ONE YEAR ON

The first year of coalition government

A collection of views

INSTITUTE FOR GOVERNMENT

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Introduction

by Andrew Adonis, Director, Institute for Government

Andrew Adonis

Disraeli was right. England does not love coalitions. The Populus poll commissioned by the Institute for Government for the first anniversary of the Coalition shows weak support for the principle and practice of coalition government. Far from being strengthened by the past year's coalition experience, support for a parliament without a single party majority is below the level of last May. As discussed in chapter 9, nearly two-thirds of respondents now say it is "a bad thing for the country" that no party achieved an overall majority in the general election. A majority think the Liberal Democrats were right to enter a coalition given the electoral outcome, but far larger majorities believe that coalition has led government to be weaker, more confused, more indecisive and less responsive to the public.

Nor is the Coalition remotely viewed as a partnership of equals. A large majority believe the Liberal Democrats "abandoned their principles" by forming a coalition with the Conservatives, and majorities reject the notion that they have had "a significant influence" on any area of policy – even on constitutional reform, the topic of most concern to the Lib Dems in their negotiations to form the coalition in the first place.

"As a political project, the Coalition clearly needs to reinvent and renew itself in the light of the AV rejection and the wider public mood."

As a political project, the Coalition clearly needs to reinvent and renew itself in the light of the AV rejection and the wider public mood. Nick Boles, in his response to chapter 1, says: "12 months on, the Blitzkrieg is over. The next four years will be a long, hard slog." This is obviously true of the deficit reduction plan – discussed by Julian McCrae in chapter 4 – unless the Government decides to change course on its core economic strategy. Elsewhere, however, more of the same is unlikely to be a recipe for stability, let alone success. In the case of the Big Society, discussed by Adrian Brown and Kate Blatchford in chapter 5, there isn't even a clear definition to start with. The review of the NHS reforms and the Health and Social Care Bill is the immediate test of the Coalition's capacity to reinvent itself. But others will follow.

A critical issue is the policy agenda which the Liberal Democrats put at the heart of the Coalition's renewal. Until now,

constitutional reform has been the key Lib Dem priority. This is reflected not only in the Coalition Agreement but also in Nick Clegg's decision at the formation of the Coalition to combine the office of Deputy Prime Minister with responsibility for constitutional reform, rather than taking one of the principal offices of state (the Home Office or Foreign Office) or one of the major public service departments. A significant pointer to the future is whether Nick Clegg revisits this decision or sticks to constitutional reform as his major preoccupation.

On constitutional reform, Robert Hazell points out in chapter 6, the irony of the Coalition is that it has indeed been radical, but the reforms that are passing are predominantly those put forward by the Conservatives not the Lib Dems. The reduction in the size of the House of Commons to 600, the acceleration of the next boundary review and the introduction of a single electoral quota for the Commons, are three key Tory reforms yoked together with the legislation for the AV referendum. Legislation for elected police commissioners and referendums on mayors in the major cities outside London – two other radical Tory-inspired reforms – is also proceeding. Following the AV referendum defeat, of the key Lib Dem-inspired constitutional reforms, only fixed-term parliaments and additional powers for the Scottish Parliament look likely to be enacted, though both still have to complete their parliamentary passage. Even 'fixed-term parliaments' have turned out to be far from fixed in that there is provision for an early general election if a government loses a motion of confidence on a simple majority of those voting in the Commons and a new government is unable to command a majority. In practice this could make it possible for an early election to take place if either coalition partner wished it.

If the Lib Dems stick to the constitution as their coalition priority, they will seek to move boldly and rapidly on House of Lords reform, which is the next "big ticket" item on their constitutional agenda. However, any reform proposing to replace the existing nominated Lords with an elected House will meet intense resistance in the Lords itself, not least from Tory and Labour peers who largely and strongly oppose this. Overcoming this hurdle would be as big a challenge as overcoming the AV referendum, but without even the first flush of post-election enthusiasm among both coalition parties. It would also run up against growing parliamentary criticism of the lack of proper consideration and consultation before the introduction of major constitutional reforms by the Coalition. A cross-party group chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister was set up after the election to discuss Lords reform, to seek to reach consensus. But it has not met since November; there is no cross-party agreement on key features of the reform; and

any Bill published in the immediate future is unlikely to command consensus within or beyond the Coalition's supporters. The risk of an AV-style debacle would be acute.

Peter Riddell notes, in his concluding essay, that while England may not love coalitions "it has had quite a few of them over the past 159 years." Whatever their fate as political projects, previous coalitions have by and large worked effectively as executive machines. This is proving to be the case with the Cameron-Clegg Coalition too. As Akash Paun puts it in chapter 1: "On the whole, the coalition has performed effectively *as a government*."

In private, senior civil servants have been strikingly positive about the internal functioning of the Coalition government, with its return to a more classical form of "Cabinet government" through Cabinet itself, Cabinet committees and a more formalised decision-making structure. (Their major concern is about cost-cutting and downsizing within Whitehall, James Page's theme in chapter 3). The Coalition Agreement, and the subsequent longer coalition Programme for Government, have taken the place of the manifesto of the winning party as the "project" to be delivered by ministers and departments, with similar imperative status. Civil servants report few difficulties in working for two political parties. Some say it is little different, or even smoother, than working for a factionalised single-party government, as under Blair/Brown or the dying days of the Major government.

However, Lib Dem ministers are not so uniformly positive. From Nick Clegg downwards, they have been critical about their lack of civil service and special adviser support for them as coalition partner, both at the Centre and within departments. The Institute for Government reported on this soon after the Coalition's formation, and it has led to some strengthening of Clegg's own office. But this remains a bone of contention.

David Cameron is also revisiting his own post-election decision to operate a very slim-line Number 10 operation, reducing the number of special advisers in Downing Street and across Whitehall. As Jill Rutter and David Atkinson note in chapter 2, the Prime Minister has recently in effect recreated the Number 10 Policy Unit, although staffed largely with civil servants not special advisers. And the number of politically-inspired advisers – under one title or another – has been steadily increasing across Whitehall as the Prime Minister and ministers seek to strengthen their leverage.

Surprisingly, the Coalition has so far led to little change in parliamentary practice or impact, or the role of the Opposition (discussed in chapter 8). As Akash Paun describes in chapter 7, the Coalition operates like a single-party government with a secure majority in the Commons. In the Lords, thanks to substantial Tory and Lib Dem creations and their (so far) disciplined support for the Coalition, the Government parties have a large majority over Labour and have only been defeated when crossbench peers have united strongly against the government.

The more striking parliamentary innovation is the implementation of a reform agreed by the last parliament: the introduction of elections, by secret ballot of all MPs, for the chairs of select committees. This has produced a number of strong, independent-minded chairs of select committees, notably Andrew Tyrie as chair of the Treasury Select Committee, Stephen Dorrell as chair of the Health Select Committee, and Margaret Hodge as chair of the Public Accounts Committee. Andrew Tyrie secured a decisive reform in persuading George Osborne to give his committee a right of veto over the appointment of the chair of the Office for Budget Responsibility. A debate has started (supported by the Institute for Government) on whether this power should be extended to other major public appointments. If so, this will be an important constitutional innovation.

So one year on, government and parliament have adapted fairly smoothly to the exigencies of coalition. As a political project, the Coalition is under intense pressure and its path ahead is difficult and hazardous. Yet the same could be said of virtually every government a year after an election. If England does not love coalitions, it is at least showing that it can accommodate them.

1. Governing in coalition

What lessons have been learnt since May 2011 about how to govern in coalition?

by Akash Paun, Institute for Government

Akash Paun

One year ago, the first inconclusive election in nearly four decades was followed by the historic formation of the Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition. The first 12 months have taught us that despite the prevalence of the metaphor, coalition government is *not* a marriage. It entails not permanent union, but a more limited and temporary collaboration, in which the two sides expect to pull apart and compete again after a set period. The partners commit to making a success of their shared creation, but implicit in the deal is that the separate and distinct interests of each must also be served.

On the whole, the Coalition has performed effectively *as a government*. It has proven able to develop major policy initiatives, to take and implement difficult decisions, and (up until the referendum campaign at least) to avoid significant conflict between ministers of the two parties. The revived machinery of cabinet government has functioned well too. But the other side of the equation – the need to preserve the separate identity of each party – has been handled less successfully. In particular, the Liberal Democrats have suffered from the perception that they are too close to the Conservatives and exercise little influence.

"The Coalition has performed effectively as a government. But the challenge of preserving the identity of the two separate parties has been handled less successfully."

An initial honeymoon period for the Coalition faded rapidly, and while the Conservative vote remained largely constant over the year, a large chunk of Liberal Democrat voters deserted the party, as illustrated in the local and devolved elections of May 2011. Tensions within both parties about the nature of the Coalition also became more visible as the year progressed.

In the months before the AV referendum, these developments had already prompted some rethinking in Whitehall and Westminster, less about the overall policy direction of the Coalition than the question of how to manage the challenge of governing in coalition. Following the bruising referendum campaign and the demoralising defeat for the Lib Dems, further and more fundamental change is likely.

The balance of power

Governing in coalition requires an effective balance to be struck between the two sides, in terms of personnel, policy and profile. The Liberal Democrats took a slightly greater share of ministerial portfolios than their seat share warrants, but the major spending departments (health, education, defence, work and pensions, justice) are controlled by Conservatives. In these departments, the Liberal Democrats are reliant on under-resourced junior ministers and overstretched advisers at the Centre to ensure that their interests are taken into account.

The largest department with a Liberal Democrat Secretary of State is Vince Cable's Business Department, but Cable has only intermittent control over universities policy (there is a separate Tory cabinet-level minister for universities within his department), and he was stripped of media policy after a media sting caught him declaring "war on Murdoch" over the Sky takeover. As for Nick Clegg, he decided not to take on a major departmental portfolio, instead seeking a cross-government leadership role from the Cabinet Office.

The Centre (discussed in chapter 2) was initially organised according to the principle that there should be a single and unified core executive, rather than competing powerbases. For the most part this has been a success: in comparison with the battles of the Blair–Brown years, relationships at the Centre, between key ministers and advisers, are strong.

But following Institute for Government recommendations,[1] it was recognised that the Deputy Prime Minister needed greater support to enable him to keep a "full and contemporaneous overview of the work of government as a whole", as he and the Prime Minister are both expected to maintain according to the Agreement for Stability and Reform published by the Cabinet Office.[2] Consequently, the Deputy Prime Minister's private office was strengthened, with a more senior official at the head. A small Research and Analysis Team for the Deputy Prime Minister was also established, allowing the Deputy Prime Minister to own a few cross-cutting themes such as social mobility. However, whether his small team can drive progress on this and other complex areas through the Whitehall machine will remain a key issue for the Coalition.

The Deputy Prime Minister also has responsibility for political and constitutional reform, and has the support of a dedicated directorate from the Ministry of Justice in carrying this out. This job has kept him busy so far, but with electoral reform now settled, fixed term parliaments heading for the statute book, and House of Lords reform likely to run into the sand, the Lib Dem leader might well start to consider the attraction of running a major policy department.

Given the widespread perception that Conservatives are setting the agenda in key areas such as welfare and public service reform, the possibility of a wider reshuffle may also be considered. However, reshuffles are inherently more difficult under a coalition, since anything that appears to alter the balance of power (between the parties, but also between the different wings of each party) will engender opposition.

A shared policy programme

In terms of policy development, the challenge of governing in coalition is to craft a shared programme out of two competing manifestos. This was largely accomplished in the negotiations immediately following the election, leading to the short Coalition Agreement of 10 May, and then a longer Programme for Government drawn up with civil service support.

In some areas there was clear agreement between the parties, and here, unsurprisingly, it was easy to push ahead swiftly with implementation. Thus, in its early days, the Coalition abolished ID cards, cancelled the third runway at Heathrow, and swept away centralised public sector targets.

But in most areas agreement has had to be forged from contrasting positions. In the initial negotiations, according to Lib Dem lead negotiator David Laws, the approach often adopted was to select either the Conservative or the Lib Dem policy wholesale, rather than crafting "lowest common denominator compromises". Laws claimed that this led to the best of each party's manifesto being adopted, and the worst being left by the wayside.[3] Crucially, since the coalition negotiations stretched across a wide range of policy issues, policy concessions in different areas could be traded.

The crucial issues that had to be hammered out at the outset centred on the non-negotiable items of a 'bankable offer' on electoral reform (for the Lib Dems), and an accelerated deficit reduction plan (for the Tories). The eventual agreement incorporated both these potential dealbreakers, granting each side a totemic victory to highlight to their supporters.

The Coalition Agreement included several other big 'policy wins' for each side, helping to persuade the two parties to back the deal. For the Liberal Democrats, flagship policies included the 'pupil premium', a significant increase in income tax personal allowances, the pensions 'triple guarantee' and fixed parliamentary terms. On the Conservative side, protection of the NHS budget, an immigration quota, the free schools policy and the EU Sovereignty Bill were key. Importantly, to sweeten the pill on electoral reform, the parties also committed to equalising

the size of House of Commons constituencies. Indeed, these two policies were subsequently wrapped into a single bill to ensure that both sides had a reason to back the legislation.

Beyond the Programme for Government

Although the initial negotiations resolved many big issues, a number of complex dilemmas – particularly around the detail of fiscal consolidation, university finance, NHS and welfare reform – were left to be negotiated and 'coalitionised' subsequently. Policy decisions taken after the initial coalition deal have often arisen one-by-one, in specific departmental contexts, making cross-issue bargaining more difficult. The exception has been budget negotiations, where the tight bipartisan team at the Centre has ensured that the Government's fiscal plans contain items important to both sides.

More often it is necessary to find middle ground between the parties' different positions. Compromise is the default approach of Whitehall. Civil servants are accustomed to resolving differences between competing ministers and departmental perspectives. But compromise in the context of coalition involves a different set of calculations and risks, as illustrated by the Coalition's difficulties over university finance.

Having fought the election on a pledge to oppose any rise in tuition fees, the Liberal Democrats could have made this a 'red line issue' in the initial negotiations, but opted to use their scarce negotiating capital to secure concessions elsewhere. The party won the right to abstain if agreement could not be found with the Conservatives, but this approach would essentially have conceded control of this area entirely to the Conservatives. Instead, they sought to exercise influence from within and won a number of important concessions. However, failure to stand by the pre-election pledge has significantly damaged the party's public standing.

The Liberal Democrats have also been criticised for compromising on plans to abolish control orders and to take tough action on the banks. The limited concessions the Liberal Democrats have so far secured on the NHS reform plans have also attracted criticism from party members and MPs, who will be expecting further movement during the pause in the bill's progress announced by the Health Secretary in early April. Meanwhile, the Conservative leadership has faced criticism from its own supporters and members for failing to adopt a more Eurosceptic stance and moving too slowly to reform the Human Rights Act, which are associated with Lib Dem influence.

One problem faced by the Coalition is that after decades of single-party rule, British voters are accustomed to treating pre-election commitments as a definitive guide to what the party would do in government, rather than as bargaining positions, which is what they become in a hung parliament context. Compromise is often seen almost as a dirty word in British political discourse. Cameron himself argued before the election that voters should avoid a hung parliament since it would lead to "compromises and half-measures".[4]

A further problem is that voters tend not to be persuaded by the 'counterfactual proposition' that things would have been worse in the absence of the party's participation in government.[5] The Liberal Democrat strategy of acting as "a moderating force to Conservative populism" has therefore not borne political fruit.[6]

A new emphasis on difference

These lessons led to talk of a new phase of the Coalition, in which greater emphasis is placed on the differences between the two parties. In January 2011, Nick Clegg set out his thinking, stating that after having focused in the first months on demonstrating that coalition government can work, there would now be "a natural reassertion of the separate identities in the Coalition".[7] The leadership strategy was termed "positive differentiation", and was encapsulated in the Deputy Prime Minister's championing of the freedom bill and development of a cross-government social mobility strategy.[8]

Party 'identity' subsequently became the buzzword of the Lib Dem spring conference, with pressure on the leadership to chart a more distinct course from their partners in power. Most notable was the conference motion on NHS policy – more a case of negative differentiation – which criticised the "damaging and unjustified" plans outlined by the Conservative Health Secretary.

