

SUPPORTING HEADS OF GOVERNMENT

A comparison across six countries

Working paper

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Acknowledgements

This paper is the result of the generosity of many people who willingly gave their time and expertise. We would particularly like to thank our interviewees across six case study countries, who provided insightful and candid answers to our questions and also helped develop our understanding of the cultural differences between our case study countries. We hope that our interviewees feel their views have been reflected fairly in our paper.

At the Institute for Government, Julian McCrae provided guidance and helped determine the direction of the paper. We worked closely with Anne White to structure the paper's narrative, and Anne also provided the paper's Canadian input. The paper also benefited from the generous support, suggestions and feedback of a number of Institute for Government staff. Inside and outside the Institute, we particularly wish to thank (in alphabetical order) Lord Adonis, Paul Drinkwater, Catherine Haddon, Andrew McLeod, Peter Riddell, Jill Rutter and Emma Thwaites.

While many people made this paper possible, any errors are entirely our own.

Emma Truswell and David Atkinson

Executive summary

The case study countries considered in this paper – Australia, Canada, Germany, New Zealand and Sweden – have leaders with similar responsibilities to the UK Prime Minister. We chose them expecting that these leaders would have broadly comparable support systems which would make points of difference enlightening. Indeed, those we interviewed from all six countries had very similar opinions about the biggest challenges for a leader's support system. In particular, interviewees discussed in detail the difficulty of helping a leader to respond effectively to the issue of the day while also making good and considered decisions about policy and the general direction of government.

Instead, the support systems that have developed around the leaders of our six case study countries vary considerably in their size, functions and structures.

We came away with three key messages.

- When compared to our other case studies, the UK has far fewer policy advisers directly supporting the Prime Minister than leaders in Australia, Canada or Germany.
- Across the case studies there are relatively small numbers of staff providing support for a leader's direction and focus, despite the importance placed on this function by those we interviewed across all countries. Often only a few personally-appointed advisers are relied upon to provide strategic support.
- The implementation of policy priorities across government was only monitored by the leader's direct support system in three of the countries we studied; in other cases this was the role of other central agencies.

The differences between countries were at times so great that comparison was sometimes difficult or even unhelpful. We have tried to make clear in the report where comparisons cannot be easily made. In addition, any paper considering leaders' staff that focuses on formal systems has inherent limitations, as much of the interaction between a leader and his or her staff depends on personal relationships and occurs outside formal channels. Nonetheless, we make two broad observations about the nature of support systems, and the nature of the commentary that surrounds them.

First, our findings suggest that the political commentary surrounding a leader's staff could benefit from an international perspective. The influence of personally appointed special advisers close to a leader, for example, is not a phenomenon unique to one country.

Secondly, we found that a leader's support system is not merely a product of their country's system of government. It is also the complex result of the leader's personality and preferences, as well as the accumulation of the personalities and preferences of many previous leaders and their advisers. A leader can adapt the system to suit them, but may need to be mindful that there is much to learn from previous administrations and other countries.

Introduction

At a time when the composition and staffing of Number 10 has received increased attention and media comment in its own right, this working paper places the Prime Minister's support system in its international context in three critical areas: policy support; direction; and monitoring implementation. The paper compares advice and assistance provided to the UK Prime Minister with support for heads of government in five comparable countries: Australia, Canada, Germany, New Zealand and Sweden.

Each of these countries is a member of the OECD with a Prime Minister or, in the case of Germany, a Chancellor who leads a parliamentary party and is head of a Cabinet Government. For each country, we have focused on that part of government which directly supports the head of government: this includes, for example, some but not all of the UK Cabinet Office and excludes the Treasury (see page 10).

Although the leaders of our case study countries have broadly similar roles, the structures, make-up and size of their support systems vary considerably. The people who surround heads of government in their offices and their departments are among the most powerful people in government, but there has been limited international comparative work on this topic to date. This report does not examine what the head of government does, but instead focuses what the people and institutions around a leader do, and on how that support is structured.

