Output 7

Transferable Lessons: 'The Policy Making Process and The Introduction of Elected Regional Assemblies'

SURF Centre

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Abbreviations

DCMS	Department for Culture, Media and Sports
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DfES	Department for Education and Science
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
DTp	Department for Transport
ERA	Elected Regional Assembly
GO	Government Office
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
OGDs	Other Government Departments
RA	Regional Assembly
RAD	Regional Assemblies Division, ODPM
RCU	Regional Coordination Unit
RDA	Regional Development Agency

Executive Summary

1.   The key finding from this review of the Whitehall policy making process for ERAs are the different sets of expectations and experiences of the central and regional officials involved. Central officials were focused on internal processual issues within Whitehall in order to meet the tight timetable outlined in the White Paper. The critical issue was to provide the framework for action that would lead to the establishment of ERAs. Regional officials were attempting to anticipate what this framework for action might mean in practice in particular regional contexts. Yet all officials agreed that the central policy making processes did not attempt to bring together the relevant departmental and regional interest to anticipate how the framework would be translated into effective action.

2.   The work raises issues that are central for understanding the development of more effective policy making and making more successful use of regions in national policy making. Whilst ERAs are stalled, the role of regions and how central policy in general can be improved is still very much a live issue for Whitehall. Successful policy making links context and interpretations to organisational cultures and proposed environmental solutions embedded in policy itself. Key to this is generating a greater understanding of expectations, degrees of ambition, drive and resistance.

3.   The key transferable lessons from this work for the Better Policy Making agenda are:

Improving Understanding of Context

*   More effective strategic fit in policy making involves examining regional needs in relation to emerging policy priorities from the centre. This requires analysis of the tensions between vertical alignment and horizontal integration in terms of the cross-cutting impact of policy and the effect of variable commitment between OGDs on the development of regional policies.

*   Improved forms of communication within and between OGDs concerning policy development that has regional implications. This requires the identification of officials who would be responsible for particular substantive areas of activity within and between departments.

*   Government Offices have a key role to play in co-ordinating regional responses to policy. This requires greater sharing of knowledge and understanding in the development of shared strategic directions and partnerships between Whitehall and with officials in the regions.

*   An improved focus on generating networks and communications with the regions will enable more of the right people to be involved at the right time in policy development. This requires a commitment to building relations between

Whitehall and regions that are able to build an honest and shared understanding of what is feasible and what is desirable in policy formulation.

- Government Offices can take more active responsibilities for managing strategic fit at a regional level. This requires the co-ordination of input from different regional agencies, including the private and voluntary sectors, as well as negotiating between different perspectives and managing the resulting intelligence.

- Regions cannot respond to every new policy concern with equal capacity and commitment. This requires Whitehall and the regions to jointly make informed choices about which policies they are actively intended to respond to through a sustained process of mutual understanding.

Coherence, Consistency and Communication

- Close linkage between policy and evaluation needs a more in-depth understanding the capacity of different institutions to deliver outcomes according to over-arching purposes This requires an evaluation process that not only asks how it will be known that a policy is working, but also what is the appropriate methodology for communicating that to different audiences.

- Turnover of key personnel leaves important tacit knowledge that makes policy work in particular contexts, diminished. This requires consistency and continuity in roles and responsibilities by selecting key personnel in terms of the knowledge and capacity they possess, as well as consideration given to the time and space to occupy these roles effectively.

- The evaluation function should not be developed at the end of the policy process. This requires designing evaluation into the planning phase in cooperation with key personnel at different levels to ensure that it is linked with the strategic purpose of policy.

- Restrictive time deadlines exist in uneasy tension with effective enrolment to make policy work. This requires a more systematic approach to developing networks for policy engagement and learning is needed that gives consideration to who is included and why, but also who is excluded, why and with what effect?

- Policy making is often characterised by misalignments and duplication rather than identifying overlaps and interrelationships. This requires the development of a shared ethos in partnership with identified stakeholders with a clear set of aims that are internally coherent and externally communicated in a consistent manner.

- More effective strategic fit involves the development of a stronger foresight element in the policy making process. This requires the development of prospective techniques and process that aid identification of the difficulties that

will be faced in the process of design and implementation and anticipation of how they might be overcome.

