

## Changing Roles and Relationships between Politicians and Civil Servants

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Paper for Presentation at Conference of the IPSA Research Committee 32 in collaboration  
with Croatian organisations

Centre for Advanced Academic Studies,  
Dubrovnik, April 4-7

*Work in progress. Please do not cite.*

In 2013 the public service's relationship with politicians in Anglophone countries would be hard to recognise by observers in the early 1980s and impossible to envisage. What were understood then as basic tenets of the relationship are either gone, been decisively modified or exist in a vulnerable environment. In the three decades between these dates, a high level of contestation emerged as politicians exploited unused powers to direct and influence, while observers critiqued the expansions of political executive roles. Did these trends foreshadow the end of systems such as Whitehall (Campbell and Wilson 1995; Page 2010) or was it being reinvented for a different era? Does Aucoin's (2008) diagnosis of the emergence of 'new political governance' accurately portray the deterioration of public services?

The core argument and analysis centres on the implications of the breakdown in traditional norms that regulated the relationship, and the problems with obtaining a new fit between politicians and public servants. Consequently, an extended period of relative stability in which the permanent component of the relationship prevailed was replaced by one of relative instability – depending on the context – under the dominance of the political executive. Three elements account for most of the change: ministerial resources and their potential for extending political influence; the handling of appointments to the senior civil service; and the roles of ministers and the senior public service.

The four countries – Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom – have shared an administrative tradition and practice (Halligan 2010), yet each has moved significantly from a traditional political-bureaucratic relationship. This paper examines how the relationships have moved over time, different options used by political executives

for exercising direct influence on the public service, pathways taken by the four systems, and the long-term impact of this behaviour on the character of the relationship.

### **Analysing the relationship**

The modes of demarcating politics and administration range from a model that firmly separates political and public service careers to that in which the careers intermingle and boundaries are weak (Pierre 1995: 207). The traditional British system has approximated the former: an explicit separation combined with distinctive boundaries. The modern reform era, however, has produced striking departures from tradition, and this section considers means for analysing the movements away from traditional political-bureaucratic relationships in Anglophone countries.

The relationship has traditionally been based on well-understood norms: a neutral public service that served the political executive regardless of party. The political executive in turn respected the integrity of the civil service by maintaining its apolitical and professional character. Specific features were the career public servant, a permanent official who survived successive governments; senior appointments drawn from the ranks of careerists; and the ministerial department as the repository of policy knowledge and primary adviser to government (Roberts 1987; Aucoin 1995; Campbell and Wilson 1995; Halligan 2001) (Table 1).

By the 2010s, all of these features had changed as the system was broadened and deepened to accommodate other actors<sup>1</sup>. Advice was no longer centred mainly on the public service. The principle that the public service could serve a new government had been routinely challenged. The public service was usually no longer permanent at senior levels. The apolitical or impartial service could still be detected but dented by political infractions over time and continual political pressures on public servants (Boston et al 1996; Aucoin 2010; Halligan 2001).

Table 1 Characteristics of relationship

| <i>Characteristics</i>              | <i>Traditional conception</i>    | <i>Responsive conception</i>                 |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| PS serves government of day         | Accepted as fundamental          | Questioned following regime change           |
| Bases of the relationship           | Permanence of PS<br>Stable       | Contractualised PS<br>Variable and contested |
| Advice                              | Essentially the PS               | Plus political advisers & other actors       |
| Apolitical/impartial public service | Maintained by independence of PS | Pressure points on public servants           |

The depictions in Table 1 are designed to capture the general character of the two models. There have of course been variations in both traditional and responsive conceptions (e.g. Britain's administrative class was not found in its former colonies), and the responsiveness takes several forms.

The features of the responsive model had important implications for the operation of the political-administrative system because it was no longer a relatively closed and stable system underpinned by a general understanding of roles. Instead over time there had been sustained attempts by the political executive to secure and then sustain its control over the public service. There have been various interpretations of the direction of the relationships with generic 'politicisation' being favoured by many observers (Peters and Pierre 2001, 2004).

