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POLICY MAKING IN BRITAIN

AN INTRODUCTION

PETER DOREY

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3 The Core Executive, Part One: The Individuals and their Policy Roles

The concept of the core executive was developed from the late 1980s onwards, primarily by political scientists dissatisfied with the limitations of the 'Prime Minister versus Cabinet' debate, which had been rehearsed and rehashed for at least the previous two decades (see, for example, Dunleavy and Rhodes, 1990; Rhodes, 1995). This debate implied that the possession and exercise of political power in British government could be understood in 'either/or' terms, as a zero-sum phenomenon, whereby more power for the Prime Minister automatically meant less power for the Cabinet and its ministers, and vice versa. Furthermore, this debate tended to overlook or undervalue the increasingly important role of other individuals and institutions in central government, surrounding and supporting the Prime Minister, the Cabinet and individual ministers.

What the emergence of 'core executive studies' sought to illustrate, therefore, was not only the range of individuals and institutions involved in central policy making in Britain, but also their respective sources of power, which ensured that many decisions entailed bargaining and negotiation between individuals or institutions. Each policy actor possesses (or has access to) particular resources and can pursue various strategies to achieve their policy goals. Consequently, core executive studies emphatically reject any notion of policies being routinely imposed by one central individual or institution; political reality and policy making are usually rather more complex, subtle and nuanced.

The classic definition of the core executive was provided by Rhodes, when he identified it as:

> *… all those organizations and procedures which co-ordinate central government policies, and act as final arbiters of conflict between different parts of the government machine* … the 'core executive' is the heart of the machine, covering the complex web of institutions, networks and practices surrounding the prime minister, cabinet, Cabinet committees and their official counterparts, less formalised ministerial 'clubs' or meetings, bilateral negotiations and interdepartmental committees. It also includes co-ordinating departments, chiefly the Cabinet Office, the Treasury [and] the Foreign Office.
>
> (Rhodes, 1995: 12, original emphasis)

To this list, Smith adds government departments in general, not only because these are 'the core policy-making units within central government', but also because they are headed by

ministers, who themselves are 'key actors within the institutions of the core executive' (Smith, 1999: 5).

The central importance of the core executive to the policy process in Britain is clearly confirmed by the opening words of Smith's book on the topic, namely that:

> The core executive is at the heart of British government. It contains the key institutions and actors concerned with developing policy, co-ordinating government activity and providing the necessary resources for delivering public goods.
>
> (Smith, 1999: 1)

In similar vein, Holliday notes that: 'The heart of the UK state, and the key driving force in UK politics, is the core executive' (Holliday, 2000: 8).

Indeed, the importance of the core executive to policy making in Britain is such that we are devoting two chapters to it. This chapter examines the policy roles and political relationships of the individuals who collectively comprise the core executive, and how these impact upon policy making in Britain. The next chapter will analyze the institutions of the core executive that provide many of the resources and much of the support, which individuals utilize in policy making, while also facilitating coordination between them.

THE PRIME MINISTER

Since the 1960s, discussions about the role of the Prime Minister in British politics have almost invariably focused on his/her apparently increased powers, to the extent that a number of commentators – some of them former ministers, no less – have asserted that parliamentary government and Cabinet government have been supplanted by the establishment of 'Prime Ministerial government' (Benn, 1980: *passim*; Crossman, 1963: 51; Mackintosh, 1977: 629).

According to this perspective, the increased role of government in 20th century Britain, the corresponding expansion of the core executive and the emergence of the 'career politician' dependent on prime ministerial patronage to further their political careers, have all imbued the Prime Minister with ever greater power. Indeed, Tony Blair's premiership heard this line of argument taken further, to the extent that some commentators spoke of a new 'Presidentialism' (Foley, 2000; see also Foley, 1992; Pryce, 1997), with Blair variously accused of adopting a 'Napoleonic' style of leadership and control.

In response to the allegations about the rise of 'prime ministerial government' or 'British Presidentialism', there have been three alternative – but not necessarily mutually exclusive – counter perspectives, emphasizing either the constraints that impinge upon contemporary British Prime Ministers, or the manner in which their authority is contingent and contextual.

The relational character of prime ministerial power

One of the first writers to refute the 'prime ministerial government' thesis was G.W. Jones (1965), who argued that the power of the post-war British premier was exaggerated because a Prime Minister is dependent upon the support of their Cabinet colleagues (and

ultimately, one might add, their backbench MPs too). As such, Prime Ministers are only as powerful as their senior ministers allow them to be. Or as another commentator expressed it in the mid-1990s, 'Prime Ministers are, in effect, captains of their teams, but they owe their position (and its very real powers) … to the team itself' (Hodder-Williams, 1995: 232).

For such commentators, what has been most notable about prime ministerial 'power' in Britain is precisely its contingent and contextual character, and the practical limitations that British Premiers invariably encounter, irrespective of their formal or constitutional powers. The very complexity of contemporary British society, which has arguably served to downgrade the role of Parliament in policy making (as discussed in Chapter 5) and yielded a corresponding centralization of power in the core executive, can equally be cited as evidence of the constraints facing any modern Prime Minister in Britain. No British Prime Minister can seriously expect to grasp the intricacies of more than a couple of policies at any one time. Indeed, even focusing on just one particular sphere of public policy will almost certainly mean neglecting many others, or at most, giving them only cursory consideration.

Certainly, beyond the realms of economic affairs and international relations, prime ministerial involvement in domestic policy initiatives has generally been sporadic and *ad hoc*, varying from one premiership to another (Barber, 1991: Chapters 9 and 10). For example, during her first two years as Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher took a keen interest in trade union reform, while towards the end of her premiership, she became actively interested in the reform of education and also local government finance *pace* the Poll Tax.

Tony Blair, meanwhile, initially sought to involve himself closely in the pursuit of peace in Northern Ireland (as had his Conservative predecessor, John Major) before focusing on the pursuit of war in Iraq. As a consequence of the latter, from 2003 onwards, Blair's attention was diverted from some of his domestic policy objectives, such as public sector reform and tackling anti-social behaviour. More recently, Conservative leader and Prime Minister, David Cameron, initially focused strongly on promoting the 'Big Society' as an integral part of his professed determination to mend 'broken Britain', while also curbing public expenditure and 'rolling back' the welfare state.

Clearly, the more time or energy that any Prime Minister devotes to one particular policy, the less time and energy this leaves them to pursue other policies. Consequently: 'Management by exception is the only way to find time to deal with high priority matters' (Rose, 2001: 155). Even 'activist' or 'innovator' Prime Ministers – as personified by Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair – cannot involve themselves in more than a very small number of policy issues at any one time; they lack 'the time, resources and the inclination to occupy, on a significant and continuous basis, policy space outside that of high policy' (Norton, 2000: 105–6) – 'high policy' referring to economic and foreign affairs.

If Prime Ministers do attempt to intervene and involve themselves more widely, they are likely to deal only superficially with each policy issue or problem, while also potentially antagonizing more ministerial colleagues, each of whom may well resent what they

consider to be ill-judged or half-hearted 'interference' by 10 Downing Street in their departmental policy domain (Donoughue, 1987: 6; Pym, 1984: 16).

Indeed, while most Prime Ministers have sought to concern themselves with a few specific policies, it has been suggested that: 'Few post-war Prime Ministers … have left much of an intended and enduring legacy on public policy' (with Margaret Thatcher as the obvious exception), reflecting the fact that while the precise origins of any individual policy are often difficult to pinpoint accurately, 'most derive not from Number Ten, but from the parties' work in Opposition or friendly think tanks, or from within the Departments, which then go on to shape them and in so doing can change them beyond all recognition' (Kavanagh and Seldon, 2000: 316–17). Not dissimilarly, Smith et al. (2000: 161–2) argue that: 'The impact of a prime minister on a department is highly variable, depending on the policy, the departmental minister and the particular circumstances'.

This should not be too surprising, because lack of time, energy and expertise, coupled with a necessary focus on the broader picture and strategic objectives or oversight, means that Prime Ministers are obliged to leave many, if not most, domestic policies to their ministerial colleagues. This reaffirms the crucial point that in many respects, a Prime Minister is as dependent upon his/her senior ministers for policy success as they are on him/her (see, for example, Smith, 2011: 167–8).

In fact, it has been suggested that the contemporary British premiership is subject to a perennial paradox of politics, which has serious implications for prime ministerial power, and also governmental policy outputs and outcomes, namely that:

> ... the higher an institution is placed within an organizational hierarchy, the more distant it tends to be from the outcomes it seeks to bring about; and the more dependent it is upon the cooperation of others. The principle applies to central government in general, since decisions taken at the highest level in Whitehall can be implemented only elsewhere, either down the chain of command or relevant departments, or by hived-off agencies or bodies such as local government. Within the central executive, this tendency is exceptionally relevant to the premiership.
>
> (Blick and Jones, 2010: 171–2)

Blick and Jones' observations are especially relevant in the era of governance, as discussed in Chapter 6.

The Prime Minister and resource dependency

A second rebuttal of the 'prime ministerial government' thesis, therefore, is that the Prime Minister is but one of several individuals and institutions at the centre of the British political system. In this respect, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, 'core executive studies' emphasizes the interdependency of policy actors in the higher echelons of the British political system, this deriving from the different resources that each policy actor possesses or has access to, as illustrated in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Resources of key policy actors in the core executive

Prime Minister	Ministers	Senior civil servants
Patronage (appointing ministers)	Political/party support	Permanence/longevity
Authority	Authority	Knowledge
Political/Party support	Department	Time
Popular/Electoral support	Knowledge	Whitehall network
Prime Minister's Office	Policy networks	Control over information (gatekeeper function)
Bilateral policy making	Policy success	Defenders of the constitution

Source: Adapted from Smith, 1999: 32.