- Establishing programmes of work outside of the normal policy process will benefit different stakeholders. This requires the development of effective and sustainable infrastructures of communication can be built that support and enable developments over time and coordinate effectively between different policies innovations.

Section 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This section of the report outlines the wider purpose and scope of the project, the research aims and objectives and provides an outline of the report.

1.2 Purpose and Scope of the Project

The core purpose of the work was to review the process informing the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill in order to generate knowledge and intelligence that would improve the quality and effectiveness of central government policy making. With this in mind, the project focused on:

- tracking the delivery of policy relating to ERAs;
- examining the regional responses to policy and
- identifying 'good practice' from both central and regional perspectives.

1.3 Study Approach

The research sought to examine how ERAs were viewed in different Government Departments. In particular, how did these central viewpoints compare to regional perspectives and with what implications for the policy making process? Central to this was building an understanding of how practice related to the prescriptions for improving policy making for regions in terms of the following three documents:

- *Your Region, Your Choice* (2002), which outlined the Government's plans for the regions in England.
- *Modernising Government White Paper* (1999), which stated that policy making should be characterised by more joined-up working between Departments.
- *Incorporating Regional Perspectives into Policy Making* (2002), which noted that a lack of joined up working acted as a barrier to regional engagement with central policy making.

1.4 Structure of Report

The remainder of the report is divided into four sections:

- Section 2 provides an overview of the policy context.

- Section 3 examines the practice contexts.

- Section 4 focuses upon transferable lessons.

- Section 5 concludes with recommendations and ways forward.

Section 2:   The Policy Context: Frameworks for Action

2.1 Introduction

This section of the report sets out the wider policy context for ERA policy making and implementation.

2.2 Frameworks for Action: Improving the Policy Making Process

The White Paper *Your Region, Your Choice* (2002) is the only official, detailed source of guidance on the purposes, powers and functions of the proposed elected regional assemblies (ERAs) in England. Policy implementation was in a two stage legislative process. First, the Preparations Bill was a relatively straight forward set of changes based on the *Political Parties Elections and Referendums Act* (2000), as well as building on previous devolution experience in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the establishment of the GLA. It was also based on existing legislation to deal with local government reviews. Second, the primary legislation was designed to create the framework outlining the powers and responsibilities of ERAs. This was much more complex as it involved negotiation with a wide range of central government departments.

In order to understand the enlarged scope of the second Bill it is important to understand how Government viewed the potential of ERAs. The White Paper argued that ERAs 'will make regional governance more effective and more accountable to the regional electorate' and that 'greater accountability will itself lead to a more effective decision-making process' (3.4). ERAs were expected to make a difference because they will be controlling or influencing resources that are not already being used within the regions and because they will be able to bring a stronger regional perspective to bear on decisions that are either taken nationally, or by regional agencies that are not answerable to the electorate.

In this context, *The Modernising Government White Paper* (1999) defined policy making as 'the process by which governments translate their political vision into programmes and actions to deliver 'outcomes' – desired changes in the real world'. In

order to improve the quality of policy and implementation, Government made a commitment to policy makers that they should have available to them the widest and latest information on research and best practice. The reports, *Better Policy-Making* (2001) and *Professional Policy-Making for the 21st Century* (2000), provide examples of some of the difficulties faced in taking new approaches to policy-making. Two themes came out strongly: a lack of confidence in different ways of doing things unless they have been shown to work and the need to ground the implementation of policy in practical experience. According to *Better Policy Making* (p.14), modern policy making should incorporate forward looking, outward looking, innovative, flexible and creative, evidence-based, inclusive, and joined up methods of working. These should then be reviewed and evaluated in order to learn lessons for subsequent practice.

The role of regions in national policy became the focus of a stream of work within the wider modernising government and the better policy making initiative. A report - *Incorporating Regional Perspectives into the Policy Making Process* (2002) - was commissioned by the Government to examine how regional perspectives could be effectively incorporated into the policy making process. Focusing specifically on the publication of the *Your Region, Your Choice* it stated that the White Paper: 'Expresses the Government's belief that successful solutions to regional problems need to be rooted in the regions themselves, through improved co-ordination of Government policy and regional strategies, to provide for more efficient and effective delivery' (3). In addition: 'The impact of different departmental cultures remained crucial in determining how effectively they engaged with regions' (9). Table 1, below, provides a summary of the seven building blocks that were developed as the foundation for sound policy development with specific examples of the mechanisms for improving effectiveness.

