and its Website will shortly be published in the *Infocid Journal* (Interdepartmental Electronic Information system for public service users).

France

18. PUMA's work is followed within the Interministerial Delegation for the Reform of the State in order to ensure a real synergy between the experiences of OECD countries with public management

modernisation and the French experience. *Focus* is distributed via the modernisation networks of the various ministries.

Conclusions

19. A major benefit of PUMA's work is the horizontal linkages it creates and maintains among people working on similar issues in different countries. This is done through Committee meetings or Working Parties (networks) that collaborate for specific work. These linkages enable officials to learn from each other and provide vital input to the thinking on public management issues in countries. The networking function provided by PUMA goes beyond the occasions where network members come together at meetings, and continue on a bilateral level.

20. Effective communication is fundamental to this networking, and can help spread the benefits beyond those who are able to attend meetings. Committee members have a role to play in this. As examples given above indicate, there are many ways of establishing local networks within public administration and linking them to PUMA networks.