

in-touch

Newsletter



Crossing continents: our new consultancy projects in Barbados, Cambodia and Lesotho

We're very happy to announce that we have recently been awarded three new projects in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean.

Barbados

Claire Cameron, Director, PAI

Our project in Barbados is to work with the Ministry for the Public Service (MPS) to carry out a Human Resources Transformation Strategy, develop an HR Model and a Strategic Workforce Plan for the Public Service. The assignment is funded by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) as part of an overarching Public Sector Modernisation Programme. Our team of British and Barbados-based human resources and capacity building consultants will be working closely with key counterparts in the MPS and will also be engaging with HR staff in six other pilot Ministries. Work started in November, and we are very much looking forward to working with colleagues from the Government of Barbados over the next nine months. PAI is now registered as a company in Barbados, and we are keen to expand our range of projects and professional development programmes in the Caribbean region. Individual consultants or potential partner consultancy firms from the region who are interested in collaboration on other potential projects are more than welcome to get in touch with me at claire.cameron@public-admin.co.uk

Cambodia

Edite Kalnina, Associate Consultant, PAI

Ulle Purga, another of PAI's Associate Consultants, and I are currently implementing a technical assistance project in Cambodia, supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), for the Royal School of Administration (RSA) and the National School of Local Administration (NASLA) focused on developing and rolling out a Training Programme on Innovation Learning. The project's objective is to support RSA and NASLA's selected training designers and lecturers in delivering modules on innovation learning and shaping the learning contents into a certificate programme. In addition, we are providing coaching and mentoring sessions for RSA and NASLA to support the implementation of the innovation learning programme.

During the first week of October, we visited Cambodia to run workshops, hold interviews with RSA and NASLA colleagues and discuss suggestions proposed in our Facilitator Guidelines and Recommendations for Innovation Learning Modules, as well as in the newly-developed Certificate Programme on Innovation Learning. During the next six months, we will be providing online coaching and mentoring sessions for RSA and NASLA trainers to enable them to gain more knowledge on innovative content and apply new methods in their training programmes. The outputs of the assignment will contribute to the implementation of a Concept Note for the Civil Service Innovation Programme as well as the National Programme on Sub-National Democratic Development Phase 2 (2021-2030). This is PAI's first project in Cambodia. We hope it will be the first of many.



Royal School of Administration, Cambodia

Lesotho

Vitaliy Baev, International Projects Manager, PAI

We are implementing a high-level project, funded by UNDP, focused on conducting an Institutional Gap Assessment of Core Governance Institutions in the Kingdom of Lesotho. Our team of five international experts are co-operating with the National Assembly and the Senate; the Judiciary, the Office of the Prime Minister, the Ministries of Justice and Law; Development Planning; Foreign Affairs and International Relations; Defence and National Security and Police and Public Safety.

This assessment will help to plan, implement, coordinate, monitor and deliver key targeted reforms set out in the national reform agenda for Lesotho. In addition we will develop a response strategy for the identified gaps following a multi-layered, consultative and comprehensive approach, taking into consideration UNDP’s Capacity Assessment Framework as a guide.

The project team participated in a stakeholder inception conference in September in Maseru. The conference, organized by UNDP with support from the EC, brought together the Deputy Prime Minister, Ministers, Deputy Ministers, Permanent Secretaries, top officials from both Chambers of the Parliament, senior members of the Judiciary, representatives of NGOs and other experts in institutional reform and capacity building. The conference participants discussed implementation of the project in the light of recently-adopted constitutional amendments and the main plenary session was followed by sectoral working groups which addressed specific issues in more depth. Our team of consultants followed this up with individual face-to-face and online meetings and are currently preparing to engage with the new government following the recent elections in Lesotho.



Project team working in Lesotho

The 19th Triennial Conference of the Commonwealth Magistrates and Judges Association (CMJA), Accra, Ghana, September 2022

Neil McCallum, Workshop Director for PAI’s Judicial Administration and Transforming Criminal Justice workshops



CMJA 19th Triennial Conference

Mkandawire, observed the CMJA is the only organisation bringing together judicial officers at all court levels in an atmosphere of collegiality and mutual respect.

