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For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives

In the valley of its saying where executives

Would never want to tamper

W. H. Auden, 1979, p. 82

Introduction

There are many claims that the involvement of national governments with the cultural policy sector tends to err towards being undertaken reluctantly and with relatively low levels of practical support (Gray, 2009; McCall, 2009; Mulcahy, 2006; Rindzeviciute, 2008; Wyszomirski, 1999). Such a position for national governments can be explained as being a consequence of political choices to avoid accusations of state censorship or manipulation, or a lack of political significance being attached to the policy sector in comparison with such matters as the economy, foreign affairs, health, education or trade (Gray, 2002). Despite such claims, however, there is no doubt that national governments have become increasingly active in the field of cultural policy since the late-1950s/early-1960s (see, for example, Duelund, 2003 on Scandinavia; Craik, 2007 on Australia; and Looseley, 1995 on France) with the creation of new government departments with responsibility for culture, or the re-naming of existing departments to incorporate an explicit reference to ‘culture’ as part of their remit (see Gray, 2000 on Britain; the Finnish Ministry of Education will be re-titled the Ministry of Education and Culture in early 2010¹).

Even with this, however, there is no doubt that national governments spend relatively little on the cultural sector in comparison with other policy sectors – in the countries of the European Union, for example, expenditure on culture varies between 0.4% and 2.0% of national budgets (European Parliament, 2006). Whether this is an adequate measure of the significance of culture to national governments, however, is a different matter: most national treasuries/exchequers/finance ministries, for example, spend relatively small amounts of money but their significance accrues as a consequence of their functional importance to the rest of the governmental machinery: indeed Rose (1987, p. 256) argued in his study of British ministries and ministers that ‘all six ministers ranking high in political status are below average in spending’. The fact that cultural ministries and departments do not spend large sums on providing goods and services may not, therefore, be an indicator of their significance either to the governmental machinery that they are a part of, or to the government *per se*.

The intention of this article is to provide an empirical assessment of the status of the British Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) within the British machinery of state. Such an assessment may provide a basis for justifying the claim that ‘culture’ is of low priority and status to, at least, the British government. In doing so it will also identify how far such an assessment could be developed to allow for a comparative evaluation of national culture departments that would extend the empirical foundation for such claims to other countries and other political systems. Such a development will also serve to establish an alternative empirical basis for the analysis of cultural policy issues that goes beyond the currently predominant discursive and interpretive approaches to the subject.

Assessing Departments and Ministriesⁱⁱ

It is, perhaps, surprising that there has been relatively little work undertaken within political science and public administration to assess the relative status of government departments given the centrality of such organisations to both the making and implementation of public policyⁱⁱⁱ. Whilst a great deal of work has been undertaken to analyse many other features of public bureaucratic structures in both a national and comparative sense (see the summaries in Lodge, 2007; Brans, 2007), the relative differences in status and importance (either real or ascribed) between departments and ministries has not been so investigated. More usually departments and ministries are discussed in terms of their functional role (see Hennessy, 1989, pp. 381-2), the structural basis of their organisation (Peters, 2010, pp. 139-55), the processes of administrative reform (Toonen, 2007), patterns of internal management and functioning (Ferlie *et al*, 2005), or the political role of senior bureaucrats (Page & Wright, 2007).

An important exception to this came with Rose’s (1987, pp. 84-91) ranking of the political significance of departments/ministries in Britain. This ranking was based on:

- ✗ how much of the legislation that departments introduced was subject to partisan division in Parliament;
- ✗ how often departments were reported on the front page of *The Times* (then, if not now, the ‘paper of record’);
- ✗ whether a department was a stepping-stone to promotion for ministers or an end in itself;

✘ and whether ministers chaired Cabinet Committees or not.

This produced a general ranking of departments as being of high, medium or low political status. With hindsight it is possible to identify the historical specificity of this ranking as education was classed as being of low political importance, a status which changed shortly after the book was published with the passing of the Education Reform Act in 1988 and the subsequent increase in political importance of the field of education within the British political system. Since the publication of Rose's book not only has education increased in significance but central government in Britain as a whole has also been subject to the normal processes of administrative reform and change. Whilst this has been an ever-present reality in British government (see, historically, Mackenzie & Grove, 1957, ch. 11; Pollitt, 1984), this process has led to the creation of new administrative and managerial patterns within central government that have transformed the landscape that Rose was addressing. In this article the analysis of departmental importance develops from Rose's original model to incorporate the developments that have taken place over the last 20 years, it also extends the analysis that Rose undertook to incorporate a larger number of factors and makes use of different techniques to assess departmental status and significance.

