

Externalisation and politicisation in policy advisory systems: A case-study of contestable policy-making 2010-15

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Implications for policy-makers and managers:

Those policy-makers and practitioners who have contact with civil servants and Ministers need to comprehend the more fluid and unpredictable policy environment that is emerging at various tiers of UK governance, shaped by a multiplicity of actors sitting within, and outside, the formal boundaries of the state. The diverse ecology of policy-making institutions includes think-tanks, research institutes, non-governmental organisations, charities, community groups, management consultancies, and professional services companies, all of whom are involved to an unprecedented extent in directly providing policy advice to Ministers. The 'monopoly' over policy-making traditionally enjoyed by the Whitehall civil service can no longer be taken for granted. A subtle but perceptible shift is occurring whereby elected politicians and their advisers are gaining greater control over the policy-making processes of the UK state.

Keywords:

Whitehall paradigm; post-bureaucratic state; civil service; politicisation; policy advisory systems.

Abstract:

This article contends that since 2010 in the UK, there has been an unprecedented attempt to disrupt the traditional civil service 'monopoly' over policy advice, outsourcing policy-making to actors beyond the central state. The paper draws on the comparative literature on 'policy advisory systems' to argue that the policy-making processes of Whitehall and Westminster governance are being radically overhauled. The case-study is the 2010-15 Conservative-led Coalition Government's initiative on 'open' policy-making and its launch of the 'Contestable Policy Fund'. In the Anglophone countries, principally Canada, New Zealand, Australia as well as Great Britain, Ministers have sought to reduce their structural dependence on the permanent civil service. After 2010, UK politicians accelerated these changes, incentivising Whitehall departments to obtain policy advice from external actors who are not part of the official bureaucracy, while undermining the 'monopoly' over policy-making once held by civil servants. In so doing, Ministers sought to gain political control over the machinery of policy-making in the light of frustration about incompetent managerialism, and the alleged 'accountability deficit' at the heart of British government where officials repeatedly escaped blame for egregious failings. These efforts to restructure the permanent bureaucracy had unintended consequences, however. The policy process in the UK state became more fragmented, as policy-making and implementation increasingly diverged. The danger is that Ministers have paradoxically made themselves less able to tackle the intractable problems of post-industrial societies, while achieving their stated political goals.

Introduction

In most advanced democratic states over the last thirty years, the 'policy advisory systems' of governments have been transformed. The concept of the 'policy advisory system' was developed by the Australian public administration scholar, John Halligan, to denote the 'interlocking set of actors' who provide specialist knowledge and policy advice to decision-makers (Halligan, 1995; Craft & Howlett, 2012, p. 80).¹ The term 'policy advisory system' was originally coined by William Plowden in an edited book published in 1987 entitled *Ruling the Rulers*. In this context, policy advice was defined as, 'the analysis of problems and the proposing of solutions' (Halligan cited in Craft & Howlett, 2012, p. 82). Meanwhile, policy-making is clearly linked to the process of implementation as it relates to the feasibility and practicality of policy proposals. Halligan's claim is that policy-making is no longer a closed world controlled by anonymous civil servants willing to

'speak truth to power'. Policy advice is increasingly formulated within a diverse 'marketplace' of institutions and policy entrepreneurs (Craft & Howlett, 2012, p. 84; Wildavsky, 1979). Strikingly, Peters (2000) maintains that policy-making in Whitehall and Westminster is now, 'a very large game which almost any number can play'. Drawing on the work of the US political scientist, Charles O. Jones, Peters reflects that where the policy process was once dominated by 'cosy little triangles' and traditional elites, it is now shaped by a multiplicity of actors, the 'big sloppy hexagons' of decision-making authority.

Yet while it was prescient to draw attention to the growing complexity of the supply chain of advice in the 1990s, these scholars were at risk of overstating the pluralism of the policy process. They under-appreciated how far Ministers in the Anglophone countries have sought to gain political control over policy-making by appointing larger numbers of partisan aides (Rhodes & Weller, 2001); implanting central policy units into the heart of Whitehall (Rhodes, 2011; Fleischer, 2009); bringing think-tanks and management consultancies directly into the policy process (Craft & Halligan, 2012); and 'personalising' the appointment of civil servants so they are responsive to the demands of politicians (Aucoin, 2012).

This article contends that in recent years, UK Ministers have sought to reduce their structural dependence on the permanent civil service, undermining the 'monopoly' once enjoyed by officials over policy advice. Since 2010, Ministers have actively encouraged Whitehall departments to obtain advice from external actors who sit outside the permanent bureaucracy: think-tanks, charities, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), civil society networks, and especially management consultancies in the private sector. The changes came on top of managerial reforms introduced by the Blair governments from the late 1990s that sought to expose civil service recruitment to external competition, brought outsiders onto the boards of Whitehall departments, and outsourced large swathes of public sector delivery.

