# Labour government's reckless reshaping of civil service raises accountability concerns



The UK's Labour government is embarking on a reckless reshaping of its civil service, targeting the extensive network of quangos as part of a misguided effort to cut costs. Reports indicate that in a bid to slash through the fat of public expenditure, ministers could push legislation to eradicate a significant number of these vital organisations, which are responsible for a staggering £353 billion in spending.

Pat McFadden, the Cabinet Office Minister, is demanding justifications from all Whitehall departments for each quango’s survival. Under the guise of efficiency, the new administration is operating under a blanket assumption that these arm’s-length bodies will face closure or absorption unless they can provide compelling reasons to remain independent. The sheer arrogance of this approach poses an existential threat to the essential services and regulatory frameworks that keep governmental powers in check.

In a drastic first step, NHS England has been dissolved, with health services now under direct government control. This move raises serious concerns about accountability and the potential for political interference in healthcare—a trend that will only serve to exacerbate existing issues. While the government claims this is about cutting out waste, it reeks of a dangerous lack of understanding regarding the importance of these bodies that ensure transparency and protection of public interests.

Although some quangos may face reforms, particularly those affecting vital national policies, the independence of these organisations is paramount. The focus on consolidating power will only dilute the checks and balances on government actions, undermining the rule of law that citizens rely upon.

In addition to these dangerous changes, the prime minister is pushing for ill-thought-out technology initiatives, including the use of artificial intelligence, to further streamline operations. These proposals to cut perceived waste—such as banning branded merchandise and curtailing staff away-days—do little to address the real problem: an underfunded public sector struggling to meet the needs of the population.

Mike Clancy, general secretary of the Prospect union, voiced strong concerns over the potential impact of these plans, noting the critical contributions of specialist civil servants within quangos. His remarks highlight the unforeseen repercussions of a sweeping overhaul that prioritises cuts over clear objectives and rationality. The government’s current path will jeopardise not just the jobs of these professionals, but the services they provide, which are crucial for the public.

Similar political maneuvers are visible across the globe, with Australia’s Coalition leader Peter Dutton also facing backlash over his party's stance on flexible working. Initially, he proposed a draconian return-to-office policy that has now been adjusted to limit its impact merely to Canberra public servants—showcasing a disconnect from the realities of the workforce.

With around 185,000 public servants employed in Australia, the limited application of Dutton's office mandate demonstrates a failure to recognise the diverse needs of workers across the nation. Public figures like Jane Hume have finally conceded that flexible work is essential, particularly for women in the workforce—a realization that comes too late, following significant criticism of the initial proposal.

As governments in both the UK and Australia convolute their operational structures, they seem to overlook a fundamental truth: cutting costs at the expense of accountability and quality service delivery is a foolhardy gamble. Citizens deserve a government that prioritises effective governance and the integrity of public services, rather than one that cavalierly dismantles the very structures that sustain them.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://labourlist.org/2025/03/keir-starmer-speech-crackdown-on-quangos/> - This article supports the UK's Labour government's crackdown on quangos as part of a broader state reform, aiming to reduce waste and increase ministerial oversight.
* <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/comment/five-things-keir-starmers-speech-reforming-state> - This source provides insight into Keir Starmer's speech on state reform, including the abolition of NHS England and the reevaluation of quangos, highlighting his commitment to an 'active state'.
* <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/peter-dutton-s-return-to-office-policy-for-canberra-public-servants-sparks-backlash-20231122-p5g42n.html> - This article covers the backlash against Peter Dutton's return-to-office policy for public servants in Canberra, illustrating similar themes of government policy impacting public sector operations.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/nov/23/peter-dutton-walks-back-return-to-office-demands-for-public-servants-after-backlash> - This source discusses Peter Dutton's adjustment of his initial return-to-office proposal, demonstrating the complexities of policy-making in response to public and workforce feedback.
* <https://www.ipaa.org.au/publications/2023/working-from-anywhere-accelerating-flexible-and-productive-work> - This publication discusses flexible work policies and their importance in modern governance, offering context to the debate around work arrangements in public services.
* <https://www.publicservice.co.uk/specialist-features/190/the-importance-of-quangos-in-uk-governance> - This article explores the role of quangos in UK governance and why their independence is crucial for maintaining checks and balances against government actions.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/apr/06/ministers-consider-abolishing-hundreds-of-quangos-sources-say> - Please view link - unable to able to access data