It is not intended in this article to assess the validity, or otherwise, of the reforms that governments have undertaken with regard to their state machinery, or to assess the effectiveness or administrative (in)efficiencies that such reforms have given rise to. The focus, instead, is on the extent to which it is possible to identify the general pattern of significance that can be attached to different government departments over a period of time, and to use this to assess whether the DCMS appears to be important for British central government as a whole. As such the article is concerned with one dimension of the politics of cultural policy – the internal politics of states – rather than with other analyses of power, ideology and legitimacy. While this may be limiting it is worth noting that even after the recent Spending Review in Britain the DCMS is still due to spend £5.6 billion in 2010-11 (Treasury, 2010c, p. 65), indicating that there is a real, practical, significance to questions of state organisation for the cultural sector.

Factors for Analysis

The analysis which will be undertaken is in two parts. The first involves a quantitative assessment of departmental significance based upon ranking a number of distinct variables, some of which are discrete, some of which are continuous. As such the final comparison of departmental status must be treated with some caution as the variables that are involved are not directly comparable in type with

each other^{iv}. The use of rank ordering, however, allows for some basic assessments of departmental importance to be made that are not dependent upon the specifics of data form. The extent to which the variables that have been selected are appropriate measures for the comparison must also be questioned as while they assess different dimensions of departmental status they are not necessarily the only, or even necessarily the best, set of variables that could have been chosen^v. As the intention of the article is exploratory, however, it is not intended that the comparison be seen as the final word on the subject, only that it is one potential mechanism by which departmental status can be investigated. The second form of analysis utilises Crisp Set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (csQCA). This can be traced back to the 19th century work of John Stuart Mill (Ragin, 1987, p. 12) and is an emerging methodology within the social sciences (see Ragin, 2000; Wagemann & Schneider, 2007; Rihoux & Ragin, 2009). It utilises qualitative data to identify the presence or absence of cases from a defined set (in this case whether a department is significant or important to government as a whole). As such it utilises different forms of data and assesses them differently than the simple rank-ordering of the quantitative approach. The use of both forms of analysis can serve as a cross-check of the relative status of departments to government as a whole.

Quantitative Analysis of Data

The factors that are analysed here are:

- The relative growth or decline of departmental expenditure over time
- The age of the department
- The number of cabinet committees that departmental ministers attend
- The number of cabinet committees that are chaired by departmental ministers
- The number of Public Service Agreements that departments contribute to
- The number of pieces of legislation originating from each department
- Press coverage of departments

The reasons for assessing these, and how they are to be assessed, vary but are based upon assumptions about what could be assessed as making a department important in terms of governmental activity as a whole. These assumptions are based upon ideas about the relative status, rather than the absolute

status, of departments in relation to each other. For this reason looking at the sheer amount of money that departments spend is not relevant as, at the very least, departments that have responsibility for open-ended policies that have created 'entitlement' programmes (Peters, 2010, pp. 8-9) (such as state pensions have tended to be) are always likely to spend more than departments which have responsibility for discretionary activities (such as arts support has tended to be). As such, the amount of money that is spent is a function of the programmes that the department has responsibility for rather than anything to do with the department in relation to other departments. An examination of relative shares in increases or cuts in public expenditure, however, does compare the support that is given to the department as a whole and can be taken as indicative of how far the programmes (and policies) of the departments concerned are supported (or not) by the executive. Thus, while entitlement programmes simply require people to fall within categories of entitlement political actors can still make choices about whether to increase or decrease how much this entitlement is worth. Regardless of whether the economic climate is good or poor (or, more recently, simply awful) the choices that political actors make about the sharing of financial pleasure or pain is an indication of the relative status of departments in comparison with each other. This variable is assessed by ranking the changes in budget from year-to-year between 1993/4 and 2006/7 (Treasury, 2010b) and aggregating these rankings.