Table 1: Model of Effective Regional Involvement in Policy-Making

Feature	Examples of Mechanisms for Improving Effectiveness
1. Culture – promoting understanding and engagement between the centre and the regions	• Examine the context of the policy development and explore the added value of the regions. • Build in time to involve the regions at the beginning of policy. • Do not make assumptions that what works well in one place will work well in another.
2. Mapping need – developing an analysis of regional policy needs	• Provide regions with a forward plan of potential priority policy areas for each department. • Reflect back overall regional concerns across the country. • Encourage national bodies to provide regional analyses to support this process.
3. Strategic fit – exploring synergies between regional need and central policy priorities	• Examine strategically the vertical management and horizontal integration of policy. • Work with Regional Directors to gain a better understanding of how the regional picture joins up. • Work at resolving conflicts between national and local priorities.
4. Networks and communications – between the centre, regions and other stakeholders	• Work to ensure that regions are engaged early in the intelligence stage of the policy process. • Support and develop regional 'champions' at the centre. • Develop colleague interchange programmes.
5. Project planning and accountability – to manage the process effectively	• Develop a project plan in collaboration with other regional and central stakeholders. • Focus on a 'hub-and-spoke' planning process. • Make sure that the plan is appropriately resourced.
6. Organisational capacity – to deliver effective policy	• Identify development needs of staff. • Undertake risk assessments of new projects. • Develop joint training programmes between the centre and the regions.
7. Evaluation and feedback – to learn lessons and highlight good practice	• Develop an evaluation stage into any project planning process. • Be more receptive to creative solutions. • Be responsive when regions participate in policy and give them useful feedback.

2.3 Summary

There were two sets of expectations shaping the policy making framework for ERAs.

The first perspective views the policy making process as comprising:

- the translation of the White Paper into a legislative programme to create the formal framework for enabling action in the regions;

- a central lead in RAD in the development and delivery of the structural framework for action

- and a focus on efficiency and speed in establishing framework that effectively delivers the White Paper within the proposed timetable.

Second, the expectations set out in the better policy making agenda concerned regions involved in shaping the development of the policy making process. This regards the policy making process as comprising:

- the translation of a general framework into effective action in specific regional and central contexts;

- regional involvement and anticipation of how the general framework will work effectively in practice

- and finally, a focus on developing a joint and shared understanding of how the framework will formally and informally facilitate new and effective action and practices in regions and with the centre.

With these issues in mind, the next section examines the affinities between these perspectives in practice.

Section 3:   The Practice Context: Frameworks in Action

3.1 Introduction

This section of the report synthesises the results of the central and regional interviews to provide an understanding of the level of affinity between experiences within the centre and between the centre and regions over the policy implementation for ERAs.

3.2 Frameworks in Action: Perspectives on the Policy Making Process

The purpose of the ERA policy was intended to bring about a set of circumstances that may end up having an effect on subsequent policy-making processes themselves within Whitehall. Yet whilst this was recognised by officials, it became a processual matter of meeting deadlines and timetables which required a considerable effort in terms of coordination between the policy and legal sections, with 8 Departments involved around 38 functional areas. At one stage it was necessary to provide a complete draft of instructions to Parliamentary Counsel within a 13 week time period.

In OGDs the region was frequently seen as a convenient scale of implementation, but not an active contributor to the conception of policy, only its execution. As one official expressed it: "It is an old fashioned way of doing things but a good way that is built up entirely in government and we managed to build a consensus". Consequently the process had a very strong internal focus where matters of coordination and ensuring coherence and fit in terms of the relations between general and specific legislation, meant that draft policy instruments were required according to tight timetables.

The strategic fit between the intentions of the legislation and potential effect upon the work of OGDs was illustrated by the sustainable development agenda. In the case of DEFRA, they translated this into a principle purpose for ERAs that officials in ODPM could easily support as it provided a joint approach that would not require separate strategies. At the same time, those in the DTI and it was suggested, amongst Treasury and key ministers in ODPM, saw the prime role of ERAs as dealing with wider economic disparities. This led to a concern about not seeing this objective as being 'watered down' by the sustainable development agenda. DTI and HMT, already worried

by loss of control, did not want to see principal purposes amended to create what they interpreted as less regional commitment to the economic agenda.

