
Understanding Whitehall

Chapter 1

Director level – and is usually a rising .304 40.31 Tmconomi

Ministers and internal management

The structure of Whitehall

Chapter 2: The policy-making process

white or green;

The presentation of such documents has changed markedly, with more use of background data and table; and documents which might once have been 30 pages are now more likely to be 300 pages in length. They are no longer published between green and white covers but often have high production values, with glossy covers and striking photographs.

But the distinction is far from redundant and the old terminology is still in common use as a conceptual way of distinguishing between the "green" stage of the Government consulting on "what to do" on a given area of policy; and the "white" stage of setting out the Government's conclusions. . Both Green Papers and White Papers thus continue to be issued.

The Whitehall calendar

The Whitehall calendar essentially marches to the same tune as the parliamentary calendar, with periods of intense activity while Ministers are in the office and periods of respite when they are not. .

Whitehall never formally shuts down, though the numbers in the office are obviously lower during public holidays, August and "half-term weeks". But there are also constraints on what officials can drive forward when Ministers are away from the office given the broad convention that major policy announcements can only be made when Parliament is sitting.

Until 2010, Parliament effectively began each year in November with the Queen's Speech; after two week breaks for Christmas and Easter, it then closed down in mid July for the summer holidays and party conference season, with a brief resumption in October before the Queen's Speech began the process again in November. Since the Coalition, however, this has now changed, due to the introduction of fixed five year Parliament with elections in May. So, unless that legislation is repealed, The Queen's Speech will kick off the Parliamentary year in future each May.

When Parliament is not sitting, Ministers, particularly those with constituencies some way from the capital, try to spend more of their time in their constituencies, making up for being in London during the rest of the year. And they also try and use time when Parliament is not sitting for Ministerial visits overseas. So in practice, some Ministers may be in London and in their Departmental office for only about eight months of the year.

They can of course always be contacted; and will always be sent red boxes. But in terms of policy development, officials have to take account of when Ministers are available for discussions and when Parliament is sitting. This tends to lead to desperate and not always successful attempts to "get things through" before each of the Christmas, Easter and summer breaks – and in the run-up to these breaks Ministers can often feel they are being "bounced" into taking too many decisions in too short a time.

A further complication is elections and the concept of "purdah". In effect, whenever a democratic election is being held - whether for Parliament, Europe or local elections - no announcements are allowed during the election period which could remotely impact on those elections unless they are absolutely essential for practical reasons. And the rules are generally interpreted tightly. So April is usually a "dead" month for announcements because of local elections in early May. And, once a general election is announced, Whitehall is effectively prevented from any further policy development until a new Government is elected.

already been) Ministers.

