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Joining-up or departmentalism? Coordinating policy for sustainable development in the United Kingdom

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Sustainable Development in the
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Abstract

Joined-up government (JUG) is a major pillar of the Labour Government's Modernising Government agenda in the United Kingdom (UK). To date, however, there are still surprisingly few detailed empirical studies of how well JUG initiatives are performing. This paper takes the policy challenge of sustainable development, which incorporates economic, social and environmental elements, as a critical test of JUG. It does so by empirically examining how well sustainable development is integrated into mainstream sectoral policy making through the application of policy appraisal in the areas of energy, defence and public spending. Overall, it demonstrates that joining-up by centralized means has been unable to override the forces of departmentalism, which are shown to be deeply rooted in departments' approaches to policy appraisal. It then argues that addressing this problem will require a carefully designed package of centralised initiatives to minimize departmental discretion, and a series of more diffuse tools and administrative capacities to encourage departmental policy makers to coordinate. Without such a two pronged approach, Labour's pursuit of more joined-up policy making may be severely undermined.

Keywords: joined-up government, policy coordination, policy appraisal, sustainable development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Shortly after being elected in 1997, the United Kingdom (UK) Labour Government published its White Paper on Modernising Government (Cabinet Office, 1999). It outlined an approach for more joined-up government (JUG), supported by evidenced-based policy making, across a number of so-called cross-cutting wicked issues (e.g. social exclusion, race, environment, etc.), i.e. those 'persistent and intractable issues that span the interests of several departments' (Flinders 2002, p. 56). Of course, JUG is not a new concept (Pollitt 2003, p. 36; Bogandar 2005). It is simply the latest attempt at achieving the 'holy grail' of coordination (Peters 1998, p. 1). Many problems are seen to stem from the functional configuration of departments, whereby they are each allocated specific policy responsibilities. This type of departmental structure has advantages as it allows for specialisation (Page 2005, p. 141), increased efficiency, easier budgeting and clear lines of accountability to help formulate and deliver policy (Mulgan 2005, pp. 167-177). However, it can also encourage departmentalism where policy makers may think sectorally at the expense cross-cutting objectives, targets and best practice, making complex issues difficult to tackle (Richards and Smith 2002; Hood 2005, pp. 22-23). Some authors argue that these practices are so widespread that they are pathological (Richards and Smith 2002, p. 6).

Labour's enthusiasm for JUG can mainly be attributed to two interrelated factors. First, following over a decade in opposition, prioritising a more joined-up approach allowed Labour to make a significant mark on policy making. In doing so, it presented an JUG as a common sense approach that radically differed from many of the public sector reforms made by its Conservative predecessors (e.g. the creation of executive agencies, the privatisation of public utilities, etc), which were seen to fragment the central state and thus make cross-cutting action more difficult (Ling 2002, p. 639; Pollitt 2003, p. 36). Second, further fragmentation was said to have stemmed from the ceding of some powers to supra-national entities such as the European Union. This trend, coupled with the effects the public sector reforms made in the 1980s and early 1990s was said to have led to the 'hollowing out' of the central state (see Rhodes 1996, pp. 661-663). The effects of hollowing out are argued to have made it more difficult for governments to control the policy arena due to the multiplicity of actors involved (Flinders 2002, p. 57; Cabinet Office 1999, Ch. 2), a situation often referred to as governance (Rhodes 2000; Bevir and Rhodes 2003). Therefore, Labour felt that policy making needed to reflect the realities of the modern world and thus used JUG to increase central government control over policy making in an attempt to counteract the effects of hollowing out (Flinders 2002, p.2).

The focus of this paper is on Labours attempt to joined-up policy making for sustainable development. Sustainable development can be viewed as wicked issue par excellence as it represents a hugely complicated issue necessitating the integration of economic, social and environmental considerations into the policy making of all sectors. It seemingly has been a core priority of the Labour Government with, for example, Prime Minister Tony Blair making no less than six major speeches on it and related issues (e.g. climate change). Moreover, he prioritised it as one of the crucial wicked issues that should be addressed in his forward to the seminal report on JUG, *Wiring it Up* (Cabinet Office 2000, p.3). Up until 2004, one of the prime vehicles to join-up for sustainable development was the application of an environmental policy appraisal (EPA) to sectoral policies. The main purpose of EPA was to better integrate environmental considerations, alongside social and economic concerns, into the decision making of all sectors at the earliest opportunity (i.e. it was *ex ante*) by assessing possible (intended and unintended) policy impacts. Consequently information could be generated on policy spillovers around which coordination between departments and non-governmental actors could occur so that policy could be adjusted accordingly. Before it was abandoned in favour of a more integrated form of the Cabinet Office's regulatory impact assessment in 2004, the ownership of EPA and corresponding guidance lay with the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). However, individual

departments were responsible for applying it to their policies, which is something they first signed up to do in the 1990 Environment White Paper (HMG 1990). While EPA's focus was primarily environmental, which does not singularly constitute sustainable development, it is an 'indispensable part of the concept' (Lafferty and Hovden 2003, p.2), i.e. sustainable development performance requires EPA.