Liberal Democrat opponents of the NHS reforms were also keen to emphasise that the plans lacked legitimacy as they were absent from the initial Coalition Agreement ratified by the party (though the longer Programme for Government did contain some detail on the plans). This echoed a similar criticism of housing benefit policy in summer 2010 by the party's deputy leader Simon Hughes.

On the Conservative side, the leadership faced pressure to take a tougher line against the Liberal Democrats during the January 2011 Oldham and Saddleworth by-election and, more importantly, the AV campaign. The Prime Minister's tough speech on immigration in April 2011 also clearly reflected this need to emphasise core party themes, while Business Secretary Vince Cable's critical response to the Prime Minister was a further example on the Lib Dem side of deliberate

differentiation from the Tory position.[9] In the last week of the referendum campaign, tensions within the Government reached a new peak, with details of rows within the sanctum of the Cabinet room itself being leaked to the press.[10] In the aftermath of victory for the No campaign, coupled with the LibDems' electoral losses across the UK, the new phrase doing the rounds was that the Coalition had to move onto a more "transactional" footing – joint business venture rather than marriage.

Towards the next election

The Coalition must now start to think about its plans for the remainder of the Parliament. As of May 2011, there is still plenty in the Programme for Government to be implemented, but by 2013 most of the objectives set out in the departmental business plans should have been achieved.

As a result, a new policy programme will be required, yet recent events illustrate the difficulty of creating one. There will be scepticism within both parties about moving away from the initial Coalition Agreement, and pressure on the leaders of each party to adopt a tougher negotiating stance this time round. The Prime Minister may find it difficult to make further concessions to the Lib Dems in important areas for his grassroots such as Europe and criminal justice, while the Deputy PM will be expected to keep up the pressure to gain further concessions on NHS reform and other issues. Further, as the next general election looms larger on the horizon, the parties will have a growing incentive to differ in public more often. Allowing greater space to 'agree to disagree' might signal a mature approach to the realities of coalition government, but taken too far, it could render the administration divided and rudderless.

The recent reorganisation of the Centre of government (discussed in chapter 2) was reportedly designed in part to create space for thinking about the Coalition's forward agenda, a project dubbed "Coalition 2.0". But the Government needs to avoid an exercise conducted entirely within the executive. Single-party governments can face serious problems when they seek to impose policies on reluctant backbenchers and party members, but such difficulties are greater still for a coalition.

In sum, as the Coalition moves forward, it will almost certainly have to pay greater attention to the needs and distinctive identities of its component parts. And as the balance tips, the effectiveness of the Government as a whole may suffer. Whatever the ultimate success of this experiment in multi-party rule, the next few years will hold valuable lessons, both positive and negative, about how to govern in coalition.

Nick Boles

Governing in coalition: a response

by Nick Boles MP, Conservative Party

In 12 months, the Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition has agreed a bold plan for rapid reduction of the budget deficit, enabled hundreds of schools to shape their own destinies by becoming academies, unveiled radical reforms of the benefits and state pension systems, legislated for the election of police commissioners and for referenda on the introduction of mayors in 12 English cities, set in train the equalisation of the size of parliamentary constituencies and held a referendum on the voting system. Whether you approve of these policies or not, you have to admit that no government since Clement Attlee's administration in 1945 has brought about so much change in its first year.

I spent a lot of time during last year's election campaign urging people in Grantham and Stamford to resist the temptation to vote Lib Dem, because a coalition government would inevitably be weak, divided and incapable of tackling the serious problems facing the country. So why have I had to eat my words? What has enabled the Coalition to be so much more radical and consequential than any of us dared hope?

"While there is much that still divides Conservatives from Liberal Democrats, we are guided by common instincts in our responses to the biggest economic and social challenges."

It boils down to values, people and a sense of urgency born of crisis.

First, values. While there is much that still divides Conservatives from Liberal Democrats (not least in our attitudes towards the EU and the European Court in Strasbourg), we are guided by common instincts in our responses to the biggest economic and social challenges. We both recognise that Britain's reliance on financial services is unhealthy and that we need to work out new ways of earning our way in the world. We both believe that central government has become too powerful and intrusive and that a strong society is made up of independent individuals, families and communities taking the initiative themselves. We both want to be part of a government whose overriding mission is to help those born with least do better in life. We both

embrace our responsibility for the natural world and are determined to pass on to future generations a more sustainable society.

These common values mean that the two parties are usually pointing in roughly the same direction. But the ease with which the Coalition has been able to make decisions is a product of the strong working relationships formed between the key players: not just between David Cameron and George Osborne on the one hand and Nick Clegg and Danny Alexander on the other, but also between Michael Gove and Sarah Teather, Vince Cable and David Willetts, and Iain Duncan Smith and Steve Webb. Forget the early jokes about civil partnerships in the Rose Garden. There is little sentimental or starry-eyed about these relationships; but they are underpinned by a much more important quality: respect.

If good relationships have helped translate common values into detailed policy, what explains the breathless, almost breakneck speed with which the Government has set about implementing its priorities? This is a product of the circumstances facing the country and the Coalition. When times are good, our leaders become risk averse. Reflecting the conservative instincts of the people they serve, they see no reason to muck about with a formula that seems to be working.

But at a time when the money has run out, when vultures are circling above weaker members of the European herd, there is no status quo to preserve because everything is in flux. Although speed can breed error and mishap, it is also true that, in charting a course out of a crisis, momentum is all. And those who move too slowly may never get another chance to move at all.

So, 12 months on, the blitzkrieg is over. The next four years will be a long, hard slog. We will suffer defeats, and will probably be forced to concede some ground. But already the Coalition can claim to be one of the most radical governments of the post-war era. And that is something that a junior foot soldier like me can be proud of.

Jim Wallace

Governing in coalition: a response

by Jim Wallace, Member of the House of Lords, Liberal Democrat Party

Akash Paun has contributed a very perceptive analysis of the issues thrown up by one year of coalition government. His observation that, for the most part, the business of government has proceeded effectively is an accurate one. Whilst at the highest level, coalition government requires one-to-one discussions, for most of the time 'sofa government' won't work. Coalition requires officials to think about the sensibilities of the respective parties and for advice, options and decisions to be properly recorded. Ministers from the two parties, by and large, work together well. Similar to my experience in Scotland, contributions in ministerial meetings are more often than not prompted by genuine views on the merits or workability of a particular proposition, rather than coloured by tribal considerations.

"In spite of what people say about liking the idea of parties working together, the Coalition still seems to be judged and expected to perform according to the rules of single party government."

But therein lies a potential danger, not least for the junior coalition party. Paun refers to "under-resourced [Lib Dem] junior ministers". It is essential that they are the Lib Dem eyes and ears throughout their department; not becoming overly bogged down in perfecting every detail of some worthy portfolio policy initiative. In turn, Conservative secretaries of state must recognise that their Lib Dem junior ministers have a legitimate role in representing the party's interests across the board. Many do and if a policy is to command support across the Coalition, it makes sense that they should.

Paun also refers to "overstretched advisers at the centre". My experience of coalition government in Scotland underscores the importance of these advisers. They provided a vital channel of communication with the backbenches and the wider party, both to explain decisions, and to inform decision making with the knowledge of what our MSPs would wear.

Their role was particularly important in dealing with legislation. They worked with ministers and backbenchers to address particular concerns in bills. It is possibly not recognised how

much interaction there is at Westminster between ministers (of both parties) and backbenchers to try and satisfy specific problems. From my observations in the Lords, I am aware of how much time and effort is made by ministers (including Commons ministers) to meet coalition peers to try and identify legislative solutions.

One way or another, all these points relate to the fundamental issue of party identity. That was my abiding concern after I led Scottish Liberal Democrats into coalition with Labour in the Scottish Parliament in 1999. Key to this was to have certain policies which were clearly badged as Liberal Democrat policies, and repeatedly to remind people of the fact.

I think we can expect a bit more trumpeting of Lib Dem policy achievements in the coming months.

When it came to differentiating ourselves from Labour, we had the advantage in a devolved parliament of being able to point to the differences which clearly existed between our two parties at Westminster. Initially it took Scottish Labour ministers some time to come to terms with the fact that an agreement to govern together in Scotland did not extend to endorsement of the Blair government. But coalition politics requires grown-up attitudes and very quickly we learned to accept these differences. Even at the time of a major difference over Iraq, there was never any personal acrimony.

At Westminster, we don't have the option of airing differences on a different battleground, so the 'new emphasis on difference' will require sensitive handling. Nick Clegg has already flagged up NHS reforms as a priority where Lib Dems will try to make a difference. More daylight may have to be let in on the decision-making process. But in a coalition, united in its objective of restoring the economy to health, this can surely be accommodated by people practising grown-up politics. Ministers I've worked with in the last year show every sign of being able to.

But can grown-up politics be reported in a grown-up way? Will every difference become a government-threatening split? In spite of what people say about liking the idea of parties working together, the Coalition still seems to be judged and expected to perform according to the rules of single party government. Maybe the real challenge is to show not only the differences between the parties, but also what is really different about coalition government.

2. Number 10 and the Centre

How have Number 10 and the Cabinet Office adapted in the Coalition's first year in office?

by Jill Rutter and David Atkinson, Institute for Government

Jill Rutter

David Atkinson

"Current moves to strengthen Number 10 are an admission that the original lean vision was misguided."

Getting the Centre right in modern day government is hard. Under the Coalition's predecessors it had been chopped and changed; new units for strategy and delivery had been created in the Cabinet Office; and the immediate support to the prime ministers waxed and waned, then waxed again.

Like Gordon Brown, David Cameron initially believed he could streamline the support he received by downsizing Number 10, and thus lead by example in a government committed to efficiency.

Plans for reform

The Conservatives came to power with a clear, if not entirely coherent, view of how 'the way things were run' should change from the approach of the last Labour government, in particular responding to perceived politicisation and micromanagement from the Centre.[11]

Specifically, as described by David Cameron and Francis Maude, they wanted to reduce the number of special advisers compared with the previous regime;[12] return power to departments, who would be held to account for results against published business plans and by strengthened departmental boards;[13] reduce interference from the Centre on policy;[14] but use the Centre to launch a ruthless drive on efficiency.[15] But the Government also saw a need for new units to take forward cross-cutting agendas on behaviour change and the Big Society, and to create new, more strategic arrangements on national security.[16]

For the Liberal Democrats, Nick Clegg outlined a less detailed vision for the Civil Service and centre of government in January 2010, including a slimmer Whitehall "no longer responsible for micro-managing day to day policy across Britain".[17]

One year into the Coalition, we can look at how far the blueprints have been implemented, how far they have had to be modified to cope with the demands of coalition and how far plans developed in opposition have had to change when confronted with the realities of power.

Implementing planned changes

The most striking thing to any external observer of UK transitions is the continuity of top personnel, particularly Jeremy Heywood and Gus O'Donnell. But underneath that stability there have been a number of very significant changes within the Cabinet Office and Number 10, some planned in advance, some a consequence of governing in coalition.

In line with pre-election plans, a small Implementation Unit was set up in Number 10[18] tasked with overseeing the business plans produced by departments (which were formally launched in November),[19] and the Number 10 Policy Unit was slimmed down. In November, the Strategy Unit, set up under Tony Blair, was formally disbanded, with members dispersed between Number 10, the Office for Civil Society and the Deputy Prime Minister's office.

In the Cabinet Office, the Government's efficiency agenda was put under the new Efficiency and Reform Group (ERG). Tasked with pushing through the programme of administrative savings, the ERG took over the Office of Government Commerce from the Treasury, incorporated a number of the corporate groups in the Cabinet Office and absorbed the Office of the Third Sector and morphed it into the Office for Civil Society to lead on the Big Society. The ERG thus spanned the detailed application of controls on individual items of departmental spending, to pushing through implementation of the Prime Minister's big idea. Ian Watmore, who had joined the Civil Service under Tony Blair, returned to head up the ERG as the first ever Government Chief Operating Officer.

The ERG's first task was to oversee delivery of the Coalition's commitment to reduce spending in 2010-11 by £6.2bn. But those temporary controls have now become part of a permanent regime of detailed central spending controls.[20] The Behavioural Insights Team was established to nudge Whitehall into 'nudging' the public at large to live healthier, greener lives.

The Government also put in place the Conservative pre-election plans to bolster the National Security Secretariat to give more strategic drive and oversight to national security issues, building on Gordon Brown's changes. An IPPR commission, co-chaired by Lord Ashdown and Lord Robertson, had proposed something similar.[20] Former FCO Permanent Secretary, Sir Peter Ricketts, became the first National Security Adviser, and the National Security Council, chaired by the Prime Minister, oversaw the production of a new National Security Strategy and the Strategic Defence and Security Review.

Coping with coalition

No party's pre-election plans addressed how to cope with coalition.

Without the Liberal Democrats in government, the position of Deputy Prime Minister would probably not have existed. But Nick Clegg's decision not to take a departmental portfolio meant a new office had to be set up from scratch – and his oversight of political and constitutional reform meant that around 60 civil servants transferred from Ministry of Justice to the Cabinet Office to push through legislation on fixed term parliaments and electoral reform.

But just as important as his policy function was the new need to 'coalitionise' policy. New machinery, with a new Cabinet Committee to resolve coalition differences, was established. But what rapidly became clear was that additional resources were needed to bolster the Deputy Prime Minister's ability to operate across the whole of government[22] and in the autumn his office was finally strengthened.[23]

The second consequence was that the ministerial team at the Cabinet Office became even more important. Oliver Letwin and Francis Maude, both nominally ministers of state, were given key roles as Minister for Government Policy and as Minister for the Cabinet Office respectively. The third surprising, but vital, figure in the triumvirate was provided by the Lib Dem Treasury Chief Secretary, Danny Alexander, who straddled both the coalition dimensions, co-chairing the Coalition Operation and Strategic Planning Group[24] with Oliver Letwin, and the drive to cut spending through his joint chairmanship with Francis Maude of the Efficiency and Reform Group.[25] This double hatting was an unintended consequence of Alexander's move to the Treasury after David Laws' unexpected early resignation.

The third consequence of coalition was that more formal Cabinet processes were reenergised. Early on, the Government published its new rules for cabinet committees to ensure that Lib Dems could not be overruled. Oliver Letwin has said that he hoped that the Conservatives would have gone back to more formal processes anyway, but coalition forced them to do it.

One year on

One year on, the verdict on the changes at the Centre is mixed.

On the positive side of the balance sheet, the plans for the Efficiency and Reform Group and on national security have both been implemented, the initial spending

reductions were delivered, and both are now established parts of the landscape (even if some departments chafe under the detailed controls).

Second, the structures to deal with coalition have worked surprisingly well, helped by the good personal relations that have characterised its early days. It took too long for the top of the Civil Service to accept that Nick Clegg needed extra support to perform effectively as Deputy Prime Minister, and recent comments suggest that the DPM himself continues to see the support he receives from the Civil Service as a problem.[26] The adequacy of his office needs to be kept under constant review, to prevent it becoming a risk for the Coalition's decision-making capacity.

Third, in notable contrast to the previous 13 years, there are no longer two competing centres, with the Treasury returning to its more conventional finance ministry role and the Cabinet Office dismantling its internal economic capacity. There are reports, though, of emerging tensions as the Treasury perceives the ERG encroaching on its traditional territory.[27]

However, it is clear that in other respects the Prime Minister and his advisers made a false start from which he is only just recovering. In deciding that a lean Number 10 was preferable to the bloated operation of his predecessor, David Cameron was following Gordon Brown's approach when he became Prime Minister. But fond memories of how Mrs Thatcher commanded from Downing Street with a small, expert Policy Unit proved a poor guide to serving the needs of a modern prime minister. After a number of policy reverses, such as on forest asset sales, and concerns on the robustness of the health reforms, the Prime Minister is creating a new Policy and Implementation Unit (PIU) of some 15 senior civil servants and special advisers,[28] with a new Head of Policy Development, Paul Kirby, alongside Kris Murrin (Head of Implementation), and a new Analytics team.