The theme of the event was “Access to Justice in a Modern World”. The impact of recent years was evident throughout, from the period of silence to reflect upon the colleagues lost during the pandemic to the advances made to maintain service delivery, including mobile and virtual courts and digitised court systems. It was also evident in the clear pleasure all took in finally being able to meet in person at last and to enjoy talking, listening and socialising. As one might perhaps expect with any Commonwealth event, there was much that all present shared, but also some significant differences. Common concerns were explored around delays, judicial education, judicial independence and security of tenure. Some of the most stimulating debates were over the elements of the judicial systems represented which were less common, including the role of traditional courts instead of civil courts and community violence against suspected witches. Throughout, discussions were well informed, cogently argued and enthusiastically debated.

The CMJA has been around for more than half a century, starting life as the Commonwealth Magistrates Association and adding “Judges” to its title in 1988. It exists to promote and protect judicial independence across the Commonwealth, standards within the judiciary and the rule of law through its education conferences, capacity building programmes and projects to support good governance. I had been aware of its good work for some years and had the pleasure of working with the CMJA on court registry systems in The Gambia earlier this year. However, I hadn’t truly appreciated the breadth and depth of its reach until I attended their conference this September.

Over 400 delegates gathered from across the Commonwealth, including 25 Chief Justices. In normal circumstances, the presence of such elevated figures reduces everyone else to respectful silence, but that was certainly not the case at this event! As its outgoing President, the Hon Justice M Charles

The CMJA benefits not only from its remarkably diverse membership but also a redoubtable Secretary General in Dr Karen Brewer and a multi-talented Director of Programmes in Judge Shamim Qureshi. The Local Organising Committee did an incredible job, from handling initial arrival to final departure. All in all, an extremely impressively organised and delivered event. The Opening Ceremony included a message from CMJA's Patron, Her Majesty the Queen. Its close was overshadowed by the very sad news of her death. The genuine, shared sense of loss of the Head of the Commonwealth re-echoed the bonds shared by all present.

PAI in Dubai

Ann Hall, Workshop Director for PAI's Leadership workshops

In August this year I had the great pleasure of delivering a two-week Inspirational Leadership programme in Dubai for senior representatives from the Ministry of Justice and the Federal Inland Revenue Service, Nigeria, and from the Ghana Maritime Agency. It was a really good learning event, with plenty of opportunity for the participants to exchange experiences from their different organisations and to compare leadership approaches and challenges. As part of the programme we explored the latest thinking in leadership and looked at a range of tools to assist with what it means in practice to be an effective and inspirational leader in these challenging times. This was a very participative programme and we used Leadership Action Groups to discuss, in a confidential and in a safe setting, some difficult issues that participants faced in their day-to-day work.

Although the temperature was predictably hot in Dubai, the facilities at the conference hotel, the Holiday Inn in Al Burah, ensured that we were all cool and comfortable. The hotel provided a very conducive working environment and also a good place in which to relax after a busy day. The staff there really went the extra mile to make sure that everyone was well looked after and happy. I'm very pleased to say that the feedback on the workshop was very positive and participants felt that they had benefitted a great deal from attending.



Participants reviewing their group work

International Accounting Standards: the public sector response in Nigeria and the UK

Jim Brooks and Ken MacNeill, Workshop Directors for PAI's workshop on International Public Sector Accounting Standards

We recently facilitated two high-level tailor-made workshops hosted by PAI on recent developments in International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) for Finance Commissioners from many of the 36 States of Nigeria. The week-long programme was repeated over two weeks, allowing a greater number of these extremely busy people to attend.

The Chairman of the Finance Commissioners' organisation felt that neither the Federal Government nor the States were making rapid enough progress towards compliance with the Standards. He commissioned PAI to design and organise the workshops on behalf of his colleagues as part of efforts to achieve renewed impetus towards compliance. The fact that over 20 of the Finance Commissioners were able to attend is remarkable and demonstrates their commitment to improving financial information and compliance, which is seen as critical to international finance and collaboration.

