

# editorial

The theme of public services forms the core of this issue of *risk&regulation*. The definition of what constitutes a public service – and how it is supposed to be organized, funded and regulated – is a classic question in the study of risk and regulation. It is fundamentally tied to understandings of the role of the state, what is considered ‘public’ and how the role of citizens as users of and participants in social and economic activities is being understood.

Articles in this issue reflect on a variety of themes that inform debates about public services. One central theme here, as the article by Andrea Mennicken and Fabian Muniesa shows, has been the rise of quantification as a means to assess, compare and steer performance. The article by Nathalie Iloga Balep and Christian Huber highlights how the system of German federalism rather than facilitating benchmarking and competition between different sub-national jurisdictions is actually impeding such decentralized ‘discovery’ processes. Elsewhere, there has been a rise in calls for more ‘customer engagement’ in the regulated industries. Drawing on their work on the UK’s air traffic management system, Eva Heims and Martin Lodge highlight which key prerequisites need to be considered before advocating ‘more’ customer engagement. Beyond engagement, there has also been considerable interest in the use of algorithmic regulation to ‘optimize’ (the regulation of) public services. In view of this interest, Andrea Mennicken and Martin Lodge suggest that the regulation of and by algorithm has to become a central concern for students and practitioners of public policy generally.

Relatedly, in an age of ‘post-factual’ politics, the role of public and private sector fact-checkers in public life has become prominent. However, how such fact-checkers and myth-busters can act in ‘real time’ to tackle cynical forms of misinformation requires considerable regulatory nous, as noted in the article by Miran Norderland and Martin Lodge.

Questions about capacity and approach also feature in debates about regulation in post-Brexit UK. Peter Bonisch and Mustafa Cavus note areas in which such nous will be required in the future to ensure public interested outcomes. In the area of economic regulation, Claire Forbes highlights the communication challenge for regulators, offering the case of

the English and Welsh water regulator, Ofwat, as an example. Changing contexts, whether it is by growing complexity or transboundary effects, raise also issues for national regulation dealing with public services. Bridget Hutter notes how environmental law continues to play a critical role in shaping regulatory regimes.

Closer to **carr**’s home, higher education as part of the wider education sector represents a critical example for public services. As Maarten Hillebrandt and Michael Huber note, the demands for increased managerialism in university administration has not been just an Anglo-Saxon ‘disease’ but has spread to different state traditions, including Germany. The highly political nature of public services was also evident in the British debate about higher education in the summer of 2017. On the one hand, there was the view that teaching and research were engines for continued economic and social prosperity. On the other hand, universities were accused of being a problem, whether this was because of lacking responsiveness to ‘business needs’, inadequate provision of services to student demands, high vice-chancellor salaries, or appearing as bastions of internationalism. Whatever the merit of these criticisms, they highlight that public services are inherently political. They attract debate about underlying societal values that will never be far away from public attention. Whether public services are intended to maximize efficiency, service quality, fairness or resilience will be reflected in particular regulatory approaches, leading to their own side effects.

We hope you enjoy this latest issue of *risk&regulation*. Producing this bi-annual magazine as part of **carr**’s activities is not just about voluntary accountability; we seek to contribute to public debate and showcase research in the belief that rigorous scholarship on major substantive problems can make a significant contribution in the long-term. **carr** is both a venue for the production of this kind of research, and for communication and exchange. It is in both of these senses that **carr** seeks to provide a public service. We are dependent on your support to fulfil this function. We are looking forward to your comments and support over the coming period.

**Martin Lodge & Andrea Mennicken**