

Government had been warned of skills gaps before the pandemic

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Thursday, 5 August 2021

In his new book *Coronadiary: 100 days that changed our lives and three skills* government had been told to improve former National Audit Office Director David Finlay reveals that official reports prior to the pandemic had repeatedly told the government to improve their skills in planning, data and risks, skills gaps which contributed to the shortcomings in the government's response to the pandemic.

Drawing on material in reports by the National Audit Office, the Public Accounts Committee, the Institute for Government and others Finlay shows that there were significant government skills gaps in planning, data and risks before the pandemic. His analysis shows that the shortcomings in the government's response to the pandemic can all be attributed to these skill sets. For example, the lack of planning for sufficient initial testing capacity meant the government lacked accurate data on how fast the virus was spreading which resulted in it underestimating the risks to the public and delaying the first lockdown.

Finlay's forthright new book also notes that whilst we expect doctors to be highly trained in these skills of planning, data and risks to protect us from danger, the Prime Minister and Cabinet Ministers received little or no training in these critical decision making skills on entering government yet they took huge decisions on our behalf affecting the nation's welfare.

At the end of 2020 the Cabinet Office announced a new strategy for improving the use of data across government and an overhaul of government training. Finlay welcomes these initiatives but observes that their timing reinforces his conclusion that there were previously crucial skills gaps which contributed to the shortcomings in the government's response to the pandemic.

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Coronadiary: 100 days that changed our lives and three skills government had been told to improve available from Amazon and leading bookshops