The aim, in the words of Number 10 Permanent Secretary Jeremy Heywood, is to ensure that "Number 10 and the Deputy Prime Minister are better informed at an earlier stage of the policy development and delivery performance of individual departments".[29] Unit members (technically civil servants, but personally selected by the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister) will shadow departments. At the same time a Director of Political Strategy has been recruited, to sit alongside the Prime Minister's strategy adviser (Steve Hilton) and the new Director of Government Communications, Craig Oliver.

Looking forward

It is not clear that this will be enough.

In the Institute for Government's report Shaping Up, published before the election, we argued that the Cabinet Office needed to become a department of strategy and capability, rather than simply providing secretariat functions.[30] The changes since the election suggest that it has moved some way to becoming a department of capability, with the emergence of the ERG. However, with the notable exception of national security, the Centre has reduced its strategic capacity. The mechanisms established to drive delivery in departments – business plans and strengthened departmental boards – have yet to prove themselves.

Successive prime ministers have found they need support to develop and deliver their agenda and avoid political elephant traps. Limited traditional structures offer no scope for policy initiation by the Prime Minister, no scope for policy follow through or delivery oversight, and assume that the brokering function can be delivered through Cabinet committees.

Current moves to strengthen Number 10 are an admission that the original lean vision was misguided. But the view that a strong centre is inherently un-British is very ingrained. Other similar countries do not feel the same need to deny the Prime Minister the means he needs to achieve his goals. The Institute for Government's international work has shown that David Cameron receives far less designated policy support from the Centre than is provided for prime ministers in Australia, Germany and Canada. In Canberra, for instance, 230 civil servants at the Centre work on direct policy advice for the Prime Minister shadowing the work of other government departments; in the Chancellery in Berlin there are approximately 225 civil servants; and in Canada 535. By comparison, Number 10 in the UK has just 200 staff in total.

The unexpected formation of a coalition government placed extraordinary new demands on the Centre. It is adjusting. But the determination to lead by example and skimp on support to the Prime Minister has yet again shown itself to be a false economy.

David Bennett

Number 10 and the Centre: a response

by David Bennett, former Chief Policy Advisor to the Prime Minister

By the time I joined Number 10 after the 2005 election, there had already been several iterations of the structures and systems supporting Tony Blair as Prime Minister. These changes, as well as subsequent developments under Gordon Brown and the Coalition (discussed in the preceding chapter), suggest a number of high level lessons.

First, the nature of support to the Prime Minister must reflect the Prime Minister's own preferred style, whether that of chair, chief executive or anything else. The Whitehall 'system' may take the view that only certain styles are appropriate, but if the Prime Minister is uncomfortable or unwilling to adopt such a style, the support structures must have the flexibility to adapt.

"No matter how 'hands off' a prime minister wants to be they cannot escape the political reality that difficulties within individual departments can have significant consequences for the Government as a whole."

Second, whatever the style of an incoming administration, and no matter how close they may previously have been to the Centre of government, it is likely they will not fully understand the nature of the support currently needed at the Centre until they have (re-)established themselves in office. It is a mistake simply to assume that there is little to learn from previous administrations. Of course, a wholesale copying of existing structures and processes will not necessarily be right either.

Third, no matter how 'hands off' a prime minister wants to be they cannot escape the political reality that policy or implementation difficulties within individual departments can have significant consequences for them and the Government as a whole. The Centre, and the Prime Minister's Office in particular, must have enough resource and the right systems in place to stay sufficiently well informed about what is happening within individual departments, and to have adequate levers of control when courses need to be changed.

These observations raise questions about the role – or even existence – of various structures at the Centre. First, the Cabinet Office. Its role as coordinator of government policy is

accepted, but what should it be doing beyond this? In the later part of the Blair administration, when a broad-based reform agenda including of Whitehall itself had emerged, many argued that the Cabinet Office should be given the capacity to drive change from the Centre. This might have been similar in style to the new Efficiency and Reform Group, but would have been much broader in scope.

Close collaboration between the Cabinet Office and the Treasury is also important. Whilst an amount of constructive tension no doubt provides a useful check and balance, shared objectives and close collaboration are essential for the effective functioning of the Centre. On the other hand, and perhaps more surprisingly, the division between the Prime Minister's Office and the rest of the Cabinet Office seems more important than might be expected. In particular, the prime minister of the day often feels the need to have a small(ish) team under his or her direct control and somewhat separate from the broader Cabinet Office, albeit closely linked.

One key organisation in the Prime Minister's Office itself is the Policy Unit, which has enjoyed many different manifestations under several administrations. My own experiences suggest that the Policy Unit must be small enough that it is not drawn too heavily into policy formulation or operational detail, but large enough to achieve a proper grasp of departmental policy and operations. This probably means one senior individual for each of the major departments of state and around a total of 10–12 people to cover all of Whitehall adequately. These senior individuals can be civil servants or special advisers, or a mix of both, but they must be alive to the political as well as policy implications of departmental actions.

Closely related to the Policy Unit has been the now disbanded Strategy Unit. Many questioned the appropriateness of having such a central unit, fearing that it disempowered individual departments and/or wasted resources by duplicating effort. Both are concerns to be guarded against, but there is nevertheless a case for a unit – in my time working to an agenda set by the Prime Minister through the Policy Unit – looking at long term, strategic and, especially, cross-cutting issues not otherwise covered by an individual department and, much more controversially, bringing new perspectives to long-established problems where departmental thinking may have become somewhat settled.

Finally, an innovation of the Blair administration was to ally the Strategy Unit focused on policy design with a Delivery Unit focused on the implementation of key objectives. Although there is scope to argue how these objectives should be

defined – top down targets, outcome measures or anything else – I believe there is real merit in the development and application of tools and techniques to aid and drive delivery. However, this is a capability which once established should be dispersed to individual departments, provided it is not diluted to the point of inconsequence in the process.

3. Transforming Whitehall

How has Whitehall changed under the Coalition, and what are the biggest issues it faces over the coming years?

by James Page, Institute for Government

James Page

Civil service reform has been a virtually constant theme since at least 1980, when Margaret Thatcher declared: "If Sir Derek Rayner could teach the Civil Service to manage itself as well as he manages Marks & Spencer's I should be very pleased." Yet, even compared with the Thatcher reforms, present day Whitehall is facing a profound revolution.

A radical agenda

The Government has made it clear that its first priority is to deal with the deficit, and has already taken steps to reduce government spending. Taken together, the June Emergency Budget and the Spending Review in October 2010 signalled an overall cut in public spending totalling £81bn across the next four years.[31]

Unprotected departments have an average overall settlement reduction of a fifth and all departments have committed to reducing their administrative spending by at least a third. This is the largest reduction in public spending since the Second World War. By way of comparison, between 1980 and 1984 a much larger civil service was cut by a little over 10%.[32]

"In the private sector, major organisational change has a success rate estimated at one in three. Should that ratio hold true for Whitehall, reforms in perhaps 12 of the 19 main departments could fail."

Alongside this fiscal austerity, the Prime Minister has spoken of his desire to "turn government on its head". Whitehall is to enter a "Post-Bureaucratic Age": shifting power away from central government, opening up service provision to multiple providers, making government data widely available and 'nudging' citizens to influence their behaviour.

The Government has also outlined a radical reform agenda, including major changes to welfare, health, education, the justice system and the police among others. Each of these depends critically on the Civil Service and has the potential to greatly undermine the Coalition.

Setting out on the revolutionary road

Some structures and processes show little sign of change. Most notably, there have not been any major structural reorganisations of departments – in part based on the recognition that, while there can be long-term gains, this comes

at a high price in the short-term.[33] Despite the unprecedented scale of savings required across government, the Spending Review process was also conducted along wholly familiar lines with the Treasury leading a series of bilateral negotiations with departments.

However, change has already begun.

'Coalitionising' is the new buzzword in Whitehall. In a sense, this is simply taking the Civil Service back to the future with a renewed emphasis on formalised, collective decision-making. In another, it represents a marked contrast with the 'sofa' style of government built up under several administrations. Formally, coalitionising means virtually all departments having a mix of ministers from both parties and Cabinet committees being chaired by a minister from one party and deputy chaired by a minister from the other. The real importance for Whitehall, though, is the change in process and culture, with far greater Cabinet involvement and scrutiny of policy development to maintain trust across the Coalition.

The Government is also intent on increasing what Francis Maude has called "democratic accountability" through greater transparency. Publication of government data (most notably the COINS database), departmental organograms and salaries for senior civil servants allows unparalleled access to, and scrutiny of, the inner workings of government. Departmental business plans set out a detailed agenda for Whitehall and allow observers to see immediately where actions have been delayed or missed. Having scrapped top-down targets (the most important of which were the public service agreements), this represents a big shift in how departments are held to account – outwards rather than upwards.

Although there have not been any big changes to the machinery of government, there has been a big shift at the Centre of the Civil Service with the creation of the Efficiency and Reform Group (ERG) in the Cabinet Office (discussed in chapter 2). The National Audit Office has likened the ERG to a traditional corporate headquarters, tasked with controlling costs and improving efficiency across central government.[34] Early actions (such as imposing an immediate spending freeze on consultancy, IT and advertising) sent a huge jolt through Whitehall and represented a 'shock and awe' opening in the battle to win greater central control over departmental spending.

Departments' efforts to cut costs are at different stages but several are taking shape rapidly. Most advanced is the Ministry of Justice, which started a reform programme Transforming Justice over 18 months ago, and is now moving rapidly to implement key strands of it.[35] Others too are moving fast including the Departments for Communities and Local Government, Transport, and Culture, Media and Sport. These departments' plans are to be not only smaller but also very different in how they operate.

'A revolution is not a bed of roses' – risks and opportunities

Downsizing departments on this scale represents the single biggest risk to Whitehall over the coming years – and a big opportunity. Natural wastage and recruitment freezes will not achieve what is required in most departments. Moreover, this would miss the opportunity to transform how Whitehall works.

The challenge facing Whitehall is to bring together the skills and capability to lead this change. With almost universally rising budgets for departments since 1999, there is extremely limited experience in the Civil Service of successfully undertaking major change programmes on anything like a comparable scale to what is now required. The Department for Work and Pensions was praised by the National Audit Office for increasing its productivity between 2004 and 2007 while producing £1.446bn of efficiency savings, a headcount reduction of 31,100, relocation of over 4,000 posts from London and the South East, and redeployment of 10,000 staff to customer facing roles.[36] Yet this achievement stands out in the recent history of the Civil Service and is, in fact, relatively small scale compared with what is likely to be required over the coming years as departments meet their Spending Review settlements.

In the private sector, where change is more a part of everyday reality, major organisational change generally takes between three and five years to embed and the success rate is estimated at roughly one in three.[37] Should that ratio hold true for Whitehall, reforms in perhaps 12 of the 19 main departments could fail. At best, this would mean a failure to realise the promised administrative savings. At worst, whole areas of the reform programme could be jeopardised.

A dominant theme in the literature on organisational change in the private sector is the battle leaders face in winning the support of staff for new ways of working. The dual leadership of government departments – by ministers and senior civil servants – makes this still more challenging. Morale is already low as pay is frozen, pensions cut back and staff start to be made redundant. In this context, attack by political leaders and defence (behind closed doors) by senior civil servants is not a healthy way to proceed.

The opportunity is for the civil service to do things very differently. Moving towards the Post-Bureaucratic Age and Big Society imply the need for a Civil Service which is more strategic, enabling and transparent, as public service provision becomes more diverse and closer to the citizen. A major shift will be required to move from delivering services to commissioning them, with payment by results as measured by a defined set of outcomes.[38]

This implies a shift in the skills base from one that prescribes treatment to one which sets outcomes and structures markets. Whitehall must have a workforce that is rewarded, incentivised and expert in its knowledge so that it can develop a fuller understanding of users, communities, external delivery chains and local markets in the delivery of services. It needs to become much more outward-facing and be ready to reflect the experiences of those users and markets, in order to shape the Government's approach to commissioning and funding.

There is also a broader opportunity to test and reshape some of the foundations on which Whitehall rests. The most important of these is ministerial accountability as currently practised. Civil servants and front line services will need to respond to an increasingly complex web of accountability. There has been a large reduction in the number of arm's length bodies on the grounds that this will simplify and improve accountability. At the same time, top down performance management has been substantially reduced and the Government's reform plans include major changes to accountability arrangements, such as the introduction of elected police commissioners and publication of spending information. All of this is designed to make accountability flow outwards to citizens and communities rather than upwards to Whitehall and Parliament.

Despite these changes the Government remains committed to ministerial accountability to Parliament, which provides the overwhelming majority of funding for public services. Meeting the principle of accountability to Parliament without compromising the operational independence of decentralised services or constricting new sources of accountability will be a challenge. Ministers, civil servants and parliamentarians will need clarity about who is accountable, for what, and to whom; as well as about who is responsible for stepping in if things go wrong, and in what circumstances.

A cunning plan?

It is shaping up to be a strange revolution for the Civil Service. The Government has put great effort into its plans for public service reform, including the forthcoming white paper. But despite the enormity of change on the horizon, there is no equivalent blueprint or design for the future of the Civil Service itself. What emerges in 2015 will certainly be different, but without a plan it is hard to know what Whitehall should be aiming for.

Kate Jenkins

Transforming Whitehall: a response

by Kate Jenkins, former Head of the Prime Minister's Efficiency Unit

James Page's chapter is a fascinating look at what the Government hopes to achieve in its reform of the public sector. It is clear that there are challenging plans, conflicting objectives and a hole in the middle.

Whitehall is facing major changes in the way it works. James Page charts some of the plans that are under way or in prospect. As Whitehall insiders and Whitehall watchers know to their cost, it is not the plans or good intentions that matter – the proof is all in what happens.

James Page produces an interesting statistic: only one in three private sector reorganisations succeed. That seems quite high – and many of those will only partly succeed. But does this hold lessons for the Civil Service? Well maybe, but Whitehall and Government is beset even more perniciously by unintended consequences than the private sector. Indeed if it is 'Whitehall' – the Civil Service – that is involved, then the lesson of history is that private sector experience is a snare and a delusion.

"Government is beset even more perniciously by unintended consequences than the private sector. Indeed for Whitehall the lesson of history is that private sector experience is a snare and a delusion."

No matter what their enthusiasm for the task, most private sector appointees into the Civil Service retreat fairly rapidly to the surprisingly calmer waters of business. And as James Page makes clear, some of the most intractable problems seem to be built into the new ideas and plans.

This is not to argue that many of the ideas for improving effectiveness are other than sensible and overdue. There is a great deal to be done in productivity and unit cost reductions. This does not need to be done with a fanfare of trumpets but by low key and sensible management. Many government organisations have been operating for many years and most organisations with a long history need tightening up, improvements in procedures and cost cutting. Many will also need to rethink what they do and how they do it. All that is the stuff of competent management.

But be careful. 'Commissioning' is 21st century speak for 20th century 'contracting out'. It is a long and difficult process to retrain or find skilled people to become experts in commissioning. In the public sector procurement rules and political intervention always make a simple task more difficult. It will fail at the first hurdle unless ministers, as well as civil servants, understand and stick to their new roles – and the House of Commons supports them.

Accountability in the public sector is always a difficulty. If there is to be accountability to the House of Commons for the expenditure of public money, as there should be, then how the money is spent and with what result will remain a concern of ministers. That concern will inevitably mean pulling up to the top of departments' decisions to spend and the accounting officer functions of senior officials. And what will then follow is the centralising of policy and operations.