The wave of reforms since 2010 represents an even more fundamental challenge to the Whitehall model that once prevailed in the Anglophone states centred on the mutual dependency of Ministers and bureaucrats (Campbell & Wilson, 1995; Page, 2010). The bond or 'governing marriage' between officials and Ministers was believed to be essentially harmonious grounded in mutual self-interest: a 'symbiotic' relationship codified in the report of the 1918 Haldane Committee where Ministers have democratic legitimacy and are accountable to parliament, while officials provide dispassionate advice and uphold constitutional proprieties (Hennessy, 1995; Pollitt, 2003). Campbell and Wilson (1995: p. 9) attest that, 'To understand British executive politics, one needs to understand the world of the politician, the world of the bureaucrat, and the interaction between the two'. In the Whitehall model, it was axiomatic that the permanent bureaucracy had a 'monopoly' over policy-making; civil servants oversaw the policy-making process, ensuring 'honest and

occasionally unwelcome advice' was provided to Ministers: 'To add value for Ministers across government requires the foundation of a relationship of mutual trust, built on professional respect, and evidence of competence, and able to handle the pressure of events' (Donnelly, 2014).

Yet at the behest of politicians, the policy advisory system in Whitehall is being 'externalised'; the supply chain of policy advice has been diversified from the traditional civil service to a plurality of actors; it has then been 'politicised' as the primacy of partisan strategies and goals are enforced throughout the policy process (Craft & Halligan, 2015, p. 3). Politicisation and externalisation are interlinked; for instance, political advisers are sceptical of official guidance; they actively 'broker' external advice while acting as 'gatekeepers', maintaining contacts with actors in ideologically sympathetic think-tanks (Eichbaum & Shaw, 2007; Stoker & Gains, 2011). As Stoker and Gains (2011) and Page (2010) attest, greater numbers of special advisers do not necessarily lead to politicisation. The extent of politicisation depends on the relative influence of those advisers; what special advisers can do is act as ideas brokers through which external actors penetrate the hitherto closed policy-making processes of the central state bureaucracy.

This paper draws on seven years of scholarly investigation into Whitehall policy-making. The analysis of a single case-study is derived from secondary documents and informed by seventeen semi-structured, one-hour research interviews. Ten semi-structured interviews were carried out from September 2016 to January 2018. A further seven interviews were undertaken from 2011 to 2013. Interviewees consisted of a former Cabinet Secretary, two permanent secretaries, two former special advisers, a variety of senior civil servants in Whitehall departments, and think-tank experts. The interviews were conducted under the Chatham House Rule. All of the sources are kept anonymous.

The aim of this study is to consider what factors lead to patterns of change and divergence in policy advisory systems across countries (Halligan, 1995; Craft & Halligan, 2012; Gouglas, 2013). The comparative analysis of policy advisory systems is less developed than other areas of scholarly research on the policy process. Hustedt and Veit (2017, p. 43) attest that, 'Efforts to systematise, theorise or explain variation of policy systems across countries...are rare'. This article thus makes the following contribution to extant comparative scholarship. Firstly, it argues that all Anglophone states, including the UK, have witnessed major changes in their policy advisory systems over the last 30 years. Secondly, the article avers that such changes have been driven by politicians who have sought to weaken the influence of civil servants, undermining their monopoly over policy-making. According to an insider, the Cabinet Office Minister responsible for civil service reform from 2010, Francis Maude, was hostile to Whitehall mandarins and, 'appalled by the state of the civil service'; Maude took the view that, 'nothing really worked properly in government. Too much policy was ill-thought through' (Interview with a senior official in the Department for Education and the Ministry of Justice, 7th October 2016). Thirdly, the paper takes issue with the claim in the literature that we are

witnessing a paradigmatic shift towards a 'networked and collaborative' style of policy advice in Whitehall and Westminster systems (Craft & Howlett, 2012, p. 94). The reforms have been specifically designed to enhance the influence of Ministers in the policy-making structures of UK governance.

The article will proceed in the following way. The next section of the paper briefly outlines the comparative literature on policy advice in Westminster-Whitehall systems. The background to the case-study is outlined. What then follows is a detailed analysis of the impact of the Contestable Policy Fund (CPF) and 'open policy-making' on the policy advisory system and the Whitehall model across time. Particular attention is paid to the symbolic impact of the CPF in undermining Minister's dependence on officials, while eroding the monopoly over policy advice once enjoyed by civil servants.