In this paper, we specifically examine how Labour applied EPA to join-up policy making for sustainable development as a critical examination of JUG in general. We feel EPA is useful object of study in this regard for three main reasons. First, the UK's attempts at environmental coordination have won the plaudits of the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development, especially for the use of innovative tools such as EPA (OECD 2002). Second, being both a tool for both evidence-based policy making and coordination, EPA is emblematic of Labour's modernising government agenda. Third, EPA significantly pre-dates Labour's focus on JUG as it was first formally introduced in 1990. (HMG 1990). Thus, in relation to similar initiatives instigated by the Labour Government, such as social exclusion, it has had a longer opportunity to become an established feature of daily Whitehall policy making.

The remainder of this paper unfolds as follows. In the next section we frame the approach used in this study by examining some of the key themes and debates in the JUG literature, particularly those relating to the use of diffuse and/or centralised approaches to JUG during policy making (Jordan and Schout, 2006). We then empirically examine the Labour Government's use of EPA in three policy case studies, namely: energy, public spending and defence. Following this, we return to the debates in the literature by critically examining the use of diffuse and/or centralised approaches to joining-up in our case studies. Finally we conclude and provide a set of reflections on JUG during policy making in the UK.

2. JOINING-UP WHITEHALL POLICY MAKING: A LITERATURE REVIEW

On the whole, there is an increasing corpus of literature on Labour's JUG agenda as well as more coordinated government in general. Much of this work: tends to focus on the conceptual details of coordination (e.g. Metcalfe 2000; Peters 1997; Peters 1998; 6, *et al.* 2002; Flinders 2002; Pollitt 2003); details the history of JUG (e.g. Hood 2005; Bogdanor 2005); and/or examines the political rationale behind Labour's pursuit of JUG (e.g. Flinders 2002; Ling 2002; Pollitt 2003; Kavanagh and Richards 2001). Overall, though, there is a dearth of detailed empirical accounts that actually examine how Labour's Modernising Government initiative has worked in practice. Those that do exist, largely deal with issues surrounding the delivery public services and/or the implementation of policy (e.g. CMPS 2000, NAO 2001; 6, *et al.* 2005; Bellamy, *et al.* 2005). As a result there are few accounts on the effectiveness of JUG during policy making.

While the existing studies on policy implementation help illuminate some of the process and issues surrounding JUG:

'...coordination issues conceptualised as implementation issues are more likely to be resolved successfully than are issues that are considered at the policy levels. Implementation issues tend to be addressed at the lower level of organisations and settled around individual client issues, while policy debate emphasises issues of turf and organisational survival' (Peters 1998, p. 308).

In other words, departmentalism is arguably more difficult to counteract during policy making as it is strategic in nature and is dominated by the political bargaining related to competing departmental interests. On the other hand, joining-up during implementation is more likely to be focused on the technical details of delivering a policy as the main policy direction will

have already been decided. Therefore, in this study of JUG we specifically focus on policy making, rather than implementation, as it might provide a different perspective on how well Labour's attempts at more joined-up action have managed to counteract the so-called pathology of departmentalism.

There is also a lack of clarity in the existing literature regarding the most appropriate means of pursuing JUG. Debates are often framed around the use of more centralised or diffuse approaches (Jordan and Schout 2006) to pursue JUG. Very simply put, centralised approaches are mainly based around minimising the amount of discretion that departmental policy makers have when dealing with cross-cutting issues. While such approaches are likely to reduce opportunities for departmentalism, they may overload the central actors (Jordan and Schout 2006, p. 44) and offer little flexibility to take account of sectoral constraints and needs, i.e. centrally imposed solutions may not necessarily be appropriate for all sectors. By contrast, diffuse approaches suggest that coordination should primarily be a concern for departments with more central actors only becoming involved were irreconcilable differences exist between departments (e.g. see Metcalfe 2000). The advantages of such an approach arguably lies in the fact that it allows for greater flexibility to take account of departmental expertise and the specific characteristics of a sector. On the other hand, the lack of strong central steering may potentially lead to a situation whereby departments follow their own separate approaches to cross-cutting priorities and address them to varying degrees, i.e. departmentalism. Overall, the existing literature tends to portray centralised and diffuse approaches as either rivals (e.g. Flinders 2002, p. 70; Peters 1998, p. 299; Metcalfe 2000) or mutually re-enforcing (e.g. 6 *et al.* 2002 p. 102; Page 2005, p. 149).