It would be better to accept that the constitutional convention of accountability to the Commons will have this centralising effect and build in other mechanisms for effective delegation and local information and accountability. It is wholly unrealistic to assume that accountability to the Commons does not affect how the public service operates.

Finally, James Page's last paragraph has the killer punch. Is there really no plan for the Civil Service? In that case the confusion and muddle that has affected Whitehall for the past decade will continue. Why are ministers so reluctant to take a serious look at the kind of civil service we need to undertake the changes the Coalition want to see?

Over the past 20 years or so, the Civil Service's functions and priorities have been changed by external circumstance and political pressures. It may be better and more effective now. But taking a hard look at what it does, what it should do, and what are the constitutional implications of its likely future direction could and should have a transforming effect on Whitehall – and see to it that elected ministers get what they want.

4. Fiscal consolidation

How effectively has the Coalition managed the challenge of fiscal consolidation?

by Julian McCrae, Institute for Government

Julian McCrae

The fiscal consolidation was going to be the number one issue for any incoming government. With the largest budget deficit since the Second World War, the Government was borrowing £1 in every £4 of spending. How well the Coalition government manages this challenge will surely be one of the key yardsticks by which it will be judged.

Of course, it is still very early days to judge the consolidation's success or otherwise. The UK is just at the end of the planning phase, and with any change on this scale the real trick is implementing the plan, not coming up with it. However, it is possible to get some sense of how things are going, and what the challenges will be going forward.

The Institute's interest in the challenge of deficit reduction has not been focused on what the consolidation plan should contain, which is fundamentally a question of policy on which many other commentators have views. Rather our interest is in the process by which such a plan should be constructed. In 2009, we looked at international experience of countries that had successfully undertaken large consolidations in previous decades. The headline finding from this work was that how you come up with your plan makes a real difference to the potential for successful implementation. It is not simply that some planning processes come up with objectively better plans. The key point is that some processes build up the consensus around the need to take particular actions, and generate a sense of ownership among those who actually have to take those actions.

"The ambition of the Government's plans suggests it has very high expectations of public sector leaders' capacity to manage change. Its rhetoric, however suggests it believes the opposite. The next year is likely to reveal which is closest to the truth."

How did the planning process go?

First it is worth comparing the timing of the planning process. The UK planned its consolidation relatively swiftly. The publication of the Spending Review in October 2010 came less than six months after the election. Compare this with the Canadian consolidation of the early 1990s: that review took a year from start to completion. On the other hand, the UK Spending Review lasted longer than the period of planning in Sweden following that country's financial crisis at the start of the 1990s. There the incoming government faced problems raising

funds on the markets, and acted very rapidly with departments given a matter of weeks to bring forward their plans.

There is one major difference between the UK case and all of the international examples we looked at – the UK is being far more ambitious. The Government is not only looking to undertake the largest consolidation since the War, it is also undertaking the largest reforms in a generation to the biggest areas of spending (particularly health and welfare) while reducing the size of central government itself by a third or more. In contrast, Sweden for example deliberately avoided any structural reforms to its ministries, on the grounds that it would be too risky to attempt so much change alongside the number one priority of sorting out the public finances.

So the duration of the planning phase may look short given the scale of the ambition, but how did the Government go about this process? In our earlier work, the Institute identified four principles that improve the chances of any given consolidation plan being successfully implemented:

- Building a mandate
- Demonstrating political commitment
- Ensuring cabinet collegiality
- Fostering ownership.

We can look at each of these in turn, and see what the Government did.

Building a mandate

Large fiscal adjustments need a political rationale capable of building a principled mandate for change among the public. This is essential if the consolidation is to survive the inevitable challenges from those losing out as a result of the necessary action. The Government appears to have convinced the public that its course of action is indeed necessary. In March 2011, YouGov found that nearly three out of five respondents (57%) felt that the way the Government is cutting spending is necessary, compared with less than a third (32%) who considered it unnecessary.[39] A central part of this argument has been driven by international comparisons – put crudely, "we can't risk going the same way as Greece". But it is more questionable as to whether it is seen as principled.

The first way to build principle into a consolidation is to make sure that the project is motivated by an appropriate set of questions. It should not be simply focused on 'what should be cut', but rather on 'what should the Government

preserve' for the good of the nation. In setting up the Spending Review, the Government drew heavily on the Canadian experience, using a set of questions that did just this.

The second is involving the public as much as possible in the discussion around the choices being made. Here again the Government looked to move beyond a traditional, closed Whitehall process. The most noticeable example was the Treasury's Spending Challenge website, where members of the public and public sector workers were encouraged to feed their own ideas into the process. This produced some announcements, but of a relatively micro nature (the top ideas highlighted by the Treasury saved a few million pounds each).

Beyond this, there was relatively little engagement of the public directly by the Government. There were some noticeable attempts by organisations beyond government to fill this gap. For example, PricewaterhouseCoopers organised a deliberative citizens' jury with 24 members of the public considering the broad outline of the spending review over three days. One of the striking results from this is the degree to which the jury felt the Government's communications had failed to inform them about the nature of the problem faced by the country. Interestingly, when the jury considered the issue, the criteria they came up with closely matched those being used by the Government itself to drive the Spending Review process.

Finally, when it comes to presenting the plan to the public, it is important to present it as a single package. Many of the measures involved are never going to be popular, and if presented on their own they are likely to be overwhelmed by opposition. Presenting the measures as a single package makes trade-offs clearer – those arguing against tax rises or spending cuts in their area are more easily forced to identify which area they think should take more of the pain. Here the Government made an early error, announcing the end of the Building Schools for the Future programme in isolation from other measures in summer 2010. This was the first tangible change which went beyond a 'cutting waste' agenda, and it met considerable opposition. As the announcement was made on its own, it could not be accompanied by a reinforcing message (e.g. "we have to prioritise the education our children get in a classroom over the 'nice to have' of shiny new classrooms") and caused the Government serious problems.

More worryingly perhaps is that the Spending Review announcement itself was not entirely transparent about the choices being considered. As part of its package, the Department for the Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra) was considering the sale of UK forestry. However, this was not mentioned in

the Spending Review document (interestingly the Defra section leads with the promise of 'continued investment' in flood defences). When the eventual consultation document on the future of the public forestry estate was published three months later, it was met by a storm of criticism. The handling of this issue led to the proposals being seen as an underhand way to cut costs, rather than as a principled prioritisation among many unpalatable choices. This may prove to be an isolated example of the Government holding back on difficult messages, or the start of a trend. Certainly the Government may want to reflect on how contentious policies should be presented going forward.

Demonstrating political commitment

Given their inherently political nature, these processes need to be guided by political will from the top, and require the determined commitment of the Prime Minister and his closest political allies, including the Chancellor. The Government has certainly achieved this. Famously the Chancellor and Prime Minister have no Plan B.

As a coalition, delivering clear leadership from the top has been more difficult to achieve, as it has involved four people – Cameron, Clegg, Osborne and Alexander. However, there appears to be a genuine consensus among this group. Certainly the functioning of the 'quadrilateral' between these four men was highlighted as part of the success of the Spending Review process by Treasury officials.[40] That the unity of this core group is seen as a strength is no mean feat given the scale of the political challenges.

One way of demonstrating political commitment is to go against the political grain. Evidence shows that the more that governments on the left focus on spending cuts (and conversely, the more that governments on the right focus on tax increases), the more likely it is that the consolidation is successful. This is probably because it runs counter to expectations, and reassures markets that the Government is serious about getting its finances under control.

While this government has in general been very focused on spending cuts rather than tax rises, within this overall picture there are some noticeable elements that go against traditional political expectations. The Conservatives are, for example, committed to cutting both the police and defence budgets. Similarly, the Liberal Democrats agreed to raise university tuition fees which allowed a sharp fall in government spending on the area. In the latter case does highlight the perils of going too much against the grain – the stark nature of the switch in position has

led to questions as to whether the Liberal Democrat leadership really believed in its own policy before the election.

Overall, the Government's determination has no doubt contributed to the perception among the public that the consolidation is necessary.

Ensuring cabinet collegiality

Beyond the commitment of the Prime Minister and Chancellor, it is essential that ministers tasked with carrying out a painful consolidation buy in to the plan. At its highest level, this requires a collective cabinet endeavour, with broad cabinet agreement on the overall priorities for government, and on the amount of resources available to different departments and cross-cutting programmes.

Here the spending review process was probably at its weakest. The Government used a very traditional UK process, focused on bilateral agreements between the Treasury and individual departments. Unlike Canada, which used a committee of ministers to help draw up its plan, the UK used the concept of the 'Star Chamber', where ministers act not as authors of the plan, but as a (decidedly biased) jury on colleagues' proposals. The sense at cabinet level that 'we're all in it together' cannot have been helped by the forestry example, where the Prime Minister very publicly disowned the policy.

Fostering ownership

Those responsible for delivering the plans need to take ownership of them. This will not only produce better plans, it may also direct energies towards maintaining services under pressure rather than simply lobbying against cuts. It is still too early to tell how well this has gone. Certainly the Government has taken a robust approach to its relationship with local government and arm's length bodies. This strident tone is increasingly apparent in ministerial comments on the Civil Service itself.

This is probably the most worrying issue for the consolidation. It is difficult to see how change on the scale envisaged can be successfully achieved through a web of poisoned relationships. You ignore the 'people side' of change at your peril.

Indeed, this points to one of the continuing ironies of the UK's fiscal consolidation. The ambition of the Government's plans suggests it has very high expectations of public sector leaders' capacity to absorb and manage change. Its rhetoric, on the other hand, sometimes suggests it believes the opposite to be the case. The next year is likely to reveal which is closest to the truth.

Jonathan Portes

Fiscal consolidation: a response

by Jonathan Portes, Director of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research

In discussing the fiscal consolidation, it is perhaps worth separating out the macro and the micro – the overall size, pace and composition of the consolidation on the one hand, and the specific measures on the other.

On the first, I think you can draw out more from Julian's chapter about the extent of the Government's success. The size and pace of the fiscal consolidation substantially exceeds what either coalition partner suggested in the election campaign, so they have set themselves a high bar. Yet on each of the four criteria Julian sets out, the outcome so far has exceeded expectations: polling evidence, as he says, suggests that overall most people think that the Government's spending cuts are necessary; the Coalition has demonstrated a clear political commitment to seeing them through; cabinet discipline and collective responsibility in sticking to this line have been very largely observed; and both wings of the Coalition have clearly taken ownership of the overall macroeconomic strategy. This was achieved by agreeing and communicating a very clear and simple message that the country was in fiscal crisis, and very rapid and drastic action was required to avoid severe consequences. Personally I think this was grossly exaggerated[41] but as a political strategy it was highly successful.

"The size and pace of the fiscal consolidation substantially exceeds what either coalition partner suggested in the election campaign, so they have set themselves a high bar. Yet the outcome so far has exceeded expectations."

However, this success – and in particular the speed and degree of central control it made necessary – did, as Julian says, lead in turn to some defects in the process for identifying specific consolidation measures, which in turn pose risks to implementation. The combination of ad hoc political commitments (for example, to protecting health and overseas aid) with traditional bilateral Treasury–departmental negotiations meant an almost complete lack of attention to cross-cutting issues. The consequences of this are likely to be reflected at local level, as cuts made by different departments and local authorities combine to produce disproportionate

impacts on some vulnerable groups. Meanwhile, the attempts to blame specific cuts on local authorities have little credibility, given the overall message that cuts are necessary, and as Julian points out may jeopardise the relationships necessary to make implementation a success.

Even within the constraints of politics and departmental budgets, prioritisation was at best patchy. In some areas – especially capital spending – there was a genuine and largely successful attempt to prioritise on the basis of the evidence of what was most likely to be cost-effective. However, there was very little of this for the bulk of current spending. In my view, even more than the confusion over forestry Julian identifies, the decision to cancel the Educational Maintenance Allowance, even if now partially reversed, on the basis of an entirely misleading presentation of the evidence,[42] has done considerable and unnecessary damage to the cause of evidence-based policy in Whitehall.

One final issue is the interaction between the consolidation and policy change. For example, the Department for Work and Pensions is cutting its administration budget by more than a third, and its programme budget by a quarter. That would be demanding in a time of stable policy. To do it at the same time as cutting and reforming Disability Living Allowance, received by 2 million people; retesting the entire IB/ESA caseload of 2.5 million; making major cuts to housing benefit that are likely to result in severe hardship for at least some affected groups; and then sweeping away much of the benefit and tax credit system and replacing it by a new Universal Credit; that might be seen by some as courageous to say the least.

5. The Big Society

What progress has the Coalition made in turning its Big Society vision into policy reality?

by Adrian Brown and Kate Blatchford, Institute for Government

Adrian Brown

Kate Blatchford

"The Big Society can mean almost anything. That's a problem if it requires public servants, civil society, and the public to work together towards common goals."

A year ago, as the Coalition was being forged, there was a great deal of speculation about the policies each side would need to drop to make the pact stick. Here was the chance to dump those ideas that were included in manifestos for political expediency or to pander to particular interests – and one idea in particular seemed certain to be jettisoned.

The Big Society failed to connect with voters during the 2010 election campaign and some even suggested it was the main reason why the Conservatives had failed to secure a majority. It confused people and sounded like something dreamt up in a think tank. With the general election over, most people expected the Big Society to be consigned to the political dustbin.

Fast-forward 12 months and the Big Society remains central to the Coalition's agenda despite being routinely lambasted and even declared dead on several occasions. How did that happen?

Big problems

Over the past year, the Big Society has been dogged by three big problems:

- Firstly, because it is irrevocably linked to Cameron (and the Prime Minister's chief strategist Steve Hilton) it has been treated with suspicion by the Liberal Democrats and the Tory grassroots
- Secondly, the concept seems almost wilfully vague, defying all attempts to be pinned down to a discrete set of tangible concepts
- Thirdly, the cuts now risk overwhelming the concept, breeding cynicism among initially supportive sections of the public and civil society.

Examining each of these sheds some light on why the Big Society has had such a challenging year, but also helps to explain the secret of its longevity.

The Cameron connection

If it wasn't for the Prime Minister's ongoing personal investment in the Big Society it wouldn't have survived the Coalition Agreement. Why does he continue to promote the idea so strongly?

The Big Society is Cameron's equivalent of Blair's Third Way. The idea neatly contrasts his politics with both the right and the left. On the right, the contrast is with the 'no such thing as society' Thatcherism that turned the Tories into the nasty party. On the left, the contrast is with the 'big government', top-down approach that characterised much of New Labour's era. The Big Society therefore defines Cameron and his philosophy of government.

Ironically, it is precisely this direct link to the Prime Minister that makes the Big Society hard to embrace for those outside his inner circle. The Liberal Democrats have always been a bit suspicious of the idea, originally describing it as "patronising nonsense", and many Tory backbenchers have voiced similar views. Even those close to Cameron with some responsibility for pushing the Big Society such as Oliver Letwin and Francis Maude are far from fluent on the subject, preferring the concepts of marketisation and government efficiency respectively.

There is little doubt that if the Big Society was less politicised it would fare far better as a neutral concept everyone could rally round. To some extent this is happening at the local level, where councils are rebranding their Big Society work to make it more universally acceptable. However, the choice for Cameron over the past 12 months has been to hold the Big Society close or watch it die and so at the national level at least, the idea remains defiantly political.

Given the significant investment from Cameron, you might legitimately ask why more progress has not been made. The answer is that Cameron's commitment has not been backed up by organisational clout. Valuable months were lost while Number 10 and the Cabinet Office dodged the issue preferring to argue that the Big Society does not require a 'top-down plan'. It did, and it does. The ongoing delays to the public services white paper are just the latest sign of a lack of grip from the Centre.

Lost in vagueness

The second problem for the Big Society is that nobody knows what it is. This article has already spent over 500 words discussing the Big Society without defining it. One might think this wouldn't be necessary for an idea with such a high profile, but the truth is that the Big Society means different things to different people.