What this and other examples illustrate is a set of complex environments through which the policy making process had to navigate. It was dealing with differing cultures of regionalism within Departments that, in turn, constituted a particular way of seeing regions: "You can talk to colleagues in another government department and they are incredibly plugged in, very much on the ball…You can talk to other colleagues in another government department and although they think it's probably important, it's a tiny peripheral thing compared to what they're doing"

The need for consistency, in terms of having the same personnel from OGDs turn up to meeting, was central to obtaining clarity. A cross-departmental meeting began by one official stating: "I am just looking around the room to see if there are the usual suspects". Without the appropriate commitment at a particular level within OGDs, the policy process was inevitably problematic leaving the onus upon RAD to attempt to continually enrol others within tight policy making timetables. In the face of such forces, balance and a concern with due process became the justifications for practice. Policy making was therefore strongly focused on internal processes as if this could be separated from the wider purposes of ERAs.

Overall, the central interviews exhibited a high degree of consistency in accounts concerning the policy making process, despite the diversity of regions, personnel and agencies interviewed. Critically, such views were also reflected in acknowledgements of the absence of regional input into the implementation process itself, which was described as 'the involvement of external stakeholders'.

What became evident during the research was the importance of the informal ways of working that were not generally acknowledged in organisational cultures, nor recognised by performance management systems. These provided for ways of making sense of particular communications in context and also worked to derive benefits for consultations between the centre and the three potential ERA regions. We can see here

the both the strengths and weaknesses of the consultation process. Its strengths are the informality and drawing upon local knowledge in order to make contacts. Its weaknesses are that it is not systematic and who is excluded is just as, if not more, important that who is included and why? Overall, therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that there was a clearly expressed view among regional stakeholders that there had been few opportunities to make a considered or strategic input into the policy making process.

Officials from the three northern GOs worked together to produce a proposal for more effective engagement with RAD over the policy making process. A number of meetings were held in the Northern regions and London to discuss improvements in the relationship. Consequently officials felt that more effective forms of communication and dissemination were built between the GOs and Whitehall. These were primarily focused on informing GOs of progress in Whitehall rather than seeking a strategic regional input into the policy making process. However, officials at the centre also felt a much higher degree of engagement with the private, public and voluntary sectors in the ERA regions was needed.

A clear wish for a comparative understanding was required that would address issues concerned with the absence of a learning culture in the policy making process. At both the centre and within the referenda regions pressure of time, due to the nature of the performance management systems in place, led to such comments as: "We have not had a chance to have a sensible dialogue". Whilst there was also evidence, that because of the normal ways of working, some did not "understand how to engage and have a partnership". Consultation processes were often informal and unsystematic. Officials, both regionally and centrally, agreed that relevant expertise and knowledge could have been of value in shaping the policy making process. Regional officials felt that despite central uncertainties, a more strategic approach could have been taken to incorporate local knowledge and expertise into the policy making process. Critical to this were the potential development of joint processes involving regional interests and institutions working with Whitehall departments that could explore what preparedness and

effectiveness might mean in practice by drawing on existing experiences with devolved institutions and developing scenarios.

All the regions expressed support for the chapter 2 agenda. Specifically, it was seen to offer non-referendum regions a wider flexibility because, in contrast to interpretations of chapter 4, it was not seen to have a prescriptive central framework. Instead, it created a context for innovation in the development of regional working by providing policy agenda that enabled engagement with other regional partners and contributed to the development of regional capacity. Officials consistently provided examples of regional innovations in joint working and arrangement that had been made possible by the regional work led by GOs on the Chapter 2 agenda. At the same time, different views were offered about the further development of the Chapter 2 agenda.

Officials were concerned that the space for innovation created by the chapter 2 agenda was already filled and that the limitations, particularly the ability of regions to national policies and priorities, were evident to officials in the GOs, RDAs and RAs. Officials were already starting to anticipate what other options might be available for strengthening democratic regionalism ranging from rolling out the recent changes in spatial and housing policy to other functions to the appointment of a regional minister but without moving to an ERA. However, it was felt that the ERA agenda was driving national imperatives with the result that: "To us it seems very distant…the perception is that there is a particular timescale and a sense of waiting to see what happens and with a general election on the horizon, the region is not paying much attention".