Given that British government departments have been subject to a great deal of re-structuring over this time the budget changes that have been examined are those concerning areas of functional responsibility with these being related to the current government department that has responsibility for the function concerned. It is perhaps not surprising to discover (see Table 1) that the departments responsible for school education and health appear to have been the most successful in increasing their budgetary allocations given the overt political support given to these functions by politicians from opposing parties from 1993 to 2007. In terms of the assessment of the significance of the DCMS for government as a whole it is possible that the creation of the department *ab initio* in 1992 may have inflated financial allocations at the start of the period (its ranking between 2000 and 2007 fell to eighth). The same phenomenon may also have been in place for the Department of Energy and Climate Change which was established at a later date. To check this a shorter time-span of 1996/7 to 2006/7 was also examined to see whether the creation of the DCMS had inflated its financial allocation. While there is a high correlation between these two rankings (a Spearman's correlation coefficient of 0.865, significant at the .01 level (two-tailed test)) across all departments the DCMS fell in rank order on this variable from third to seventh. The rearranging of rankings across all of the departments involved would indicate that age alone is not necessarily the key factor involved given

the high correlation that exists between the two financial measures. As a consequence the rankings of the longer time-period were used as these incorporated more data.

(Table 1 around here)

At its most simple the age of a government department is an indicator of how important the function that is contained within it is perceived to be for government as a whole. Thus, the management of the money of the state is central to the functioning of the state as a whole in a way that is not necessarily true of providing an educational system and it is thus usual for states to have finance ministries/treasuries before they have education departments^{vi}. Even here, however, there are difficulties involved: in Britain there were developed systems for collecting and spending money by the government before the Norman Conquest in 1066 but the management of this money was divided between multiple organisations with a basic organising principle appearing to be ‘flexibility carried to the point of fluidity’ (Roseveare, 1969, p. 19). This elasticity of management means that identifying a clear location for the exercise of financial management and control with a clear, single, date of origin is problematic. Likewise in the case of the DCMS ministers for various of the functions that are currently located in the department were created over a period of years in a variety of departmental locations: broadcasting, for example, was originally located in the Post Office (which itself goes back to the 16th century in Britain), while the arts were originally located in the Treasury until the creation of the first Minister for the Arts in 1965 when they were transferred to the Department of Education and Science (Pollitt, 1984, p. 187). The creation of the DCMS in 1992 (as the Department of National Heritage: Gray, 2000, pp. 59-60) does mark, however, a clear structural break with the past by consolidating a range of individual functions in a department headed by a cabinet minister, which had never been the case before. This is not unusual in British government and this variable becomes difficult to assess when departments are merged, or fragment, into new forms: is ‘age’ to be taken from the creation of the new department or from the original functional development? In the present case the emphasis has been on the functional continuity of governmental activities, regardless of the shifts in title and content of the departments concerned with managing activities. Thus, the current British Department for Work and Pensions was created in 2001 but it has direct central government antecedents going back to the establishment of the Ministry of Pensions in 1916 (King, 1958, p. 10)^{vii}. Where such a link is evident it seems appropriate to date the age of the department from its first appearance as a formal ministry/department headed by a minister, even if precursors demonstrate a longer involvement of the centre with the function. Thus, education in Britain only became a formal department headed by a minister in 1944, even though education was overseen by a Board of Education from the 19th century. Similarly, local government was overseen by a Local Government

Board from 1871, became part of the Ministry of Health in 1919 and became an independent department in 1951 (even if the departmental name was shared with housing: Sharpe, 1969, pp. 11-16). This variable is simply ranked in terms of the date of establishment of the first independent department that was directly answerable to the national executive that carried out the function that persists to the current day. For the oldest governmental functions this may mean direct answerability to the monarch or to the Privy Council but for more recent creations it concerns ministers with a seat in Cabinet. Thus, while the Ministry of Defence dates to 1946 (Hennessy, 1989, p. 412), its position as a cabinet ministerial post (or equivalent) long ante-cedes this, with the Admiralty originating in the 14th century (Mackenzie & Grove, 1957, p.176), with this position being directly traceable to the current Ministry of Defence. On this basis government departments have been ranked from oldest to youngest (Mackenzie & Grove, 1957, pp. 176-7) in Table 1.