If we go back to the 'launch' of the Big Society, before the General Election campaign began, we can see the seeds of the problem. David Cameron and 11 members of the Shadow Cabinet addressed an invited audience at a community centre on London's South Bank to explain what the Big Society meant in each policy area.

Cameron described the Big Society as "about enabling and encouraging people to come together to solve their problems and make life better".[43] Frankly, that could mean anything, and a lot of the debate about the Big Society has struggled to move beyond these clichés. In fairness to Cameron, he did go on to outline three themes within the Big Society, which have been repeated throughout the year: public service reform, empowering communities and encouraging social action.

Each of these themes can be unpacked. For example, public service reform includes ideas about social enterprises being able to take over public services and increasing the use of payment by results. The problem is that once you unpack every concept, you end up with a very broad sweep of policies covering everything from localism to social impact bonds. Different people inevitably end up cherry-picking different aspects of the Big Society for different ends. When different government departments do this, the narrative becomes very confused.

The end result is that the Big Society can mean almost anything – and that's a problem if it requires public servants, civil society and the public at large to come together and work towards a common set of goals. But being vague also has distinct benefits. It makes the Big Society as hard to catch as a rainbow, meaning it is very difficult for opponents to score a direct hit.

Big Society versus Big Cuts

The final challenge is perhaps the most dangerous as it has driven a wedge between the Government and previously vocal supporters of the Big Society. How can the cuts agenda be squared with the Big Society?

In the early days of the Coalition, before the Spending Review had revealed the true horrors of the fiscal squeeze to come, the Big Society could bask in the warm glow that comes from being associated with charities, voluntary groups and philanthropy. Once the full scale of the cuts became apparent, and the voluntary sector realised they were not immune, the mood rapidly turned sour.

The accusation that the Big Society was 'just a cover for cuts' began to gain traction. Whether you believed this or not, it was hard to avoid the conclusion that at a time when the Government was talking up the role of charities it was simultaneously withdrawing support across the sector. This problem is compounded by the fact that, because of the wider cuts in public services and the impact of the recession, the demand for many services provided by the voluntary sector is on the rise.

It is indeed unfortunate that the Government is attempting to push the idea of the Big Society at a time of such dramatic cuts. As with most policy ideas, it would be much easier to implement if there was a bit of money to throw at the problem. However, there is no doubt that the fiscal challenge needs to be addressed and the cuts to funding for the voluntary sector are no more draconian, as a percentage of total income, than the cuts in many parts of the public sector.

There is an element of the definitional problem here. If you define the Big Society as voluntary activity (and, more specifically, government-funded programmes) then the situation indeed looks grim, but as discussed above, the Big Society is about much more than that. In fact, if the Big Society is about fundamentally rethinking the role of the state and the delivery of public services then it is difficult to imagine a more prescient time. The cuts demand radical thinking and the Big Society at least provides some signposts towards possible solutions.

This is the final reason why the Big Society has survived. The Government desperately needs an antidote to the cuts story and the Big Society helps to provide this – not just by being something different, but by possibly including the seeds of the solution.

Looking ahead

So the challenges faced by the Big Society can also explain why the concept has survived. As none of these challenges look likely to be solved anytime soon, we should expect the Big Society still to be with us this time next year, and quite possibly at the end of the parliament. In any case, it will take years rather than months for the kinds of change the Big Society promises to come to fruition.

Over the coming year some of these challenges look set to be addressed more directly. For example, the policy team in Number 10 has been strengthened, which should result in a better grip on the agenda from the top; the forthcoming white paper on public services should provide a more coherent narrative about what the Big Society implies in policy terms, and the Big Society Bank will aim to address some of the funding challenges precipitated by the cuts. Whether these actions will be sufficient to drag the Big Society out of its lethargy remains to be seen.

If nothing else the Big Society has taught the Coalition a few valuable lessons about government: just because the Prime Minister believes in something doesn't make it happen; big concepts are no substitute for tangible actions; and the cuts must be seen as an opportunity for reform rather than just fiscal pain to be endured.

Sir Stuart Etherington

The Big Society: a response

by Sir Stuart Etherington, Chief Executive of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations

The Big Society has rarely been out of the headlines in the last year. Although still an arguably nebulous and sometimes unclear concept, there are discernible strands and some concrete proposals emerging around the themes of public service reform, promoting social action and decentralisation of power. It is too early to assess how successful these will be but one achievement is simply that the Government has not abandoned its commitment to the Big Society, despite considerable pressure. As Adrian and Kate point out, that is in part down to political calculation – the Big Society forms a central component of David Cameron's 'triangulation' strategy – but is also due to genuine belief in its principles.

"Having a precise definition of the Big Society should not be part of the criteria for judging its success. Government needs our help in shaping what we want the Big Society to be. This should be used as an opportunity to influence policy."

It is important to acknowledge that the Big Society is not new – it exists in every community and in 900,000 civil society organisations across the country. Civil society is essential to the economic and social well-being of the country and is already a huge success. To make the Government's own vision of the Big Society a success, we must build on what works, create the right environment to allow social action to flourish and hand over real power and influence to local people and communities – and not just town halls.

Cameron's vision does mean different things to different people. That is not a problem in itself and there is a danger of being too critical in suggesting that government has failed to define the 'Big Society'. I do not share the preceding chapter's concerns that the concept is 'lost in vagueness'. Having a precise or measurable definition of the Big Society should not be part of the criteria for judging its success. Government needs our help in shaping exactly what we want the Big Society to be, so rather than an opportunity to criticise, this should be used as an opportunity to influence government policy. We are seeing the emergence of such engagement in responses from the voluntary sector (including the launch of 'Our Society').

The Big Society is not just about the voluntary sector, but what is very clear is that government cannot build the sort of society it wants without voluntary action and voluntary organisations. Profile and respect alone though are not enough to compensate for the significant challenges facing voluntary organisations. For many, these challenges include a sharp reduction in government funding, following a recession that hit donated income. Meanwhile, the need for services has continued to rise. The VAT increase is one of a number of rising costs, whilst an end to transitional relief on Gift Aid will impact before improvements to the Gift Aid system take effect. But it must be reiterated that the sharp, sudden cuts to government funding are having a significant impact on the sector and in many areas these cuts are removing community capacity, which is the basis for building the Big Society.

Most state funding to the sector flows through local government, and this is where many of the deepest and quickest cuts will be felt. To ensure that the sector is in a fit state to benefit from potential opportunities ahead will require more comprehensive and accessible support through the transition – and this is an area where government must do more. The jury is still out on whether government's role so far in helping to manage this transition can be judged a 'success'.

I do not subscribe to the view that the Big Society is simply a mask for cuts. Nevertheless, to implement the Big Society while simultaneously reducing funding to the organisations that will be essential to its success presents challenges, as Adrian and Kate's analysis suggests. Rather than adopt a 'no to cuts' position, NCVO accepts that our sector should not and cannot be immune from difficult decisions. However, government at all levels should mitigate the impact of spending cuts where possible – for example, through making intelligent, strategic funding decisions and giving early warning of cuts to funding. The timing of funding cuts is of course as important as the level of reduction in funding.

We want the Big Society to be a success and for civil society to flourish. The time has now come to move away from debates about what the Big Society means to concentrate on how we support and enable voluntary and community organisations to play their vital role in our society.

6. Constitutional reform

How successful has the Coalition's constitutional reform agenda been?

by Robert Hazell, Institute for Government and UCL Constitution Unit

Robert Hazell

Nick Clegg said that one of his main reasons for entering the Coalition was to ensure delivery of the Liberal Democrats' long held ambitions for constitutional reform. His party had watched with mounting frustration as Labour's constitutional reform programme gradually ran out of steam. Now all that unfinished business could be resolved with an injection of fresh political will.

Constitutional reform is seen very much as the Liberal Democrats' agenda. But without acknowledging it, the Conservatives had themselves developed big plans for political reform.[44] Indeed, the main constitutional reform items in the Coalition's Programme for Government derive equally from both parties (see the table at the end of this chapter).

"The electoral reform bill was pushed through Parliament at reckless speed. In its haste the Government overlooked the need to allow sufficient time for public information and education about electoral reform. 10 weeks was never going to be enough."

The big Lib Dem measures have been implemented first, which is why the constitutional reform agenda is still seen as predominantly Lib Dem. Nick Clegg was put in overall charge of political and constitutional reform, with a team of 60 officials working directly to him. Of the 13 items listed in the table below, he leads directly on seven. But if the reforms fail, the Liberal Democrats cannot simply blame their Conservative partners: they will look to their leader as the man in overall charge. The stakes are high, and Clegg set a breathless pace for the initial reforms, especially the referendum on AV.

The referendum on AV

The referendum was a totemic issue. It was the last item the Conservatives conceded in the coalition negotiations. The Liberal Democrats were determined to hold the referendum as early as possible, because they were convinced that the earlier the referendum was held, the greater its chances of success. However, the Constitution Unit warned from the start that it was likely to be lost, on the grounds that:

> *"The difference between AV and FPTP is slight. Some electoral reformers will campaign against, because AV is not proportional. Others will claim that a vote for AV is a vote for perpetually hung parliaments. If voters are confused, they are likely to cling to what they know."*[45]

The referendum bill was introduced in July 2010, with no consultation – no green or white paper. There was no time for consultation with the devolved administrations about the clash between the referendum and the devolved assembly elections. And there was no time for considering alternative approaches, or combining the referendum with one on an elected Lords, or a referendum including the option of PR.

The bill was pushed through Parliament at equally reckless speed. In its haste the Government overlooked the need to allow sufficient time for public information and education about electoral reform. 10 weeks was never going to be enough. The public know very little about electoral systems, and care even less.

Research shows that when the public find political issues difficult or confusing, they look to politicians they like to give them a lead on how to vote. But the AV referendum offered no easy cues. Conservatives campaigned against, Liberal Democrats for, and Labour was divided. Any clear signals from politicians were masked by the elections also held on 5 May. The political parties put their grassroots campaigning effort into the elections, and not the referendum.

All this was predictable, and predicted. It is what happened in Canada, where they held referendums on electoral reform at the same time as provincial elections in Ontario (2007) and British Columbia (2009). The political parties were silent about the referendum issues, and electoral reform was defeated in both cases. The same has happened here, putting electoral reform back for a generation.

Reducing the size of the House of Commons

Linked in the same bill as the AV referendum were the plans to reduce the Commons by 50 MPs. Select committees in the Commons and the Lords strongly criticised the Government for its haste, and for combining in one bill two issues which should have been considered separately.

The Conservatives were equally keen to push the bill through Parliament quickly, in order to start the wholesale boundary reviews necessary to create 600 constituencies by the time of the next election. Even MPs are still largely unaware of the consequences. They will become painfully aware, as all are forced to compete for reselection in new constituencies. The public may also become aware, as historic boundaries are ignored in the drive to create much more equally sized constituencies. Eighteen months may also prove very tight for political parties to form new local associations and to choose candidates for the new constituencies.

Fixed term parliaments

The Fixed Term Parliaments Bill was also introduced in July 2010, with a similar lack of consultation. It provides for the next election to take place in May 2015, with fixed five-year terms thereafter. The bill involves a major surrender of prime ministerial power to decide the date of the next election. Key issues are the length of the fixed term, and how to allow for midterm dissolution.

Select committees in the Commons and Lords have both suggested a four rather than a five-year term. The Lords may yet insist on that, and have warned that the Parliament Acts do not apply to this bill, so the Government cannot use its Commons majority to override the Lords.

After an early wobble around 55%, the Government settled on a two-thirds vote of MPs for an early election requested by the Government; or the usual 50% threshold for a no confidence motion. The high threshold for a government-initiated dissolution should make it impossible for future governments to call an early election without significant cross-party support (although it might sometimes be circumvented by engineered no confidence motions). Future governments could of course abandon fixed term parliaments; but they would need to pass amending or repealing legislation to do so.

Reform of the House of Lords

Nick Clegg is also in the lead on Lords reform, chairing a cross-party committee, which met six times in 2010. Its report will be published in a white paper in May. It is likely to recommend:

- A much smaller House, of salaried full time members
- 80% of the House to be elected, allowing retention of the appointed crossbenchers
- The House to be elected by regional lists, in large multi member constituencies
- Long 15-year terms, non renewable to buttress the Lords' independence
- A third of the elected members to stand down at each election.

This is very similar to the proposals put forward by Jack Straw in 2008. But If Clegg thinks that his proposals will therefore command cross party support he may be disappointed. The Conservatives have very little enthusiasm, and could mount a major rebellion in both Houses. The extent of cross party support will be tested in the next stage, when the white paper and draft bill are considered at length by a joint committee of both Houses.

The joint committee may reveal that all the parties remain divided, on the principle and on the detail. Supporters of an elected House disagree on key issues. When MPs are forced to think about it, many find the idea of an elected second chamber a threat. There are strong arguments on both sides; and the media and public opinion are fickle. The public support the idea of an elected chamber in principle; but in practice they also value the Lords' independence and expertise.

The Conservative agenda

There is not enough space to go through the other reforms one by one. Suffice it to say that most of the Conservative/Lib Dem and Conservative items are likely to be implemented, in whole or in part. The Welsh referendum (which Welsh Secretary Cheryl Gillan supported more strongly than the Conservative manifesto might suggest) has been held and won. The Calman Commission proposals are being taken through Parliament by the Scottish Secretary Michael Moore (Lib Dem), to make the Scottish government and Parliament more fiscally accountable. Plans are under way for referendums in 11 English cities in 2012 on introducing directly elected mayors. The EU Bill, providing a referendum lock on future EU treaties, is also being taken through Parliament by William Hague.

Less likely to make headway is the commission established by Ken Clarke on a British bill of rights: with four ardent supporters of the Human Rights Act and four deep Conservative sceptics, it will struggle to reach agreement. A commission still has to be established on the West Lothian Question. If it is established as a parliamentary committee to investigate the feasibility of English votes on English laws (the Conservative solution), it will be in part the responsibility of Sir George Young as Leader of the House. He will also lead on strengthening petitions to Parliament, and possibly on introducing a right of recall for errant MPs. The one Conservative policy that is likely to be dumped outright is all postal primaries. There is going to be trouble enough with all MPs having to compete against each other for reselection on new constituency boundaries, without turning 200 of those contests into primaries.

Conclusion: triumph or disaster?

Nick Clegg's difficulty is that the Liberal Democrat reforms are bigger, and more likely to fail. Having failed in the AV referendum, he will redouble his efforts to deliver on Lords reform. But Lords reform remains genuinely difficult, because there is little agreement within the parties, and within Parliament. If he also fails on Lords reform, his constitutional reform programme may be deemed overall to be a failure.

That may be the verdict of his Lib Dem supporters, but he and his colleagues will probably deliver on a host of lesser reforms. These include fixed term parliaments, further devolution in Scotland and Wales, the EU Bill, and establishing commissions on the British bill of rights and the West Lothian Question (even if those commissions ultimately lead nowhere). Most of these are Conservative measures. But he will get little credit from the Conservatives, because they do not conceive of themselves as constitutional reformers. So he risks being damned by his own side for his failures, and ignored by the Conservatives for his successes.

Constitutional reforms in the Coalition Programme for Government, and their origins.

Key:
• = manifesto commitment fully incorporated into Programme for Government

◦ = manifesto commitment only partially incorporated.