However, Smith is quick to emphasize that this quantitative 'measurement' of resources must also recognize the qualitative aspect, because even when a policy actor possesses particular political resources, s/he needs to utilize them effectively and their success in this regard will depend on their own personality and judgement, as well as their relationships with their colleagues and wider circumstances: 'capabilities in deploying resources and the strategic settings are critical to understanding who influences outcomes', because 'power is rarely, if ever, based directly on command. Power depends on how resources are exchanged, and hence it is about dependence not control' (Smith, 1999: 31).

Consequently, against those who talk of increasing prime ministerial power, apparently assuming that power entails a 'zero sum' relationship between political or policy actors (whereby more power for one means correspondingly less power for another), 'core executive studies' emphasize the extent to which policy actors are invariably dependent on each other, and therefore need to cooperate in order to achieve their policy goals. A Prime Minister can only achieve his/her policy objectives if they have a clear vision of what they want to achieve, the necessary resources are available and their ministerial colleagues share this vision. It also requires that the relevant minister(s) and department(s) are competent in pursuing it.

Yet even then, the Prime Minister's policy objectives might not be fully realized or successfully enacted, perhaps because of resistance or misinterpretation during implementation, when sub-national policy actors and 'street-level bureaucrats' might not apply the policy in the manner that was originally intended, or the sections of society to whom the policy was supposed to apply do not respond as envisaged (issues that we will examine in Chapter 8).

The Prime Minister in a 'shrinking world'

The third critique of the 'prime ministerial government' thesis has been advanced by Richard Rose, who locates the contemporary British Prime Minister 'in a shrinking world' (Rose, 2001). Analyzing the British Premiership in the context of Europeanization and globalization (both of which are discussed in Chapter 7), Rose argues that although British Prime Ministers now enjoy a higher profile than ever before, due both to modern 24/7 mass media and the frequency of international summits, the power that these imply is largely illusory because in the world beyond Westminster – where important policy decisions are increasingly taken – the Prime Minister is often constrained by external or global factors; omnipresence does not mean omnipotence.

On the contrary, the extent to which contemporary British Prime Ministers seem to be involved in an almost constant series of high-profile international conferences and prestigious summits with their overseas counterparts can actually be interpreted as a two-fold limitation on their power. First, because the increasing amount of time and energy expended in intergovernmental and supranational forums is time and energy not being expended at home on domestic affairs, although, of course, many international summits and their subsequent decisions will have an impact on domestic policies, particularly in the era of globalization (discussed in Chapter 7).

Prime Ministers therefore increasingly have to delegate policy issues to their ministerial colleagues and other senior officials in the Downing Street Policy Unit and Cabinet Office (these two institutions are discussed in the next chapter).

Second, the increasing number of international meetings and summits, which Prime Ministers are obliged to attend, is itself an indication of the extent to which public policy is being 'Europeanized' and 'globalized', and thus subject to international agreement and coordination. Or as Rose expresses it: 'National policies are no longer national' (Rose, 2001: 45, Chapters 3 and 10).

The contingent and contextual character of prime ministerial power

Meanwhile, to return to what still remains of domestic British politics and policy making, two other factors must be noted when considering the policy role of the Prime Minister in the core executive. First, irrespective of their formal or constitutional powers, the actual authority and influence of a Prime Minister cannot be isolated from the economic and political circumstances of their premiership (Elgie, 1995: 40–50). Prime ministerial 'power' will often ebb and flow according to such variables as the state of the economy, levels of (un)employment, the degree (or perceptions) of prosperity, the size of the government's parliamentary majority, the degree of party unity or backbench support, opinion poll ratings, and so on.

These are all subject to fluctuations: an apparently buoyant economy can be hit by a major economic crisis, whereupon unemployment increases, previously rising prosperity stalls, consumer confidence declines and plummeting opinion poll ratings or heavy by-election defeats cause growing anxiety among government backbenchers, quite possibly resulting in debilitating or demoralizing rumours of an imminent leadership challenge. In such circumstances, Prime Ministers will often be (or certainly appear to be) weaker than s/he or their immediate predecessor was in more propitious circumstances, and thus constrained in their policy options or room for manoeuvre.

Consequently, Martin J. Smith has argued that 'Prime Ministerial authority is largely relational' (Smith, 2003: 65). Similarly, when giving evidence to the House of Commons select committee on public administration, Sir Richard Wilson, a former Cabinet Secretary, explained that:

> His or her power varies from time to time according to the extent their Cabinet colleagues permit them to have that power, depending on whether the Cabinet is split, depending also on the strength of the government majority in the House of Commons and also popular opinion in the electorate and attitudes in the party.
>
> (House of Commons Public Administration Committee, 2002a: Q. 209)

Sir Richard reiterated this crucial observation towards the end of the 2000s (and in so doing, echoed G.W. Jones' 1965 argument), when he emphasized that:

> Prime Ministers are only as powerful as their colleagues allow them to be. You may have times, we have had times, when Prime Ministers have been so strong that their colleagues accepted anything that they wanted to do … but that does not alter the fundamental fact that if circumstances are different and a Prime Minister is in a weak position … it is not possible for the Prime Minister to have his way.
>
> (House of Lords Constitution Committee, 2010: 57, Q. 110)

Similarly, Sir Michael Barber, formerly Head of Tony Blair's [Downing Street] Delivery Unit, has emphasized that:

> … the power of a given Prime Minister is very contingent on the moment. I remember in 2003 that one of the things Tony Blair was considering was ring-fencing funding for schools … but he chose not to take it to the Cabinet because he was exhausted. It was immediately after the Iraq War and he did not think he had the political capital to take it through … you get an ebb and flow in prime ministerial power.
>
> (House of Lords Constitution Committee, 2010: 101, Q. 220)

The second factor to be borne in mind concerning the policy role of the Prime Minister is their personality and style. Prime Ministers will adopt different approaches to political leadership, deriving from their own personality, style of leadership and temperament (see, for example, Barber, 1991: *passim*; Hennessy, 2001: *passim*; James, 1999: 98–100; King, 1985: Chapter 4; Rose, 2001: 59–61). As such, the formal constitutional powers vested in the office of Prime Minister will actually be exercised in different ways, by different Premiers. For example, Sir Gus O'Donnell, a former Cabinet Secretary, has explained how 'John Major … had a very collegiate style', whereas 'Tony Blair, when he came in 1997 … had a strong emphasis on stock takes and delivery … There is a personality element' (House of Lords Constitution Committee, 2010: 12). Professor Peter Hennessy, meanwhile, suggests that Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair could both be viewed as Prime Ministers who saw a 'destiny', which meant that their style was very much different to Prime Ministers 'more attuned to a collective style, such as James Callaghan and John Major' (House of Lords Constitution Committee, 2010: 12).

SENIOR CABINET MINISTERS

Apart from the Prime Minister, most of the senior ministers in Britain's core executive ('senior' here referring to those of Cabinet rank) have the official title of Secretary of State (although a few will have alternative appellations, such as Chancellor of the Exchequer), and most of these will be political heads of a key government department or ministry. In addition, two or three senior ministers will be appointed as 'Ministers without Portfolio' – usually free of any departmental responsibilities – with quaint, usually archaic, titles such as Lord President of the Council, Lord Privy Seal, and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

It is these Secretaries of State and 'Ministers without Portfolio', who, along with the Prime Minister, and the government's Chief Whip, collectively constitute the Cabinet (whose policy role is examined in the next chapter). The senior ministers in the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government (in August 2013) are listed in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Senior Ministers in the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government in August 2013

C = Conservative

LD = Liberal Democrat

Post	Name of post holder (party in brackets)
Prime Minister	David Cameron (C)
Deputy Prime Minister and Lord President of the Council	Nick Clegg (LD)
Chancellor of the Exchequer	George Osborne (C)
Chief Secretary to the Treasury	Danny Alexander (LD)
Foreign Secretary	William Hague (C)
Home Secretary	Theresa May (C)
Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills	Vince Cable (LD)
Secretary of State for Education	Michael Gove (C)
Secretary of State for Health	Jeremy Hunt (C)
Secretary of State for Defence	Philip Hammond (C)
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions	Iain Duncan Smith (C)
Secretary of State for Justice	Chris Grayling (C)
Secretary of State for Transport	Patrick McLoughlin (C)
Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government	Eric Pickles (C)
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	Owen Paterson (C)
Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change	Edward Davey (LD)
Secretary of State for International Development	Justine Greening (C)
Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport	Maria Miller (C)
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland	Theresa Villiers (C)
Secretary of State for Scotland	Michael Moore (LD)
Secretary of State for Wales	David Jones (C)

The precise role that any Secretary of State plays in policy making will vary from minister to minister, and depend upon a range of variables, most notably:

- the extent to which the minister has a clear policy objective that they are determined to pursue
- the extent to which there is a strongly entrenched departmental philosophy, which the minister becomes persuaded by. Gerald Kaufman (1997: Chapter 2), a Labour minister in the 1970s, warns of the danger of contracting the disease of 'departmentalitis', whereby a minister increasingly views issues primarily from their department's perspective and interests, and pursues policy objectives accordingly (the notion of 'departmental philosophies' is discussed in the next chapter)
- the degree of support that a minister receives from the Prime Minister. If a Cabinet Minister is known to enjoy the full support of the Prime Minister, they are much more likely to pursue a policy initiative successfully because prime ministerial backing will usually incentivize departmental officials or other policy actors who the minister partly depends upon for policy development and implementation
- the nature of the issues or problems with which a Cabinet Minister is faced during his/her tenure at a particular department. A crisis, for example, is both an opportunity and a threat: if successfully overcome, then the minister's political stature and authority are likely to increase accordingly, whereas failure to tackle the problem satisfactorily – even if it is unfair or unrealistic to expect them to have done so, given its nature or scale – is likely to prove detrimental to their political stature and authority
- the Cabinet Minister's own style and personality: just as Prime Ministers vary in their approach to leadership, so do Cabinet Ministers have different styles of departmental leadership and policy making.