This report does not present an ideal system; all leaders will need different kinds of support from their staff, and will structure their offices and departments accordingly. Instead, this report identifies the functions of a leader's support system, summarises how different countries have approached common problems and draws out possible lessons for the UK from the differences between systems.

We intend this paper to provide perspective on leaders' support systems, to stimulate discussion on this important subject and to encourage further work in the area. We recognise the inherent limitations that necessarily result from our drawing comparisons across six countries, and consequently have not made recommendations about how best to structure a leader's support system, nor made any conclusions about which of the systems works most effectively.

Our findings are based largely on interviews with more than 25 people who have worked closely with leaders in each of the six case study countries as political advisers, civil servants and expert commentators. Our interviews focused on two main questions: what does a head of government need from his or her support system, and how are the major functions of a support system provided in practice?

This paper begins by describing the basic arrangements of leader's support staffs in each of the six case study countries. We then draw out the central functions of leaders' support systems with particular focus on three major areas:

- **Direction and focus:** helping the head of government to spend his or her time and energy most productively, to determine priorities and to position the government and the country

- **Policy:** helping the head of government to make policy decisions through policy coordination, providing critical analysis, resolving disputes, and in some cases originating policy, and
- **Implementation:** helping to ensure that the leader's priority policies are being delivered by government, and ensuring that the leader has the information necessary to make decisions about the progress of government and how best to deploy resources.

These three functions are the areas in which support for the UK Prime Minister differs most markedly from support received by leaders of our other case study countries. We hope that further work will examine a larger range of countries and focus on other areas of support for leaders that were outside the scope of this report, including crisis management, communications, foreign policy, political advice and the exercise of executive powers.

1. The case studies

This section summarises the basic structures of the institutions supporting the heads of government in our case study countries. Below is a discussion of leaders' departments, the composition of leaders' offices and key data on the six countries.

Prime Ministers' departments and the Cabinet Office

Australia, Canada, Germany and New Zealand each have departments that provide civil service support primarily to their head of government. While leaders can influence the structure and focus of these departments, the departments nonetheless provide institutional continuity between leaders and give non-partisan advice.

The Departments of the Prime Minister and Cabinet in Australia and in New Zealand, the Privy Council Office in Canada and the Chancellery in Germany are similar to the UK Cabinet Office in certain respects. All perform whole-of-government functions such as intelligence coordination and Cabinet secretariat support. These departments differ from the Cabinet Office in providing everyday advice to their Prime Minister across a much wider array of government policy, and in their capacity to provide in-depth policy advice. This policy role is considered in more detail below.

Leader's offices

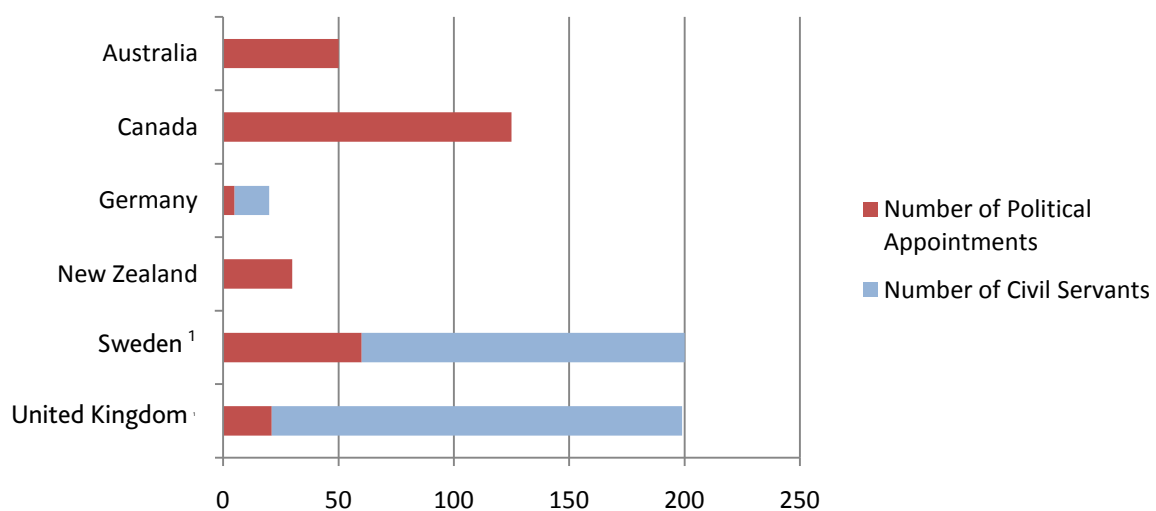
The size and composition of leaders' offices also varied considerably between case studies. In this paper, we use the term 'leader's office' to refer not only to the head of government's private office, but to the wider staff which includes close political advisers. By this definition, the leader's office includes all of Number 10 in the UK and much of the Prime Minister's Office in Sweden.