One attempt to articulate the elements of change has been Peter Aucoin's argument about 'new political governance' (NPG), which represented political leaders' responses to the combination of political pressures that had emerged in recent decades. NPG had four dimensions within Westminster systems: the increased concentration of power in the office of the prime minister; the increased number, role and influence of partisan-political staff; the personal-politicisation of appointments to the senior public service; and, an assumption that the public service is promiscuously partisan for the government of the day (2008: 13-14).<sup>2</sup> Aucoin contended that these features applied to Anglophone systems, and were strongly evident in Canada in recent decades. The extent to which these dimensions could be generalised to all four countries has been questioned because of contextual variations among them (Boston and Halligan 2012).

Wilson (1991) expresses the central paradox that lies at the heart of the British senior civil service.

Since the Northcote-Trevelyan reforms ... the senior bureaucracy has prided itself on being a *profession* that recruits and promotes its members on merit free from partisan 'interference'; however, the civil service is not expected to be neutral, but partisan for whatever government the electorate has returned.... The professional skill of the senior bureaucrat in Britain lies in being able to perform these functions for any duly constitute government; their professional skill lies not in being politically chaster but in being sufficiently promiscuous to accommodate to changes in the party in power... The implicit deal at the heart of British government is that in return for such political promiscuity, the senior civil service will enjoy a monopoly on advising ministers (Wilson 1991: 328).

Once this monopoly is lost and the political executive no longer accepts that the public servants skills are sufficient serious problems arise as to how to reconcile the two.

There are also potentially significant issues with redefining boundaries for promiscuous behaviour.

This paper revisits the question of change to the relationships in the Anglophone systems and in what respects they have found a new fit between the politicians and public service (Plowden 1994). Leaving aside the traditional relationship (Model 1), at least three responsiveness models can be advanced. They range from low partisan and stable through to partisan and relatively unstable.

A second model is based on a new accommodation (or bargain in Hood and Lodge's 2006 terms) in which concessions have been made, the politicians desire for control has been satisfied, at least temporally. In the context of management reform some degree of modernisation has occurred that has converted the tradition relationship into contemporary terms involving some redistribution of power in favour of the political executive within new managerialism.

Movement between political and bureaucratic roles is well documented in the literature (Peters 1987; Aberbach et al 1981). With model three, swings are apparent between intervention and containment. Typically this is instigated through incursions by politicians that are deemed to violate fundamental principles and which become subject to public debate. This may include some form of dislocation in the short term – an apparent inability to reconcile the respective claims about the relationship, and providing a test of the strength of traditional norms. By a form of dialectical process there is movement towards some solution. However this process may subsequently be repeated on another issue. The model therefore is characterised by swings between different positions, which makes for an imbalanced system.

The tendency towards 'politicisation' over time (Peters and Pierre 2004) points to a long-term trend. A progression has been illustrated by Aberbach et al's (1981) analysis of the expanding policy roles of bureaucrats over time. Model four in this present study represents a shift in favour of the political executive that is potentially irrevocable and therefore destabilising because there are few constraints on executive power. This was a position underlying Aucoin's (2008) argument about the changing conditions under which government operate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including greater open government and transparency, external audit and review, political volatility and polarisation, media demands and the growth of think tanks, lobbyists and interest groups. These factors produced a 'more politicized environment for the public service'.

In terms of analysing change, the range of instruments used by the political executive to control, mobilise and relate to the public service are centred on two categories: ministerial resources and appointments. The definition of roles of ministers and senior public servants is also important, but is not systematically examined in this paper. In combination the three shape the standing of the senior public service, and the emergence and longevity of distinctive models (Campbell and Wilson 1995; Page 2010).

### **Confronting traditional public service independence**

One element common to the four systems was the mandarin who stood astride the department of state, typified as a strong and domineering personality, of formidable intellect and seemingly impervious to political direction. The Canadian public service was overshadowed by a group of mandarins during the Liberals' domination of government for two decades (1935-57) described as 'the presumed glory days of the public service, led by a handful of legendary mandarins' (Aucoin 2010: 67). In the United Kingdom, the years after World War II were depicted as "'a mandarin's paradise"...Except in the fields of colonial and defence policy ... ministers seldom sought to take major policy initiatives, and senior civil servants were largely left to get on with it' (King 2007: 217).<sup>3</sup> Australia had the so-called 'Seven Dwarfs', a group of permanent secretaries who ruled the Australian public service for decades and monopolised the policy advice.<sup>3</sup>(Rhodes, Wanna and Weller 2009).