There are several accounts that list the different mechanisms, tools and/or processes that can be used to pursue more centralised or diffuse approaches to joining-up policy making (e.g. Peters 1997, 6, *et al.*, 2002, Metcalfe 2000, p. 822). One of the most exhaustive lists of centralised mechanisms, tools and processes is provided by Peters (1997). It includes: leadership by the Prime Minister through his or her personal office; the assignment of responsibility for joined-up initiatives to central departments (e.g. the Cabinet Office's management of social exclusion); the use of the cabinet and cabinet committees to manage cross-cutting objectives (e.g. the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Policy for Children); the allocation of cross-cutting issues to ministerial briefs (e.g. The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government Ruth Kelly was also given the Minister for Women brief). Peters also outlines a number of mechanisms, tools and/or processes that are less centralised but not diffuse (*ibid*) (i.e. they still seek to limit the discretion of departmental policy makers), for example: the creation of super ministries which incorporate a wide range of interrelated responsibilities that would normally be distributed across a number of departments (e.g. DEFRA which comprises of an environment and agricultural brief); the setting up of agencies or integration units within (central) departments as centres of excellence for cross-cutting themes (e.g. the Better Regulation Executive Unit in the Cabinet Office); and the establishment of inter-ministerial committees to manage multi-actor policy areas and specific JUG initiatives (e.g. the Committee of the Ministers for Sustainable Development).

The literature is generally less precise when it comes to discussing mechanisms, process and tools for more diffuse approaches to joining-up. Peter's (1997), for example, has little to say on this beyond a vague discussion on the need to create an institutional culture that embraces joined-up policy making (a theme also taken up by other authors (6, *et al.* 2002, pp. 107-109; Kavannagh and Richards 2001, p. 16)). Therefore, it is necessary to go to the wider literature to examine how such change may be engendered. Metcalfe (2000, p. 822), for instance, usefully advocates the building up the capacity of officials to join-up within departments. Capacity building in this sense includes setting up standardised rules of procedure, alongside the formal clarification of responsibilities (*ibid*: 827) for joining-up (e.g. the rules and stipulations that dictate the UK's policy consultation processes). It can also

relate to the concept of institutional learning so that policy makers are incentivised to unlearn habits and practices that might inhibit joined-up working (Metcalfe, 2000, p. 833; Ling 2002, p. 638). Such learning can be stimulated, for example, through training (Cabinet Office, 2000: Ch. 8) to build-up know-how and expertise on joining-up (e.g. the National School of Government's course on policy delivery). Institutional learning can also incorporate the drawing of lessons from past experience and from others (e.g. the UK's reporting of progress against sustainable development indicators). Another aspect of capacity building within departments may involve having appropriate tools to help bureaucrats join-up (6, *et al.* 2002, p. 109). Policy appraisal, and thus EPA, is an example of such a tool as it helps departmental policy makers identify potential spillovers of policies into other sectors (i.e. it can aid learning) and provides the same information to other departments and stakeholders.

Many of the claims about how more join-up action should ideally pursued (i.e. centrally, diffusely or a combination of both) are based on conceptual, theoretical and/or philosophical premises. As such, they need to be better tested through detailed empirical investigation. Through examining the use of EPA alongside other diffuse as well as more centralised approaches for JUG, this paper attempts to provide an empirically informed critique of the claims made in the literature.

3. JOINING-UP IN PRACTICE?

The analysis in this section draws on empirical data from three core areas of policy making case studies, namely: energy, the public spending and defence. Each case represents an example of a multi-actor policy issue with high potential for negative environmental impacts, thus necessitating the need for more coordinated action. Pollitt (2002, pp. 43-44) suggests there are three ways to assess the level of JUG, namely: focus on best practice to see if the right things are being done; seek the views of stakeholders to ask them about the quality of coordination; and/or identify the outputs in terms of improvements to policies, programmes and projects. We use all three approaches. First, we examine the quality of EPAs against DEFRA-sponsored best practice guidelines (DETR 1998),¹ which strongly advised that appraisals should: be started in the early stages of policy development (i.e. *ex ante*); use highly quantified technical rational techniques such as cost-benefit analysis; and follow nine prescribed steps.² While these guidelines were DEFRA's and therefore not entirely objective, they were promoted as the cross-governmental standard and therefore should provide an indication of whether departments were joining-up consistently. Second, we draw on empirical data from extensive interviews and detailed documentary analysis to examine the views of key stakeholders, such as academic appraisal experts, officials responsible for conducting appraisals, the parliamentary environmental audit committee (EAC), etc. Third, we examine whether EPA has actually led to outcomes that have improved policies in respect to their environmental impacts.

Energy Policy

Background

Energy is possibly one of the most environmentally unsustainable sectors in the UK (RCEP 2000, p. 1) as consumes large quantities of non-renewable resources (e.g. coal and gas), is associated with large scale atmospheric pollution (e.g. emissions of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide), etc. It is also classic example of a multi-actor sector which requires more joined-up action. The lead department in the energy sector is the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), but other government departments are also accountable for various aspects of energy policy namely: DEFRA; the Department for Transport; the former Office of the Deputy Prime Minister; the Treasury; the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; and the regulator Ofgem (Cabinet Office 2002, p. 144).

In 1998, the newly elected Labour Government made its first major intervention in the energy sector with the publication of an Energy White Paper (DTI 1998). The White Paper was primarily concerned with protecting and providing a short-term boost to the coal industry, which had been in decline following the expansion of gas-powered electricity production in the previous decade. As such, it represented a 'short-term political fix to address the threat of huge job losses in Labour's heartlands' (Jordan 2002, p. 347).