Overall, we found that Number 10 is unusual among Westminster countries. The number of special advisers at the UK Prime Minister's disposal is around 20, which is the lowest number of political appointments of our case studies and substantially smaller than the number of political staff in leaders' offices in the other Westminster systems. However, as most of these special advisers give policy advice, the number of political policy advisers in the UK is more comparable to other systems. Political appointments in other Westminster countries perform a much larger variety of tasks than special advisers in the UK.

In Australia, Canada and New Zealand the Prime Minister's Offices are smaller organisations overall but are composed entirely of staff appointed politically and without tenure (as illustrated in Figure 1 below). The central role of Prime Minister's Offices is to provide political advice, functioning separately from Prime Ministers' departments. In Germany, the Chancellor's small office plays a similar, though not identical, political role but sits at the literal and metaphorical centre of the Chancellery and functions as part of that institution.

In size, Number 10 is closest to the Swedish Prime Minister’s Office, as each have a total staff of approximately 200¹. The Prime Minister’s Office in Sweden, however, is less involved in providing policy advice than Number 10. Instead, the Swedish Prime Minister’s Office is structured around managing coalition relations and providing high-level support for Sweden’s relations with the European Union. As we explain in the policy support section below, it is a unique feature of Number 10 among the six systems we studied that it acts, on most areas of domestic policy, as the major source of both whole-of-government and party political policy advice to the Prime Minister.

Figure 1: Approximate composition of the leader’s offices: civil servants and untenured political appointments



Sources: interviews and government websites

To illustrate these differences, Figure 1 (above) shows the numbers of staff members who make up leaders’ offices, and whether they are members of a professional civil service or appointed politically. While these figures help to show differences between leaders’ support systems, they are nonetheless somewhat misleading when viewed out of context. For example, Number 10 currently contains a number of civil servants who are on short-term contracts to perform a particular function for the Prime Minister. Additionally, not all of the political staff in the Prime Minister’s Offices in Australia, Canada and New Zealand perform work that would traditionally be seen as party political. Not all of the political appointments in Australia, Canada and New Zealand are employed to give partisan policy advice. Indeed, Prime Minister’s Offices in those countries also contain politically appointed staff whose jobs are performed by civil servants in the UK, such as private office staff in Australia who are political appointments without tenure.

¹ Our figures for Sweden and the UK should not be considered definitive because of the difficulty we have had of establishing their exact staffing arrangements. We have used the October 2010 figures for the UK and excluded the most junior staff, but our figure still includes staff at grade C some of whom may not work in support of the Prime Minister. For Sweden, our figures for the Prime Minister’s Office are sourced from government data and our interviews. However, in this draft, we have been unable to exclude the staff who work for the Minister for European Affairs (who is located within the Prime Minister’s Office) as we have not yet established the exact size of her section.