All four of the country systems approximated the traditional model. The permanent public service was the pivot through which interaction with the political executive was funnelled. Ministers were inclined to acquiesce to their permanent secretary in most fields and their undisputed role as primary policy adviser. Ministerial staff were usually provided by the department and were few in number.

The critique of this arrangement emerged most explicitly in the 1970s, and reflected both political frustration with implementing programs and mounting reservations about the performance of the senior public service. There were variations among the countries but overall similar critiques emerged. The reaction in Britain was influential because it surfaced early, as expressed through Labour Prime Minister Wilson and the Fulton report (1968). Thatcher's view was of an 'over-large, under-responsive public service' (Fawcett and Gay 2010: 27). There emerged a 'more reasoned critique of the civil service and performance. Civil servants, it was claimed had been far too complacent for far too long, wallowing in their own collective self esteem. They came from too narrow social

class...The educational base was also too narrow and they were out of touch... with a rapidly changing society' (King 2007: 218).

In Australia, the pressure to expand the influence of the politicians intensified in the 1970s with the introduction of political advisors and several partisan appointments to head departments. A Royal Commission saw the bureaucracy as being too elitist, independent, unrepresentative and insufficiently responsive (RCAGA 1976). The official reaction was to challenge the public servants' position: 'the balance of power and influence has tipped too far in favour of permanent rather than elected office holders' (Commonwealth 1983). This agenda was a priority of the Labor in 1983 with political control an end in itself, and a means to implementing party policy. To achieve this required a redistribution of power between the bureaucracy and the politicians.

Until the 1980s, the New Zealand system operated under principles and constitutional conventions established at least seventy years previously when the public service was small and concerned with implementation. It eventually produced 'bureaucratic stasis': Westminster administrative conventions supporting continuity. The system became regarded as inflexible, inefficient and insufficiently accountability (Roberts 1987:14; Boston et al 1996). There was also pressure to break the 'old-boys network', to diversify the senior public service including external appointments and to define the minister's role (Boston and Halligan 2012). This eventually occurred through New Zealand's new public management model, which produced a new formulation of political-bureaucratic relationships, including the separation of responsibilities where the roles were distinctive (e.g. ministers and chief executives), and where different functions were involved (e.g. purchaser and provider; policy advice and regulation). (Boston et al 1996: 4-5, 91).

### **Instruments of change**

#### *Political advisers*

The ministerial adviser has been the most prominent addition to executive branches of the early reform era. The political executive used advisers to increase and extend the influence of the ministerial office. This served to enlarge the partisan element within the executive. The adviser could exercise a major influence on policy processes – if not always on the content of policy – and sustain the minister's authority at the interface with the public service.

The political or ministerial adviser, also known as special advisers (or SPADs) in the UK, and exempt staff in Canada, provided the new element in the political-bureaucratic

relationship. It is not clear how comparable the usage is for it may apply to several types of ministerial staff ranging from media to technical and policy experts. In the United Kingdom, for example, possibly a majority were 'political dogsbodies' (King 2007: 230-1). Similarly, whether they are members of a political party is subject to variations between governments (e.g. Halligan and Power 1992).

Advisers contributed to a redistribution of power between political and administrative systems; performed tasks that otherwise would be undertaken by public servants, thereby reducing the influence of the public service; acted as the main communication link between the minister and other institutions thereby contributing to breaking down barriers around departments.

The early modern stirrings of interest in advisers occurred in Canada and the United Kingdom. According to Aucoin, political staff began to increase in the 1950s from modest ministerial office where almost all exempt staff were clerical. The modern institutional role began in the 1960s when the Pearson Liberal sought to implement an ambitious party policy agenda (Aucoin 2010: 70, 78). Labour Prime Minister Wilson was credited with laying the foundation of the British system in 1964 when 'special advisers' were employed in the Cabinet Office, Foreign Office and Treasury (Fawcett and Gay 2010: 26, 29).