The next major energy initiative did not occur until 2001, when the Prime Minister asked his Cabinet Office-based Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU)³ to conduct an energy review. This Prime Ministerial intervention followed a critical report on the Government's climate change strategy by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (RCEP 2000), and concerns over the security of energy supplies (Jordan 2002, p. 344). According to Jordan (2002, p. 347), the PIU review 'was a serious political blow to the DTI which [had] seen its grip on energy matters slip'. The PIU review was generally critical of the purely strategic priorities presented by DTI-sponsored policies, and recommended that renewables, energy efficiency and low-carbon transport be placed at the centre of the future energy network. Furthermore, it recommended that the DTI produce a White Paper (Cabinet Office 2002, p. 162). Thus, in February 2003 Labour's second Energy White Paper (DTI 2003) was published. It was essentially a carbon copy of the PIU's Energy Review, outlining a series of high profile environmental measures such as twenty percent target for renewable energy by 2020 and a strong drive for greater energy efficiency to help combat climate change.

The appraisal of Energy Policy

The 1998 White Paper was accompanied by EPA which offered little in the way detailed analysis. Indeed, its quality and robustness was questionable when compared to official DEFRA best practice guidance (Table 1) (DETR 1998). Despite official appraisal guidance (DETR 1998) strongly advocating the use of quantification, the EPA was very descriptive containing mainly qualitative assessments. Indeed, it even failed to use a recognised appraisal technique (e.g. cost-benefit analysis).

Table 1: Fulfilment of best practice criteria by the environmental policy appraisals on the 1998 and 2003 Energy White Papers

	Is the appraisal quantified?	Is the policy issue summarised?	Are the objectives identified?	Are policy constraints mentioned?	Are many policy options considered?	Are costs and benefits adequately identified?	Are costs and benefits Compared?	Are uncertainty and sensitivity tested?	Was the preferred option selected?	Is there an evaluation/monitoring programme?
1998 Energy White Paper	X	√	√	X	X	√	X	X	X	X
2003 Energy White Paper	X	√	√	X	X	√	X	√	X	√

As demonstrated by Table 1, the EPA only met three of DEFRA's best practice criteria (DETR 1998). Crucially, it did not assess a range of options, which suggests that the EPA

was not used to develop the policy but was instead conducted at the end of the decision making process, once the key direction had been already set. In all, it is difficult, therefore, to envisage how EPA could have been used to inform the development of the White Paper or contribute information to aid coordination between the various actors involved in the White Paper.

The DTI's 2003 White Paper was published alongside a slightly more comprehensive appraisal, but notably it was a sustainability policy appraisal not an EPA. This move into uncharted waters is significant as there were no agreed criteria for sustainable development appraisal, i.e. it can be seen as an example of departmentalism. The following discussion and the analysis displayed in Table 1 uses the EPA cross-governmental best practice steps (DETR 1998) as, if done properly, a sustainability appraisal should be performed incorporate an analysis of environmental impacts.

Overall, the sustainability appraisal fulfilled five of the nine DEFRA best practice criteria (DETR 1998) (Table 1). However, like its predecessor, it failed to appraise a variety of options and to compare costs and benefits in any meaningful way. Therefore, it is difficult to see how it could have been used drive policy development and coordination between the different parts of government. Consequently, while environmental non-governmental organisations might regard the conclusions of the White Paper to be favourable (i.e. an increase in renewables and greater efforts on energy efficiency), there appears to have been little comprehensive appraisal to fully assess its environmental impact in a manner consistent with suggested cross-governmental best practice.

Critically, both the 1998 and 2003 energy White Papers looked to be little more than *ex-post* after-the-event justifications of predetermined policy directions. As an interviewee from the DTI remarked:

'...you will always get tension between people seeing the appraisal as an add-on or afterthought...When an appraisal should be done is not always a black and white issue. A lot of policy is decided on a political basis, especially high level decisions.' (emphasis added).

Thus, he implies that conducting an EPA in the early stages of policy making (as prescribed in DEFRA best-practice guidance (DETR 1998)) would be a pointless exercise as it is unlikely to affect the policy outcome, which is based on broader political priorities. Overall, it appears that the DTI did not see the iterative use of EPA as an important driver of policy development but as a legitimating device to deflect criticism from external critics such as the Parliamentary EAC and environmental pressure groups. An interviewee from the DTI nearly said as much when he remarked, 'scrutiny from external bodies [means that] we have to demonstrate that we have taken into account environmental considerations'.

Overall, the Labour Government has failed to systematically deal with some of the crucial issues related to energy policy, such as the reliance on fossil fuels and emissions of carbon dioxide, in a coherent joined-up manner. Indeed, despite the production of two energy White Papers and the PIU energy review key issues, especially surrounding climate change, were not settled leading to: the recent publication of yet another Energy Review (DTI 2005) with a focus on climate change and energy security; the commissioning of Stern Report (Stern 2006) on the economic impacts of climate change; and the development of new energy White Paper to be published later this year.