With regard to the last of these factors, Norton has identified five main types of minister in Britain (Norton, 2000: 109–10):

> *Commanders*, who pursue policy goals based on personal experience or motivation of what they believe ought to be done.
> *Ideologues*, who are concerned primarily to pursue policies based on a clear political philosophy or doctrine.
> *Managers*, these being ministers who are essentially pragmatic decision takers, and who are generally more concerned with the efficient administration of their department.
> *Agents*, namely ministers who effectively act on behalf of others, such as the Prime Minister or departmental civil servants.
> *Team players*, being those ministers who believe in collective decision taking and seek to secure the agreement of as many Cabinet colleagues as possible.

Norton suggests that the two most common types of ministerial role are commander or manager, although we would argue that since the 1980s, an increasing number of senior ministers have adopted a 'commander' role, this reflecting a general transformation in the roles and styles of many ministers since the 1980s. While there have always been some Cabinet Ministers adopting such a proactive and agenda-setting role in their departments – such as Roy

Jenkins' socially liberal or 'permissive' reforms at the Home Office in the mid-1960s – their numbers have increased since the 1980s (Campbell and Wilson, 1995; Foster and Plowden, 1996; Marsh et al., 2001: Chapter 6; Richards, 1997).

Initially, this shift in ministerial style was largely attributable to the ideological objectives of the Thatcher governments, and their determination to break with the post-war consensus in British politics. To achieve this, several Cabinet Ministers in the 1980s and 1990s deemed it essential to challenge and confront the long-established departmental philosophies and policy communities, which militated against policy change and innovation. Hence the proactive, innovative or agenda-setting policy role adopted by senior ministers such as Nigel Lawson at the Department of Energy in the early 1980s, Lord (David) Young at the DTI in the late 1980s, Michael Howard at the Home Office in the 1990s, and Peter Lilley at the Department of Social Security during the same decade (Marsh et al., 2001: Chapter 6).

This trend towards more proactive, agenda-setting Cabinet Ministers subsequently continued during the Blair premiership, as evinced by Gordon Brown's tenure as Chancellor of the Exchequer, David Blunkett at the Home Office and Charles Clarke at the Department of Education and Skills. Brown sought to be actively involved in the development of policies beyond the Treasury's traditional remit, such as welfare reform, on which the Chancellor regarded himself as 'the overlord' (Rawnsley, 2001: 111). Indeed, it has been argued that:

> … the real architect of Labour's welfare strategy was the Chancellor, Gordon Brown … unlike previous Chancellors, Brown was not simply concerned with scrutinising expenditure, but also played a much greater role in directing social policy … policy units were established in the Treasury for health, education, transport and social security.
>
> (Bochel and Defty, 2007: 37. See also, Connell, 2011: *passim*; Naughtie, 2001: 339)

Meanwhile, Blunkett and Clarke became strongly identified with controversial policies – albeit polices that Tony Blair was known strongly to support – such as advocacy of ID cards in Blunkett's case, and the introduction of university top-up fees in the case of Clarke.

A similar ministerial style has also been evident in the post-2010 Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government, with former Secretary of State for Health, Andrew Lansley, pursuing a major (and controversial) reorganization of the NHS in spite of widespread opposition, and Education Secretary Michael Gove actively pursuing several radical initiatives to transform secondary education in Britain. Indeed, during much of 2013, it seemed as if Gove was announcing a new policy or additional targets for England's schools and their teachers every week!

The increasing trend towards more proactive or 'commander' Cabinet Ministers has been both reflected and reinforced by such factors as: the increased use of Special (Policy) Advisers as a source of original – or more partisan – ideas (see below); the modified role of senior civil servants, who are now expected to focus somewhat more on policy 'delivery' and management; the weakening or restructuring of particular policy communities

(discussed in the previous chapter); the general increase both in policy transfer and of 'evidence-based' policy.

Of course, the extent to which an individual Cabinet Minister will adopt a proactive or agenda-setting role will depend on various factors, including the minister's own personality and style, the nature of the issue they are seeking to address, the wider economic, social or political context and circumstances, the degree of prime ministerial support, and the degree of cooperation (or acquiescence) provided by other policy actors in their field. Yet it remains the case that more Cabinet Ministers are adopting a more proactive or agenda-setting role in their departments.

As a consequence, the erstwhile image of senior ministers being content merely to act as reactive or steady-as-she-goes managers of their department, who only responded to problems as and when they occurred and looked primarily to their senior civil servants for policy initiatives, looks increasingly outdated.

Meanwhile, the Ministers without Portfolio will often be allocated specific tasks or policy roles by the Prime Minister, these usually *not* corresponding to particular departmental responsibilities. For example, a Minister without Portfolio might be tasked with helping to coordinate the work of several government departments, thereby helping the Prime Minister – and the Cabinet Office – to achieve 'joined-up government' and supervise policy 'delivery' (for a fuller discussion of the roles generally ascribed to Ministers without Portfolio, see Lee et al., 1998: Chapter 11).

Certainly, Tony Blair tended to appoint a Minister without Portfolio to act as a 'Cabinet enforcer', whose role was to chase up and monitor the extent to which departments and their ministers were actively pursuing agreed policies. More recently, David Cameron appointed Oliver Letwin as Minister for Government Policy, based in the Cabinet Office, to assist in the coordination and enforcement of policies agreed by the Cabinet.

Perennial problems faced by many Cabinet Ministers

In pursuing their departmental responsibilities, numerous Secretaries of State have encountered various problems, which have either hindered their ability to pursue policy change, or threatened the overall cohesion of the government of which they are the most senior members.

Short-termism and reactive policy making

One notable problem that many Cabinet Ministers encounter in pursuing their departmental responsibilities, and which also has implications for the achievement of long-term policy innovation or reform, is the pressure of short-term decisions and events. These can seriously distract ministers from adopting a broader or more strategic perspective, or from devising a new policy. A newly-appointed Secretary of State does not arrive at their department with a clear desk, an empty in-tray, a blank sheet of paper or a clear computer screen into or onto which they can immediately draft a new strategy or policy for immediate enactment. Instead, they will invariably be presented with a range of ongoing issues, problems and cases requiring an instant decision, quite apart from the new issues and problems that occur during their tenure at the department, and which may similarly require an immediate response.

A minister in the Blair governments emphasized that:

> Ministers do not work in a vacuum, and policies do not come out of thin air. It is rare to start with a clean sheet. Rather, policies are formulated … within the context of great complexity. And also against the backcloth of history … Economics and finance, administrative realities, existing legislation and the courts, party policy and public opinion, science and research, sectional interests, pressure groups, the media, and so much more, all play their part.
>
> (Wicks, 2012: 593)

This is part of the wider phenomenon of 'policy inheritance' (Rose and Davies, 1994), which impacts upon all new governments and ministers, and often limits their room for manoeuvre and constrains their choices, at least in the short term. As a consequence, immediate or major policy changes when a new government is elected or a new minister is appointed, are often difficult to achieve. They frequently have too many immediate issues and unresolved problems, bequeathed by their predecessor(s), which they need to tackle before they can start working on their own policy objectives.

Many of these 'inherited' issues or new problems might be rather technical or administrative or politically 'low-level' in which case they might well be delegated to the department's civil servants, but a variety of issues and problems will still require ministerial consideration and authorization, and demand the minister's repeated attention. This immersion in day-to-day decision taking and problem solving, coupled with the need to respond to new problems that suddenly arise, almost inevitably means that a new policy initiative will either have to be pursued alongside these other issues and cases, therefore limiting the time that the Secretary of State can devote to it, or that the minister will defer pursuit of a new policy until his/her desk or in-tray 'clears' – which it might never do.

As Lord Croham, a former Head of the Civil Service once explained, 'in general, the Minister is so captivated … by the day-to-day affairs of being a Minister … that he finds the long-term issue is something he'll do tomorrow – and tomorrow never comes' (quoted in Hennessy, 1990: 492).

Lack of time spent in the department

A Secretary of State will only spend a limited amount of time each week actually in their department, because their other departmental and political responsibilities oblige them to be elsewhere: attending Cabinet committees; holding meetings with another minister – a bilateral – over a shared (interdepartmental) policy or problem; sundry appearances in the House of Commons for Question Time, the 'Readings' or committee stage of a Bill they are 'sponsoring'; and giving evidence to select committee inquiries. Secretaries of State will also need to attend meetings of the Council of the European Union (previously called the Council of Ministers) when their particular sphere of policy is under discussion, as well as other occasional international summits or intergovernmental conferences (for recent detailed accounts of ministers' weekly workloads, see Rhodes, 2011: 77–85, 90–8; Wicks, 2012).

It would seem that many ministers spend less than 40 per cent of their time physically in their department each week, due to these other activities and attendance. Indeed, in a recent study of day-to-day life inside government, Rod Rhodes 'shadowed' several ministers to observe directly the demands on their time and the relentless pressure they faced. It transpires that for many of them, a 15-hour day is normal, but with only about three hours devoted to dealing directly with departmental policy issues (Rhodes, 2011: 102–3).

Departmentalism

As mentioned above, another problem faced by many Cabinet Ministers and which can have serious implications for their, or even the government's, policy objectives, is 'departmentalitis'. This is something that many Cabinet Ministers have become afflicted with, meaning that they 'go native' by adopting the views and values of their particular department (see next chapter). Certainly, during the 1970s and 1980s especially, several memoirs and diaries published by former Cabinet Ministers testified to the extent to which they – or some of their ministerial colleagues – became pre-occupied with their department's interests and objectives, and therefore paid insufficient attention to policies pursued by their ministerial colleagues (see, for examples: Barnett, 1982: 81–2; Castle, 1993: 341; Crossman, 1975: 201, diary entry for 18 April 1965; Dell, 1980: 25; Healey, 1990: 326–7; Marsh, 1978: 87).