Figure 2: Details of the case study countries

Country	Government system	Population size	Approx. size of Prime Minister's Department	Approx. size of leader's Office	Total size of leader's support staff
Australia	Federal, Westminster system	22 million	> 500 people	~50 people	~550
Canada	Federal, Westminster system	34 million	> 1000	~125	~1125
Germany	Federal System	82 million	> 600	~20	~620
New Zealand	Unitary, Westminster system	4 million	> 100	~30	~150
Sweden	Unitary system	9 million	None ²	~200	~200
United Kingdom	Unitary, Westminster system	62 million	None (We estimated that approx. 100 Cabinet Office staff work in direct support of the PM) ³	~200	~300

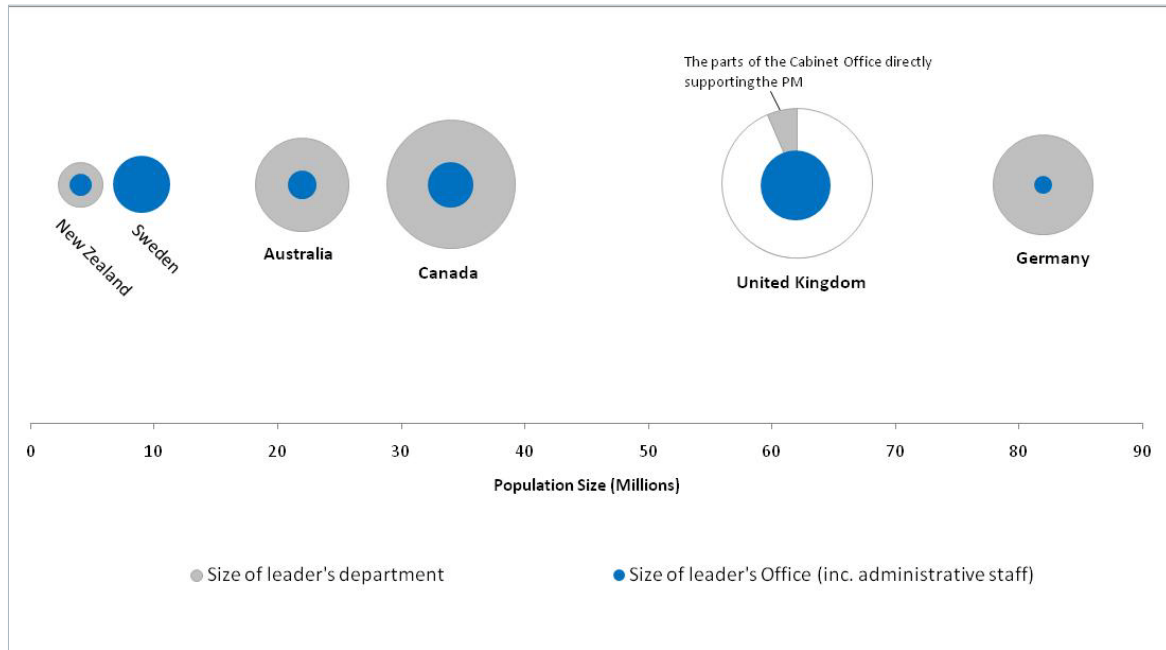
Sources: World Bank, World Development Indicators, Government websites and interview

² The Swedish Prime Minister's Office contains some of the functions associated with a Prime Minister's department (such as support for the Prime Minister's conduct of European affairs) but does not contain the policy shadowing capacity that is present in Australia, Canada, Germany and New Zealand.