Programme for Government	LD	C	Lib Dem manifesto	Conservative manifesto
Referendum on AV	◦		Introduce proportional voting system, preferably single transferable vote	Retain first past the post
Reduce House of Commons to 600 MPs	•	•	Reduce to 500 MPs	Reduce to 585 MPs
Fixed term parliaments	•		Fixed term parliaments	Make use of royal prerogative subject to greater parliamentary control
Wholly or mainly elected second chamber	•	◦	Elected House of Lords	Build a consensus for a mainly elected second chamber
Commission to investigate British bill of rights	•	•	British bill of rights	UK bill of rights
Implement Calman Commission in Scotland	•	•	Implement Calman to give new powers to Scotland	White Paper on how to deal with Calman
Introduce referendum on further Welsh devolution	•	◦	Give Welsh Assembly primary legislative powers	Will not stand in the way of Welsh referendum on further legislative powers
Hold referendums on introducing elected mayors in 12 largest English cities		•		Give citizens in each of England's 12 largest cities the chance of having an elected mayor
Commission on West Lothian Question		•		English votes on English laws
Legislate so that future treaties are subject to 'referendum lock'		•		Sovereignty Bill
Right of recall of MPs	•	•	Power of recall in the event of serious wrongdoing	Power of recall triggered by proven serious wrongdoing
200 all postal primaries		•		All postal primaries
Petitions to force issues onto Parliament's agenda		•		Petitions to force issues onto Parliament's agenda

Will Straw

Guy Lodge

Constitutional reform: a response

by Will Straw and Guy Lodge, Institute for Public Policy Research

Following the defeat of AV, Nick Clegg will now turn his attention to Lords reform hoping – in the year of the centenary of Asquith's Parliament Act – to go down in history as the man who finally democratised the second chamber. But, as Robert Hazell rightly warns in his chapter, "if Clegg thinks that his proposals will command cross party support he may be disappointed".

Clegg's coalition partners are likely to be the worst sinners. Despite claiming to support a partly elected Lords, most Tory backbenchers and peers are dead against reform since it would weaken their position. Should Lords reform go through, the Tory right will once again question Cameron's judgment and leadership. Clegg will therefore need Labour support to implement his proposals. Of course many in Labour's ranks remain opposed in principle but others will think blocking Lords reform presents another opportunity to damage Clegg's leadership. Such a course of action should be avoided. Labour would simply be walking into the same trap it did over AV where the temptation to weaken the Liberal Democrats came at the expense of achieving important political reform as well as strengthening Cameron's own position.

"The lesson from the AV debacle is that the Liberal Democrats are too weak to drive constitutional change without wider progressive support."

The lesson from the AV debacle is that the Liberal Democrats are too weak to drive constitutional change without wider progressive support. The raft of constitutional changes on the table all suffer from a similar problem – that no significant popular mobilisation has taken place to underpin and channel energy into political and democratic reform. Nothing akin to Charter 88 or the Scottish Constitutional Convention of 1988-95 has animated recent reform efforts. The public has simply not been engaged, despite the best efforts of the Yes campaign. Popular legitimacy needs to be built into the process from the start, not sought at the end.

With their rhetoric on the Big Society, the Coalition also need to tell a story about how greater localism is being used to give away power from Westminster. The Government has sent mixed signals on this with, for example, Eric Pickles' Localism Bill containing over 100 new powers for Ministers. But at the same stroke it is a Conservative, rather than Liberal Democrat, policy to hold referendums on introducing elected mayors in the largest English cities. As ippr's report Mayors Rule argues, elected mayors not only increase democratic accountability but also represent a necessary precondition for ministers to devolve real powers to the local level.[46] The mayoral agenda is essential for making politics matter in places far removed from Westminster.

The other big ticket items for the Coalition are fixed term parliaments and the reduction in the size of the Commons. As Hazell makes clear, both contain concerns for reformers. Fixed five-year terms would make Britain (alongside France) the democratic country with the least frequent elections. Meanwhile, the process to reduce the size of the Commons will be beset by difficulties as new constituencies ride roughshod over natural and county boundaries. But none of these reforms – focused as they are on the machinery of Westminster – are likely to restore trust in politics. There are, however, two measures which more directly deal with public concerns about Britain's political class. First, primaries offer one route to greater diversity of MPs. Sarah Wollaston, a local doctor who was elected by open primary in Totnes, has been an impressive, independently-minded MP. Indeed, it would be a missed opportunity if the Coalition's promise to pay for 200 primaries was "dumped outright" as Hazell predicts. Second, for MPs who have abused the privilege of office, the right to recall would allow the public to boot them out without the need for a general election.

But reformers should remember that no institutional solution – no matter how right it appears on paper – will work without meeting two conditions. First, it must answer a question that the public are asking rather than one made up by reformers and politicians. Second, it must follow rather than precede a broad civil society movement calling for its implementation. This makes reform harder but also more likely.

7. Parliament under the Coalition

How has Parliament changed since the formation of the Coalition government?

by Akash Paun, Institute for Government

Akash Paun

Contrary to pre-election predictions that a hung parliament would lead to a weak minority government, the May 2010 election led to a Coalition with a sizeable majority in the House of Commons, and a near majority in the House of Lords too. This potentially enables it to dominate Parliament to a similar extent to its predecessors. On the other hand, however, the Coalition came into office committed to strengthening the ability of Parliament to hold government to account. The Programme for Government reflected this, with pledges to enact a number of important reforms.

Since the election, other political leaders, notably the Speaker and leading select committee chairs, have also used their powers and profile to advance the parliamentary reform agenda. Backbench MPs meanwhile have continued their recent trend of increased willingness to rebel against the strictures of the party whips. And the relationship between the two Houses of Parliament has been called into question.

"As the coalition parties grow increasingly restless about the compromises inherent in coalition government, the executive may experience greater difficulties in getting legislation through."

The overall picture is of an evolving relationship between executive and legislature, though in true British tradition, the developments of the past year have been the result of a range of pressures and decisions, and are not guided by a coherent constitutional master plan.

Controlling the parliamentary timetable

The Government has historically maintained a strong grip over the timetable of the House of Commons. At the most fundamental level, this has included the prerogative powers to determine the date of dissolution. But, as discussed in chapter 6, the Government's Fixed Term Parliaments Bill will bind the Prime Minister's hands, allowing early dissolution only with the consent of two-thirds of MPs.

The day-to-day proceedings of Parliament have also largely been under the control of the executive, save for specified exceptions (such as the annual allocation of 20 days to the Opposition, and three days for consideration of committee reports). This has left MPs dependent on ministerial discretion for the opportunity to discuss and vote on major topical and contentious issues like the commitment of British forces into military action.

But this too has changed. The Coalition pledged in its Programme for Government to implement the recommendations of the Wright Committee on Reform of the House of Commons, which set out a package of reforms designed to "enhance the House of Commons' control over its own agenda, timetable and procedures".[47]

The Government moved swiftly to act on this commitment, in June 2010 bringing forward motions to create a Backbench Business Committee (BBBC) with the power to determine the agenda on 35 days per year (at least 27 on the floor of the House). In its short life, the BBBC has demonstrated the importance of this reform by creating time for substantive debates on controversial issues that the Coalition might have preferred to keep off the agenda, allowing MPs to vote on withdrawal from Afghanistan and subjects that divide the Coalition such as votes for prisoners and the impact of immigration.

A further reform proposed by the Wright committee was the creation of a House Business Committee, comprising the BBBC along with government and opposition whips, to agree on the overall parliamentary timetable. The House would then be asked to vote on the draft agenda, replacing the current system whereby the Leader of the House simply announces the agenda. The Coalition has promised that this body "will be established by the third year of the Parliament".[48]

The Coalition also has plans to allow members of the public more directly to influence the agenda. Work is under way on a new public petitions system with a view to allowing petitions that receive over 100,000 signatures to be scheduled for debate in the House. In February 2011, there was also a pilot of a new 'public reading stage' of the legislative process, with some 500 comments received on the text of the Freedom Bill. Whether this small experiment will lead to a new era of direct public involvement in the law-making process remains to be seen.

Other changes to the agenda of the House stem from decisions taken by the Speaker of the House, John Bercow. Following his re-election in May 2010, he has continued to use the discretionary powers at his disposal to, in his words, "enhance our capacity to scrutinise the executive in a more forensic and politically meaningful fashion".[49] He has, for instance, chaired sessions more rigorously to allow for more oral questions to be answered, and has permitted Urgent Questions far more frequently than his predecessors, requiring ministers to attend the House to answer concerns about topical issues.

Select committee confidence

Away from the floor of the House, the select committee system has also continued to grow as a central mechanism for ensuring accountability of government. Before the election, the House had voted to implement another important part of the Wright reforms, resolving that select committee chairs should be elected by secret ballot of the whole House.

In June 2010, select committees were established using this new system for the first time. There was at least one unexpected result: Andrew Tyrie won the chair of the Treasury Committee over the perceived choice of the Conservative whips, Michael Fallon, after running a campaign designed to appeal to Opposition MPs as well as his party colleagues. As significant as the specific individuals elected is the fact that committee chairs therefore now have a direct and personal mandate from the House as a whole. This should give them greater authority to speak on behalf of all members of Parliament on the area covered by their committee.

There was a parallel change to the appointment process for select committee members more widely. Here the shift was to a system of secret ballots within the different parliamentary parties, a change also designed to take power away from the whips and to entrench committees' independence. However, many MPs continue to see committee work as a low priority. This was illustrated by the fact that posts on some important committees were uncontested (or even left vacant). Also, a number of committee members left just weeks after being appointed when offered the alternative of junior frontbench or parliamentary private secretary roles by the Government or Opposition.

Many select committees have nonetheless managed to make an impact on the political agenda and on important policy processes, by holding evidence sessions and publishing reports on the right subject at the right time. Committees that have made a splash include the Health Committee (on the NHS reform agenda), the Defence Committee (on the Strategic Defence Review), the Home Affairs Committee (on the 'phone hacking' scandal, and immigration) and the Treasury Committee (on banking reform and fiscal policy).

A further significant reform of the past year has been the decision to grant the Treasury Committee an unprecedented veto over appointments to and dismissal from the new Office for Budget Responsibility, to entrench the latter's independence from government. This move followed the Coalition's commitment

to strengthen committees' ability to scrutinise major public appointments. There is now a lively debate about whether veto powers should be extended more widely, with the Liaison Committee of committee chairs expected to make recommendations for further reform.

Growing tensions?

A further indicator of the relationship between executive and legislature is the level of rebelliousness among government backbenchers. The academic Philip Cowley has charted the growing tendency under the previous Labour administration of MPs to vote against the party whip.[50] Now in opposition, Labour MPs are far more cohesive and likely to vote en bloc against Coalition policy. But on the other side of the House, many Coalition backbenchers have proved similarly disposed to cast their votes against government policy. The pattern has been for Conservatives on the right of their party and left-leaning Lib Dems to rebel on specific issues where their party has had to compromise significantly on policy, leading to the suggestion that this is a "coalition with wobbly wings".[51] By April 2011, votes against the government whip had been cast by all but two Liberal Democrat backbenchers and by nearly 80 Tory backbenchers.[52]

In particular, Tory MPs have rebelled against constitutional reform plans and EU issues, while the biggest revolt on the Lib Dem side was against government policy on tuition fees. So far, the Government's majority has not been threatened, largely because there are few issues that unite the Tory right, the Lib Dem left and the Labour Party. However, as the two coalition parties grow increasingly restless about the compromises inherent in coalition government, the executive may experience greater difficulties in getting contentious legislation through the House. The Government's decision in April 2011 to delay further progress with its NHS reform legislation can be seen as an early sign of this changing context. The Government might in future need to take longer to build the case for its legislation, and to make more use of green and white papers and draft bills to allow for sufficient consultation. It may also simply become less able to legislate at all in certain areas.

The formation of a coalition has also had consequences for the House of Lords. Indeed, Lords Speaker Baroness Hayman recently argued that the Coalition had "produced more fundamental problems for the House of Lords than the House of Commons".[53] A particular question mark has arisen in relation to the Salisbury–Addison Convention, which holds that manifesto bills should not be blocked by the unelected chamber. Many peers now claim that this constraint no longer

applies, since the manifestos of the two coalition partners have been superseded by a joint Programme for Government that did not receive an explicit mandate from the electorate.

In practice, since the Coalition is far closer to holding a majority in the upper chamber than its Labour predecessor, it has faced fewer problems in getting through its legislation. The very fact of a government with a near majority in the upper chamber is controversial, however, since the convention since 1999 has been for balance between government and opposition.

And despite the Coalition's numerical advantage (as of April 2011, there were 311 Coalition peers compared with 243 from the Labour Party) it has faced difficulties (and a number of defeats) on high-profile bills, largely as a result of crossbench peers (of whom there are nearly 200) turning out in force on certain issues.[54]

For instance, the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill was criticised as having been introduced without sufficient consultation, and also because of the politically motivated decision to package together the electoral reform referendum and constituency boundary changes in a single bill. A stand-off between government and opposition in the Lords was ultimately resolved, but not before the Government raised the spectre of curtailing debate by means of a guillotine vote.

The Public Bodies Bill has also come under fire, in particular for extensive delegated powers that the original version would have granted to ministers. Following pressure (including from the Institute for Government), the Government backtracked on this particular point, though has faced further defeats subsequently.

The overall picture

A year after its formation, the Coalition can claim credit for implementing a number of important reforms to Parliament. In particular, ministers have shown a willingness to give up power over dissolution, the parliamentary agenda and public appointments. But the Government has also rightly been criticised for its haste in pushing through legislation. Many governments face such criticisms, but for a coalition there may a particular imperative to make swift progress in order to pacify sceptics within both parties, and to do so early on while the going is (relatively) good. If dissatisfaction on the backbenches of the two Houses continues to rise, we may see the emergence of a far more dramatic and unpredictable relationship between government and parliament over the coming years.

Paul Evans

Parliament under the Coalition: a response

by Paul Evans, Principal Clerk of Committees, House of Commons

The arrangements for setting its agenda are the most obviously new aspects of the post-election House of Commons. What could have been a cosmetic change has turned out to be something more. It may mark a real culture shift. The Backbench Business Committee's openness in how it transacts its business (with a public Dragons' Den style pitching for time by applicant backbenchers and an explanation of the Committee's decisions placed on the order paper) could be a quiet revolution.

The BBBC is perhaps the most striking example of the rash of democracy that has spread over the procedures of the House in the wake of the Wright Report. Had its members not been elected by secret ballot of the whole House (not least in the wholly unpredicted emergence of an opposition chair in the shape of Natascha Engel) it seems probable it would have been more conservative than it has proved.

"It is possible that subtle effects of procedural reform will create a new third party within the House between government and opposition – the backbenchers."

Election of the chairs of select committees by the same method has had less clear-cut effects. Although members of the new Liaison Committee show some awareness of their role as tribunes of the backbenches the committee has not, so far, energetically taken up the torch ignited by their predecessors a decade ago in Shifting the Balance.[55] It has had relatively little to say collectively about asserting the role of the House against an over-mighty executive. Further, the concessions have so far been largely executive-led.

The select committees have also been slow to exploit the opportunities offered by the new arrangements for backbench business. Their place in backbench life is not self-evidently secure: on the Environmental Audit Committee, for example, there was sufficiently little competition for the available opposition seats to allow Caroline Lucas, the solitary Green MP, to secure a place.

The forces drawing backbench MPs away from the core parliamentary roles have not lessened. They will all, in effect, be required to compete for their own seats over the next couple of years as boundaries are redrawn. This, combined with the continuing backwash of the expenses scandal, not least in coping with the restrictive and complex new scheme prepared by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, has not made it easier to be an effective backbencher.

The Wright reforms had two avowed purposes: to liberate the select committees from the control of the whips and to reinvigorate the Chamber. Though not formally recorded, attendance at debates (including those chosen by the BBBC) seems to suggest some success in the second of these ambitions. If the separate House Business Committee does happen, it may change the chemistry of the Chamber yet again. But the legislative process is so far largely untouched by reform. The radical step would be to take control of programming out of the hands of the executive, and perhaps somehow to liberate private members' bills from a single member veto at report stage.

Predictions before the election foresaw a more multipolar House replacing a straightforwardly secure majority government. In the event, we have seen something like a reversion to a binary House, with a large (though diverse) government majority and a unitary opposition. But Akash Paun has identified the curious (ever-present but more often private) tensions within parties that the Coalition has brought out into the open. It is possible that subtle effects of procedural reform will create a new third party within the House between government and opposition – the backbenchers. It is much too early to see this as a certainty, but the signs of the times are intriguing.