The involvement of ministers, as departmental representatives, in the executive functions of governmental work that is undertaken in cabinet committees is an indication of how far ministries are seen as being relevant to the development of policy, and the co-ordination of government action, and, as Moran (2005, p. 121) noted, ‘assignment to Cabinet committees is an important indicator of place in the political pecking order, with the prize of Chair of the most important committees going to the most powerful ministers’. In July 2009 there were 45 Cabinet Committees in existence, ranging from PSX (Public Services and Public Expenditure) to MISC 35 (Ageing) (Cabinet Office, 2010). While membership of these committees is in the gift of the Prime Minister their freedom to act is not complete. Certain Ministers, by the nature of the functions that their departments undertake, would necessarily need to be on certain committees that are directly related to the exercise of that function: not to have the Secretary of State for Defence on the NSID (National Security, International Relations and Development) would be a questionable use of departmental expertise. With some committees, however, the clarity of these functional requirements is, perhaps, not so clear-cut: why the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, for example, should be on the Economic Development Sub-Committee on the Olympic and Paralympic Games (ED(OPG)) is by no means self-evident. In this case the allocation of seats on committees can be utilised as a measure of how far particular ministers and departmental interests are seen to be important for the functioning of the executive system as a whole. The fewer the committees that a department is represented on the more likely it is that the department is perceived – by the Prime Minister if no one else – to have relatively little importance in the grand scheme of governmental activity. Alternatively, the fewer the committees that are sat upon the less central a department could be seen to be to the co-ordination of overall governmental activity, and the less it contributes to the major policy concerns of government. This variable was assessed in two ways: firstly, the number of committees that are sat on in total by Secretaries and Ministers of

State is taken as an indication of the centrality of any given department to the overall functioning of the government; and, secondly, the number of committees that are chaired by departmental ministers is used as an indicator of the political significance of the departmental head (and, by proxy, of the department itself). Both of these measures are taken from Cabinet Committee membership in 2009 (Cabinet Office 2010). The second ranking (of committees chaired) demonstrated, as may have been expected, a concentration of control in the hands of the Prime Minister (chairing 27% of all committees) and the Chancellor of the Exchequer or the Chief Secretary to the Treasury chairing another 22% of committees. For the other departments concerned five chaired only one committee and two chaired no committees at all. On this basis while there is some indicative value to the variable it was excluded from the final ranking in Table 1, which is based on total committee membership.

The involvement of departments with the delivery of government policy is an indicator of the spread of departmental activity across service areas. Even with the multi-functional nature of most government departments (the DCMS, for example, takes its title from three areas of activity that are treated as being identifiably separate policy sectors - culture, media and sport – with each of these having different component elements within them, such as the performing arts, museums and galleries, libraries, creative industries, copyright and cultural property, gambling, tourism, sport and broadcasting amongst many others (DCMS, 2010)) there are still important areas where the work of departments intersect with each other, either in meeting specific functional ends, or in contributing to the creation of over-arching government policy. In the case of the former, for example, housing and education can both be involved in improving the standard of people's health. In the case of the latter, all government departments might be expected to contribute to something as large as the creation of a 'green', 'sustainable' environmental policy for governments to pursue, even if their individual contribution is not directly concerned with such a policy. This departmental involvement with the overall actions of government can, in the case of Britain, be assessed by reference to the Public Service Agreements (PSAs) that are intended to provide the objectives of government policy, how departments are intended to contribute to the fulfilment of these objectives, and to provide a basis for assessing the performance of government (Treasury, 2010a). In the United Kingdom there are 30 PSAs in existence for the period 2008-11. They identify a range of policy priorities and responsibilities for government departments to contribute to. The level of involvement in these PSAs that different departments have can be taken as an indication of their functional contribution to the overall attainment of government policy objectives. Departments are ranked in terms of the numbers of PSAs that they contribute to. It should be noted, however, that the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) was only created after the PSAs were agreed. DECC does lead on one PSA (PSA 27: Lead the global effort to avoid dangerous climate change) but is otherwise noticeable by its

explicit absence of reference to other PSAs in its 2009 Autumn Performance Report (DECC, 2009)^{viii}. Tied rankings on this measure were avoided by taking into account the number of PSAs that departments lead on^{ix}.