In Australia the Whitlam Labor government introduced an advisory system in 1972, although partisan advisers existed before, but now they became the norm and the size of the ministerial office increased (Halligan and Power 1992: 81). The Hawke Labor government sought to strengthen political direction to give more prominence to collective responsibility and its priorities (Campbell and Halligan 1992), and proposed a political tier within the senior public service, which would have placed policy control with political appointees. The government eventually compromised with a new position, the ministerial consultant, and the minister's office was expanded as an alternative to overt politicisation. Ministerial staff were increasingly interposed between the bureaucracy and politicians, taking over roles previously undertaken by public servants, and could be routinely involved in departmental processes. The ministerial adviser became an institutionalised part of government (Halligan and Power 1992).

In contrast with the other Anglophone countries, there was more reluctance in New Zealand to develop ministerial offices. Ministerial suspicions of senior departmental advice in the 1980s led them to rely less on the public service and more on political appointees in their offices (Boston 1992: 95), but the position was not institutionalised.

The number of ministerial advisers increased during the last two decades. By 2006, there were about 30 political advisers (excluding press secretaries) compared with half this number in 1998 (Eichbaum and Shaw 2007: 465). The numbers remained small – around one per minister, although a few ministers have had two or three advisers. In addition ministers usually agreed to the placement of departmental staff in ministerial offices to provide policy advice and liaison (Boston and Halligan 2012; Eichbaum and Shaw 2010).

Over the past four decades, political staff have added a significant new element to the Canadian government as the agent of the minister's to whom they were responsible and accountable (Aucoin 2010: 64). Under Mulroney the number of political staff rose to 460 in the early 1990s (with an astounding 99 in the Prime Minister's Office), and subsequently the combined staff exceeded 500, which has been maintained despite fluctuations (Aucoin 2010: 71, 73). In contrast the UK number edged up slowly, and despite constant reviews of the role, have remained comparatively small in overall numbers (Table 2).

Table 2 Advisors in Anglophone systems

|                | Ministers' offices | PM's Office | Total       |
|----------------|--------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Australia      | 420                | 50          | 470* (2007) |
| Canada         | 431                | 93          | 524 (2007)  |
| New Zealand    |                    |             | 58 (2008)   |
| United Kingdom | 48                 | 20          | 68** (2007) |

\* Since reduced. \*\* Increased to 56 and 23 by 2012.

Sources: chapters in Eichbaum and Shaw 2010

While all countries developed systems of ministerial advisers in the reform era there were significant variations between them: the smallest and largest systems have under one hundred; while the two medium-sized federal systems have 400-500.

Numbers alone do not of course indicate the influence of advisers for many may be young and with limited experience as in Australia and Canada, the countries with the largest numbers (Aucoin 2010). Fawcett and Gay (2010: 25) captured the British experience: 'Special advisers have acted as the lightning-rod for debate in the UK for debate about the politicization of the public service'. The roles of individual advisers attracted more attention than elsewhere, such as the two senior advisers under Prime Minister Blair, who were given authority to issue instructions to civil servants (most notably Alistair Campbell, an authority that was subsequently rescinded by Prime Minister

Brown). Advisers were the subject of several investigations over the years, and again by parliamentary committee inquiries in 2012 (e.g. House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee 2012).

The frayed nexus between the political executive and senior officials in Australia was often centred on the impact of ministerial advisers on public servants and their lack of accountability when involved in major public policy issues and the lack of a governance framework for the staffers (Tiernan 2007). As in other countries a Code of Conduct for Ministerial Staff was introduced (2008), which stipulated that ministerial staff were not empowered to direct public servants. Political advisers were now expected to be accountable where they had a policy role. However, the head of the public service in his valedictory speech observed that the mechanisms for holding advisers accountable remained murky, one implication being that they had not been contained, despite the code of conduct (Moran 2011).

#### *Senior appointments*

Two types of change were of particular importance: the processes for appointing (and terminating) departmental heads and the employment basis.