The first session of this Parliament is scheduled to run for two years, from May 2010 to April or May 2012, calling into question the whole principle of annuality of sessions, a principle it is not found necessary to observe elsewhere in the UK or the Commonwealth. If Parliament were liberated from the prerogative-driven imposition of annual sessions a different (and perhaps more rational) way of planning the legislative timetable might emerge. A more leisurely and consultative approach might anyway be forced upon Parliament if, as Akash Paun speculates, the House of Lords changes its spots too.

8. The Opposition

How has the Opposition adapted to being out of power, and what are the main challenges it has faced?

by Catherine Haddon and Zoe Gruhn, Institute for Government

Catherine Haddon

Zoe Gruhn

"No matter how expected the result, it is always a shock for parties to find themselves cast out of office. It is also an experience that the Labour Party has not gone through in many years."

In contrast to the transition into government, for a party going into opposition there is no preparation undertaken, no civil service to meet you with briefing papers and policy options, and no euphoria of victory to sustain you through the learning curve. And yet the speed and success of this 'reverse transition' is still important, not just for the party, but, because of the important democratic function played by the official opposition, for the country at large.

Over the past year, members of the Labour Party have had to come to terms with the diminished resources at their disposal and the reduced media interest in what they have to say. They have faced the dilemma of whether to focus on providing an immediate challenge to a new and inexperienced government, or to take the opportunity for a major policy rethink. Most importantly, as for all oppositions, the reaction and process of adjustment of Labour politicians over the past year has been determined by one major factor: how soon do they think they can get back into office?

No matter how expected the result, it is always a shock for parties to find themselves cast out of office. It is also an experience that the Labour Party has not gone through in many years. Just as the lengthy duration of the last two governments (1979–97 and 1997–2010) led to difficulties for opposition parties preparing for government, the time it takes to adjust to opposition is the same. Members of the Conservative Party in 1997, after 18 years in power, went through a lengthy and often difficult process of re-imagining themselves.

As for Labour, at the time of the election it had been 13 years since the party was last in opposition, but 31 years since it had been through a transition out of government. That transition, after the 1979 defeat, resulted in big ideological divisions and a rank-and-file backlash against the Centre. A repeat seems unlikely, given the party's present ideological position. Instead, Labour will be hoping to emulate its swift return to power following the troubled Heath government of 1970–74.

The 2010 election was a major defeat – with Labour receiving its worst vote share, except for 1983, since 1931. However, in the end it was a better result than many had predicted. The election saw the Conservatives on 36%, Labour on 29% and the Lib Dems on 23%.[56] This was a significant improvement compared with the low points of the preceding years: Labour had touched a nadir of 18% in June 2009.[57] Also, despite winning a lower vote share than the Conservatives in 1997, Labour came away with over 100 more seats. All of this was a major relief, but it has delivered a mixed message. For the Conservatives in 1997, and indeed for Labour after the 1983 election, the decisive defeat made an unequivocal case for reform and renewal, in both policy and organisational terms. For Labour in 2010, the message from the electorate was more qualified. As a result, the party has been ambivalent about how much it needs to go away and reform, or whether it could soon find itself back in office without having to go through this difficult process.

The Labour leadership battle of summer 2010 became synonymous with opposing views about continuity or a fresh start, particularly over the speed and extent of deficit reduction. This was reflected in the campaign of the eventual winner, Ed Miliband, who declared that Labour "must change to win. Not moving a millimetre from New Labour, as some have argued, is the path to another election defeat."[58] The issue of deficit reduction also came to affect the choice of Shadow Chancellor, with Ed Balls initially rejected in favour of Alan Johnson. But the ambiguity of Labour's position on how, when and where to cut public expenditure meant that the Coalition could continue to push blame for the deficit onto the Labour government.[59] This continues to be something for Labour to address, with a 25 March 2011 poll showing public trust for Labour on the economy had gone down to 24%, compared with the Coalition's 38%, even though voting intentions pointed to a Labour lead.[60]

Equally important for Labour's reverse transition, and its ability to hit the ground running in challenging the new government, was the length of the leadership contest. Lasting from May to September 2010, it consumed much of the early period of opposition. The leadership campaign did help keep Labour in the spotlight over the summer, not least because of the media interest in the Miliband brothers' battle. But by the time Ed Miliband was able to begin to make his mark the Government was already in full flow with spending cuts and major reform of public services under way. The speed of the Government's agenda meant there was great pressure on Labour, from the media but also to some extent the party, to instantly become a strong opposition, which would

be reactive to events. This has again reinforced a sense of a potentially short period in opposition. Labour has been somewhat flattered by the immediate unpopularity of the Coalition because of tuition fees and public service cuts. This reduced the pressure on the party to rethink its appeal to the electorate. Although there has been much talk about re-engaging with lost voters, many Labour MPs may think that one more heave will get them back in power.

In fact, though it is worth considering lessons from the past, there is much about this period that is wholly new. Labour may well have to forge a new concept of opposition in a coalition context. This is partly about the absence of a major competing opposition party (in England at least), which means a monopoly for Labour, and a range of new voters to target. However, it also places increased pressure on the party over where to position itself. The Coalition has confronted Labour with a difficult strategic choice between tarring the Tories and Lib Dems with the same brush, or attempting to prise open the splits within the Government. The issue of the Alternative Vote referendum has been a classic example of this. Labour was the only party to have it in its manifesto, and the opportunity to campaign alongside the Lib Dems provided a useful way of highlighting divisions in the Coalition, although Ed Miliband took the deliberate tactical decision not to appear with Nick Clegg at the launch of the Yes Campaign. Labour was also internally split on the principle of electoral reform.

Another issue is how Labour goes about opposing, particularly through Parliament. One of the consequences of the Coalition, which has angered many in the Labour Party, is that it has allowed the Tories and Lib Dems a commanding lead over Labour in the Lords, in addition to the comfortable majority the Coalition enjoys in the Commons. This makes the job of the Opposition rather different than if Labour had been facing a confidence and supply agreement between the Tories and Lib Dems, and the likely prospect of an early election.

The formation of a coalition has also meant that all parties, Labour included, will have to rethink how they approach the next election. The prospect of two parties going from a united government into a campaign against each other brings a whole range of new dynamics. And the next election will likely be preceded by far greater preparation by all parties for the prospect of potential coalition negotiations.

The way Labour approaches these issues is still largely down to the cumulative expertise that the party is able to draw on. As is common after a long period in office, there was an immediate, albeit partial, generational shift in the party with

a number of former Labour secretaries of state standing down from frontline politics. But many of the top team, notably Ed Miliband, Ed Balls, Yvette Cooper, Andy Burnham, Harriet Harman and Tessa Jowell, and a number of those who have now gone to the Lords, were key figures in the last government, bringing with them collective wisdom, specific policy expertise and understanding about the way the government machine works. An issue for Labour in the longer term is not only how to retain and draw on this for the future, but also how to pass it on to newer, less experienced politicians who are already coming to the fore in the new Shadow Cabinet. Of the 27 members of Labour's current Shadow Cabinet, just six were in Parliament in the pre-1997 period, and just one of those (Harriet Harman) had previously served in the Shadow Cabinet. Labour's frontbench team therefore has limited experience of opposition politics at the senior level.

The change in resources and access to information that Opposition brings can also prove a big shock. This is a challenge first of all at the individual level, as former ministers find themselves without the significant resources of the civil service diary planners and switchboard, and must learn to plough through legislation and begin to develop new policies without support from Whitehall officials. Making the best use of the experience of those who helped establish successful opposition practices the last time round will be crucial to coping with this change of fortunes.

Added to this is another longer-term issue about how and when this shared experience and collective knowledge starts to dissipate. Going into opposition after a long period in government brings a danger of complacency. Opposition involves thinking about the different crafts involved in influencing and making an impact compared with government. It will require consideration of how the Labour leadership builds different teams across the Shadow Cabinet, and how members can use their current knowledge to mentor new and future members of the frontbench team. In the first year of Labour's reverse transition, the need to focus on the requirements and skills development of the new frontbenchers and to increase members' confidence in their performance as opposition spokespersons has become increasingly apparent. Labour will need to do this in spite of limited resources and while also developing alternative policies to those of the Coalition. Also, the current shadow top team is unlikely to remain unchanged up to the next election. As new frontbenchers are appointed, there will also need to be an ongoing focus on developing a collective vision for the Labour Party to ensure that the party presents a strong and consistent message to the voters.

Labour's perception of its role as an alternative government in waiting is made more real by its consistent lead in opinion polls since autumn 2010.[61] Continuing speculation about the solidity of the Coalition and the success of deficit reduction, impact of public expenditure cuts and outcome of centrepiece Coalition policies will dictate much of the Opposition's immediate task, but in their lessons from history Labour would do well to remember the other side of the 1979–83 period. The Thatcher government was far from popular in its own approach to public expenditure cuts, but an improving economic outlook and the Falklands War did much to restore that government's fortunes, helped by the lack of credibility of the then Labour opposition. Planning on the basis of current circumstances, or anticipating a swift return to power, as occurred in 1974, could well prove costly if the years ahead throw up their own surprises. In the end the purpose of opposition is about appearing as a viable alternative government. Labour will have to look to the longer term if it wants that future government to be effective.

Hilary Armstrong

The Opposition: a response

by Hilary Armstrong, Member of the House of Lords, Labour Party

Any analysis of the first year in opposition of what is very likely to be a five year Parliament is important in understanding process, but it is too early to understand outcomes.

Although I agree with Catherine Haddon and Zoe Gruhn that our political system needs strong opposition, the aim of a political party is not to provide good opposition. The Labour Party does not exist to become a brilliant opposition; it seeks to become a brilliant opposition only so that it can win the next election. It wants to win the next election to gain democratic power to serve the country.

So for me the yardstick of our first year in opposition is not to find out whether we have become effective at opposing, but whether our year in opposition gives us a good chance of success at the next election.

"The yardstick of Labour's first year in opposition is not to find out whether we have become effective at opposing, but whether our year in opposition gives us a good chance of success at the next election."

And to do that I would compare it with the political experience of the first year of opposition following the five previous 'turnovers': 1964/65 for the Conservatives, 1970/71 for the Labour Party, 1974/75 for the Conservatives, 1979/80 for Labour and 1997/98 for the Conservative Party.

Losing power and going into opposition is very hard and my judgement of Labour in the last year, compared with the new oppositions in the five examples above, is that the outcome so far has been better than average.

The shock of losing power for the leadership of political parties is very considerable. All new oppositions have a very difficult task and the crucial outcome of the first year of the five year race to the next election is not to blow it under the pressures of that first year.

The Labour opposition has achieved that.

Those of us involved in democratic politics experience defeat at elections for what it is – failure. The electorate rejected Labour in

2010 and the first thing to do is acknowledge that in electoral politics the voters are always right. The message is that Labour had to change from 2010, and it is important to take some time in developing that change.

This will take more than a year and needs us to understand much better where the British public will be in five years' time and what we have to offer to them at that time.

It will be a tough five years for most people in the country. Left of centre parties do well when they connect with people in tough times and develop some form of realistic hope. Labour does well when it can link to the aspirations that people have for themselves and their family, and when it develops policies that combine individual effort and collective support for that effort.

In 2011 does the Labour opposition know what its programme should be in 2015? No. But neither did any of the oppositions in the above transitional years.

Has the last year made it easier to find those answers in the next period? Perhaps.

Crucially, we have not made the mistakes that we and others have in the past that would put this task beyond us.

The marathon of five years is still there to be run and won.

9. Public opinion

What is the state of public opinion after 12 months of the Coalition government?

by Rick Nye, Director of Populus

Rick Nye

In April 2011, the Institute for Government commissioned an opinion poll, conducted by Populus, to assess what the public make of Coalition government after the first year. The results, reproduced in Tables 1-14 in the Annex of this report and on the Institute for Government's website,[62] suggest that the experience of coalition in practice has turned more people away from the idea in principle. On the eve of last May's General Election, with polls suggesting the possibility of a hung parliament, Ipsos/Mori asked whether people thought it would be a good or a bad thing if no party achieved an overall majority. Then 55% said it would be a bad thing; now, with hindsight, this figure has increased to 63%, more than twice the number (30%) saying that it was a good thing [Table 1].

"The experience of coalition in practice has turned more people away from the idea in principle."

Before polling day the composition of any subsequent coalition was to some extent unknowable, whereas today people are able to judge the record of the Conservative–Liberal Democrat government's first 12 months in office, but a breakdown of the figures by current voting intention throws up some interesting differences. Current Conservative supporters fall into line with the general population; a third (32%) who say they would vote Conservative at the next election still think it's a good thing that the last election returned a hung parliament. By contrast, three-quarters of current Labour supporters (75%) consider it a bad thing that no one party won the last election outright, even though the alternative might have been a Conservative majority government. Among current Liberal Democrat supporters – who are outnumbered by those who actually voted Liberal Democrat at the election and now say they won't do so again – opinion is divided about the merits of coalition, with almost a half (49%) thinking it is a bad thing for the country and slightly fewer (44%) saying it is a good thing.

These overall sentiments are echoed when people are asked in detail about the impact of having a coalition on the nature of government in Britain. Clear majorities think having the country run by a coalition rather than a single party has made government weaker (+44%), more indecisive (+54%), less responsive (+21%) and, particularly, more confused (+64%)

[Tables 2-5].

Two-thirds of people (68%) say that coalition has made government in Britain weaker, ranging from three in five (62%) senior managers and professionals to nearly three-quarters (74%) of working class people. Even a majority of current Liberal Democrat supporters believe this to be the case by 50% to 44% as does a 2 to 1 majority of current Conservative voters (61% to 31%). Current Labour supporters believe this by a 5 to 1 majority (81% to 16%).

Nearly three-quarters (73%) believe that coalition has made the country's government less decisive. Here the views of current Liberal Democrats are more in line with the total population; they accept this proposition by 65% to 30%. Current Conservative voters do the same by 70% to 26% and Labour voters by the much wider margin of 80% to 14%.

There is a smaller – though still significant – majority by 57% to 36%, which says that coalition has made government in Britain less responsive to the public, and it is on this measure that different groups in the population are likely to differ most markedly. Among senior managers and professionals the same proportion (47%) believes that coalition has made government more responsive as believe that it hasn't. However, among working class people two-thirds believe that government is now less responsive. Among voting groups, a small majority of current Conservative voters (51% to 44%), and a slightly larger one among Liberal Democrat supporters (55% to 41%) think that coalition has actually made government more responsive to the public. However, current Labour voters reject this notion decisively by a margin of more than 3 to 1 (74% to 23%).

There is overwhelming support for the idea that coalition has made government more confused about what it stands for. A 5 to 1 majority (80% to 16%) believes this to be true, including three-quarters (74%) of current Conservative voters and slightly more (77%) Liberal Democrat supporters.

As to the Liberal Democrats themselves, nearly 3 in 5 people (58%) believe they've abandoned their principles by joining a coalition with the Conservatives. Nearly half (45%) of current Liberal Democrat supporters agree with this – as opposed to just over half (53%) who don't – compared with 61% of Liberal Democrat voters at the last election who now say they'll vote for someone else [Table 6].

Yet overall, a small but clear majority of people, 52% to 43%, say the Liberal Democrats were right to join the Coalition with the Conservatives. Again there is

a division by class: senior managers and professionals think it was the right thing to do by a margin of 59% to 38% whereas skilled manual workers say it was the wrong thing to do by 50% to 43%. There is also a split by region, with majorities living in the South East, Wales and the South West and the Midlands believing the Liberal Democrats were right and those in the North and in Scotland saying they were wrong to join the Coalition. Interestingly, more current Conservatives (79%) than current Liberal Democrats (68%) believe the Liberal Democrats were right to join the Coalition and as many who voted Liberal Democrat in 2010 but wouldn't do so now (49%) believe they were right as believe they were wrong [Table 8].