Policy Advisory Systems: The comparative literature

Scholars have observed that every advanced democratic nation has its own distinctive policy advisory system, comprised of a unique set of institutions and actors reflecting the historical legacies of state development in that country; the comparative literature considers the varieties of institutionalisation of policy advice across countries (Hustedt & Veit, 2017, p. 42). More recent research rightly addresses the 'polycentric landscape' of contemporary governance and the increasingly 'complex web' of organisations inside and outside the state implicated in the formation of policy; Craft and Howlett (2012, p. 88), for example, conclude that the 'content' of policy advice is now more important than where actors are 'located' within an advisory system in terms of their capacity to exercise influence. While Halligan's (1995) model of advisory systems emphasised the importance of where an actor was situated in the policy-making system, Craft and Howlett (2012) focus on the substance of advice. Intriguingly, they maintain that 'location' now matters much less. They distinguish between four types of advice: political and policy process advice; long-term 'policy steering' advice; reactive 'fire-fighting' advice; and the gold standard of evidence-based policy-making (Craft & Howlett, 2012, p. 91; Gouglas, 2013, p. 6).

Yet even in the mid-1990s, Halligan observed a number of prescient trends in the key Anglophone countries: influence was already shifting from the traditional civil service to new actors, notably think-tanks, NGOs and management consultancies; governments increasingly sought out specialist advice and technical skills from beyond the permanent bureaucracy; responsibility for policy-making was externalised through the development of 'arms-length' bodies and central banks (Halligan, 1995; Craft & Halligan, 2015, p. 3; Burnham, 2002). Think-tanks were highlighted in the literature as playing a particularly important role; these organisations were 'pro-active policy pioneers', not merely the 'brokers' of knowledge (Fraussen & Halpin, 2016, p. 117). They helped to shape the

analysis of policy issues and to construct, 'the frameworks within which policy problems are understood' (Bentham 2006, p. 170; Mulgan, 2006, p. 149; Stone, 2006).

Other less visible but still important players were management consultancies increasingly drawn into governmental policy-making (Majone, 2013). There is evidence that management consultants have exerted growing influence, particularly in Whitehall. Recent reports indicate that spending on consultants has risen significantly (Gunter, Hall & Mills, 2015). More controversially, there is evidence of a growing 'consultocracy' where management consultants displace 'publicly accountable' officials and Ministers in shaping the priorities of governments (Gunter, Hall & Mills, 2015). Over the last thirty years, 'public policy makers have increased their use of management consulting knowledge in reforming their bureaucracies' (Saint-Martin, 1998, p. 41). Morgan and Sturdy (2017) have charted the growing influence of management consultancies in shaping national and global public policy agendas.

However, only relatively recently has there been much substantive discussion in the literature of the implications of the changes in policy advisory systems for the governance of the Anglophone democracies. Grube and Howard (2016) conclude that the growing contestability of policy advice is undermining the traditional relationship of trust between Ministers and officials. The Whitehall bureaucracy was already being weakened by 'politicisation', notably the pronounced increase in the appointment of special advisers (Grube & Howard, 2016; Aucoin, 2012). Moreover, scholars such as Crafts (2013) have noted that governmental and public sector policy-making capacity has been drastically cut back since the 2008 financial crisis. There was a growing vacuum in the permanent bureaucracy that provided a unique opportunity for external policy actors to seek impact and influence.

What is less adequately addressed in the literature is the pro-active attempt by politicians in the Anglophone countries to attack the traditional civil service monopoly over policy advice, reducing their reliance on the permanent bureaucracy. Ministerial agency was critical to this process, as was the role of ideas about public bureaucracy and the nature of the state. Aucoin observed that in the Anglo-American democracies, 'career public servants were subject to an assault by politicians that was unprecedented' (cited in Peters & Savoie, 2012, p. 31). When the Conservative-led Coalition came to power in the UK in 2010, Ministers sought to sharpen the contestability of the policy advice system in Whitehall, marginalising the civil service in policy-making by confining most officials to operational and implementation matters. This strategy was a fundamental provocation to the Whitehall 'paradigm' emphasising the reciprocal bond between officials and Ministers (Campbell & Wilson, 1995). The UK Government was determined to open up the 'black box' of Whitehall policy-making to external competition according to the imperatives of the Conservatives' most recent 'big idea', the concept of the 'post-bureaucratic' state (Hilton, 2015). This approach originated in the

nascent assumptions of the New Public Management (NPM). Conservative Ministers still perceived public bureaucracies to be an 'obstacle' to effective governance which could only be resolved by applying private sector management disciplines (Pollitt, 2002; 2003; Hood, 2007; Peters & Savoie, 2012, p. 29).