What about the messages that were being received from the centre about implementation and how understandings were gained in terms of experiences from other regions? One person, who had worked in a variety of settings, including at the centre, focused upon the consistency of messages: "The real problem for Whitehall is dealing with this issue as it is harder to deal with 9 regions than one nation…so systems, processes and skills have to deal with diversity…the ODPM is split – half pushing regionalism and the other half is not"

3.3 Summary

Overall what emerges from this review of the policy making process are quite different sets of experiences from the central and regional officials involved.

- Centrally officials were strongly internally focused on processual issues within Whitehall in order to meet the tight timetable outlined in the White Paper. The critical issue was to provide the framework for action that would lead to the establishment of ERAs.

- At the same time regional officials were attempting to anticipate what this framework for action might mean in practice. The critical issue was what would happen when the framework for action was put into action in particular contexts?

- Yet as all officials interviewed agreed the central policy making processes did not attempt to bring together the relevant departmental and regional interest to anticipate how the framework would be translated into effective action.

- It was also evident that in non-ERA regions a policy vacuum was opening up with the centre being unclear as their future role and capacity.

Section 4:   Transferable Lessons from Process and Practice

"...effective policy making must be a learning process which involves finding out from experience what works and what does not and making sure that others can learn from it too. This means that new policies must have evaluation of their effectiveness built into them from the start ..." [Professional Policy Making in the 21st Century](#), Cabinet Office, 2000

4.1 Introduction

This section of the report examines those lessons that arise from the research for subsequent policy making. We do this according to the aspirations and prescriptions contained within the documents as outlined in section 2.

4.2 The Opportunity for ERAs

The opportunities presented for ERAs came with a shift in emphasis that took matters of scale and context-sensitivity more seriously thereby providing for more effective governance in terms of connections to the characteristics of regions. Taking regional contexts seriously, in other words, were not envisaged as impediments to the delivery of policy, but necessary preconditions for its success. ERAs would become co-participants in implementation, as well as having an enhanced potential for co-producing policy in the first instance. We can explore this further through an examination of the relationship between official goals and those that emerge from the particular circumstances in which staff actually work. As a result the research highlighted the fact that staff drew upon different forms of intelligence to make sense of emerging regional contexts. Whilst some Whitehall officials felt far removed from the implications of ERAs, others in GOs felt positioned by those in their regions to be knowledgeable, but were unable to convey a clear sense of progress and purpose.

4.3 Fusing Frameworks for Effective Policy Making

Frameworks for action refer to those understandings that can be read off from formal policy prescriptions and the intentions of policy-makers in terms of how they anticipate they will transform actions at a distance in different locations. 'Frameworks in action', on the other hand, are concerned with the practicalities of making policy work in particular local and regional contexts. A failure to understand the relationship between

these two frameworks leads to a significant reduction in the effectiveness and efficiency of both policy conception and execution.

RAD officials examined the procedural lessons that could be learnt from the establishment of the WDA and GLA. The key lesson was the need to reduce the number of clauses in order to smooth the legislative path through parliament. RAD was consistently viewed by OGD as an effective unit working with a shared ethos that was strongly committed to implementing the White Paper within the key deadlines. At the same time, there was a high degree of consistency amongst officials across central departments, particularly over the shared requirement and joint responsibility to translate a political commitment into workable proposals and furthermore into draft instructions. But there were a number of competing viewpoints within Whitehall.

Officials in OGDs also consistently raised concerns at the extended delays in specifying the principal purposes and identifying the general powers of ERAs. These elements of the Bill instructions were more complex and contentious than anticipated and were only clarified towards the later part of the drafting process. OGDs (a view shared by RAD) felt that the early production of these instructions could have provided greater clarity and simplified production of the Bill instructions. Thus, both RAD and OGDs found that the departmental commitments produced in the White Paper could be subject to a high degree of interpretative flexibility during the drafting of the Bill instructions. A number of policy commitments that had appeared to be closed were subsequently revisited and tensions resolved by negotiation between officials and on occasion, ministerial intervention. The Bill instructions drafting process thereby re-opened and made visible OGDs competing understanding and levels of commitment to, the regionalisation agenda.