This tendency was also noted by Sir Douglas Wass, another former Head of the Civil Service, when he observed that 'for each minister, the test of success in office lies in his ability to deliver his departmental goals … No minister I know of has won political distinction by his performance in the Cabinet or by his contribution to collective decision-taking' (Wass, 1983: 25). Similarly, when an inquiry was conducted into the mid-1990s BSE crisis, which affected British farming and the meat industry, a Special Adviser to one of John Major's senior ministers confessed that:

> The BSE report confirms everything we have been saying about Whitehall as a whole. Whenever there is a potential conflict between different departments, or an awkward problem, they do not search for the right answers. Their priority is to defend their own departmental position. They do not share knowledge, but keep information to themselves. They judge the quality of their work purely on the basis of how well they defend their own department.
>
> (Quoted in Richards, 2000: 13; see also, Greer, 1999)

Certainly, within months of New Labour's May 1997 election victory, Tony Blair was bemoaning the already evident trend towards departmentalism among his ministerial colleagues: 'One of the things we have lost from Opposition is that shared sense of purpose and strategy. Ministers have become preoccupied by their departmental brief and we need to draw them back more' (Quoted in Wintour, 1997: 1–2). This tendency clearly places a premium on Ministers without Portfolio and the Prime Minister, along with institutions such as the Cabinet Office and the [Downing Street] Policy Unit, to facilitate policy coordination within the core executive, and thereby pursue joined-up government.

Interdepartmental policy conflicts

One manifestation of 'departmentalism' is the phenomenon whereby the policy preferences or proposals of one minister (or their department) impinge on those of another department. For example, in the post-May 2010 coalition government, there were public disagreements between the Home Secretary, Theresa May, and the former Justice Secretary, Kenneth Clarke (both of them Conservatives), over aspects of penal policy, as well as asylum/immigration and the Human Rights Act.

These public spats have partly reflected different personal or ideological views over policies themselves, but have also occurred because of the potential or actual overlap of responsibilities between the Home Office and the Department of Justice. One such clash was between Clarke's preference for a stronger emphasis on the rehabilitation of offenders, whereas May has strongly defended the role and importance of custodial sentences in combating crime and making communities safer (Travis, 2010; Williamson and Sparrow, 2010; Morris, 2011; Ford, 2012). The coalition government has also witnessed interministerial disagreements due to perennial tensions between the twin goals of fostering economic growth and promoting environmental protection. In this instance, public disagreements have sometimes occurred between two senior Liberal Democrat ministers because the Business Secretary, Vince Cable, has favoured (along with Conservative Chancellor, George Osborne) reducing some of the regulations and red tape on businesses in order to boost economic growth and employment, while the former Climate and Energy Secretary, Chris Huhne, wanted to ensure that companies adhered to various 'green' policies and targets commensurate with (environmentally) sustainable economic development (Stratton, 2011). Huhne was also unhappy at reports, in Spring 2011, that the Department of Transport was seriously considering an increase in the motorway speed limit from 70 to 80 mph; Huhne's concern deriving from the fact that faster driving would increase carbon emissions (McGee and Ungoed-Thomas, 2011).

Another form of interministerial tension, which has been evident in the coalition government (but has also occurred in many previous governments) is that between the Chancellor George Osborne's insistence on the need for significant cuts in public expenditure, and thus in departmental budgets, and the insistence by many other senior ministers either that they cannot find the savings being asked of them, or that the cuts being sought by the Treasury will impede their own departmental (and, *inter alia*, coalition) policy objectives. For example, Theresa May has been anxious that swingeing cuts to her Home Office budget would mean far fewer front-line police officers to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour.

Similarly, Liam Fox, while he was Defence Secretary, also clashed with the Chancellor and the Treasury because of his concern that major cuts in his ministry's budget might make the renewal of Britain's Trident nuclear submarines unaffordable. In this context, one senior civil servant in the Ministry of Defence complained that: 'Treasury officials are running amok. The Treasury needs to understand that it is a dangerous world out there' (quoted in Oliver, 2010: 1).

There were also intra-Cabinet disagreements in autumn 2012, over plans (subsequently abandoned in summer 2013) to introduce minimum prices for alcohol, in order both to

reduce binge drinking and drink-related crime, and improve public health. The proposal emanated from Theresa May's Home Office, with the support of David Cameron and Jeremy Hunt (the Health Secretary), but encountered Treasury objections over the potential loss of revenue from alcohol duty (approximately £9.5 billion) if the 'minimum' price was set 'too high' and sales of alcoholic drinks fell significantly (Hennessy and Donnelly, 2012; Morris, 2012).

Ideological tensions between senior ministers

Although membership of a political party obviously reflects general support for its philosophy, principles and policy goals (as noted in the previous chapter), these are still open to slightly different emphases and interpretation. Consequently, even the most senior members of the governing party, namely its Cabinet Ministers and the Prime Minister, will sometimes be prone to differences of opinion or disagreements over whether, or how far, a particular policy (or series of policies) should be pursued.

Until the advent of New Labour and the subsequent marginalization of the Left, ideological tensions were most commonly associated with the Labour Party, so that pre-1979 Labour Cabinets were particularly prone to Left versus Right disagreements. These had derived from tensions between those on the Left (seeing themselves as the party's true socialists), who favoured more public ownership (nationalization) of industry and more vigorous efforts at redistributing wealth from rich to poor, whereas those on the (revisionist) Right or social democratic 'wing' of the Labour party had been rather more cautious or conservative in their approach to achieving 'socialism'; indeed, they were more inclined to reform capitalism in order to make it fairer or more humane, rather than replace it completely.

These ideological divisions between Labour's 'fundamentalist' Left and 'revisionist' Right inevitably underpinned many of the disagreements, which ensued over particular policies, and reflected differing interpretations of the Labour Party's principles, as discussed in the previous chapter. This in turn did much to foster the image of a deeply divided Labour Party, which could not be trusted to govern the country effectively because it would be preoccupied with its own internal arguments and associated disputes over policies.

During the 1980s and 1990s, though, it was Conservative Cabinets that evinced ideological tensions and disagreements over the general orientation of policy, as ministers on the party's Right or Thatcherite wing battled for supremacy against representatives of the party's 'One Nation' tradition on the party's Left. These tensions were particularly prominent with regard to economic and social policies during the early 1980s, when monetarists and economic neo-liberals on the Conservative Right insisted that the recession and rising unemployment rendered it essential that stricter control was exercised over the money supply, primarily through curbing public expenditure. For these Conservatives, a major cause of high public expenditure was the cost of the welfare state, so it seemed logical, indeed unavoidable, that reducing government spending necessitated extensive cuts in welfare provision.

By contrast, One Nation Conservatives believed that the recession was not only being exacerbated by their government's economic strategy, but that this was precisely the time to relax monetary policy and carefully boost public expenditure in order to reflate the

economy and thereby get Britain out of recession. These One Nation Conservatives similarly reasoned that a period of high unemployment was exactly the time when the welfare state was most needed, in order to assist those who, due to economic circumstances beyond their control, were without jobs. To curb welfare entitlement at such a time was deemed both politically insensitive and potentially socially destabilizing.

This ideological demarcation was also replicated with regard to issues such as industrial relations reform, for while the Thatcherites were keen to emasculate the trade unions permanently, some 'One Nation' ministers believed that beyond a few modest reforms to 'clip the wings' of the trade unions, the Conservative governments ought to resume the pursuit of partnership and regular dialogue with the unions, which had been pursued by pre-Thatcher Conservative administrations throughout the 1950s and 1960s (Dorey, 2002a).

This was, of course, anathema to the Thatcherite Conservatives, who not only believed that trade union power had contributed to many of Britain's economic and industrial problems, but who reasoned that if the trade unions could be permanently emasculated, then there would be no need for a return to dialogue and partnership; the unions could simply be ignored (Dorey, 2002b; Dorey, 2003).

Since the 1990s, ideological divisions within Conservative Cabinets (and Shadow Cabinets when the party was in Opposition) have been most apparent over the issue of Britain's relationship with, or membership of, the EU. After Margaret Thatcher's replacement by John Major as Conservative leader and Prime Minster in November 1990 (her downfall partly caused by her increasingly strident anti-European views and speeches), Thatcherite ministers adopted an increasingly sceptical, if not openly hostile, stance towards the EU and Britain's membership of it.

This was particularly evident in their stance on such issues as European integration, the Maastricht Treaty's avowed objective of Economic and Monetary Union and the EU's social dimension, including employment protection and workers' rights. Indeed, some of these Cabinet Ministers made life so difficult for John Major that on one notorious occasion, when he mistakenly thought that the recording of a television interview had come to an end, he complained to the interviewer about the three 'bastards' in his Cabinet; unfortunately for Major, his microphone was still on and his comments were soon 'leaked'.

In sharp contrast, prominent ministers on the Left or One Nation wing of the Conservative Party, most notably Kenneth Clarke and Michael Heseltine, made no attempt to conceal their strong pro-European views. Instead of viewing European integration as a threat to Britain, and particularly to parliamentary sovereignty, Left-ish Conservatives adopted a more positive view of the EU. They were convinced (and still are today) that desirable policy goals, beneficial to Britain, could far more readily be attained through working in partnership with other member states than by 'splendid isolation' and self-imposed exclusion from EU policy making. As such, they rejected the 'zero sum' conception of EU power, which their Thatcherite colleagues seemed to adopt, whereby any additional power or influence for the EU *ipso facto* meant less power and influence for Britain.

Meanwhile, the general marginalization of the Left in New Labour ensured that open ideological divisions were relatively rare in Tony Blair's 1997–2007 Cabinets, with 'Old Labour' figures such as John Prescott proving reliable allies on most policy issues. When

the Blair Cabinets did disagree over policy issues, the differences were not usually derived from Labour's traditional intra-party ideological divisions, although some of the oft-reported tensions between Tony Blair and Gordon Brown were partly explicable in terms of Brown ostensibly being just a little nearer to the remnants of 'Old Labour' than Blair. Instead, most political disagreements were over policy priorities and details, rather than objectives; over means rather than ends.