The Australian guidelines and practice for the appointment process for departmental secretaries moved from official input, somewhat akin to comparable countries, to political domination. Prior to 1976 the chair of the Public Service Board advised the departmental minister of possible candidates, consulting with the prime minister as appropriate before the nomination went to cabinet. Under the revised process, the Board chair recommended candidates to the prime minister based on advice from a committee of mainly departmental heads, but subsequently this committee stage was omitted. Following the abolition of the Board in 1987, the Secretary to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet was empowered to provide the written report.

The debate about the loss of tenure was intense, changes to the standing of the head of department proceeding through several stages. The first formal change (1984) to tenure redesignated the permanent head as the departmental secretary on a fixed term. In 1994, the fixed-term statutory appointment of secretaries was introduced. The issue then became the effect of applying contracts across the senior public service on Westminster principles. As senior executives were increasingly placed on individual agreements this became a reality. In a further stage (since 1996), performance review was introduced for secretaries.

This device in itself was unexceptional, but one government employed the review as means of scrutiny and to reinforce vulnerability.

The other aspect of continuity was the association of turnover with loss of tenure. Increases in secretary turnover in the 1990s assumed significance because loss of position now meant termination of employment. Several senior departmental secretaries were replaced early in Keating's prime ministership because ministers wanted someone else, and another secretary was summarily sacked. Of great significance was the turnover associated with changes of government because it represented the ultimate departure from convention. The Coalition government disposed of six secretaries in 1996 for reasons that remained unexplained. Even more telling was the readiness of successive governments to appoint a new chief adviser (the secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet).<sup>4</sup> In contrast, the Rudd government (2007-10) promised to preserve traditional continuity on attaining office, and retained the existing departmental secretaries. This meant that when changes were eventually made at the top they did not attract public debate about the process.<sup>5</sup>

In Canada the Prime Minister has appointed the deputy ministers as heads of departments, (as well as associate deputy ministers) and they can be dismissed 'at pleasure'. Deputy ministers have long regarded the prime minister, not the minister, as the person to whom they are accountable. Deputy ministers appointments have come mostly from the public service (although there has been an increase in external appointments in the 2000s) and there have been instances of partisan political appointments. In contrast to the other Anglophone systems, deputy ministers have been unable to isolate themselves from the government.<sup>6</sup> There has also been nothing quite like Prime Minister Brian Mulroney injunction that senior public servants who did not understand that they were ministers' subordinates should be given 'pink slips and running shoes' (Aucoin 2010: 66, 67, 74).

A reform in 2003 retained the staffing-authority structure, and thereby rejected the option of giving statutory authority directly to deputy ministers to staff their departments, as had occurred elsewhere (Aucoin 2010: 66). The Public Service Commission continued to control staffing as a means safeguarding the service from political influence.

New Zealand has had specific institutional arrangements, which have made politicisation of senior appointments difficult. In contrast to the other Anglophone countries, where the responsibility for appointing (and dismissing) departmental heads lies with the Prime Minister, the New Zealand process has been different. Prior to the State

Sector Act in 1988, the power to appoint the heads of government departments (or 'permanent heads' as they were then known) lay with the State Services Commission. Ministers were not entirely excluded from the process, and were usually consulted informally. But while the appointment procedures for permanent heads worked reasonably well and provided protection to the public service from improper political interference, the system was critiqued for being cliquish. Accordingly, changes were made to the appointment process under which the State Services Commissioner acquired the formal responsibility for making recommendations to the government on the appointment of departmental chief executives. Once an appointment was made, the Commissioner became the employer and responsible for overseeing and reviewing each chief executive's performance (although ministers also contributed to the performance management regime) (Boston and Halligan 2012).

Ministers can participate in the appointment process by advising the Commissioner on relevant matters (e.g. skills) to be considered and suggest suitable and unacceptable candidates. Ministers can reject the Commissioner's recommendation, and either seek a second recommendation from the Commissioner or select someone providing the decision is published in the Gazette so that it is clear that a 'political' appointment was made and ministerial intervention is transparent. In the 25 years of this arrangement, there has been no government appointment and only one recommendation since 1988, has been rejected (Boston and Halligan 2012).<sup>7</sup>

In the United Kingdom, there has been debate since Thatcher's time as to whether the senior civil service was being politicised because promotions to permanent secretary were influenced by being 'one of us' (Richards 1997; Fawcett and Gay 2010: 27).

