

“The Future of Public Audit”

Financial Accountability & Management Special Issue

And Workshop

Call for papers

Special issue editors

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Call for papers

The audit profession has been under an ongoing ‘rumbling’ controversy of not being fit for purpose that has made it the subject of great scrutiny and much debate that will continue into the 2020’s (Canning et al., 2018), with critical questions asking whether audit is able to meet the expectations of society (Murphy et al., 2019).

Whilst much is currently made of the audit crisis enveloping the private sector, the same problems are just as manifest in the public sector and challenging to the public interest. Public auditors, their independence and relevance continue to be persistent and challenging issues in public audit (Johnsen, 2019) and are pivotal for trust in public finance and expenditure in an accountable and democratic system. Public audit has come in for increased criticism whether for not highlighting the financial sustainability and performance problems in governments and public organisations (Ferry et al., 2015), or for private sector failures by firms that deliver public services. Indeed, there remains an expectation gap around what public audit does and for whom. In terms of improving accountability of public bodies, it is important it is very clear what powers are available, where money is spent and what citizens got for it. This becomes even more central in a context of steadily decreasing resources, in the face of increasing demand for public interventions, and where a strong refocusing on the attainment of financial performance has sometimes come at the expense of non-financial performance (Bracci et al., 2015).

Over the past few decades there has been a considerable increase in studies of audit regulatory space, the audit profession and audit practice. Studies have provided insights into Professionalisation (Cooper and Robson, 2006), what makes a successful professional (Carter and Spence, 2014) and regulatory relationships (Humphrey et al., 2009; Samsonova-Taddei and Siddiqui, 2016). More specifically, in the public sector, studies of audit have covered auditee perceptions (Abu-Hasan et al.,

2013), the role of audit in adjudicating political disputes (Funnell, 2015) and how audit has helped forge the modern state (Free et al., 2019). In FAM, over the past decade or so, there have also been special issues on public audit in contemporary society (Johnsen, 2019) and performance auditing and modernisation of the public sector (Skaerbaek and English, 2008).

The existing studies have extended our insights into audit, with some studies beginning to critically appraise the broader role of audit and auditors in shaping community, organisations, institutions and society for the public interest whereby auditors can be considered as agents of change (Hopwood, 1984; Power, 1997; Ferry and Eckersley, 2019). We would like to encourage such broader conceptualisations.

The special issue is interested in any paper that addresses the current state of public audit, where it may be heading and what are the implications for society and the public interest. Some areas that authors may wish to consider include:

- ✓ Audit Society – Is it alive or dead in the public sector? How does it now relate to risk and the risk society? Is this changing?
- ✓ Audit and the Public Interest – How are corporate collapses like Carillion, PPP failures and a myriad of everyday issues affecting public services and confidence in auditors? How are social movements impacting on auditing and auditors?
- ✓ Audit scope – What is audit? Should it include financial audit, performance audit, and/or other things? What happens when audit and inspection collide? What is the relationship between audit with accountability and transparency in public services?
- ✓ Audit profession – What knowledge is needed in public audit, is it different to the private sector, how is this changing, who shapes it and why? How is identity of the public audit being forged as a profession, regulator, friend or foe? How is work controlled and why is it done in that way?
- ✓ Regulatory changes – Has there been a commercialisation of public audit? Does it matter in terms of independence who performs the audit? What is and should be the role of the state, profession and elites such as the Big 4? Can smaller audit firms play a role in public audit?
- ✓ Future of public audit – What is the future of the public audit profession? How sustainable are public audit models? What is the role of new audit technologies?
- ✓ Public audit and technology – How are traditional public audit services being transformed by technology, and especially the value of the digital data ecosystem, which is connected by exponential growth of data, data mining tools, everything perceived as a service, algorithms, data science and data analytics, machine learning and artificial intelligence, and unlimited processing power.
- ✓ Auditing new delivery models and supply chains – How does the growth in PPPs, corporatisation and outsourcing affect auditing relationships? Is any of this changed with insourcing?
- ✓ Expectations gap – Does an expectations gap exist between what public audit delivers and what is expected from stakeholders? In what ways does this matter for the 2020's and beyond?
- ✓ Integrated reporting - How does public audit fit with integrated reporting?

The SI is open to all forms of methodology. This includes historical, archival, field study and comparative studies among others. We would particularly be interested in any studies that involve co-authoring between academics and practitioners, although the research would be expected to make a substantive theoretical contribution.

Preliminary workshop

A workshop will be held in London, England, on June 18th, 2020. Authors wishing to present at the workshop should submit a paper proposal (maximum 2 paged in length) to Laurence Ferry (laurence.ferry@durham.ac.uk) by February 28th, 2020. Authors of selected papers from the

workshop will be invited to submit revised papers for this special issue, subject to the journal's normal review processes.

Submission process

Attendance and/or presentation at the workshop is not a pre-requisite for submission to the special issue. The deadline for submission of full papers via the Financial Accountability & Management online platform is December 31st 2020.

The guest editors welcome enquiries from those who are interested in submitting. All papers will be reviewed in accordance with the normal processes of Financial Accountability and Management. It is anticipated that this special issue will be published in 2022.

Any queries or enquiries about the special issue should be directed to ileana.steccolini@essex.ac.uk

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