Public spending

Background

With the launch of the Spending Review (SR) process, on 24 July 1997, the Treasury gained the apparatus to ensure that public spending could be used to facilitate the Government's

long-term aims in a joined-up manner. Labour's SR is very much a centralised joining-up process as it sets firm and fixed departmental expenditure limits to ensure that their spending programmes are complementary with the core executives' (e.g. the Prime Minister, the Treasury, the Cabinet Office, etc) main objectives and priorities (EAC HC 92, session 1998-1999, para. 2). Thus, departments have 'to justify their spending and keep within [policy and delivery-oriented] targets [known as Public Service Agreements] set by the Treasury' (Richards and Smith 2002, p. 233). The principal actor in the SR is the Treasury with each department conducting its own review, which is fed into the wider process. The Treasury has a series of spending teams shadowing departments and supplying expertise as the reviews are undertaken.

The Appraisal of Public Spending

Ever since the first review, the parliamentary EAC frequently recommend that departments' bids should be appraised for environmental impacts. It argued that 'because [the SR was] a fundamental review of public expenditure, [it] amounted to a policy review of all areas... [as] once a decision is taken to fund a programme the key policy decision has already been taken' (EAC HC 92, session 1998-1999, para. 37).

To all appearances, the Government also seemed to share the EACs view. For instance, for the 1998 Review all departmental ministers were reminded by no less than the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, that departments were expected to follow existing EPA best practice guidance (DETR 1998) to integrate sustainable development into their bids (EAC HC 92, session 1998-1999, para. 11). However, it appears, that in both the 1998 and 2000 SRs few departments, including DEFRA, took heed the reminders to conduct EPA.

In response to criticisms from the EAC, the Government replied that it was not the Treasury's responsibility to police departments with regard to sustainable development, arguing that any centralised imposition of EPA was likely to be resisted by departments (EAC HC 233, session 1999-2000, Appendix 1, para. 3). Despite this position, the Treasury eventually appeared to buckle under, amongst other things, sustained criticism from the EAC (e.g. HC 233, session 1999-2000) and made sustainable development an over-arching aim of the 2002 SR. The main apparatus to achieve this aim was the introduction of a compulsory, 'separate, freestanding Sustainable Development Report (SDR)' (EAC HC 363-II, session 2001-2002, Appendix 17, para. 5), which departments had to produce to support their funding bids. Crucially, as the SDR was meant to cover environmental issues alongside economic and social ones, it is similar to, but not, an EPA. As the SDR is a separate assessment procedure that is not an integrated part of the UK's environmental and sustainable development coordination strategies, it is arguably indicative of departmentalism.

Only four of the departmental officials (from the Ministry of Defence, Inland Revenue, Cabinet Office and the Crown Prosecution Service) interviewed during this research were willing to offer insights into how their departments produced the SDRs. There was a general view that the SDR guidance issued by the Treasury was too vague. This lack of a clarity in the SDR guidance seemingly led to a variety of approaches being used by departments (Table 2), which indicates that a cross-departmental approach was not adhered to, i.e. it was seemingly departmentalized.

Table 2: Approaches used by departments to produce Sustainable Development Reports for the 2002 Comprehensive Spending Review

Department	Tools used to produce the Sustainable Development Report
<i>Cabinet Office</i>	Not Clear
<i>Customs & Excise</i>	SDR SR 2002 guidance
<i>Department for Culture Media and Sports</i>	SDR SR 2002 guidance

<i>Department Transport</i>	<i>for</i>	Integrated policy appraisal on all bids which were then aggregated
<i>Department Education and Skills</i>	<i>for</i>	Not clear
<i>Department International Development</i>	<i>for</i>	Screening, impact assessments and expertise from a cadre of professional advisors
<i>Department of Health</i>		Iterative process using Treasury guidance (SDR SR 2002 Guidance) and advice from Treasury Officials
<i>Department for Works and Pensions</i>		Not clear
<i>Department of Trade and Industry</i>		Not clear
<i>Foreign Commonwealth Office</i>	<i>and</i>	Assessed bids against core sustainable development indicators
<i>Her Majesty's Treasury</i>		SDR SR 2002 guidance
<i>Home Office</i>		Not clear
<i>Inland Revenue</i>		Not clear
<i>Lord Chancellors</i>		Not stated
<i>Department Law</i>	<i>Officers</i>	Not clear
<i>Department Environment, Food and Rural Affairs</i>	<i>for the</i>	Integrated policy appraisals were carried out on a number of proposals
<i>The Ministry of Defence</i>		The department's newly developed appraisal matrix

(Source: compiled from the Green Ministers Committee (2002: part two, para. 2.2))

Interviewees also generally believed that the SDRs were *not* used to inform their respective department's bids, i.e. least some of the SDRs were little more than cursory after-the-event justifications rather than tools to develop bids in a meaningful evidence-based manner. Yet, despite the apparently poor quality of some departments' SDRs, they still appear to have had their bids approved by the Treasury i.e. the SDRs did appear to be seriously taken into account. However, as the Treasury resisted all attempts to publish the SDRs (EAC HC 356-I, session 2001-2002, para. 52) it was difficult to assess not only the quality of the SDRs, but also how they were also used by the Treasury to prioritise government spending.