Twenty years on from the heyday of NPM, Francis Maude once again attacked the extent of producer capture in public sector institutions. The civil service would be compelled to comply with the wishes of their political superiors in accordance with the 'principal-agent' relationship at the heart of NPM (Pollitt, 2003; Hood, 2007; Haynes, 2011). NPM had been premised on two interwoven assumptions noted by Bakvis and Jarvis (2012, p. 12); firstly, politicians who decide policy should control officials responsible for carrying out the instructions of Ministers. Secondly, private sector management techniques should be applied wherever possible in the public sector. If Ministers could procure policy advice and specialist technical skills from beyond the formal state bureaucracy, they would be less dependent on civil servants and gain crucial insights from private sector practice. Moreover, officials were all too aware that the traditional monopoly over policy-making was being undermined. It was in the interests of civil servants in this new environment to be compliant and responsive to Ministers if they were to retain at least a modicum of influence.

The Contestable Policy Fund: A Case-Study

The shift towards a 'post-bureaucratic state' after 2010 originated in the launch of a fund administered by the Cabinet Office, encouraging departments to pursue 'contestable' policy-making. The fund was unveiled in the Cameron Administration's Civil Service Reform Plan published in 2012. The plan underscored Ministers' dissatisfaction with the performance of the Whitehall bureaucracy, a view promoted by Francis Maude and his colleague in the Cabinet Office, Oliver Letwin. Maude and Letwin were sympathetic to criticisms of civil service performance, agreeing that, 'The Fulton Report description of policy officials being 'gifted amateurs' still has resonance' (cited in HMG, 2013a). Maude argued that the failings of the Whitehall civil service were symptomatic of the flaws in the central British state; he claimed in a speech to the *Reform* think-tank in 2010: 'The era of big government has come to an end not just because the money has literally run out...but it is literally shown to have failed' (Brecknell, 2014). The civil service was perceived by Ministers to be an obstreperous enemy of change (Interview with a former departmental permanent secretary, 19th October 2016). In particular, the 2012 Plan insisted: 'Whitehall has a virtual monopoly on policy development, which means that policy is often drawn up on the basis of too narrow a range of inputs and is not subject to rigorous external challenge prior to announcement' (HMG, 2012, p. 13). In its disdain for bureaucracy, the Plan declared: 'open policy-making will become the default. Whitehall does not have a monopoly on policy-making expertise' (HMG, 2012, p. 11). Civil servants were less trusted than ever, as one former permanent secretary lamented:

As politics becomes more of a career and the role of the adviser is more of a professional career, there are greater incentives not to buy into the idea that civil servants are both competent and trustworthy. There was a decline in the starting point of trust (Interview with a former departmental permanent secretary, 19th October 2016).

The role of civil servants was now defined as, 'translating policy ideas into delivery' (HMG, 2012, p. 16). Policy-making would be revolutionised by thinking from actors outside Whitehall. As well as outlining the Contestable Policy Fund (CPF), the 2012 Plan recommended a succession of administrative reforms. It was proposed that the civil service should adopt a 'collaborative' approach to policy-making including 'crowd-sourcing', enabling citizens to get involved directly in policy discussions; 'policy labs' would enable ideas to be tested prior to implementation; effective 'cross-departmental working' would break down silos; experts would be brought into policy-making earlier to assess the feasibility of ideas; 'web-based tools' and data transparency were believed to be crucial (HMG, 2012, p. 14). The 2012 Reform Plan encouraged departments to focus on key priorities using tools such as 'zero-based budgeting' and 'snapshot reviews' of policy effectiveness. This approach would be augmented by greater attention to evidence through a network of 'What Works' centres. The 'Behavioural Insights Team' would translate insight and data into practical policy interventions (HMG, 2012, p. 18). Finally, 'Extended Ministerial Offices' (EMOs) akin to 'cabinet' systems in continental Europe were proposed, where Ministers were advised by a blend of civil servants, technical experts, and political advisers. EMOs would enable capability from the private sector and the academy to move directly into Whitehall at the behest of Ministers. These initiatives were intended to ensure Ministers could acquire relative autonomy from mandarins. It was apparent that according to Francis Maude, 'the gentleman in Whitehall' no longer knew best.

The Contestable Policy-Making Fund and the IPPR Report on Civil Service Accountability

The key proposal in the 2012 plan was the CPF. The fund's aim was to:

Commission high quality advice from outside the civil service on ministers' priority policy areas; draw directly on the thinking, evidence and insight of external experts; and achieve a potentially broader and more radical range of options than ministers would receive internally (HMG, 2013).