Past experiences of regions being seen as sites of implementation, rather than co-participants in the construction of policy, as well as its delivery, meant that the consultation process between the referenda regions and the centre was variable and so overall quality was diminished as a result. Within the three referendum regions a high degree of consistency was found in relation to consultation and communication, despite

the diversity of regions and the agencies interviewed. It was clear that regional inputs were limited and there was a general concern regarding the few opportunities that had been available to inform the policy making process.

As with central perspectives, regional officials offered the view that relevant regional expertise, knowledge and intelligence could have been of significant practical value in shaping the implementation of the White Paper. But this was resource that was not exploited in any systematic or effective way. Most officials centrally and regionally had little knowledge of the Incorporating Regional Perspectives into Policy Making report and the potential implications of the tool-kit for providing a framework that could enlarge regional input into the policy making process. There were clear and competing central and regional perspectives on the quality and effectiveness of the policy making process. In referendum regions RDAs and RAs often assumed that there was a high degree of interaction between GO and RAD on the practical issues involved in preparing for ERAs. GO officials were acutely aware of these expectations and often found themselves embarrassed by a lack of intelligence concerning progress on policy implementation.

A number of ways in which regional officials could have added value to the policy making process were identified.

- An understanding of specific regional contexts, challenges and opportunities for a national White Paper may have been identified that would have resulted in the anticipation of potential problems in the future.
- A capacity could have been developed to see how policies would work in practice and identify options which would have resulted in more positive outcomes.
- Through highlighting those areas in which specific national policy recommendations would have had differential regional implications. This, in turn, could have fed back into a more sensitive analysis of differences and similarities that would have improved overall effectiveness.
- The results indicated that policy gaps and areas could have been identified among those whose needs were not being met, or anticipated, by the centre.

- In the policy making process regional officials could have more systematically mediated the policy with stakeholders enabling not only a greater understanding of the purpose and powers contained within the legislation, but also in providing an understanding of the claims of other regional actors.
- GO's could have promoted even better linkages between policies across OGDs given continual contacts with different official at the centre.

In the non-referendum regions there were important differences, but also evidence of common themes. Interviewees were generally unable to offer specific advice via their experiences of the policy making process, but were more interested in the wider implications of ERAs for the development of regionalism. To this extent there was wide support for the Chapter 2 agenda as it was not prescriptive, but instead created a context for innovation in the development of regional working through providing an agenda that could engage with other regional partners, as well as contribute to the development of regional capacity. During the research questions were raised about whether the boundaries of voluntary working were already being reached. Furthermore, officials were already anticipating what other options might be available for strengthening democratic regionalism, but without moving to an ERA. Yet in terms of seeking clarity about potential ways forward, a vacuum was believed to exist at the centre in terms of the future role of regions.

While there is no consensus that an alternative pathway of a particular type was needed, the work found support for a review of the potential options. In both ERA and non-ERA regions different degrees of preparedness were evident and there was a differential anticipation of what the legislation might have delivered according to the context in which officials work. It is for this reason that cultures of regionalism range from 'active' to 'latent' to capture their variable manifestations.

The findings on relations between perspectives lead to a number of points that have a direct bearing on the effectiveness of the policy making process.

First, there were widespread perceptions that there was no single, clear agenda of regionalisation at the centre. RCU were primarily seen as having an administrative role, with ODPM having a 'voice-giving' agenda for the northern regions. The Treasury and Cabinet Office, in turn, were seen as having a delivery and value-for-money focused agenda that was more about more effective central government policy and spending, rather than giving voice to the regions to reach their potential in the development and delivery of policy.

Second, there were strong perceptions, centrally and in referendum regions, that developments in Chapter 2 were not fully integrated into Chapter 4 thinking. This was problematic given that Chapter 2 developments inevitably changed the terrain of that which was intended to be democratised through Chapter 4. OGDs did not understand the Chapter 2 agenda and had very little direct contact with regions about its implications. The regions, in turn, felt that it was not being centrally coordinated or managed.

Third, all central and regional officials consistently stated that the regional agenda has moved forward more rapidly and on a broader front than anticipated in the White Paper. Officials at both levels referred to the Treasury Regional Emphasis Review and the Devolved Decision-Making Review (and a number of senior regional officials also referred to the Modern Regional Policy document). While each of these agendas had implications for central and regional officials it was not clear how these developments linked to the Chapter 4 agenda. A number of senior regional officials noted that in meetings with Treasury and Cabinet Office, officials had distanced themselves from Chapter 4 because it was not seen as being 'relevant' to their regional agendas.