In the 2004 SR, experimentation with standalone SDRs was dropped. Instead, the Treasury suggested that for the majority of departments, sustainable development considerations should be integrated into their overall bids (HMT 2004: para. 2, 3). With this development, it is unclear how sustainable development could be consistently and coherently integrated into the spending plans of departments and how the Treasury would judge the respective impacts of the bids in a consistent joined-up manner. Indeed, this is still an ongoing issue as perhaps signified by the fact that sustainable development has been made a key priority for the 2007 SR (HMT, 2006). How it will be tackled in the review process, however, remains to be seen.

Defence Policy

Background

The Strategic Defence Review was launched early in Labour's first term of government. The review aimed to make a significant mark on defence policy by reorganising the armed forces to account for the collapse of communism and other global, social and technological changes (MoD 1998a, para. 8). The lead department in the review was the Ministry of Defence (MoD). It, however, worked in conjunction with the executive agencies such as Defence Estates, the constituent parts of the military establishment (i.e. Royal Air Force, the

Royal Navy and the Army) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (MoD 1998b, para. 8). Also, a number of external inputs were sought, including MPs, peers, local authorities, pressure groups, industry, trade unions and the public (*ibid*, para. 20). Therefore, the review's complex multi-actor nature is akin to energy policy. Moreover, the need to accommodate of 2,500 troops with drawn from Germany and changes in the activities of the armed forces had potential environmental consequences. This is especially the case given that it involved significant changes to the management of the MoD's large estate (equal to 1 % of the UK) (MoD 2000b, p. 9) which includes land in three National Parks (HC 426-III, session 1998-1999, Appendix 39) and almost 200 sites of special scientific interest (MoD 2000b, p. 9).

The appraisal of defence policy

In recognition of the potential environmental impacts of the Defence Review, the MoD published an EPA in June 2000 (MoD 2000a). An interviewee, who was involved in conducting the appraisal, suggested that the order to produce an EPA came from no less than the Secretary of State for Defence, George Robertson. Despite this central imposition, overall responsibility for producing the EPA was given to a team from the executive agency Defence Estates which chaired monthly steering group meetings with consultancies who had been contracted to conduct the bulk of the work.

According to the MoD (2000b, p. 6), the EPA process was modelled on official DEFRA best practice guidance (DETR 1998). This is reflected in the final appraisal (Table 3) which managed to fulfil eight of DEFRA's criteria. Also, in contrast to the previous case studies, the EPA was produced using a recognized appraisal methodology, namely strategic environmental assessment (SEA). However, SEA is a qualitative approach and as such it runs counter to advice given in most of the Government's appraisal guidance (e.g.: DETR 1998) which advocates technical quantified techniques such as cost-benefit analysis. Thus, the use of SEA represents another example of departmentalism as it does not follow official best practice (DETR 1998).

Table 3: Fulfilment of environmental policy appraisal best practice criteria by the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Defence Review

	Is the appraisal quantified?	Is the policy issue summarised?	Are the objectives identified?	Are policy constraints mentioned?	Are many policy options considered?	Are costs and benefits adequately identified?	Are costs and benefits compared?	Are uncertainty and sensitivity tested?	Was the preferred option selected?	Is there an evaluation/monitoring programme?
The Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Strategic Defence Review	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	√

Notably, stakeholder consultation and coordination appeared to have played an important role in the EPA. Initially, a formal advisory group was established, comprising of the relevant statutory bodies (e.g. English Nature) and DEFRA (EAC HC 426-III, session 1998-1999, Appendix 4). Furthermore local planning authorities and non-governmental organisations

were consulted. According to an interviewee they were presented with a 'variety of options' and were allowed 'to choose the ones that they felt were better'. Thus, the EPA appeared to be used as a conduit for coordination amongst the various stakeholders and was thus more in line with the spirit of JUG.

At first glance, therefore, it seems that the SEA can be viewed as an example of fairly good EPA practice, with a more inclusive joined-up approach. However, on closer inspection, it failed to address a vital component of the official EPA guidance: the requirement for the appraisal 'to run alongside the development of a policy' (DETR 1998, para. 5.5). In fact, it appears that the SEA process actually began two years *after* the Defence Review was initiated (EAC HC 426-III, session 1998-1999, Appendix 39; ENDS 2000, p. 15), i.e. it was more an exercise in mitigating the impacts of a highly level policy initiative than an *ex ante* driver of JUG. That said, it did have some impact on the final review outcomes, with 64 of its recommendations being taken on board in the final version of the Defence Review (MoD 2000b, pp. 17-27).

In all, despite the MoD having a robust system in place for project and programme appraisal, the SEA of Defence Review remains the only major strategic EPA undertaken by the MoD. This is the case despite the fact that many of the defence sector's activities still have a potentially significant impact on the environment (e.g. radiation contamination from the use of depleted uranium in armour piercing munitions (Royal Society 2003)). As such, there are still major environmental spillover effects related to defence policy that are unresolved.