In terms of the appointment process and the employment basis some form of accommodation was achieved much earlier in other jurisdictions, whereas the failure in the UK to produce a redefined relationship has contributed to the apparent crisis under the Cameron government as it sought to find a means of acquiring greater leverage over the civil service through controlling the appointments of permanent heads (HM Government 2012).

The senior public service has been under the oversight of a civil/public service commission in Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom, although the jurisdiction of the Canadian commission starts at the third level and reports directly to parliament. New Zealand's State Service Commission concentrates on chief executives. The level of independence of these commissions varies somewhat. In general occasional appointments

have been challenged as political and others can be argued to have connections to or experience of working closely with politicians, suggesting ‘personalisation’, overall the professional public servants have continued to account for most appointments.

### **Explaining the process of change**

Three types of explanation assist with explaining change. The first centres on the enlarged role of politicians in government – the rise of the activist minister – in that they were now neither subservient to the public service in policy nor bound by traditional convention about how they operated. The second Labor prime minister of the reform era reflected that central to the reforms was ensuring the government ‘belonged to the elected politicians’ with ministers ‘in the driving seat’ (Keating 1993). As the realm of the political expanded the boundaries became blurred and permeable. Of course, in substantial part this was enabled because of political staff in the minister’s office.

The emergence of conviction politicians on the right (Mulroney in Canada, Howard in Australia and Thatcher in the UK) raised question about the role and condition of the public service. Governments from the left were motivated by the desire to implement their policies, and consequently the need to employ a range of unconventional mechanism to change the public service. The instrumentalist tradition in the Anglophone countries facilitated reform of the public service (Halligan 2010).

The second explanation concerns the convention about the public service and the government of the day. A cycle can be discerned in this case relating to regular elections. The interventions were inclined to be more significant when new governments into office, but this was magnified by the length of time in opposition. In other word in the absence of regular alternations of government the length of the intervals between changes of governments were significant.<sup>8</sup> As Aucoin observes, ‘the relationship between ministers and public servants ... has been infected by long periods of single-party majority government’ (2010: 67). Moreover the question also became a matter of the degree of promiscuity in serving the government (Aucoin 2008).

The long tenure by governments in all systems led to perceptions that they owned the public service. Ministers no longer accepted the traditional dictum that the public service was prepared to serve successive government on an apolitical basis. There is anecdotal evidence of new governments coming to power with the belief that the public service will be unable or unwilling to support them, despite indications to the contrary. The

transitional adjustments to the relationship may take some time to settle (as in the case of Prime Minister Howard in Australia who took approaching two terms).

A final factor is the relative strength of the Anglophone administrative tradition (Halligan 2010). The Anglophone administrative tradition continues to provide an evolving and pluralist vehicle that can accommodate the complexities of country systems. It has been fairly resilient in general respects and adaptive in specifics. The administrative tradition is modified in content, but durable in terms of some essential elements, which is reflected in the debates about political incursions into the realm of the public service.

The working through of the debates and tensions surrounding departures from convention has followed several processes. The first is the gradual evolution of principles and practice over time, normally punctuated by distinctive flourishes by one government and then by the government of an opposing party. The development of advisers takes this form leading to institutionalisation. Secondly, the change process often takes something of a dialectical form: a radical departure is followed by public debate eventually producing modified principles and/or behaviour. The appointment of externals and partisans to department head positions (Australia and Canada), and the peremptory dismissal of professional public servants (Australia), most clearly fit this category. This also applies to dramatic changes in the use of political advisers (e.g. Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom or the institution of purchase advisers in New Zealand: Boston and Halligan 2012).

### **Revisiting the relationship after thirty years**

Four models have been differentiated according to the role of politicisation and the extent to which a durable relationship has been forged within the managerialist environment of the reform era.