For example, on various occasions, there were disagreements over the allocation of increased public expenditure with some ministers, most notably Brown himself as Chancellor, favouring raising social security benefits and extending tax credits for the low paid in order to tackle poverty, while others in the Cabinet – including Blair – preferred to target any public expenditure increases on services, most notable health and education. The reasoning underpinning the latter approach was that increasing welfare benefits might be seen as merely providing 'hand outs' and increasing welfare dependency amongst the poor, whereas 'investing' in public services would be viewed by more voters – particularly Middle England – as a worthwhile and justified way of spending their tax contributions, especially as they themselves would benefit from an improved NHS and 'better' schools. Besides, Blair was inclined to emphasize that poorer people would also be beneficiaries of better schools and hospitals (Reeves and Wintour, 1999; Ward, 2001).

Rather more recently, and not surprisingly, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, formed in May 2010, has yielded some discernible tensions deriving partly from differences in philosophy and concomitant policy preferences between the two parties. For example, there have been clear disagreements over reform of Britain's banking system (in response to the 2008 financial crash), with Liberal Democrats urging significant reform and restructuring of 'the City' and the financial services sector. By contrast, senior Conservatives, particularly Chancellor George Osborne, have proved reluctant to act, seemingly accepting the City's argument that the middle of an economic downturn is precisely the wrong time to create further uncertainty by reorganizing and imposing regulations, on Britain's banking industry.

Following on from this issue, Conservative and Liberal Democrat ministers have also disagreed over how – or whether – to respond to the continued payment of large bonuses to senior bankers, these reflecting the 'bonus culture' in the City. Senior Conservatives, particularly the Chancellor, George Osborne, have proved totally unwilling to take any action over bankers' pay or bonuses, much to the annoyance and frustration of senior Liberal Democrats. The Liberal Democrats' Business Secretary, Vince Cable, has made his irritation clear on numerous occasions (Grice, 2010; Savage, 2011; Wintour, 2012; Treanor, 2013), while in February 2011, the Liberal Democrats' Lord Oakeshott resigned as a Treasury Junior Minister in February because of his clear frustration at the continued failure to take action to curb bankers' pay.

There have also been disagreements over employment law, with some Conservatives favouring new curbs on trade unions and strikes, coupled with a weakening of statutory employment protection or workers' rights ('labour market deregulation'), particularly with regard to 'unfair dismissal' and maternity leave – their argument being that if employers can sack staff more easily, they will be correspondingly more likely to recruit workers in

the first place and thereby reduce unemployment. Such calls and arguments have been strongly condemned by the Liberal Democrats' Vince Cable, who pointedly suggested that those Conservatives urging such measures were 'descendants of those who sent children up chimneys' (quoted in Wintour, 2011: 11).

At the same time, ideological tensions have been increasingly evident *within* the Conservative Party itself, where some on the Right have been deeply sceptical about David Cameron's leadership and strategy. His efforts to 'modernize' the party and 'detoxify' it in order to make the Conservatives attractive to voters again (following its three successive defeats in 1997, 2001 and 2005), have consistently been viewed with suspicion and derision on the party's Right – many of them unreconstructed Thatcherites.

Indeed, many of Cameron's critics on the Conservative Right felt vindicated by his failure to lead the party to a clear victory in the May 2010 general election. They were convinced that this failure was largely due to Cameron's refusal to pursue a more populist Right-wing approach, entailing pledges on tax cuts, much tougher curbs on immigration and a rather more robust stance against the EU (Dorey, 2010b. See also the post-election analysis published by the 'conservativehome' blog, Montgomerie/conservativehome, 2010).

The ensuing frustration on the Conservative Right has manifested itself most clearly on the issue of the EU, particularly as Cameron (in 2009) abandoned an erstwhile pledge to hold a referendum on ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. That Cameron subsequently entered into a coalition with the pro-EU Liberal Democrats merely exacerbated the seething frustration and resentment on the Conservative Right. This culminated in a major rebellion in the House of Commons in October 2011 when 81 Conservative MPs voted in favour of a motion calling for a referendum on whether the UK should remain in the EU, leave it or renegotiate its membership. In so doing, they flagrantly defied a three-line whip imposed by the party's leadership, instructing Conservative MPs to vote *against* the motion.

Another issue that has highlighted ideological divisions within the Conservative Party is that of gay marriage, which many 'traditionalists' on the Right are bitterly opposed to, due to their conviction that same-sex relationships are unnatural or morally wrong anyway, and that a 'proper' marriage entails a man and woman becoming husband and wife, a primary purpose of which is to have children. For such Conservatives, the notion of two men or two women getting married to each other is both nonsensical and morally repugnant, and a debasement of the true meaning of marriage. Such is the hostility of many Conservative MPs to same-sex relationships that 134 of them (more than half of the parliamentary party) voted against the Second Reading of the 2013 Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill, which Cameron himself strongly supported. It eventually reached the statute book by virtue of support proffered by Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs.

What has compounded the hostility of many Right-wing/Thatcherite Conservative MPs towards Cameron is their belief that since the formation of the coalition government at the May 2010 election, he has conceded too much to the Liberal Democrats, thereby permitting them to have an excessive influence over the Coalition's policies, out of all proportion to their number of MPs (Helm, 2011: 22. See also Bagehot, 2011; Helm, 2011; Richards, 2011).

Yet some Liberal Democrats believe that they (or their parliamentary leaders) have sometimes yielded too much to the Conservative Right, hence Nick Clegg's promise of a 'more muscular liberalism' (quoted in Mulholland and Wintour, 2011), and Chris Huhne's demand that David Cameron should keep the Conservative Party's 'Tea Party tendency' under control (Grice, 2011).

JUNIOR MINISTERS

Once largely unsung and almost unseen, Junior Ministers have increased both in number and importance since the 1970s. While the precise role ascribed to Junior Ministers varies from department to department, and is also heavily dependent on who their Secretary of State is, there is no doubt that Junior Ministers generally play a much more extensive policy role in the core executive than they did in the 1950s and 1960s. Indeed, Britain's foremost academic expert on Junior Ministers, Kevin Theakston, informed a recent parliamentary inquiry that because 'Cabinet Ministers are already overloaded; without the support of Junior Ministers their jobs would be impossible', as reflected by the fact that Junior Ministers' departmental and policy-making roles have grown more important in recent years (House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee, 2011). In effect, if Junior Ministers did not already exist, they would have to be invented.

The increased importance of Junior Ministers is partly reflected by the growth in their numbers during the past century, from 15 Junior Ministers in 1914 to 66 in 1998 (Theakston, 1999a: 230–1). Prior to the 2010 general election, Gordon Brown's government contained 77 Junior Ministers, although in the post-May 2010 Coalition, the number initially fell back to 66. That Junior Ministers have increased overall since the early 20th century, both in number and importance, is itself indicative of the greatly expanded roles and responsibilities of British governments during the past century, as well as the greater complexity of governing.

There are actually two categories of Junior Minister, the higher-ranking of these being the Minister of State, with the second category comprising Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State. Junior Ministers are normally selected by the Prime Minister, rather than by the Secretary of State under whom they serve and to whom they are constitutionally accountable, although the Prime Minister may choose to consult the Secretary of State over proposed appointments.

Most of the key government departments now have two or three Ministers of State, each of whom is usually given responsibility for a particular area of policy within their department. In many cases, the Minister of State's full title will clearly indicate their primary policy responsibility in the department – Minister of State for Higher Education, Minister of State for Immigration, Minister of State for Prisons, and so on.

Meanwhile, a Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State is the most junior in the ministerial hierarchy, these usually being allocated very specific tasks, often technically specialized or concerned with administrative minutiae (but still important nonetheless). Again, their precise title usually reflects the nature of their precise remit, such as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Public Health.

Tables 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5 each illustrate the allocation of responsibilities between Secretaries of State, Ministers of State and Parliamentary Under-Secretaries in three government

Table 3.3 Allocation of responsibilities between ministers in the Home Office

Ministerial post	Name of Minister
Home Secretary	Theresa May
Minister of State for Immigration	Mark Harper
Minister of State for Policing and Criminal Justice	Damian Green
Minister of State for Crime Prevention	Jeremy Browne
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Crime and Security)	James Brokenshire
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Criminal Information	Lord Taylor of Holbeach

Table 3.4 Allocation of responsibilities between ministers in the Department for Work and Pensions

Ministerial post	Name of Minister
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions	Iain Duncan Smith
Minister of State for Employment	Mark Hoban
Minister of State for Pensions	Steve Webb
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People	Esther McVey
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Welfare Reform	Lord Freud

Table 3.5 Allocation of responsibilities between ministers in the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills

Ministerial post	Name of Minister
Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills	Vince Cable
Minister of State for Universities and Science	David Willetts
Minister of State for Business and Enterprise	Michael Fallon
Minister of State for Trade and Investment	Lord Green of Hurstpierpoint
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment Relations and Consumer Affairs	Jo Swinson
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Skills	Matthew Hancock
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Intellectual Property	Viscount Younger of Leckie

departments in August 2013. Although ministerial reshuffles mean that the actual individuals will be moved periodically, the titles and division of departmental responsibilities will remain broadly similar in most cases.

Junior Ministers do not ordinarily attend meetings of the full Cabinet, although they will occasionally be invited if the particular policy issue for which they are directly responsible is on the agenda. Yet on these relatively rare occasions, they will only attend for the duration of the relevant item on the Cabinet agenda, and leave immediately after this is concluded.

The infrequency with which Junior Ministers attend the full Cabinet is not surprising, given that this body does not usually engage in detailed discussion of policies (for reasons which we will explain in the next chapter). Furthermore, even if the Cabinet did conduct such a discussion, the Secretary of State would normally be able to provide sufficient information about any policies emanating from their department. That said, Junior Ministers do regularly serve on Cabinet committees, precisely because these are often concerned with the more detailed aspects of policy development (as will also be examined in the next chapter).

