Preface

This new collection of original essays is intended as a challenging exploration of public management and public policy in a postmodern era. Written by a group of leading international scholars, the book addresses key issues of theory and practice. Its central concern is with a public service and public policy environment that has now moved irreversibly beyond the historical moment of the New Public Management (NPM). In a post-NPM world, the old ways of working and making practical sense, and the superficial changes associated with the period of ‘modernisation’, have ceased to have any utility for public sector practitioners. Correspondingly, on a theoretical level, the old assumptions of modernism and foundationalism have ceased to have explanatory or heuristic value. We are, as researchers and as practical people, in a state of constant change. The maps we previously used to chart our course have become faded and indistinct, describing a country we no longer recognise.

The contributors to this book each, in their own way, seek to make sense of this changed environment. We are confident that these collected essays will prompt further research and further thought around the sometimes difficult ideas within. In particular, we hope that challenging theoretical work can be made relevant to the day-to-day work of public sector managers and practitioners. Just as empirical work without theory can only be, at best, descriptive, we believe that theoretical work without reference to practice will be judged irrelevant. In difficult postmodern times, the task of addressing both theory and practice is more important than ever.

A number of audiences – academic researchers, students and practitioners alike – will find different parts of this book relevant to their particular needs, and we hope, above all, that the book as a whole will stimulate further research in these demanding areas of enquiry.