Fourth, central and regional officials were clear that the implementation of assemblies would lead to the development of increasingly shared roles between OGDs and ERAs and also with a restructured local government. Yet there was concern about the lack of clarity about what effective working might mean in practice or how relations between local government, ERAs, non-referendum regions and OGDs would be managed.

Officials were unclear who was responsible for anticipating and reorganising intergovernmental relations in an ERA context.

4.4 Summary

The findings of this work are central for understanding not only effective policy-making, but also the future role of regions in national policy frameworks:

- Whilst the introduction of ERAs has stalled, the role of regions and how central policy in general can be improved is still very much alive.
- Successful policy making links context and interpretations to organisational problems and the proposed solutions embedded in the policy itself.
- Key to this is generating a greater understanding of expectations, degrees of ambition, drive and resistance.

5 Ways Forward for Effective Policy Making and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This section of the report considers the ways forward and specific recommendations for action.

5.2 Improving Effectiveness through Enhanced Legitimacy

The results of this work highlight the importance in policy making not just of communication, coordination and consultation with those who might normally be excluded from such processes, but also how enrolment, anticipation and preparedness affect outcomes. Without these in place it gives rise to common complaints that policies and associated measures have no relevance to frameworks in action. A core issue then becomes to what extent particular policies are seen as providing solutions to common problems, or not seen as relevant to those issues, by whom and why? An enormous amount of energy can be devoted to not addressing these core issues and a reduction in effectiveness and legitimacy is the inevitable result.

5.2.1 Reconnecting Purpose Process and Product

What we find in the results is that considerations of process and product cannot be divorced from purpose. Quite simply, unless a policy has sufficient legitimacy attached to it, then the extent to which it is effective will be reduced as it is not perceived as making any addition to existing conditions but may, instead, actually detract from those in significant ways. The processes of enrolment, communication and how resultant decision-making is affected by those, is thus crucial to obtaining the commitment of those who are expected deliver it in different settings. That, in turn, also provides for better dissemination to stakeholders of intentions and opportunities as those persons act as intermediaries of understanding to those who may not just be hostile, but often confused and uncertain about implications.

5.2.2 Developing a Shared Orientation

A sense of provisional orientation is required for this process to be effective. Thus, a problem may arise if there is a selection of issues to be included that excludes the frame

of reference of those whose actions are meant to be changed by the policy itself. In this case, an absence of such orientation, in terms of clear strategic messages from the centre that explains not only process, but also purpose, will lead to considerable degrees of uncertainty. What may be taken from this is that successful policy making links context and interpretations to the issues and opportunities that the proposed policy is intended to address and bring about. What is implied is not that context drives such considerations, but that policy is sufficiently context-sensitive to work in different environments in order to be effective.

5.2.3 Creating a Learning Culture

Ideally, from the policy point of view, this is about generating a learning culture. What is absent in the 'official' channels of communication in the civil service is how the 'informal' means and mechanisms through which policy is contested and resolved are understood and then inform practice in context according to different pressures. There was a clear tendency to see the ERA Bill as an end-point or product, whereas experiences of devolution in other countries have emphasised the importance of viewing devolution as a process that changes over time, not an event within a particular time frame. At present, there is a limited understanding at the centre of how policy works in particular contexts and as a result, a limited effectiveness to that policy itself. Instead of addressing this performance management measures, which carry little context-sensitivity, transmit messages that by-pass the necessity of understanding which is part of this process. Such an absence then re-bounds on policy to challenge its process and purpose and overall effects.

5.2.4 Quality, Knowledge and Intelligence

Success, derived from the lessons from this work, depends on the quality of thinking within the regions and the confidence of the policy-making processes adopted at the centre. Regions need to coordinate themselves in improved ways and be proactive around inputs into policy. This is a matter of practical organization, along with the power and responsibility to construct an orientation towards the future in order to become pro-active problem solvers, not just reactive implementers. Not all regions will have the abilities and resources to achieve such changes. After all, resources are scarce

and regions, if they want to take on this role, will have to invest in their own development to improve their leadership and negotiation skills. What is required here is the tangible support of the centre and a willingness to reflect upon what implications this would have for the policy making process, accompanied by a transformation in the light of these new relations.