In his seminal study of Junior Ministers, Kevin Theakston noted that their precise role and the authority they enjoy in a department are 'essentially informal and indeterminate, depending upon personal and political, not statutory, factors'. Consequently, the precise policy role of a Junior Minister will depend very much upon their relationship with the Secretary of State heading their department; where there is a good professional relationship or personal rapport between a Junior Minister and his/her Secretary of State, it is likely that the former will be trusted to play a more extensive policy role in the department. Where the relationship is less cordial, however, the Junior Minister is likely to be given a very limited role in policy development, to the extent that they may be confined to administrative tasks or replying to correspondence sent to the department by MPs from outside bodies or members of the public (Theakston, 1987: 93–4. See also Kakabadse and Kakabadse, 2011: 355–6, 365–6; Theakston, 1999a: 235–6; Theakston et al., forthcoming).

Theakston reiterated this important observation about the variable and contingent character of Junior Ministers' roles and relationships in his written evidence to the House of Commons Public Administration Committee's (2011: Ev w7, para. 1) inquiry into ministerial activities and functions. He emphasized that 'what the job of a Junior Minister has amounted to in practice has usually varied between one department and another, and has depended greatly on the style of the Cabinet Minister involved and his or her relations with the Junior Minister(s)', a point reiterated by two Junior Ministers in the Blair governments, Chris Mullin (2011: 2) and Lord [Jeff] Rooker (House of Commons Public Administration Committee, 2011: Ev 9, Q. 47).

A further factor that influences the precise role of Junior Ministers will be the size and jurisdiction of the department in which they work. The larger the Ministry and the broader its range of responsibilities, the more likely it is that a Junior Minister will be granted a more significant policy role, for the Secretary of State would otherwise be overwhelmed (Theakston, 1987: 95).

Meanwhile, with regard to the relationship between Junior Ministers and senior civil servants, the Cabinet Office's *Ministerial Code* decrees that while 'the Permanent Secretary [the most senior civil servant in a department] is not subject to the direction of Junior Ministers', it is also the case that 'Junior Ministers are not subject to the directions of the Permanent Secretary.' As such: 'Any conflict of view between the two can be resolved

only by reference to the Minister [Secretary of State] in charge of the department' (Cabinet Office, 2010a: 10). Ordinarily: 'Civil Servants observe the balance of forces and operate accordingly. They gauge whether the junior Minister has his boss's confidence' (James, 1999: 20–1. See also, Riddell et al., 2011: 18).

SENIOR CIVIL SERVANTS

Although the British civil service overall comprises more than 500,000 people, those who are classified as 'senior civil servants' constitute just 0.1 per cent of this tally. It is these senior civil servants who have traditionally played a substantial role in the detailed, day-to-day formulation and administration of public policy within departments. Certainly, it has often been their formal role in helping ministers to devise or draft policies that has attracted most academic attention, often in the context of concerns about the degree of influence that senior civil servants have traditionally exercised.

The constitutional convention has been that 'advisers advise, ministers decide' (advisers in this context meaning senior civil servants – 'Special Advisers' will be treated separately, below), yet this has often begged the question of what advice senior civil servants were giving their ministers and the extent to which this was pre-determining the latter's policy decisions.

Undoubtedly, a major role of senior civil servants has been to provide empirical evidence and policy advice to ministers, this being proffered in a variety of guises, such as statistical data, the viewpoints elicited from consultations with organized interests, the predicted 'pros and cons' or 'costs and benefits' of particular policy options, and so on. In so doing, senior civil servants could present their advice in such a way as to 'steer' the minister towards a particular policy decision, one that the departmental officials themselves preferred rather than one that the minister favoured.

This is certainly one of the criticisms traditionally levelled against some senior civil servants, namely that as 'gatekeepers' controlling the flow of information reaching their minister, they can exercise discretion or be selective in what they allow him/her to see and thereby subtly influence the minister's policy decision. In describing the presentation of policy options by senior civil servants to ministers, former Labour minister, Gerald Kaufman (1997: 30) recalls that:

> Most submissions consist of three or four pages containing a concise summary of a problem with possible courses of action completing the document. Some officials will just suggest one course of action, for you to take or leave. Others, more cunning, will attempt to confuse you with a choice, while carefully steering you in the direction they want you to go.

Yet for many Cabinet Ministers, a heavy reliance on departmental officials has been virtually unavoidable on key issues, partly because of the amount of time that senior ministers will normally spend outside of their department (as noted above) and partly because of the greater expertise that civil servants often possess, having perhaps worked in the department for many years or even decades. Consequently, Cabinet Ministers have previously had to rely heavily on delegation to, and thus discretion by, the senior civil servants in their department.

Meanwhile, detailed or administrative policy work is often conducted deep within the department, often by Grade 6 or 7 civil servants, with the most senior civil servants focusing more on strategic leadership and management in their department. For example, the most senior civil servant in a department is the Permanent Secretary, while immediately below them in the hierarchy will be senior civil servants occupying Grades 2–5, these usually being Directors and Deputy Directors who tend to focus on a particular policy area division or unit within the department (Drewry and Butcher, 1991: *passim*; McClory, 2010: 8; Stanley, 2000: 28–30).

However, since the 1980s, there has been a partial downgrading or diminution of the traditional policy-advising and policy-making role of senior civil servants. This is partly because the machinery of government reforms – the 'Next Steps' programme – of the Thatcher-Major governments sought to steer the civil service more towards a stronger focus on policy implementation and 'delivery' (Richards, 1997; Theakston, 1999b). However, this shift has also been compounded by the increased role of Special Advisers as a source of 'independent' or alternative policy advice for many Cabinet Ministers, as discussed below.

Yet it is important not to exaggerate the reduced role of senior civil servants, for while there has certainly been an overall trend towards more proactive or agenda-setting Cabinet Ministers, and a consequent shift in the role of many senior civil servants towards policy management or 'delivery' (rather than policy advice and formulation), it is very much a matter of degree. Certainly, not all Cabinet Ministers since the 1980s have adopted a proactive or agenda-setting role, and as such, there will remain instances where some senior civil servants continue to play a traditional role in advising their Secretary of State and presenting a range of policy options, accompanied by recommendations as to the most appropriate or practicable one to choose.

As with other relationships in the core executive, much will depend on the context, in terms of specific issues, circumstances, resources, and the minister's own style or personality. According to one senior civil servant interviewed towards the end of the 1990s:

> Your experience around Whitehall depends very much on who your Minister is, and what his/her attitude is. Some Ministers think they are there to run the Department, and others think that the Permanent Secretary is there to do that and they are only there to give broad instructions. I think that will continue to vary depending on the personality and predilection of Ministers.
>
> (Quoted in Marsh et al., 2001: 167)

In other words, although there has undoubtedly been a trend towards more proactive or agenda-setting Cabinet Ministers since the 1980s, and a parallel reorientation of senior civil servants towards policy management and delivery, there remains a close professional relationship between many senior civil servants and Secretaries of State. Nonetheless, it is true that many Cabinet Ministers are less dependent than they used to be on senior civil servants for policy ideas and advice partly because of the increased employment, especially since the 1980s, of Special Advisers.

SPECIAL ADVISERS

In recent decades, senior ministers (including the Prime Minister) have appointed their own Special Advisers in order to secure an additional or independent (of the civil service) source of policy advice and research, and perhaps to engage in 'blue skies' or longer-term, strategic thinking. Certainly, the policy work of Special Advisers is often more ideological or partisan than that of politically impartial senior civil servants. As the 2011 *Cabinet Manual* explains:

> Special advisers are employed as temporary civil servants to help ministers on matters where the work of government and the work of the party, or parties, of government overlap and where it would be inappropriate for permanent civil servants to become involved. They are an additional resource for the minister, providing assistance from a standpoint that is more politically committed and politically aware than would be available to a minister from the permanent Civil Service … The employment of special advisers adds a political dimension to the advice and assistance available to ministers, while reinforcing the political impartiality of the permanent Civil Service by distinguishing the source of political advice and support.
>
> (Cabinet Office, 2011a: 58)

The precise role of Special Advisers, often referred to as 'SPADs', will vary slightly according to the remit stipulated by each Secretary of State who employs them, but according to the Cabinet Office's *Code of Conduct for Special Advisers*, they can perform 12 main roles for their minister, as listed in Box 3.1.

Box 3.1 Roles and functions of Special Advisers

- Reviewing papers that are going to the minister, drawing attention to any aspect that they think has party political implications and ensuring that sensitive political points are handled properly. They may give assistance on any aspect of departmental business and give advice to their minister when the latter is taking part in party political activities.
- Checking facts and research findings from a party political viewpoint.
- Preparing speculative policy papers, which can generate long-term policy thinking within the department.
- Contributing to policy planning within the department, including ideas that extend the existing range of options available to the minister with a political viewpoint in mind.
- Liaising with the minister's party to ensure that the department's own policy reviews and analysis take full advantage of ideas from the party, and encouraging presentational activities by the party that contribute to the government's and department's objectives.

(Continued)

(Continued)

- Briefing the party's MPs and officials on aspects of government policy.
- Liaising with outside interest groups, including groups with a political allegiance to assist the minister's access to their contribution.
- Speechwriting and related research, including adding party political content to material prepared by permanent civil servants.
- Representing the views of their minister to the media, including a party viewpoint where they have been authorized by the minister to do so.
- Providing expert advice as a specialist in a particular field.
- Attending party functions (although they may not speak publicly at the party conference) and maintaining contact with party members.
- Taking part in policy reviews organized by the party or officially in conjunction with it for the purpose of ensuring that those undertaking the review are fully aware of the government's views and their minister's thinking and policy.

(Cabinet Office, 2010b: paragraph 3. See also McClory, 2010: 3–4)

Most Secretaries of State are permitted to employ two Special Advisers, although a few Cabinet Ministers are allowed to employ more, for example the Foreign Office employs three SPADs while the Chancellor employs four.

The Prime Minister employs a much larger number of Special Advisers than each Secretary of State, but this reflects the fact that a Prime Minister does not have the administrative support and sources of policy advice that a department (via its senior civil servants) provides to his/her Cabinet colleagues. For example, Tony Blair employed up to 27 Special Advisers, approximately two each for most policy areas or issues, but a few more for foreign affairs, while David Cameron (in 2013) employed 19, and Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, had 14 Special Advisers.