Opinion is more finely balanced as to whether the Lib Dems have had significant influence on government policy as a result of forming a coalition with the Conservatives. 44% say they've had significant influence, while 50% disagree. Current Conservative supporters agree that the Liberal Democrats have had significant influence by 61% to 34% and current Liberal Democrat voters do so by a larger margin still of 71% to 26%. Labour voters however reject the idea by a 3 to 1 majority (75% to 23%) as do former Liberal Democrat voters by 54% to 41% [Table 7].

By contrast, two-thirds of people (66%) believe that the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives differ on important policy issues. This figure goes up to 72% of senior managers and professionals, 74% of current Liberal Democrat supporters and 76% of current Conservative voters. However, perhaps in light of the row over tuition fees, only 49% of 18–24 year olds believe there are important policy differences between the two coalition partners, whereas 48% do not. Even 55% of current Labour voters think there are differences, though 40% disagree [Table 9].

When it comes to judging the impact that Liberal Democrats have made on specific Coalition policies, in every sphere tested more think that the Liberal Democrats have failed to exert significant influence over the Coalition than think they have in fact exercised significant influence. On NHS reforms (–27%), university funding and tuition fees (–37%) and tax and spending decisions (–17%) large majorities think they haven't had had influence. Only in the area of constitutional reform (–3%), Nick Clegg's personal policy responsibility, do the numbers thinking the Liberal Democrats have had influence even approach those who believe the opposite [Tables 10-13].

However, among current Conservative voters the Liberal Democrats are consistently more likely to be seen as having exerted influence over coalition policy than among the population as a whole. On NHS reform, 43% of current Conservatives think the Liberal Democrats have influenced policy against 30% overall and a third of Lib Dem voters. On tax and spending decisions, 54% of Conservative voters and 56% of current Liberal Democrats think the party has made a difference compared with 37% among the wider public. On tuition fees and university funding this figure drops to 38% among Conservatives, 37% among Liberal Democrats and 27% among everyone. There are clear majorities (48% to 33%) from Conservatives and from current Liberal Democrats (55% to 34%) for the notion that the party has had a significant influence on constitutional reform, compared with 40% to 43% saying the same among the population at large.

Asked who has benefitted most from the formation of the Coalition a plurality say the Conservatives (36%) followed by 24% who say both coalition parties have benefitted about equally, 19% who name Labour as the primary beneficiaries and 14% who say the Liberal Democrats. Current Conservatives are more likely to say both parties have benefitted equally (32%) – their first choice, and three times more likely to name the Liberal Democrats as the primary beneficiary (28%) than Liberal Democrat supporters themselves (9%), but they are less likely than the wider public to say the Conservatives have benefitted the most (24%) [Table 14].

Populus interviewed a random sample of 1,003 adults aged 18+ by telephone between 15 and 17 April 2011. Interviews were conducted across the country and the results have been weighted to be representative of all adults. Populus is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules. For more details, go to www.populus.co.uk.

Concluding thoughts

by Peter Riddell, Institute for Government

Peter Riddell

Britain – or England in Disraeli's over-used phrase of 1852 – may not love coalitions, to judge by the results of the elections and AV referendum on 5 May. But we have had quite a few over the past 159 years. There have been single party majority governments for only about two-thirds of this period: but, with only three brief interruptions, they have been dominant since 1945. The recent experience has conditioned the response not only of the public, as shown by the Institute for Government/ Populus poll reported by Rick Nye above, but also of politicians.

Everyone has behaved as if the absence of single party government, and a coalition, is something novel, as, indeed, it has been for anyone currently working at Westminster, though not, of course, for the devolved administrations at Belfast, Cardiff and Edinburgh, and most other European countries. That novelty, and hostility to what a coalition involves, was a dominant theme of the AV referendum campaign.

"The Liberal Democrats have obviously been weakened, but that very weakness will keep them in the Coalition for some time"

A central assumption of much British political debate has been that the creation of the Coalition in May 2010 was an aberration: a reluctant one-off necessity but not permanent, the result of exceptional electoral factors unlikely to be repeated in a first-past-the-post system. On this view, we can expect to return to single party majority governments in future, especially if the present electoral system is retained, as it will be. That was a core argument of the No to AV campaign. No one, of course, knows, and many electoral analysts argue that a single party majority is less likely in future than it has been since 1945, even after taking account of the change in the way electoral boundaries are decided. The decline in the share of the national vote taken by the two main parties down from nearly 97% in 1951 to well under 70% in the last two general elections has made hung parliaments more likely.

The British political world has adapted only partially to the creation of the Coalition. There has not been a permanent adjustment in either behaviour or structures because a hung parliament is not yet seen as the norm, as opposed to an exception. As earlier chapters show, there have been changes

at the centre of Whitehall and in Parliament to take account of the Coalition. But they have essentially been modifications of the familiar structures of single party government rather than a wholesale transformation of procedures, as in countries with proportional representation systems of election.

In these countries, the general expectation is that no single party will win a majority and that there will be either a coalition or a minority government – though there are occasional exceptions as in Scotland now. These expectations permeate the whole of politics, both during campaigns and afterwards in negotiations about creating coalitions. Compromises over individual parties' election pledges are seen as normal, and not as betrayals, as the No campaign and Conservative spokesmen sought to portray the behaviour of Nick Clegg and the Liberal Democrats. That is why the more than two to one rejection of AV was as much an expression of voter hostility to Mr Clegg and the Coalition as it was a decision about electoral systems.

These complicated attitudes are reflected in the findings of our opinion poll on attitudes to the Coalition, based on interviews before Easter but entirely in line with the 5 May results. The polling figures discussed above in Chapter 9 amount to a negative verdict not only on this coalition, but also on coalitions generally. Clear majorities of those questioned think that having the country run by a coalition rather than a single party has made government weaker, more indecisive, less responsive and more confused. More than three-fifths of the public think it was a bad thing that no party achieved an overall majority at last year's general election. The results also make uncomfortable reading for the Liberal Democrats, with nearly three in five, including almost a half of current Liberal Democrat supporters, believing the party has abandoned its principles by joining the Coalition with the Conservatives.

Yet a small, but clear, majority says the Liberal Democrats were right to join the Coalition, with more Conservatives than Liberal Democrats backing the decision. Supporters of both coalition partners have ambivalent views about their party's contribution. Three-fifths of Conservatives believe the Liberal Democrats have had a significant influence on government policy. This is double edged since many Conservatives clearly resent such influence. Three-quarters of current Conservative supporters, and a similar number of Liberal Democrats, believe that the two parties differ on important policy issues. Conservative voters are more likely to think that the Liberal Democrats have exerted an influence over coalition policy than voters generally, notably on NHS reform and constitutional change.

That points to continuing tensions in the Coalition between supporters of both parties. But it does not necessarily mean the end of the Coalition in the short-term. While relations between the leaderships of both parties became strained as insults were traded in the final fortnight of campaigning, there have been no signs since 5 May of a desire for a divorce at the top level. Mr Clegg and the Liberal Democrats have obviously been weakened, but that very weakness will keep them in the Coalition for some time – though in a more awkward relationship than over the past year. The machinery of government will need further development to take account of the conflicting demands of government coherence and the separate identities of the coalition partners. But, as the AV campaign, and result, showed, the adjustment, in both thinking and behaviour, will remain tentative until we see whether last year's hung parliament was a one-off, or the beginning of a new trend.

Annex: One Year On opinion poll

Table 1: Do you think it has been a good thing or a bad thing for the country that no party achieved an overall majority at the General Election in May last year?

	Total	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	AB	C1	C2	DE	Cons	Lab	Lib D
Good thing	30%	31%	29%	35%	38%	29%	32%	23%	25%	35%	32%	26%	25%	32%	22%	44%
Bad thing	63%	63%	63%	62%	54%	61%	61%	69%	69%	59%	60%	69%	66%	64%	75%	49%
Don't know	7%	6%	8%	3%	8%	10%	7%	7%	6%	6%	8%	5%	9%	3%	3%	7%

Table 2: Has Britain being run by a coalition between parties rather than by a single party with an overall majority made government in this country stronger or weaker?

	Total	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	AB	C1	C2	DE	Cons	Lab	Lib D
Stronger	24%	25%	22%	31%	25%	20%	25%	21%	22%	29%	25%	17%	22%	31%	16%	44%
Weaker	68%	68%	68%	63%	63%	69%	69%	74%	69%	62%	65%	74%	73%	61%	81%	50%
Don't know	8%	6%	10%	6%	12%	10%	6%	5%	9%	8%	10%	8%	5%	8%	3%	6%

Table 3: Has Britain being run by a coalition between parties rather than by a single party with an overall majority made government in this country more decisive or more indecisive?

	Total	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	AB	C1	C2	DE	Cons	Lab	Lib D
More decisive	19%	20%	17%	28%	19%	20%	14%	17%	18%	24%	13%	17%	22%	26%	14%	30%
More indecisive	73%	72%	75%	65%	68%	73%	76%	80%	75%	69%	75%	79%	71%	70%	80%	65%
Don't know	8%	8%	8%	7%	13%	7%	10%	3%	6%	7%	12%	4%	7%	4%	6%	5%

Table 4: Has Britain being run by a coalition between parties rather than by a single party with an overall majority made government in this country more responsive to the public or less responsive to the public?

	Total	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	AB	C1	C2	DE	Cons	Lab	Lib D
More responsive to the public	36%	40%	33%	32%	44%	39%	35%	34%	33%	47%	37%	30%	29%	51%	23%	55%
Less responsive to the public	57%	54%	60%	63%	44%	58%	60%	62%	60%	47%	55%	67%	64%	44%	74%	41%
Don't know	6%	6%	7%	5%	12%	3%	5%	4%	7%	7%	8%	3%	6%	5%	3%	3%

Table 5: Has Britain being run by a coalition between parties rather than by a single party with an overall majority made government in this country clearer or more confused about what it stands for?

	Total	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	AB	C1	C2	DE	Cons	Lab	Lib D
Clearer	16%	15%	16%	13%	18%	16%	12%	14%	18%	17%	13%	13%	19%	23%	7%	20%
More confused	80%	81%	80%	85%	76%	81%	82%	82%	77%	78%	83%	87%	74%	74%	90%	77%
Don't know	4%	4%	5%	2%	6%	2%	6%	4%	5%	5%	4%		6%	3%	3%	4%

Table 6: Which of these statements about the Liberal Democrats would you agree with?
- The Liberal Democrats abandoned their principles by forming a coalition with the Conservatives.

	Total	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	AB	C1	C2	DE	Cons	Lab	Lib D
Agree	58%	57%	58%	62%	54%	59%	64%	61%	50%	57%	58%	63%	53%	50%	76%	45%
Disagree	36%	40%	33%	32%	39%	33%	31%	37%	42%	39%	35%	32%	38%	45%	22%	53%
Don't know	6%	3%	9%	5%	7%	8%	4%	3%	9%	4%	7%	5%	9%	5%	3%	2%

Table 7: Which of these statements about the Liberal Democrats would you agree with?
- The Liberal Democrats have had a significant influence on government policy as a result of forming a coalition with the Conservatives.

	Total	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	AB	C1	C2	DE	Cons	Lab	Lib D
Agree	44%	49%	40%	52%	43%	34%	39%	47%	51%	45%	46%	42%	42%	61%	23%	71%
Disagree	50%	48%	51%	44%	48%	54%	57%	51%	43%	51%	46%	53%	49%	34%	75%	26%
Don't know	6%	4%	9%	4%	9%	11%	4%	2%	6%	4%	8%	5%	9%	6%	2%	2%

Table 8: Which of these statements about the Liberal Democrats would you agree with?
- The Liberal Democrats were right to join the Coalition with the Conservatives.

	Total	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	AB	C1	C2	DE	Cons	Lab	Lib D
Agree	52%	55%	49%	57%	55%	48%	45%	49%	59%	59%	57%	43%	46%	79%	30%	68%
Disagree	43%	42%	44%	40%	38%	46%	50%	48%	38%	38%	38%	50%	48%	18%	69%	29%
Don't know	5%	3%	6%	3%	8%	6%	5%	3%	4%	3%	4%	6%	6%	3%	1%	3%

Table 9: Which of these statements about the Liberal Democrats would you agree with?
- There is no difference between the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives in terms of their views on the most important policy questions.

	Total	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	AB	C1	C2	DE	Cons	Lab	Lib D
Agree	28%	26%	29%	48%	21%	28%	23%	31%	22%	25%	25%	36%	28%	18%	40%	25%
Disagree	66%	70%	62%	49%	66%	64%	70%	67%	72%	72%	67%	58%	65%	76%	55%	74%
Don't know	6%	4%	9%	3%	12%	8%	7%	2%	5%	4%	8%	6%	7%	6%	5%	1%

Table 10: Do you agree or disagree that the Liberal Democrats have had a significant influence on government policy in these specific areas?
- NHS reform

	Total	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	AB	C1	C2	DE	Cons	Lab	Lib D
Agree	30%	33%	27%	29%	25%	26%	30%	33%	36%	33%	27%	31%	28%	43%	18%	33%
Disagree	57%	56%	58%	57%	57%	55%	60%	64%	51%	58%	55%	56%	59%	46%	74%	48%
Don't know	13%	11%	15%	14%	18%	19%	11%	3%	13%	8%	17%	13%	14%	11%	8%	19%

Table 11: Do you agree or disagree that the Liberal Democrats have had a significant influence on government policy in these specific areas?
- Constitutional reform

	Total	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	AB	C1	C2	DE	Cons	Lab	Lib D
Agree	40%	46%	34%	40%	37%	37%	43%	48%	35%	51%	39%	39%	28%	48%	33%	55%
Disagree	43%	42%	43%	43%	39%	39%	44%	44%	47%	37%	38%	45%	53%	33%	55%	34%
Don't know	18%	12%	24%	17%	24%	24%	13%	8%	18%	12%	23%	16%	19%	19%	12%	11%

Table 12: Do you agree or disagree that the Liberal Democrats have had a significant influence on government policy in these specific areas?
- University funding and tuition fees

	Total	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	AB	C1	C2	DE	Cons	Lab	Lib D
Agree	27%	29%	25%	26%	30%	21%	20%	32%	32%	25%	27%	27%	29%	38%	20%	37%
Disagree	64%	66%	63%	68%	57%	68%	74%	64%	56%	69%	64%	64%	60%	55%	76%	58%
Don't know	9%	6%	12%	6%	14%	11%	6%	4%	12%	6%	10%	9%	11%	8%	4%	5%

Table 13: Do you agree or disagree that the Liberal Democrats have had a significant influence on government policy in these specific areas?
- Tax and spending decisions

	Total	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	AB	C1	C2	DE	Cons	Lab	Lib D
Agree	37%	41%	33%	38%	37%	31%	38%	38%	39%	40%	41%	33%	31%	54%	22%	56%
Disagree	54%	53%	56%	58%	49%	54%	56%	60%	52%	53%	49%	60%	59%	39%	74%	35%
Don't know	9%	6%	11%	4%	14%	15%	6%	2%	8%	8%	10%	6%	10%	7%	4%	8%

Table 14: Which of these statements about the formation of the Coalition government would come closest to your view?

	Total	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	AB	C1	C2	DE	Cons	Lab	Lib D
The Conservatives have benefitted the most	36%	35%	37%	43%	31%	44%	36%	36%	29%	39%	35%	33%	37%	24%	51%	38%
The Liberal Democrats have benefitted the most	14%	16%	12%	4%	13%	11%	15%	20%	18%	17%	13%	11%	15%	28%	8%	9%
Both Conservatives and Liberal Democrats have benefitted about equally	24%	22%	26%	25%	28%	18%	25%	19%	28%	22%	23%	28%	23%	32%	11%	26%
The Labour Party has benefitted the most	19%	22%	16%	21%	15%	21%	19%	22%	18%	19%	18%	23%	18%	12%	27%	22%
Don't know	7%	5%	8%	7%	13%	6%	5%	3%	7%	4%	11%	5%	7%	4%	4%	5%

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