4. CENTRALISED OR DIFFUSE APPROACHES TO JOINING-UP: A DISCUSSION

Overall, a comparison of the three policy-focused cases shows little evidence of environmental coordination occurring in a manner consistent cross-governmental JUG. For instance, the quality of appraisals in the energy and spending review cases was so poor that they were unlikely to have driven the development of policies or, for that matter, to have provided high-quality information on potential spillovers around which coordination between actors could occur. The appraisal of the Defence Review on the other hand, despite some of its aforementioned shortcomings, did generate data that was actually used to adjust policy and to consult with other interested parties. Crucially, though, all three cases demonstrate *inter alia* that the use of EPA was inconsistent and sectorized, despite being a keystone tool in the UK's environmental coordination strategy. For instance, none of the cases fully follows official EPA best practice (DETR 1998). In fact, the SDRs in the 2002 SR and the sustainability appraisal of the 2003 Energy White Paper (DTI 2003) were not even EPAs, and thus separate to existing cross-governmental procedure.

In order to examine why attempts at environmental coordination were frustrated it is useful to return to some of the aforementioned debates on whether it is better to either pursue use JUG with more centralised or diffuse approaches, or a combination of both (e.g. see Metcalfe 2000; Peters 1998; Flinders 2002).

Centralised processes were evident in the empirical data primarily in the form political leadership (6, *et al.* 2002, p. 105; Ling 2002, p. 638) and the involvement of central departments (Peters 1997). Political leadership was particularly seen in the energy case study, as demonstrated by the Prime Minister's intervention through the PIU to green energy policy, and the in defence case study by the Secretary of State's demands that an EPA be produced. Leadership by a central department, coupled with some earlier political leadership by the Deputy Prime Minister, was evident in the public spending case when the Treasury imposed a compulsory sustainable development report (akin to EPA) on departments for the 2002 SR. Given, then, the poor compliance with cross-departmental best practice guidance in each of the three cases, on the surface at least, it looks as if leadership might not be as important as some authors (e.g. 6, *et al.* 2002, p. 105; Peters 1997, pp. 28-13; Ling 2002, p. 638) make out.

That said, the high-level leadership observed in each of the cases was in fact very fitful. Accordingly, there are questions over the level of commitment behind it. Crucially, in each of the cases, central involvement was arguably sparked by external pressures (e.g. from parliament through the EAC, green pressure groups, etc) and the heightened political salience of the policy issues. For instance, it appears that the Prime Minister's involvement in energy policy was in part a response to concerns expressed about climate change by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution. Similarly, continuous criticism from the EAC appeared, in part, to lead the Treasury to centrally impose SDRs on departments in the 2002 Review. Also, the scale of military reorganisation associated with the Defence Review and its potential environmental impacts, arguably lead the Defence Secretary to intervene. Thus, it seems as if the leadership in each case resulted from reaction to external pressures rather than from the proactive commitment of the central actors and institutions involved. Thus while leadership was observed, it was arguably perfunctory as reflected by the fact that little appeared to have been done to ensure that established cross-government best practice procedures (DETR 1998) were consistently followed.

Tellingly, the central approaches observed in the case studies may have in fact retarded joining-up by departments. For instance, sustained and committed top-down leadership might in some instances lead to increased departmental resistance. Indeed, in the SR there seemed to be some evidence that departments were opposed to the integration of environmental concerns into the process and, in a similar vein, the DTI only appeared to pay lip service to EPA, despite the Prime Minister's intervention to green energy policy. Moreover, in all three cases the appraisals appeared to be after-the-event justifications conducted once the main policy direction had been set, i.e. they were arguably produced in such a way as to minimize the impact on the final policy outcomes (EAC HC 961, session 2002-2002, para. 35). That said, once the decision had been made to appraise the Defence Review there appeared to a committed response from officials in Defence Estates to engage with EPA in a meaningful way. Thus, attempts at joining-up, even if centrally imposed, may well falter, unless the departmental culture is sympathetic towards the cross-cutting issue in question or even joining-up *per se* (6, *et al.* 2002, pp. 107-109).

There is a possibility that JUG for sustainable development may not have been taken on board by departments because of a lack of diffuse approaches to support the production of EPA. For example, it may simply be the case that they did not necessarily know what was required of them. Even if they did know what to do, they may not have had the administrative capacity (e.g. rules of procedure, know-how, expertise, etc.) (Metcalf 2000) to produce them in a manner consistent with cross-governmental best practice guidance (DETR, 1998). Crucially, in the energy and defence cases, there was either ignorance, reluctance or an inability to quantify environmental impacts, as advocated by best practise guidance (DETR 1998). Quantifying environmental impacts can involve complex modelling and as such may be off putting to decision makers if they have insufficient skills to do this or a limited awareness of where they could go to get help. Therefore, while it is important to have tools in place to help policy makers join-up (6, *et al.* 2002, p.109), if they are not well suited to policy makers' needs or are overly technical, then they might not be applied properly, if at all. Moreover, without appropriate capacity among policy makers and commitment by departments, very little in the way of institutional learning, a seemingly important aspect of JUG (Ling 2002, p. 638), is likely to occur. Indeed, bar the perhaps the defence case study, the empirical data presented in this study revealed scant evidence of learning. For example, EPAs (and similar tools) were: of poor quality; had little effect on policy outcomes; and produced little high-quality information on environmental policy spillovers around which the different parts of government could coordinate and adjust their positions accordingly.