Under the fund, 'external sources are given the opportunity, through competition, to develop policy' (House of Commons 2013). The CPF was administered by the Open Policy-Making Team in the Cabinet Office overseen by Oliver Letwin; a total of 18 projects were commissioned over three years, encompassing ten departments. The scope of the projects are summarised below (the data is taken from HMG, 2013):

Project	Government Department	External Provider
Year 1: 2012-13		
Accountability in the civil service	Cabinet Office	Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR)
Decision-making by long-term investors	BIS	London Economics
Green Deal Consent Barriers	DECC	Not known
Psychological well-being and work	DWP/DH	RAND Europe
Review of energy demand-side policy landscape	DECC	Centre for Sustainable Energy
Access to Advocacy	DWP	Not known
The Local Community Challenge	DWP	Merseyside Disability Federation
Maximising revenue for English National Parks	DEFRA	Not known
Local Government Pensions Scheme	DCLG	Hymans Robertson LLP
Year 2: 2013-14		
Improving the Market for Online Courses	DFE	Cairneagle Associates
Improving maths skills in the vocational sector	DFE	Education and Training Foundation
Increasing the supply of suitable housing for older people	DCLG	Demos
Removing blockages to talented women succeeding in the civil service	CO	Hay Group
General Aviation in the UK and the economic impact	DFT	York Aviation
Business Focus on Enforcement	BIS	Not known
Assisted Living Products for Disabled People	DWP	The Open Voice Factory
Year 3: 2014-15		

Youth Offending Team review	MOJ	Deloitte
Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services	DH	Young Minds charity

As the Institute for Government (IfG) point out, this is hardly the first time there has been an opening-up of the policy process. Past governments have sought to commission ‘celebrity reviews’, notably the Dilnot review of social care and the Wanless review of NHS funding, ‘where a big name was asked to do a quick-fire study at the behest of Ministers’; ‘arms-length’ public bodies have been established including the Low Pay Commission to oversee policy decisions (Rutter, 2016). The CPF would, ‘require different skills from civil servants’, who now had to focus on, ‘being enablers and expert process designers rather than trying to monopolise the policy-making input behind closed doors’ (cited in Rutter, 2016, p. 14). It is striking that while traditional think-tanks such as RAND Europe, the IPPR, and Demos were awarded contracts alongside management consultancies, commissions under the CPF went to NGOs, charities and civil society bodies, demonstrating the residual influence of Cameron’s ‘Big Society’ agenda.

Controversially, a key project on civil service accountability was commissioned by Francis Maude under the CPF from the IPPR think-tank, marginalising the permanent bureaucracy from the preparation of analytical work relating to Whitehall’s own future; one former Treasury official concludes: ‘Maude did not trust the civil service to do the work’ (Interview with former Treasury and Cabinet Office official, 11th January 2018). Maude averred: ‘The IPPR review is a step towards our goal of policy-making being open by default and drawing on knowledge and insights from beyond Whitehall’ (HMG, 2012a). The review cost the Government £50,000; half was made available through the CPF; the remainder of the funding was provided by the Cabinet Office. The IPPR was tasked with providing, ‘a detailed and substantial evidence-based review and assessment of government machinery in other countries and multilateral organisations’, with the aim of producing, ‘a range of specific options and recommendations for further reform of the British Civil Service...that explore alternative models of government to the Northcote-Trevelyan model, as well as any recommendations that build on the existing model’ (HMG, 2012). The IPPR report made six key proposals: the Prime Minister should be given a formal say in the appointment of senior civil servants; Ministers should create ‘Extended Ministerial Offices’ (EMOs); the Head of the Civil Service should manage the performance of permanent secretaries; permanent secretaries should be given time-limited, four-year contracts; where necessary civil servants should answer directly to Parliament; finally, officials should play a role in advising opposition parties (IPPR, 2013).

The IPPR's intention was to formulate recommendations that resolved the putative tension between the constitutional 'independence' of the civil service, and the requirement for officials to directly serve Ministers. There was, nonetheless, lengthy criticism of IPPR's proposals. The House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee stated that:

The fundamental weakness of the IPPR's paper is that it cherry-picks in isolation particular aspects of different countries' systems without understanding the balancing of the cultural, political, administrative and constitutional context in each case. In addition, the IPPR report did not and was not asked to evaluate whether, in practice, other models in various countries resulted in better government than ours (House of Commons, 2014, p. 19).

Richards and Smith claim the IPPR's analysis drew on less relevant cases of administrative reform; Canada and Australia are recognisably federal states, whereas the UK had a 'power-hoarding' model centred on the Westminster tradition. Moreover, they argued giving the Prime Minister the right to appoint permanent secretaries would 'personalise' the appointments process, overturning the Northcote-Trevelyan tradition of appointment on merit (Richards & Smith, 2013).

