

Norman Glass Obituary



Norman Glass, Chair of Longview trustees, died peacefully in the company of his family on June 14th 2009. Norman will be remembered as much for his personality as his striking achievements in the civil service and in the support of research to develop policy. He was a civil servant with a difference, whose sparkling humour and never flagging enthusiasm for projects that he knew were vitally important, affected everybody who knew him.

These achievements included the Sure Start programme providing early years support for children and families growing up in disadvantaged circumstances; and most recently the substantial expansion for the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) with a turnover of £50 Million. It was in this latter capacity, as Chief Executive of NatCen, that Norman and Neville Butler, Director for the International Centre for Child Studies, agreed to establish Longview. Through a generous start-up fund, Longview was given the opportunity to prove itself as a 'think tank' that served the needs of longitudinal researchers, policy makers and practitioners. The annual conference has played a major part in the development of new strategies for investment in longitudinal research resources and may be seen as a memorial to Norman's imagination and foresight in recognising a need and finding the means of meeting it.

Norman's civil service career followed a first class degree from Trinity College Dublin, where he grew up, and a post graduate diploma in European integration from the University of Amsterdam. He started at the Department of Health as a Senior Economist, where he rose to assistant secretary. He then moved to the Department of Social Security followed by the Department of Environment, where he was Chief Economist, then to The Treasury as Deputy Director of Public Services and Chief Micro-Economist. He left Whitehall to take up the post of Chief Executive of NatCen in 2002.

In the very early days of the Thatcher government Norman was seconded from the Department of Health to the Exchequer and Audit Department (soon to become the National Audit Office). His excellent work led to a powerful report and the adoption of “discounted cash flow” (still very novel to many in the public services) and encouraged the Treasury to expand its guidance to cover the location, retention, or disposal of existing assets. This was a milestone in the development of public service appraisal and in establishing the status of the Treasury’s “Green Book” of appraisal guidance, for which 15 years later Norman was responsible.

His colleagues in the civil service and in NatCen have the fondest memories of Norman wondering at his versatility, doggedness and persistence. He was a rare mix of entrepreneur and maverick public servant totally committed to the public interest. Exceptionally insightful, and a master of the waspish aside, he cared deeply about people and about fairness.

His promotion of the role of economics in Government, through his review of the Government Economic Service helped implant the idea of multi disciplinary and participative policymaking. His energy, charm, and enthusiasm won over the sceptics to the projects he championed. A man of ‘bizzaz’, as one colleague put it, who never panicked, though occasionally panicked others!

My own memories of Norman began with SureStart, where he recruited me to supply longitudinal research evidence to support the case for early childhood intervention, at a time when there was very little recognition of the significance of the early years in White hall policy thinking. Norman’s approach to building the case was a model of consultation and decision making, which attracted much respect from academic and policy circles. Through a series of meetings he brought together policy and evidence so effectively that in the Spending Review that followed, there was no question that SureStart would be given the priority it needed. Spending departments then took over but Norman subsequently followed through his commitment to ensuring the programme worked by setting up a memorable Advisory Committee “Friends of Sure Start”.

He was one of the most effective chairmen I have encountered, as well as one of the most amusing. His boundless charm in bringing together people with conflicting views and shaking people out of complacency and negativity will always be remembered. He exercised these skills as chair of the Longview Trustees, bringing the Board to decisions to which all trustees came to be committed. It is particularly pleasing that two of the ideas, which attracted his enthusiasm - the new international journal, *Longitudinal and Life Course Studies*, and the *International Society for Longitudinal and Life Course Research*- are now coming to fruition.

There are not many genuine movers and shakers who attracted the affection Norman did. He leaves the country richer for the impact of great policy initiatives and contribution to the practice of policy making.

Norman is survived by his wife Marianne and their two children, Jerome and Sophie.