Most Special Advisers will mainly be involved either in dealing with the media in the presentation of policies (the so-called 'spin doctors'), liaising with the minister's political party or in providing their minister with new or innovative policy ideas and proposals. In the latter role, Special Advisers can, in contrast to senior civil servants perhaps, 'bring a more adventurous cast of mind … able to suggest things that officials might dismiss as outlandish.' Ultimately, a Special Policy Adviser 'acts as counsellor, confidant and political ally to a minister surrounded by officials who are – quite correctly – non-political' (James, 1999: 223, 224. See also Gruhn and Slater, 2012: 7; Stanley, 2000: 22–3).

According to Pat McFadden, who was formerly a Special Adviser in Tony Blair's Policy Unit:

> … the term 'Special Adviser' covers several different kinds of job. Sometimes it is policy expertise … general speech writing … contact with the media. It is quite difficult in government and in politics to put people into separate boxes and say that the person who deals with the media does not have policy expertise, because they might have both.
>
> (Quoted in Blick, 2004: 260)

This important point has been reiterated in a more recent study of the role of Special Advisers (LSE GV314 Group, 2012: 718–19), which identifies 'two broad, but not mutually exclusive' roles, namely 'the *political commissar* role, where advisers serve as the eyes, ears and mouth of the politician who appoints them' (emphasis in original), and the role of 'political fixer': the person who does the political jobs for the politician that civil servants could not do – dealing directly with party colleagues, legislators and writing political speeches.' However, the same study notes that the role of *political commissar* itself enshrines two aspects, namely 'policy wonk' and 'policy enforcer', although these too are not mutually exclusive (LSE GV314 Group, 2012: 720).

The 'policy wonk' primarily focuses on policy advice and development, while the 'policy enforcer' is mainly concerned to ensure that these policies are then implemented or, in modern political parlance, 'delivered'. Meanwhile, the 'political fixer' role included that of communicating the government's or minister's policies and objectives; in effect, acting as 'spin doctor'.

What is particularly notable about many Special Advisers is the extent to which they tend to emanate from sundry think tanks. Several of the Special Advisers serving ministers in the coalition government have previously worked for think tanks such as the Centre for Social Justice and Policy Exchange. For example, two of David Cameron's Special Advisers, James O'Shaughnessy and Gavin Lockhart, previously worked for Policy Exchange.

Yet this link between think tanks and Special Advisers is certainly not unique to the coalition government, for several Special Advisers in the (1979–1990) Thatcher governments originated from New Right think tanks like the Centre for Policy Studies, while the post-1997 Blair governments witnessed a proliferation of SPADs from various 'progressive' or Left-leaning think tanks such as Demos and the IPPR.

Of course, the fact that some Special Advisers emanate from think tanks compounds the methodological difficulty, noted in the previous chapter, of gauging the actual influence of think tanks on public policy, because the advice proffered to a minister by a SPAD might reflect the ideological perspective of the think tank they previously worked for, or it might be totally independent of it and derive from other influences or objectives.

From Special Adviser to senior politician

Serving as a Special Adviser has become 'an important mainstream path to senior political office', and certainly, according to the 2012 study cited above, the vast majority – 79 per cent – of SPADs (or of those who responded to the study's questionnaire) 'had been party members for five years or more before they were appointed', where 'only 6 per cent were not members of the party' (LSE GV314 Group, 2012: 720).

Several Cabinet Ministers since the 1980s previously served as Special Advisers. For example, David Young was a Special Adviser to Sir Keith Joseph at the Department of Trade and Industry in the early 1980s, and was subsequently appointed Secretary of State at the department following the 1987 election (having been awarded a peerage and a seat in the House of Lords three years earlier) (Blick, 2004: 193–4). Other notable examples of Special Advisers in the 1980s who subsequently became (Conservative) ministers include Damian Green, Oliver Letwin, John Redwood and David Willetts, the latter serving as Minister of State for Universities in the coalition government formed in May 2010. Meanwhile,

in the early 1990s, David Cameron himself was a Special Adviser to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Norman Lamont, and then to Michael Howard at the Home Office, before being elected as a Conservative MP in 2001.

Similar career trajectories were followed by several ministers in the 1997–2010 Blair governments. For example, Jack Straw, Foreign Secretary during the second (2001–05) Blair government had been a Policy Adviser to Ministers in the 1974–79 Labour government. Meanwhile, Hilary Benn (son of veteran Labour Left-winger, Tony Benn) worked as Special Adviser to David Blunkett at the Department of Education from 1997 to 1999, before successfully contesting a 1999 by-election in the Leeds Central Constituency. Following the 2001 election, Benn was appointed a Minister of State in the Department for International Development. Elsewhere, Ed Balls (Shadow Chancellor under Ed Miliband), having previously served as one of Gordon Brown's Special Advisers in the Treasury, was elected as a Labour MP in 2005.

Three other notable examples of (New Labour) Special Advisers subsequently entering Parliament and then attaining ministerial office are David Miliband, Ed Miliband and Andrew Adonis. David Miliband was appointed Head of (Blair's) Downing Street Policy Directorate when New Labour won the 1997 general election, having previously worked at the Institute for Public Policy Research. Miliband then became a Labour MP in 2001, thereafter serving in a succession of ministerial posts, culminating in his appointment as Foreign Secretary in 2008, a post he held until Labour's defeat in the May 2010 election.

Following David Miliband's election as an MP, Blair appointed Andrew Adonis, previously a senior journalist for *The Observer* newspaper, as Head of the 10 Downing Street Policy Directorate, but with a special remit also for advising the Prime Minister on education policy. Adonis was subsequently awarded a peerage, whereupon he sat on the Labour benches and held several ministerial posts, initially in the Department of Education and Skills, and then in the Department of Transport.

Finally, Ed Miliband served as a Special Adviser at the Treasury (alongside Ed Balls) prior to being elected as a Labour MP in 2005. He then swiftly ascended the ministerial hierarchy to become Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change from 2008 until Labour's defeat in May 2010, following which he was elected leader of the Labour Party.

In the context of such examples, it has been suggested that the experience acquired from serving as Special Advisers 'is clearly a big advantage if they become Ministers', for they will be 'more familiar with the workings of Whitehall than most of their new ministerial colleagues'. As such, working as a Special Adviser 'is in many ways a useful apprenticeship for becoming a minister', although one particular criticism is that those ministers who have previously served as Special Advisers will often 'lack a detailed knowledge and understanding of the outside world' (Riddell et al., 2011: 28).

Apparent policy influence of Special Advisers

Although it is difficult to attribute particular policies to specific individuals, because many policies emanate from a variety of sources, and are invariably 'processed' by various individuals and institutions, some policies since the 1980s do seem to have been closely associated with, or strongly influenced by, particular Special Advisers.

With regard to Special Advisers appointed by the Prime Minister (and based in the Downing Street Policy Unit – discussed in the next chapter), Ferdinand Mount, who served briefly

as head of Margaret Thatcher's Policy Unit during 1982–3 (for his wry recollection of this short tenure, see Mount, 2009: 281–349), has been credited with having 'contributed to her philosophical and moral approach', for he too was 'a firm advocate of the renewal of discipline and responsibility'. Consequently: 'A number of policy proposals flowed form Mount's philosophy', including tax changes beneficial to married couples, education vouchers, stronger policing and more generous discounts for those wishing to buy their council house (Blick, 2004: 200; Thatcher, 1993: 278–9), although education vouchers were not subsequently pursued. Mount's successor as Head of the Policy Unit, Brian Griffiths, also provided Thatcher with 'a moral basis for her ideological convictions' (Brown, 1990).

Meanwhile, in the early 1980s, during the first of his two spells as Margaret Thatcher's Special (Economic) Adviser, Alan Walters, apparently played a significant role in influencing or emboldening her stance on aspects of economic policy, particularly curbing public expenditure and reducing the Public Sector Borrowing Recruitment (PSBR). Indeed, Walters' influence on such issues reportedly caused some concern to various of Thatcher's Cabinet colleagues, including, on occasions, her then Chancellor Geoffrey Howe (Blick, 2004: 215; Hennessy, 2001: 410–11; Hoskyns, 2000: 273; Thatcher, 1993: 133–6).

During Walters' second spell as Thatcher's Special (Economic) Adviser, Chancellor Nigel Lawson actually resigned following increasing tensions between himself and Walters, and Thatcher's refusal to remove Walters from his post, in spite of requests from Lawson to do so (Lawson, 1992: 957–9). Ironically, Lawson's shock resignation prompted Walter's own resignation later the same day. To paraphrase Oscar Wilde, to lose one close colleague might be regarded as a misfortune; to lose two in the same day looks like carelessness!

More specifically, following his recruitment to the Policy Unit after the Conservative's 1983 election victory, John Redwood played a significant role in 'setting up a government mechanism for implementing the privatization agenda, which he'd been trying to persuade Thatcher to pursue since the early years of her leadership in the mid-1970s' (Blick, 2004: 201). Meanwhile, John Hoskyns, who was appointed Thatcher's first head of the Policy Unit in 1979 – but with the title 'Senior Policy Adviser to the Prime Minister' – seemingly played a significant role in shaping and making much tougher the Conservative governments' programme of trade union reform (Hoskyns, 2000: 157, 168, 170–1, 186. See also Blick, 2004: 205–6; Ranelagh, 1992: 218–22), much to the dismay of the emollient Secretary of State for Employment, James Prior, who wanted to pursue a more cautious and conciliatory approach to curbing the power of the unions (Prior, 1986: Chapter 9).

In John Major's 1990–97 Conservative governments, Nick True, one of the Prime Minister's early appointments as a Special Adviser in the Policy Unit, played a notable role in developing the 'Citizen's Charter', an initiative that it was hoped would make public sector employees provide a more efficient and courteous service to their public sector 'clients' or 'customers' (Hogg and Hill, 1995: 95–6; Blick, 2004: 240).