While Rose (1987, pp. 85-6) was concerned with legislative dissension as a measure of ministerial status, providing the opportunity for ministers to demonstrate their capabilities to the House of Commons as a whole – and such performance has been recognised as being important for parliamentary career advancement (Theakston, 1987, p. 41) – this is not necessarily the most appropriate measure for assessing the status of departments within the governmental system, being concerned with ministerial performance rather than anything else. Parliamentary time for passing legislation is a limited commodity and the amount of legislation that departments manage to steer through Parliament can be taken as an indicator of the importance of the legislation for government as a whole, and of the relative status of different departments in terms of overall governmental activity: the time taken on one department's legislation means that less is available for other departments to make use of. The role of financial legislation is indicative of legislative importance: governments cannot function without Parliamentary approval to raise and spend money but they can survive and operate without having a new law being passed concerning public health or street lighting – or defence or social security. As a measure of the importance of departments for the functioning of government as a whole, therefore, the number of Bills that get translated into Acts of Parliament serves as an effective indicator of the priority of the policy proposals that individual departments may produce. Thus the centrality of taxation and expenditure legislation arising from the Treasury for the continued functioning of government would imply a relatively high ranking for the Treasury on this measure as compared with other Departments that are less dependent on legislation for their activities. This, again, is measured by a ranking of the number of Acts of Parliament that departments have generated between 1992 and 2008 (House of Commons 1993-2008).

Press coverage of departments is one measure of how far they appear in the public eye. Whether this coverage is concerned with perceived departmental failings or successes, or with policy statements, or simply with detailing what departments are doing, their relative press coverage says something about the newsworthiness of different departments and can be taken as a proxy for their perceived public importance. A department that is deemed unimportant, for whatever reason, is unlikely to generate as much coverage as a department that is seen as being important by the press. Stories in *The Times* (1992-2005), and in *The Guardian* (1992-2000) were covered in this and, again, departments were ranked in terms of national broadsheet coverage. There was a high level of correlation between these

two measures (a Spearman's correlation coefficient of 0.828, significant at the .01 level (two-tailed test)), indicating that Rose's (1987, p. 87) claim that 'the tendency of the media to follow each other' is accurate, and coverage in *The Times* was finally used as that data was available over a longer time. The anticipation that there would be a large number of stories concerning the DCMS in 1992 (the year of its creation) was borne out but even if this year were excluded from consideration it made no difference to the final rank ordering.

Qualitative Analysis of Data

The utilisation of csQCA allows the development of an alternate approach to the analysis of departmental significance and centrality to governments. Rather than dealing with quantitative data csQCA uses qualitative material to construct a means to identify how particular outcomes are created. To do this an outcome is specified (in this case whether central government departments are significant or not), and the contributing conditions that lead to this outcome are clarified. These conditions are based upon qualitative judgements of the meaning of the factors for their contribution to the outcome. In each case the factor is deemed, in a qualitative fashion, to be either present (assigned as 1) or absent (assigned as 0). In the current case the four conditions that are used are:

- ✦ Policy sector significance: assessed in terms of how much coverage each policy sector received in the manifestos of the political party winning each general election between 1992 and 2009 (ie. The Conservative manifesto of 1992 and the Labour manifestos of 1997, 2001 and 2005). The greater the coverage as measured by the number of lines in each manifesto devoted to the policy sector the more important the policy sector is deemed to be. In csQCA terms this translates into a binary split where 400 lines or more over the four manifestos is classed as 1 and fewer lines is classed as 0. (Figures taken from Conservative Party, 1992; Labour Party, 1997, 2001, 2005)
- ✦ Functional centrality: this is assessed in terms of staffing connected to departments. In each case staffing was divided between those employed in the central department; those employed in implementing Executive Agencies; and those employed in arm's-length Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs). The lower the proportion of staff located in the central department the greater the department's functional centrality (in other words, the greater the proportion of staff implementing departmental policy in Executive Agencies and NDPBs the less the proportion of staff creating that policy indicating a centralisation of policy-making power), thus a low ratio of central to total staff is classed as 1, and a high ratio is classed as 0.
- ✦ Departmental remit: if the functional remit of a department is clear it would mean that there is a clear definition of what the department is concerned with in policy terms. The less clear the remit

the more problematic it is to identify a clear policy focus to the work of the department. Thus defence is clearly defined in terms of the utilisation of military power whilst the DCMS is poorly defined as a result of its functional differentiation^x. Clarity of definition is classed as 1, absence of clarity is classed as 0.