Of the IPPR's recommendations, the Prime Minister was given a say in the appointment of permanent secretaries, but only from a list approved first by the Civil Service Commission. Extended ministerial offices were adopted, but only five departments took them up. By 2015, the initiative had been abandoned while other proposals were side-lined or watered down. The problem the IPPR faced with their CPF report was that fundamentally, 'you cannot really outsource Whitehall policy-making...the stakeholder handling, the nuances, the briefing of the Minister, how you get this through the Whitehall system'; the IPPR team was, 'outside the Whitehall system' and, 'were left feeling very exposed' (Interview with former Treasury and Cabinet Office official, 11th January 2018). It appears that, 'the technocratic nature of ministerial support in policy-making', means that policy-making over sensitive constitutional issues, 'fundamentally cannot be contestable' (Interview with former Treasury and Cabinet Office official, 11th January 2018).

Despite this scepticism, the case-study of the CPF and IPPR's work enables us to make three distinct claims about the changing shape of policy advisory systems in the Anglophone countries. Firstly, policy advisory systems continue to experience significant changes, especially in the British context. Not all of the IPPR's recommendations were enacted but since 2010, the policy-making structures of UK governance have been altered further by the appointment of political advisers, the creation of specialist units at the centre of government, alongside the personalisation of civil service appointments. The policy and implementation unit in Number Ten has grown in size, while Bob Kerslake, the Head of the Domestic Civil Service who was seen as an impediment to change, was removed from his post (Hazell, 2012). Ministers then went further by incentivising Whitehall

departments to obtain policy advice from actors who are not part of the formal bureaucracy, weakening the monopoly over policy-making traditionally held by civil servants.

Secondly, changes in policy advisory systems are being driven principally by politicians who want to reduce their dependence on permanent officials. Ministers today are more likely to enter office with, 'an ideational policy portfolio in that they have their own strong priorities on what policy change is needed' (Richardson, 2017, p. 12). Francis Maude was not the only Minister post-2010 to become frustrated with the alleged shortcomings of the civil service. There was a discernible growth in criticism of Whitehall officials by politicians; by late 2012, relations between Whitehall bureaucrats and Ministers reached a 'new low' (Watts, 2012). Morale in the civil service was said to have declined. Officials manifestly lost confidence. For instance, the problems at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) concerning the chaotic implementation of Universal Credit are believed to stem from the growing reluctance of officials to tell Ministers they might be wrong (Clegg, 2016; Aucoin, 2012). Similarly, the costly legal challenge to the West Coast mainline franchise bid process managed by the Department for Transport (DfT) may have been the result of a rapid loss of civil service commissioning and policy advice capacity.

In the policy-making ecology of Whitehall envisaged by Maude, civil servants merely manage the process while Ministers determine policy; officials have lost influence to advisers, consultants and think-tanks (Richardson, 2017, p. 12). Maude's view was that civil servants should focus purely on operational and delivery matters (Aucoin, 2012). Reports indicated that the civil service now felt 'significantly marginalised' (Waller, 2012). According to another Whitehall observer, 'The monopoly [over policy-making] has ended', although they insisted, 'one shouldn't go to the opposite extreme and say civil servants don't matter' (Interview with former Head of a Whitehall think-tank, 30th September 2016). The crucial point is that, 'the civil service does retain a role', but it is now largely confined to, 'turning ideas into practical policy'.² Officials are expected to enthusiastically drive ministerial initiatives and to deliver targets set by politicians (Richardson, 2017; Richards & Smith, 2016). The IfG have warned of the consequences: 'Contrary to the popular narrative, the Civil Service has broadly said, 'yes, Minister'; 'the Civil Service has willingly taken on extreme levels of risk in support of ministerial agendas' (cited in Richardson, 2016, p. 40).

Thirdly, it is questionable whether policy-making is actually becoming more 'networked and collaborative'. The reforms in the 2012 Plan, for example, were intended to enhance the influence of Ministers rather than embracing pluralism in policy-making. The Whitehall system is still dominated by an ethic of confidentiality and secrecy. 'Open' policy-making will only succeed in a climate of transparency. As Catriona Tully attests: 'Ministers and senior officials are rarely

prepared to devolve or give decision-making power to other actors, engage with unpopular voices, respond to ideas that are not Whitehall mainstream options, or try uncomfortable or unknown policy approaches' (cited in PASC, 2014, p. 12). The former Cabinet Secretary, Lord O'Donnell, criticised the concept of 'open' policy-making insisting: 'I'm very happy for civil servants to synthesize lots of advice, to commission lots of advice from others, but actually getting [other groups] directly to provide the advice to Ministers worries me quite a lot because quite often these groups come at it with a particular agenda' (cited in Brecknell, 2014).