During Tony Blair's first term as Prime Minister, David Miliband, as head of the Downing Street Policy Unit, 'helped develop Blair's ideological approach … [as] an advocate of what came to be labelled as the "Third Way"' (Blick, 2004: 273). Miliband also, along with Geoff Mulgan (another of Blair's Special Advisers in the Policy Unit during the first term of Office), played a significant role in the development of New Labour's policies for tackling social exclusion and poverty (Riddell, 2001: 33).

Elsewhere, Andrew Adonis was widely believed to have played a significant role in persuading Blair to proceed with the proposals for university top-up fees. Indeed, it has been claimed that Andrew Adonis 'wielded enormous power and influence in the formulation of New Labour's education policy' in general, to the extent that 'education policy was determined by Tony Blair and Andrew [now Lord] Adonis' (Chitty, 2009: 138. See also Chitty, 2002: 45). That said, another of Blair's Special Advisers, Michael Barber, is also deemed to have exercised a strong influence on aspects of New Labour's education policy, albeit in tandem with Adonis (Barber, 2007: 54; Rhodes, 2011: 216).

On another occasion, Matthew Taylor, hitherto Director of the IPPR, was appointed as the head of Blair's Policy Unit (Rowan, 2003: 17). Taylor was a keen advocate of Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs), the policy initiative much favoured by Tony Blair, but bitterly opposed by many Labour MPs as 'creeping privatization' of the public sector.

More recently, David Cameron has attributed his vision of the 'Big Society' to Steve Hilton, his chief strategist and Policy Adviser from 2005 to early 2012.

With regard to the possible policy influence of Special Advisers on Cabinet Ministers, it has been suggested that David Young, when he served as a Special Adviser to Sir Keith Joseph at the Department of Trade and Industry in the 1980s, played a key role in promoting and preparing the privatization of British Telecom, while in the early 1990s, Christopher Foster, a Special Adviser to John MacGregor, Secretary of State for Transport, played 'an important role in the privatization of British Rail' (Blick, 2004: 193, 231).

Similarly, Michael Portillo, while a Special Adviser at the Department of Energy in the early 1980s, played an important role – in tandem with the Prime Minister's Policy Unit – in supervising the stock piling of coal reserves, which subsequently helped the Thatcher government to defeat the 1984–85 miners' strike (Blick, 2004: 208).

In the mid-1990s, Ed Balls (prior to becoming an MP himself) was deemed to be 'the brains behind' much of Gordon Brown's economic strategy and the decision to grant independence to the Bank of England immediately following the 1997 election (Ashley, 2002: 15), while Michael Jacobs was apparently instrumental in persuading Brown to increase National Insurance (NI) contributions by 1 per cent and spend the extra revenue solely on the NHS (Grice, 2004: 2); an example of 'hypothecated taxation'.

The increasing use of Special Advisers both reflects and reinforces the *partial* downgrading of the traditional role of senior civil servants in proffering advice and developing policy, although this role is still often important: it is a question of degree and will depend, to some extent, on both the issues concerned and the minister involved. However, with civil servants increasingly expected to focus on policy management and 'delivery', Special Advisers have acquired much greater opportunities and scope for initiating or developing policies with senior ministers and even of influencing Prime Ministers.

CONCLUSION

In identifying the individuals who collectively comprise the core executive, we have drawn particular attention to the variability of roles that they each play, as shaped by a combination of personal style, the extent to which each has clearly-defined policy objectives and the particular circumstances that prevail at any given juncture. Yet we have also noted

some general trends that have occurred since the 1980s, most notably greater ministerial 'activism' in agenda setting and policy initiation, a greater emphasis on policy management and delivery by senior civil servants, and the increasing use, by Cabinet Ministers, of Special Advisers and Junior Ministers in policy making.

The more activist role adopted by many Cabinet Ministers and the consequent willingness to impose policy change in spite of opposition from outside the core executive is part of a more general shift from the consensual mode of policy making that prevailed for much of the 1945–79 period. This had partly derived from a broadly social democratic ethos during this era, which, among other values, had enshrined notions of partnership between governments and the governed. However, it also reflected the role of key organized interests in many policy spheres, as evinced by the existence of several policy communities.

Since the 1980s, though, the superseding of social democracy by neo-liberalism has naturally entailed a change in the governing style and mode of policy making. Many ministers have sought to pursue, and if necessary, impose change derived from conviction rather than being based on consensus, and this in turn, has led both to a downgrading or dismantling of policy communities (as discussed in the previous chapter), and a reduced policy-making role for senior civil servants – the latter now expected to focus more on policy management and 'delivery'. In this context, Cabinet Ministers have increasingly turned to Special Advisers for ideas and policy initiatives, and many of these SPADs have themselves subsequently become ministers.

Meanwhile, the increasingly specialized or technical nature of many policy issues, coupled with the demands on senior ministers' time (much of it spent away from their department), has yielded an increase both in the numbers and the importance of Junior Ministers. These play a vital role inside departments, focusing on a specific aspect of policy, such as immigration, pensions or public health. In so doing, Junior Ministers complement the more strategic leadership role played by the Cabinet Minister who heads the department and also illustrate the interdependency of individuals within the core executive.

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What constraints exist on the ability of British Prime Ministers to introduce new policies?
2. In what ways is the power of a British Prime Minister contingent and contextual?
3. How has the policy role and style of (many) Cabinet Ministers changed since the 1980s?
4. What is 'departmentalitis' and what are its main symptoms?
5. How does the role of a Junior Minister differ to that of a Secretary of State?
6. Why do Junior Ministers serve on Cabinet committees, but not sit in the Cabinet?
7. How might senior civil servants steer a minister towards a particular decision or policy?
8. Why has the use of Special Advisers increased since the 1980s?
9. What roles do 'SPADs' perform?
10. In what ways are the individuals in the core executive linked by resource dependency and exchange relationships?

RECOMMENDED TEXTS AND FURTHER READING

1. Andrew Blick (2004) *People Who Live in the Dark: The History of the Special Adviser in British Politics*. London: Politico's.

   The first major study of the role of Special Advisers in British politics and policy making. Examines the manner in which they have increased, both in number, and apparent influence, particularly since the 1980s.

2. House of Commons Public Administration Committee (2011) *Smaller Government: What do Ministers do? Seventh Report of Session 2010–11*, *Volume 1*, HC 530. Available from: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmpubadm/530/530.pdf

   In the context of David Cameron's call for smaller government, and for greater efficiency by public servants in an era of fewer resources, the House of Commons' highly-respected public administration committee examines what this might mean for the core executive itself. The report claims both that there are too many Ministers in British government, and that too much time and energy are expended on relatively minor or mundane issues and activities, and often with limited discernible impact. Instead, there should be fewer Ministers overall, and they should operate more strategically, by concentrating on a smaller range of more important policy issues, or on problems where they could actually have a more meaningful impact; achieving more with less.

3. Gerald Kaufman (1997) *How to be a Minister*. London: Faber.

   Wry, often anecdotal, but always highly-informative and enjoyable, account of life as a Minister, based on the author's own experiences, and full of useful, often amusing anecdotes. Offers advice on such issues as how a Minister should: operate in Cabinet committees; work with organized interests; deal with 10 Downing Street; and 'how to make policy.'

4. LSE GV314 Group (2012) 'New life at the top: Special advisers in British Government', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 65 (4): 715–32.

   A welcome and much needed addition to the otherwise limited academic literature on Special Advisers. This article presents the findings of a recent case study (involving interviews and questionnaires) which analyses the different roles performed by SPADs, and their relationships with other policy makers in the core executive. It emphasizes that the precise role(s) undertaken by each Special Adviser, and their degree of authority or policy influence, is heavily dependent on their political and professional relationship with their Minister. This, in turn, will have an impact on how much respect they are accorded, and how seriously they are listened to, by others in the core executive, particularly civil servants in the Department.

5. David Marsh, David Richards and Martin J. Smith (2001) *Changing Patterns of Governance in the United Kingdom: Reinventing Whitehall?* Basingstoke: Palgrave (Chapters 6 and 7).

   Chapter 6 summarizes the changing role of Cabinet Ministers in Britain since the 1980s, noting the extent to which they have acquired a more active role in policy making, to the extent of increasingly challenging traditional Departmental 'philosophies'. Chapter 7

notes how this, in turn, has had an impact on Cabinet Ministers' relationships with senior civil servants, as the latter have increasingly been steered towards a policy management role. However, there remains a significant degree of reciprocity and mutual dependence.

6. R. A. W. Rhodes (2011) *Everyday Life in British Government*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

   Absolutely scintillating account of the day-to-day work of Ministers and senior civil servants in three Departments. In writing this book, Rhodes 'shadowed' the Ministers and their officials for several days while they conducted their daily business; he also conducted several in-depth interviews. This book thus provides a wealth of fascinating insights and anecdotes about daily life inside the core executive.

7. Martin J. Smith (2000) 'Prime Ministers, Ministers and Civil Servants in the Core Executive', in R. A. W. Rhodes (ed.) *Transforming British Government, Volume One: Changing Institutions*. London: Palgrave.

   Examines the interaction between Prime Ministers, Cabinet Ministers and senior civil servants with particular reference to notions of mutual dependence and exchange relationships. Thus rejects a zero-sum conception of political power, and emphasizes, instead, the manner and extent to which power is shared between the actors, albeit varying according to personalities, leadership styles, external circumstances and specific policy issues.

8. Kevin Theakston (1987) *Junior Ministers in British Government*. Oxford: Blackwell.

   Still the definitive text on this previously under-researched topic. Examines how and why Junior Ministers have increased in both number and importance, in tandem with the expansion and increased policy responsibilities of British governments during most of the 20th century. The increased number of Junior Ministers also reflects the increasing complexity of governing a modern society, and the consequent need for greater specialization among policy makers, even within individual Departments. As a consequence, many Junior Ministers have acquired a significant policy-making role within each Department.