- ✘ Ministerial Career Trajectory: this is based on an assessment of whether particular departments are seen as being at the pinnacle of ministerial ambition or whether they are stepping-stones on the way to higher political things. In terms of the Departments that are covered in the present analysis the Treasury and Home Office are normally seen as two of the top four posts in British government (alongside the Prime Minister and foreign secretary: see Berlinski *et al*, 2007, p. 250, 2009, p. 63). Rose (1987, p.60) assigned high importance to Health, Social Security (now Work and Pensions) and Defence alongside the Treasury and Home Office. Such qualitative assessments were used as the basis to assign high ranking, in career terms, departments a classification of 1, other departments a classification of 0.

Departmental significance and centrality (the end-state to be explained) is determined on the basis of qualitative assessments of these in terms of the overall work of European liberal-democratic governments within the context of welfare state capitalism^{xi}. On this basis the core defining functions of states (defence, law and order, and tax collection) are necessarily important; the role of the state in undertaking some form of economic management is central to the practical survival of the overall economic system within which states operate (as with state intervention to manage the current recession); and support for certain welfare functions has largely been accepted as an appropriate activity for states. In comparative terms support for education and children would appear to be of greater importance to European and other Western states than other welfare functions such as health and pensions which are often managed through compulsory insurance schemes which are provided by the private sector rather than directly by the state. These choices are, of course, pre-judging the relative status of government departments but in terms of qualitative comparative analysis what is important is how this status is determined by the presence or absence of other factors. Thus, the end result has to be demonstrated to be valid on the basis of these factors, not in terms of the selection of significance that is made.

Table 2 provides the allocations of departments between these factors in the form of a Table of Configurations (Truth Table) (see Rihoux & Ragin, 2009, p. 184) (ie. whether departments are within the appropriate set or not). The information in Table 2 can be manipulated through a process of

minimisation to create a range of alternative paths to the final outcome of departmental significance. These paths would also indicate whether the assignment of significance (the outcome) is a reasonable one to draw from the qualitative assessments that are being used. In this case three alternative paths to this outcome can be identified which share equifinality in the sense of being equally important as possible explanations for why departments have significance (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009, p. 17). These are outlined in Table 3 where the presence of a condition for the outcome is indicated by UPPER-CASE notation, and absence by lower-case. This indicates also that there are no other departments that contradict these paths to significance.

(Table 2 around here)

(Table 3 around here)

A diagrammatic representation of these findings is given in Figure 1 where departments are displayed in terms of their linkage to the variables that have been used in the qualitative analysis. The DCMS can be seen to share the same space as the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs but with none of the other departments that have been examined and which take distinct positions within this representation.

(Figure 1 around here)

Conclusions

On the basis of the alternative methods for assessing departmental significance it appears that there is some similarity of outcome. Both quantitatively and qualitatively the Treasury, Business, Innovation & Skills, Children, Families & Schools, and the Justice/Home Office nexus are clearly deemed to be of greater importance than are other departments by governments in the United Kingdom. Quantitatively the Department of Health is also important, even if qualitatively it would not appear to be so central. On the other hand the Ministry of Defence is qualitatively important but is not so quantitatively. All of the other departments that have been examined, however, would appear to be of relatively minor significance in terms of the overall functioning of the government machinery of Britain. Such a finding should not be taken to mean that these departments are of little, if any, use to

governments, only that in the departmental pecking order they consistently appear to be towards the bottom of the heap.