The traditional model was based on acceptance of the complementary roles of ministers and senior public servants and associated features that ensured common understandings and responsibilities. This reconciliation of a prominent role for permanent secretaries and the minister's constitutional role provided operating conditions that were stable and durable. The three models based on varying requirements for responsiveness in which the minister more explicitly stands astride the portfolio reflect different approaches to developing an effective operating system.

*Model 2: Modernised and rebalanced*

This model is best approximated by New Zealand, which has knitted together the old (traditional independence) and new (CEOs are on contract, but are appointed by an open and explicit process that is beyond the control, but not the influence, of the political executive).

A significant result of New Zealand's distinctive brand of reform was the redefinition of roles including those of ministers and senior public servants. It alone can claim to have modernised the traditional system through the use of explicitly managerialist concepts, and managed to get an appropriate fit between the two. As a modern managerialised and balanced system, it has been the subject of UK scrutiny in 2012 as the most viable model among the Anglophone countries (UK Government 2012).

Illustrative of the New Zealand position was the lack of evidence in support of Aucoin's four dimensions. An increased concentration of power in the office of the prime minister had not been apparent. With regards to appointments to the senior public service, the state services commissioner has had responsibility for recommending appointments of departmental chief executives. Ministers can participate in the appointment process, but no government has made its own appointment, one argument being that it is unnecessary to make partisan appointments because of the responsive public service (Boston and Halligan 2012). There has been little evidence to support marginalisation of the public service, or that ministerial advisers had been a significant source for concern (Eichbaum and Shaw 2010; Boston and Halligan 2012). Of Aucoin's final dimension, a public service that is promiscuously partisan for the government of the day, the openness of the New Zealand system has provided some protection for the public service. NPG has been only weakly applied in New Zealand, in part because of the strong attachment to traditional values.

*Model 3: Imbalanced*

With the imbalanced case, there are alternating phases of stability and instability. The periods of stability are punctuated by outbreaks of divergence and discordance reflecting disconnect. This oscillating is a product of divergent views of the principles and contending for influence over the system.

The Australian handling of responsiveness and public service neutrality has been subject to swings of focus and attention over the last thirty years. The general trend has

been towards responsiveness, but declarations for, and occasionally measures to reinforce, neutrality also occurred.

The Australian relationship between secretaries and ministers has at times been fraught with issues about boundaries. Under Westminster tenets there has been a tendency for successive governments to claim ownership of the public service. This has significant implications for transitions between government when tensions arise with a public service perceived by new political leadership to have been too close to its predecessors.

A significant clarification of the secretary's roles has however occurred recently, which is highly significant for codifying responsibilities obscured by the unremitting pressures to be responsive (e.g. the policy role). Of the four roles that have been recognised the most significance has been the stewardship function (Halligan 2013). According to the Blueprint, the APS-wide stewardship is a core role of the secretary, and one that is 'discharged in partnership with other secretaries and the APS Commissioner' (AGRAGA 2010). Politicians' lack of strategic focus and 'short-termism' indicated that an alternative was needed to relying heavily on political direction. The stewardship role was designed for the public service to have 'the capacity to serve successive governments. A stewardship capability must exist regardless of the style of any one Minister or government'. Stewardship covers 'financial sustainability' and efficient resource management, plus 'less tangible factors such as maintaining the trust placed in the APS and building a culture of innovation and integrity in policy advice' (AGRAGA 2010: 5). The roles were given a statutory basis in 2012.

Of Aucoin's four components of NPG, prime ministerial power had become greater but it was not unfettered; political advisers, at times seemingly rampant, have been accepted as necessary and appear to be somewhat more contained; and personalisation in appointments has occurred but is not a current issue. The question of the public service's being 'promiscuously partisan for the government' (Aucoin 2008) remains to be established as a systemic characteristic. There have been instances that supported this contention, but not as an ongoing condition. It is understood that a strong political executive can still drive a professional public service, with the range of instruments available for securing public service attentiveness. There has been some evidence of NPG, but it remains unclear, whether the trajectory is towards greater NPG or a different synthesis of traditional values and performance-based responsiveness.