Lord O'Donnell insisted the Whitehall bureaucracy should remain the 'custodian' of the policy process: civil servants oversee the probity of advice on behalf of Ministers; they ensure the decision-making structures of the core executive cannot be captured by interest groups; civil servants make sure the public interest is upheld. Confidentiality in the discussions between Ministers and officials is justified to safeguard the legitimacy and authority of the state. As a consequence, the former Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg (2016, p. 118) concluded:

Whitehall, like any government machine, is congenitally disposed to hoarding power. Over the course of decades, ministers and mandarins have centralised information and decision-making...Executive authority has steadily increased, at the cost of a neutered parliament...Despite a rich vein in government rhetoric in favour of devolution and decentralisation, England remains the most centralised country in Europe, bar Malta.

Moreover, the political environment arguably makes 'open' policy-making less feasible:

Trust is getting more problematic and difficult...The problem is a feral media. The media blow things up...Ministers want to respond in ways that aren't helpful. 24-hour news has made maintaining trust that much harder. Camilla Batmanghelidjh and Kids Company [show] it is very difficult. You are working in a very unsympathetic environment. It is very difficult to have a nuanced policy debate. Time horizons and trust come together. Civil servants have become more of a target for the media...the press view is that the public sector is incompetent and nasty (Interview with former departmental permanent secretary, 19th October 2016).

It has to be said that the CPF initiative was not judged by 'Whitehall watchers' to have had a decisive influence on the UK policy advisory system. The actual impact on policy-making appeared to be limited. Rutter (2015) wrote that of the CPF projects listed:

It is hard to distinguish these items from business as usual in government. A quick surf through public tenders by DECC turns out a long list of projects where DECC is already seeking external input. Similarly, the BIS tender to be overseen by an independent panel,

would look like a normal candidate for funding from the departmental research budget. Good to involve external experts and get input if it is felt to be absent in the department but that's something that departments can and already do. These pieces of work may end up yielding useful results but none looks like revolutionising the way policy is made.

Some civil servants were naturally dismissive of the policy actors who emerged under the CPF: 'Think-tanks tend to over-estimate their importance; they rarely produce genuinely new ideas. They cannot produce detailed or rigorous thinking about policy. Most new thinking is actually internally generated in the civil service' (Interview with former departmental permanent secretary, 19th October 2016). One seasoned observer pointed out:

Civil servants can still control the advice ministers see. You still have to run what you're doing...people still have to have their pensions paid, you have floods. The premium on the civil service is a classic one...you've got to run the existing system. The public attention is on change, but the premium on the civil service is keeping the system running...people need passports and pensions and a health service. It's not just a matter of new things (Interview with former Head of a Whitehall think-tank, 30th September 2016).

The evidence indicates that the British policy advisory system has been adapting since the Second World War. There was growing recognition that Whitehall needed to become more open to external advice even in the 1960s and 1970s:

There has never been a period where the civil service had a monopoly of policy in Britain, absolutely never. Even in the highpoint of very assertive cabinet secretaries and a central civil service, you had an endless stream of many academics going in and out of government. You had strong research departments in the parties, you had whole networks and sources flowing into policy from think-tanks...I don't buy this story that there was a monopoly and then it was broken open by special advisers and think-tanks (Interview with former Head of the Cabinet Office Strategy Unit (PMSU), February 2012).

Nevertheless, the consequences of changes in policy advisory systems has been to make Ministers less dependent on officials, limiting the structural power of civil servants while undermining their monopoly over policy advice. The CPF symbolised a shift away from ministerial reliance on officials towards a contestable structure where civil service input was no longer assumed to be integral to policy-making. What makes the last decade of administrative reform distinctive is the intensity of these changes and their long-term impact on Whitehall's policy-making system.

The situation is palpably leading to unintended consequences in British government. The policy process in the UK state has become more fragmented, as policy-making and implementation increasingly diverge. The danger is that Ministers have paradoxically made themselves less able to tackle the intractable problems of post-industrial societies while achieving their stated political goals. During the 1980s, efforts to exert political control meant that, 'the relative powers of bureaucracies and other non-political actors' grew; the expansion of autonomous public bodies, enabling managers to be 'free to manage' while 'empowering' front-line staff, meant that public sector governance became more confused and harder to steer from the centre (Peters and Savoie, 2012, p. 30). The policy process is now much more disaggregated with numerous actors contributing to the work of Whitehall's institutions. Civil servants have to co-ordinate the increasingly complex flotilla of organisations, agencies and policy entrepreneurs that enter the policy arena at Ministers' behest. However, policy-making is more chaotic as a consequence of the range of actors involved; Ministers have discovered that not surprisingly 'pluricentric systems' of policy advice are inherently difficult to steer (Pedersen et. al., 2012).