In terms of the DCMS the department does not appear to have many advantages: apart from having relatively high shares in increased governmental spending (and even that declines in significance post-1996/7), and a high level of functional centrality as a result of having a small core of central staff and a large number of arm's-length organisations (NDPBs) that have actual implementation responsibilities, there is little to indicate that in relative terms the department has a greater importance for the overall functioning of government than other departments have. The explanations that have been proposed for this lack of central significance have generally referred to matters of specific sectoral characteristics, involving lack of political support or interest in the sector (Gray, 2000; 2002), the dependency on arm's-length forms of organisation for the implementation of cultural policy (see the general discussion of this point in Craik, 2007), and the complexity of the sector and the lack of clarity about what it is intended to do in terms of public policy (Gray, 2009). More recently Nesbitt (2010) has argued that the DCMS is defined as much by its relationship to other departments as by its own status: the reactive nature of policy statements from the DCMS to external criteria and policy concerns may indicate that the department is a hostage to instrumental concerns that it has limited control over, and it is this that leads to the relative lack of centrality of the DCMS. By taking different approaches to the assessment of sectoral significance that extend beyond these particular points to consider what makes any government department important, not just cultural departments, the relative lack of centrality of the DCMS becomes even more clear. The low number of PSAs that the DCMS is involved with serves as an example of this lack of involvement of the Department across the spectrum of governmental policy activity, indicating that it is not particularly significant in contributing to the wide range of core policy aims that the government as a whole holds.

While the finding that the DCMS is not a particularly significant department as far as the British government is concerned is not necessarily surprising, the current analysis indicates that it is possible to undertake assessments of the general importance of cultural departments for governments elsewhere. Clearly the specificity of the current analysis to the British context means that the same measurements and qualitative assessments may not be directly transferable to other political systems which operate in a different fashion, utilising different tools and having different estimations of departmental and ministerial importance, but it does indicate that such assessments are not unreasonable in their outcomes. As such the development of appropriate means to assess the significance of cultural departments for governments in other countries may provide a basis for the

development of a truly comparative approach to understanding the politics of governmental cultural policy. Indeed, the development of the approach that has been adopted in this article to cultural departments at the regional (particularly in the case of federal political systems such as, for example, Germany, Australia and Switzerland) and local level could potentially identify significant differences within political systems, not only between them. In the British case a comparison of the status of cultural departments between the national core and the devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland could serve to demonstrate a political significance to culture in these areas that is simply not present in the same way at the national level. An extension to the local government level may also help to clarify comparative similarities and differences between states that are not discernible through other analytical approaches. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis that have been employed in this article provide distinct, if similar, outcomes and indicate that the use of mixed methods in research may provide an appropriate means for undertaking empirical research in the field of cultural policy that can help to explain sectoral and national peculiarities of the cultural policy sector..

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ⁱ My thanks to Anita Kangas for information on this.

ⁱⁱ Unlike most other countries the United Kingdom uses the labels ‘departments’ and ‘ministries’ interchangeably. For simplicity this paper refers only to departments unless a specific ministry is being discussed.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Finer’s (1997) three-volume history of government deals largely with questions of political management rather than political structure and deals specifically with bureaucracy in four pages (63-6) of a 1650 page book.*

^{iv} This also makes tests of significance of dubious utility for the findings.

^v Alternatives, for example, could have included the length of ministerial tenure (*Berlinski et al, 2007*), or civil service changes in structure and status between departments (*Greer & Jarman, 2010*)

^{vi} This is not necessarily true of more recently-independent nation states following decolonisation or the fragmentation of previously existing states (eg. the Soviet Union). In such cases the process of state development becomes truncated. Even so it has yet to be the case that governments have come into existence without a finance ministry at all, whereas they have managed without cultural ones.

^{vii} Even earlier bodies such as the Poor Law Commission of 1834-47 and the Poor Law Board of 1847-71 were clearly precursors to the Ministry of Pensions but were independent of central government and were not headed by ministers, thus not being a part of the machinery of the central state.

^{viii} These Reports are used to identify the contribution of Departments to the attainment of PSA targets.

^{ix} Thus the Department for Health and the Department for Communities and Local Government both contribute to 18 PSAs but Communities and Local Government leads on 3 and Health on 2, consequently the former has a higher ranking than the latter.

X The difficulties of defining culture for the work of governments in this field is well recognised (Gray, 2009) but for current purposes clarity is concerned with functional, rather than subject, coherence.

Xi Whether the description of European states as being fully 'welfare states' is still appropriate can be argued about but given that no other collective description appears to be close to the manner in which they function the title has been retained.

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