#### *Model 4: Politicised*

The final model of relationship is ‘displacement’ in which core elements of the relationship – invariably public service roles and positions – have either been taken over. The excesses accruing from redefined relationships strongly favour the political executive.

The New Political Governance that Peter Aucoin strongly argued for appears to fit here. We have it on Aucoin’s (2008, 2012) authority that Canada exemplifies this position. Simply put, some of the excesses of politicisation are more pronounced: the strong centralising prime minister’s office (the largest by far of the four systems), the prime ministers influence over the appointment of deputy ministers (although it is unclear how far ‘personalisation’ is taken), and the largest cadre of minister advisers of the four countries (Aucoin 2010, 2012; Savoie 1999, 2003; Zussman 2008, 2012). The question of Aucoin’s depiction of the promiscuous public service remains to be clarified for as Wilson (1991) observes, promiscuity has been fundamental to the British system. It is presumed therefore that behaviour in the Canadian case goes beyond boundaries normally regarded as acceptable for a public service.

This leaves the case of UK civil service, which has experienced volatility in its relationships with the political executive and is subject in 2012 to intense pressures to outsource policy and challenges to the appointment and performance review processes of permanent secretaries (HM Government 2012). The character of the rhetoric would point towards a NPG result.

It may well be seen in the longer term to be an imbalanced case (model three). While the Blair government used several instruments to control and influence the civil service it did not actually seek to politicise it, adopting ‘an essentially conservative attitude in its attempts to reform the SCS’ (Fawcett and Gay 2010: 27).

Each of the four countries has gone in a different direction at a different pace, but with similarities and attentiveness to Westminster nostrums, even if they have been distorted in some respects. The key consideration is the tendency of new governments in all four countries – even New Zealand in a more subdued way – to initiate new measures that affect the relationship between the political executive and the civil service.

#### **Conclusion**

The fundamentals of the relationship between the political executive and the public service have changed substantially. Ministers became more policy active and determined to be in the cockpit directing portfolio action. The senior civil service has had to

complement this greater assertiveness. Nestling at the interface between them is the political adviser. Overriding the relational basis is the government's need to mobilise the public service to achieve its objectives.

The impact of thirty years of redefined relationships has not produced a resolution of how best to conduct the relationship in the individual countries. Nor is it clear that expanding the range and intensity of partisan instruments necessarily produces the results desired by the political executive in terms of implementation.

Elements of the traditional Anglophone model of the relationship between ministers and public servants can still be discerned despite the role reversals and the whittling down of the public service position. The common element is the retention of the impartial public service, although that continues to be under pressure. This is reflected also in the appointment process and the institutionalised political advisory system. Having moved from the traditional model of an independent public service, the Anglophone systems now share more features with European countries (e.g. the cabinet).

The new configurations and arrangements are arguably viable only to the extent that they counter-balance imperious political executives. Yet the position of public services, with the clear exception of New Zealand, continue to be potentially vulnerable with the likelihood of new governments in the future exploring further alternatives and departures. Is it realistic to assume that stable alignments can now be sustained?

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that significant changes first occurred relatively early in the reform era.

<sup>2</sup> A later version of this paper was published posthumously (Aucoin 2012).

<sup>3</sup> The term 'mandarin' has continued to be used in the UK and elsewhere, at least by the media.

<sup>4</sup> Expectations that the incumbent would not continue with a new government, although Terry Moran remained initially despite the change of prime ministers *during* the Labor government's first term.

<sup>5</sup> Five new departmental secretaries were appointed 20 months after the 2007 election in a process that involved the movement of eleven senior executives as the government sought to place appropriate officials in significant positions.

<sup>6</sup> Several deputy ministers have moved from the public service to parliament.

<sup>7</sup> Note that certain recommendations by the State Services Commissioner for the re-appointment of departmental chief executives have been rejected, but such cases have been relatively rare.

<sup>8</sup> Multiple terms adding up to twelve years or more were fairly common in the post-war years (King/St Laurent, Pearson/Trudeau, Chrétien/Martin in Canada; Menzies, Hawke/Keating and Howard in Australia; Thatcher/Major and Blair/Brown in the United Kingdom; and New Zealand less so (despite the Holyoake period).