5.2.5 Cultures of Judgement

Taking this forward meets that most intractable of issues: that is, the strong culture of upward accountability to Ministers and Parliament within the civil service. A culture of deference and risk aversion then arises which fosters a process mentality that separates frameworks for and in action. Whilst existing structures are important for developing accountability and integration and providing orientations for career trajectories over time, greater emphasis needs to be placed on civil servants negotiating the space within the broader architecture of policy to deliver change based upon judgement within frameworks of accountability through evaluation. For instance, developing good project management skills and negotiating with Ministers on how policy drift affects delivery can be a useful means to progress change. In addition, there is a need to improve mutual understanding and open up organisational cultures between the Government Offices and the centre, as well as between OGDs and the regions. Such work should be valued highly at the centre. Learning programmes and processes to share experiences should be developed. Workshops and seminars should be promoted in the recognition that the informality that makes policy work is something valuable to be shared in developing better understanding of contexts.

5.3 Recommendations

5.3.1 Improving Understanding of Context

1) More effective strategic fit in policy making involves examining regional needs in relation to emerging policy priorities from the centre. This requires analysis of the tensions between vertical alignment and horizontal integration in terms of the cross-cutting impact of policy and the effect of variable commitment between OGDs on the development of regional policies.

2) Improved forms of communication within and between OGDs concerning policy development that has regional implications. This requires the identification of

officials who would be responsible for particular substantive areas of activity within and between departments.

3) Government Offices have a key role to play in co-ordinating regional responses to policy. This requires greater sharing of knowledge and understanding in the development of shared strategic directions and partnerships between Whitehall and with officials in the regions.

4) An improved focus on generating networks and communications with the regions will enable more of the right people to be involved at the right time in policy development. This requires a commitment to building relations between Whitehall and regions that are able to build an honest and shared understanding of what is feasible and what is desirable in policy formulation.

5) Government Offices can take more active responsibilities for managing strategic fit at a regional level. This requires the co-ordination of input from different regional agencies, including the private and voluntary sectors, as well as negotiating between different perspectives and managing the resulting intelligence.

6) Regions cannot respond to every new policy concern with equal capacity and commitment. This requires Whitehall and the regions to jointly make informed choices about which policies they are actively intended to respond to through a sustained process of mutual understanding.

5.3.2 Coherence, Consistency and Communication

1) Close linkage between policy and evaluation needs a more in-depth understanding the capacity of different institutions to deliver outcomes according to over-arching purposes This requires an evaluation process that not only asks how it will be known that a policy is working, but also what is the appropriate methodology for communicating that to different audiences.

2) Turnover of key personnel leaves important tacit knowledge that makes policy work in particular contexts, diminished. This requires consistency and continuity in roles and responsibilities by selecting key personnel in terms of the knowledge and capacity they possess, as well as consideration given to the time and space to occupy these roles effectively.

3) The evaluation function should not be developed at the end of the policy process. This requires designing evaluation into the planning phase in cooperation with key personnel at different levels to ensure that it is linked with the strategic purpose of policy.

4) Restrictive time deadlines exist in uneasy tension with effective enrolment to make policy work. This requires a more systematic approach to developing networks for policy engagement and learning is needed that gives consideration to who is included and why, but also who is excluded, why and with what effect?

5) Policy making is often characterised by misalignments and duplication rather than identifying overlaps and interrelationships. This requires the development of a shared ethos in partnership with identified stakeholders with a clear set of aims that are internally coherent and externally communicated in a consistent manner.

6) More effective strategic fit involves the development of a stronger foresight element in the policy making process. This requires the development of prospective techniques and process that aid identification of the difficulties that will be faced in the process of design and implementation and anticipation of how they might be overcome.

7) Establishing programmes of work outside of the normal policy process will benefit different stakeholders. This requires the development of effective and sustainable infrastructures of communication can be built that support and enable developments over time and coordinate effectively between different policies innovations.

Although it is relatively easy to improve the policy process from the point of view of the centre so that there is greater regional involvement. However, this says nothing about whether regional ideas and suggestions will be included in decisions and deliberations.