5. JOINING-UP OR PULLING APART?

The main aim of this paper was to provide a critical examination of JUG in the UK during policy formulation. Overall the findings contradict claims that JUG has now permeated into the culture of Whitehall (Bogdanor 2005, p. 16). It also contrasts radically to more positive conclusions reached elsewhere on JUG during policy implementation (e.g. NAO 2001). So while JUG may now be an established part of the daily rhetoric of Whitehall, it is not necessarily an established feature of departments' policy making activities, at least in the case of sustainable development.

The three policy making cases presented in this paper suggest that joining-up for sustainable development in the UK was highly departmentalized, i.e. it was being frustrated by one of the very things it is trying to counteract. The analysis, therefore, is sympathetic with claims made by other authors (e.g. Richards and Smith 2002, p. 9) that departmentalism is a significant feature of UK decision making. Moreover, the rather *ad hoc*, inconsistent and perfunctory nature of JUG observed in the three case very much echoes Page's (2005, 153) observations that 'effective solutions to non-joined-up behaviour are likely to be incremental and piecemeal rather than general and comprehensive', at least from a policy making perspective.

One of the aims of this paper was to identify the most effective balance of centralised and diffuse approaches to joining-up. In all, it appears to support the claims that a two-pronged approach employing a combination both centralised and diffuse processes is important (Metcalf 2000; 6, *et al.* 2002, p. 102; Page 2005, p. 149). For example, as the cases demonstrate, compliance with cross-cutting best practice guidance was poor in the presence of only intermittent leadership from senior political figures and/or central departments, two of the prominent centralised processes mentioned in the JUG and coordination literature (e.g. 6, *et al.* 2002, p. 105; Peters 1998; Ling 2002, p. 638). Therefore, it is not simply enough to say that leadership is needed; it must be sustained and backed-up by high-level commitment throughout the whole policy-making process so that it is more resilient to outside pressures (e.g. lobbying, competing agendas, shifting priorities, etc).

Even with such centralised approaches, there is no guarantee that departments will join-up in a manner consistent with cross-government best practice, especially if departmental resistance is strong and/or if departmental capacity is lacking due to a paucity of appropriate diffuse processes. In particular, the cases studies show *inter alia* the importance of having tools that are suitable for policy makers' needs (6, *et al.* 2002, p.109) and targeted programmes to build capacity and promote learning (e.g. training and centres of expertise) (Ling 2002, p. 638). Crucially, culture does seem to matter (6, *et al.* 2002, p. 107-109; Kavannagh and Richards 2001, p. 16). For example, despite intermittent leadership in all three of the case studies, appraisal was only seriously embraced in the defence review were at the time, there was seemingly a sympathetic *culture* towards EPA within the sector. It could, therefore, be argued that, irrespective of training, etc, it is important that appropriate incentives are established (e.g. budgets, career paths) to engender the type of cultural change that may encourage departmental policy makers to engage with cross-cutting issues.

On a final note, the findings of this paper suggest that there are at least three agendas for future research. First, while we have attempted to unpack and test the various debates over the use of centralised or diffuse approaches to joining-up, there is a need for further work in this area. For example, some issues, such as centralised political leadership, remain poorly defined and theorized. Such work could draw on other experiences where attempts have been made to change in Whitehall practice such as New Public Management in the 1980s. Second, there is a need to better theorize departmentalism to provide deeper understanding of how it can frustrate attempts to join-up. There are at least three relevant theoretical perspectives that may offer insights into why departments might have narrow sectoral

viewpoints, namely: bureau-shaping, where self-interested senior bureaucrats pursue prestigious policy projects (Dunleavy 1991); new institutionalism, where specific cultures develop due to repeated social interactions within a department (Powell and DiMaggio 1991); and policy networks, whereby powerful external actors in a given policy sector influence policy outcomes (Rhodes 1997). Finally, there is undoubtedly a need for more detailed empirical research to see if the patterns observed in this paper that show a lack of joined-up policy making are more widespread, or particular to sustainable development. If they do appear to be more commonplace, then major questions will need to be asked about the overall success of current approaches to JUG in UK policy making.

End Notes

¹ DEFRA inherited this guidance from its predecessor, the Department of the Environment, Transport and Regions.

² The nine best practice steps as outlined by EPA best practice (DETR 1998) are: summarize the policy issue; identify the policy objectives; set out a range of policy options including, do nothing; detail any constraints; identify a range of costs and benefits; compare costs and benefits; highlight any uncertainty in the data; state preferred option giving reasons; outline future monitoring/evaluation plans.

³ The PIU now forms part of the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit.

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