Nigeria is a leading member of ECOWAS, the West African economic partnership, and has overtaken South Africa as the biggest economy in Africa. It has trading partners across the world, being a prominent member of the UN and the Commonwealth. This brings with it a recognition of the need to participate fully in financial markets and, therefore, compliance with the highest standards of financial reporting and probity. Although a deadline of 2016 was originally set for compliance, most countries continue to make slow and stately progress towards that target. As at 2022, no jurisdiction in the world can claim to be fully compliant, although some countries are close.

The global financial crisis of 2008 became the catalyst for a series of public sector challenges. One of the most concerning was the dramatic growth in sovereign debt in many countries. Creditors worried about the extent to which they could trust debtor governments' financial reports and the capacity of governments to meet their future liabilities.

There was widespread recognition of the need to adopt transparent and reliable financial reporting across the public sector. Compliance with IPSAS was seen as a major part of achieving these aims. The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants in the UK has recognised two major reasons why developing countries have looked to transition to IPSAS. The first has been a transfer of political power within a government leading to a desire to strengthen transparency, accountability and financial management. The second has been the growth of donors and funders stipulating a funding requirement for the country to improve its financial management and financial reporting practices. Nigeria has recognised this and is acting to improve its financial reporting with initiatives such as a common Chart of Accounts.

The current problems facing the UK Government are a good example of the stricture and discipline of IPSAS. The then new Prime Minister, Liz Truss, wasted no time in declaring a 'fiscal event' or mini-budget designed to get the economy moving by stimulating growth through a series of very significant tax cuts. She and her new Chancellor also moved to tackle a very rapid rise in energy costs by capping the increases, again at significant cost to the Exchequer.

The problem was that the markets and economic commentators didn't believe their numbers. Part of the problem is that there is nowhere to hide. International Accounting Standards impose a discipline of recognition, measurement and disclosure for all financial transactions. The published figures on current spending, the level of sovereign debt, interest rates, inflation and the balance of trade (post- Brexit) all suggested that the course of action embarked on by Mrs Truss's Government was reckless. That financial transparency has led almost directly to the U-turn that has had to be made within only a few weeks.

This may be an unintended consequence of the Standards but it is an important step towards open markets and financial accountability.

It is no secret that Nigeria's implementation of IPSAS has faced some challenges and has not gone entirely to plan. However, it is easy to forget that this is generally true across the world. The Financial Commissioners from the States of Nigeria were well aware of the challenges and possible consequences of compliance with the Standards but, commendably, were facing up to the responsibilities and disciplines expected of them. Implementing IPSAS is a huge and complicated task. The UK took many years before it reduced the number of audit qualifications to the accounts to acceptable levels. Even now, there are still qualifications to the Whole of Government Accounts. European Union countries are embarking on the introduction of a European version of IPSAS and it will be interesting to see how smoothly that implementation is, for instance, in Germany. Other countries in Africa have also faced greater challenges than they may have expected. That provides a context within which to view Nigeria's progress.

The two groups of State Commissioners that we worked with showed a determination to make IPSAS a success and secure the associated benefits of compliance and improved financial management. The discussions during the two weeks, which were punctuated by enthusiastic discussion and personal experiences brought by the Commissioners, showed their insight into the benefits and challenges of implementing IPSAS and the participants were engaged and motivated throughout. It was a great privilege to be part of this initiative and PAI was proud to be chosen to host the events.

Leading and Managing for Results in the New Normal

Denise Smart, PAI Relationship Manager



Our participants from the Government of Botswana

We ran our two-week workshop on Leading and Managing for Results in September of this year for the fifteenth time since the programme was initially designed. Of course, the workshop is updated each year to reflect the latest leadership thinking and based on feedback from participants, and we conducted a major overhaul after the COVID-19 pandemic to take account of the many changes to our "new normal" in recent times.

Although the world has adapted and in general everyday life and travel now carry on, in some countries travel is still not possible. So we were delighted to be able to welcome four participants from Botswana to join the workshop virtually and interact with the facilitators, speakers and other participants in London. We were even able to take the "virtual" participants on a visit to a Central Government Ministry, so they did not miss any aspect of the programme.

The option to join any of our London workshops remotely is available, so please do contact denise.smart@public-admin.co.uk if you wish to explore this option.