Moreover, growing contestability narrows the 'deliberative space' for policy-making, making the relationship between officials and Ministers more problematic; as a consequence, there is a risk that governments will commit even more 'blunders' (Crewe & King, 2013; Richardson, 2017; Richards & Smith, 2016). In overhauling the policy-making process, the CPF is in danger of exacerbating the very problems initially diagnosed in the 2012 Reform Plan, dividing policy-making even more starkly from implementation. The role of the Whitehall bureaucracy since the 1980s and 1990s has been refocused from policy formulation to implementation (Aucoin 2012; Barber, 2008). Civil servants have been under growing pressure to 'deliver' (Barber, 2008). While the 2012 Plan acknowledged that robust policy design meant reintegrating formulation and implementation, initiatives such as the CPF have had the opposite effect. The CPF increases the problem of fragmentation by encouraging the incorporation of more policy institutions and actors who are separate from the bureaucrats and public managers ultimately responsible for carrying out the policies of the centre.

The 2010 Government's reforms may thus address the 'wrong' problem; the growth in the complexity of policy problems will increase demand for specialist policy skills 'inside' government. Not all policy work can be contracted out; increasingly, policy-making is about synthesising diverse streams of knowledge: statistical knowledge ('data and demographics'); policy knowledge ('what works'); scientific knowledge ('experiments and trials'); practitioner knowledge ('insights from practice and implementation'); and political knowledge ('public opinion and intelligence about the internal dynamics of political parties') (Mulgan, 2006, p. 150). Policy formulation is becoming a more specialised and technocratic activity due to the complexity of problems. As Peter Hall (1992, p. 87) remarks, 'To implement increasingly complex policies pertaining to an ever wider range of human endeavours, policy-makers [have] needed more and more information about those endeavours

and the likely effects of policy'. Expertise in policy-making is difficult to replicate outside government: long-term investment in human capital and specialist analytical capabilities is essential, until recently a unique function of the civil service (Burnham and Pyper, 2008). In this political climate, contestability gets in the way of ensuring that Whitehall is actually 'fit for purpose'.

Conclusion

This paper contends that in the UK since 2010, there has been an unprecedented attempt to undermine the civil service 'monopoly' over policy advice, outsourcing policy-making to actors outside the central bureaucracy. The backdrop to these changes were the reduction in public sector capacity, the growing divergence between policy-making and implementation, the re-designation of civil servants as 'managers' rather than 'policy-makers', alongside an increase in the appointment of partisan advisers (Aucoin, 2012; Gouglas, 2013; Page, 2010). Although Ministers repeatedly praised the loyalty of Britain's permanent bureaucracy, the civil service in reality appears to have lost influence; officials are at greater risk of marginalisation than ever before.

As a consequence, the policy advisory system in Whitehall has continued to change in recent years, as is the case in other Anglophone democracies (Grube & Howard, 2016; Craft & Halligan, 2015; Eichbaum & Shaw, 2017). Ministerial agency was critical to this process, as was the role of ideas about public bureaucracy and the nature of the state. The changes occurred at the behest of politicians who sought to reduce their dependence on officials, having absorbed the critique of public bureaucracies initiated by NPM thinking in the 1980s. The purpose of the CPF was unambiguously to strengthen the political control exerted by Ministers over policy-making. Although the actual impact of the CPF was questionable, the cumulative effect of governance changes initiated in the UK has been to expose the policy advisory system to an unprecedented wave of politicisation and externalisation. What has emerged is an unambiguously 'post-bureaucratic' state epitomised by the side-lining of permanent officials, where policy-making is controlled more than ever by Ministers. The civil service has been demoted in the policy-making process in favour of a variety of actors, notably think-tanks, NGOs, professional services companies, accountancy firms, and particularly management consultants who comprise the 'new corporate state' in Britain.

Yet paradoxically, the increasing political control associated with the 'post-bureaucratic' state makes the policy-making system ever more complex, as the tasks of policy formulation and delivery are increasingly separated. As a consequence, Ministers are often bewildered to find themselves pulling 'rubber levers' in Whitehall that do not have the desired effect on policy outcomes at street-level (Rhodes, 2011). The 'post-bureaucratic' state championed by Maude was intended to put civil servants in their place as passive 'agents' who should answer supinely to their ministerial superiors.

Perversely, however, the changes to policy advisory systems mean that politicians appear to have weakened their strategic capacity to achieve their political and personal goals in office.

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