³ As this report focuses on the part of government in each country that answers directly to the head of government, the Cabinet Office presents a special case. We include the Economic and Domestic Secretariat; but we exclude the Efficiency and Reform Group as its co-chairs have a great deal of independence in determining its agenda. As a general rule, those parts of the Cabinet Office which report directly to Cabinet Office ministers other than the Prime Minister are excluded from our scope due to the independent role of those ministers. For the other countries, we take a similar approach, dealing with those parts of departments which report to ministers other than the leader on a case-by-case basis. The German Minister for the Chancellery works directly for the Chancellor, so we have not excluded those parts of the Chancellery reporting to him. The Australian Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet has multiple ministers, but much of the department reports to ministers such as the Cabinet Secretary (a junior minister in Australia) or Parliamentary Secretary in their capacity of supporting the Prime Minister, rather than an independent area of responsibility. Those parts of the department reporting only to a minister with their own separate portfolio (such as social inclusion and, in the past year, arts and sport) have not been included

The total size of leaders' offices, departments and the Cabinet Office is illustrated in Figure 3 below, graphed by each country's total population to provide a sense of scale. The blue circles in the centre represent leaders' offices; the grey circles which surround them represent Prime Ministers' departments and the Cabinet Office. The area of the circles is proportional to the total number of staff working in offices or departments.

Figure 3: Relative size of leaders' offices and departments



2. What every Prime Minister needs: functions of support systems

Heads of government across our case study countries perform similar roles, despite differences in the basic organisation of their support systems such as those outlined above. They continue to perform their core responsibilities, which in each of our case studies includes oversight of Cabinet government, resolving disputes within government, leading their party and, where relevant, a governing coalition. It is also common for leaders to take a keen interest in policy, which may include driving certain parts of the government's agenda and ensuring the implementation of key policies.

At the same time, today's political leaders preside over extremely complex governance landscapes with fragmented layers of devolved responsibilities and increased international responsibilities. In addition, the expectations of heads of government by the press and the public have increased enormously over time. Leaders are expected to comment quickly, accurately and appropriately on local, national and international events.

With this context in mind, we asked each of those we interviewed from all six countries what functions a head of government needs from his or her support system. While the responses included both personal and structural support, we focus in this paper on structural aspects of the support system.

Structural support

For this paper, we focused on three key support functions to heads of government out of the seven we identified, which are illustrated in figure 4. The following are some of the domestic⁴ policy functions in which we found particularly disparities between our case studies, and which chime with some of the current debates in the UK about the staffing of Number 10.

- **Direction and focus:** helping the head of government with an overall strategy and sense of direction and ensuring that they spend their time in line with it.
- **Policy:** helping the head of government in his or her role overseeing policies across government.
- **Implementation:** ensuring that the Head of Government's priority policies are being implemented satisfactorily, and possibly intervening if they are not.

Additionally, there are separate, crucial support functions in the following areas, which are not covered in this report due as they lie outside its scope but can be broadly defined under the following categories:

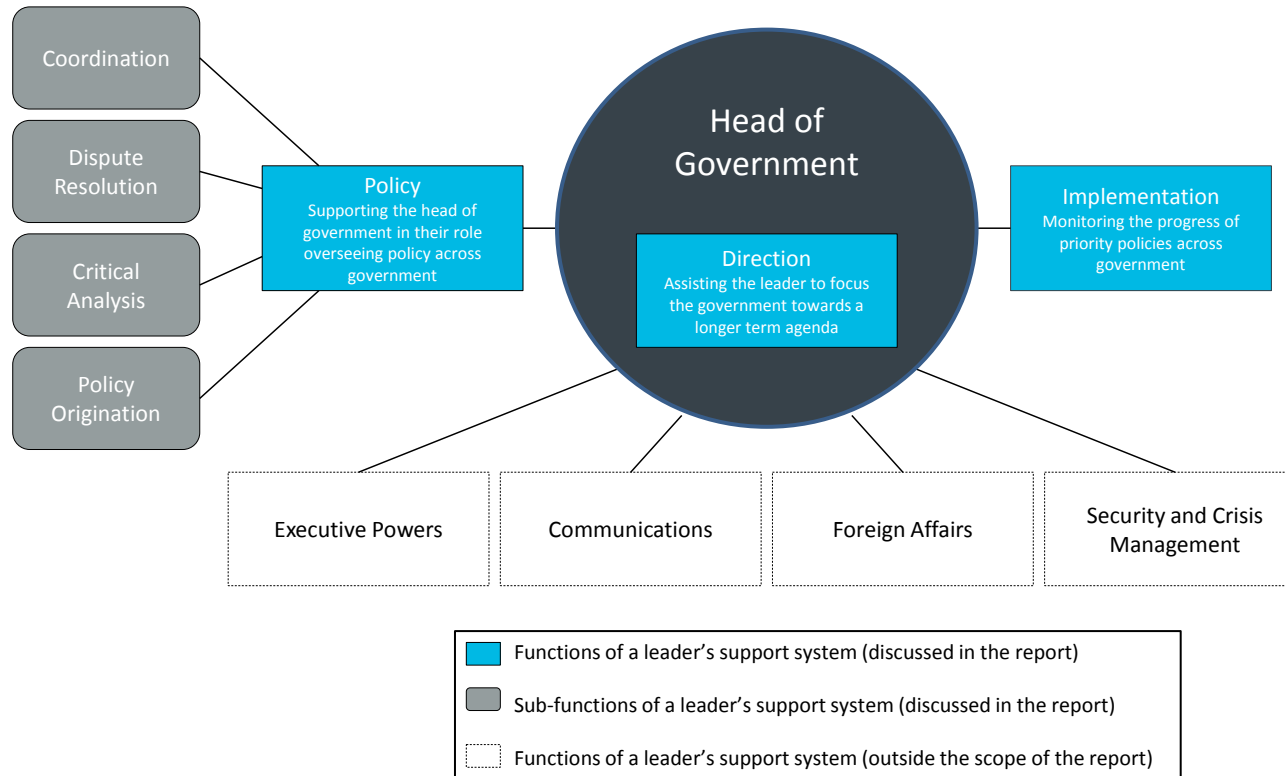
- **Exercising formal executive powers:** assisting their use of powers such as appointing the Cabinet and making changes to the machinery of government.

⁴ While we do not explicitly cover foreign policy in this paper, many of our comments are nonetheless relevant to a leader's foreign policy support, as it too requires overall direction and policy advice.

- **Communications:** helping with heads of government media role across the entirety of government
- **Foreign affairs:** providing advice to leaders in their personal role on the international stage.
- **Security and crisis management:** supporting heads of government in specific events such as flooding and also with the longer term security of the country.
- **Parliamentary and political party functions:** assisting heads of government in their role as the head of a parliamentary party.

All these different functions are summarised in figure 4 below, which sets out the individual functions that appear in many, but not all of our case studies.

Figure 4: Functions of a head of government's support system



3. Direction

“The role of the Prime Minister is to stake out the direction in which he wants to take the country, and so that is the key element for the support system around him”

Political appointee in Sweden

Across our case studies, we gained a common sense of the circumstances that heads of government face. Every day, leaders deal with overwhelming demands on their time, with unexpected daily events, speeches and policy announcements, busy national and international schedules and constant media attention. Out of this maelstrom, leaders attempt to structure an overall purpose for government and to act in line with that purpose by differentiating between the urgent and the important.

Making these daily decisions and establishing an agenda for government requires help from a leader’s support system in the form of a function we describe as ‘direction’. An important part of this function is deceptively challenging task of helping a leader to manage their time. Describing the need for a support system to carefully direct the Prime Minister’s attention, one senior Australian civil servant commented, ‘how a PM actually uses their time, and their policy time, is one of the most important commodities within govt and something that should be explicitly managed and discussed.’

Advisers provide this personal support to a leader by helping them to spend time and energy on what is important. However, such assistance is only one part of the support that a leader’s staff must provide to the head of government. The direction function also involves ensuring that the leader keeps his or her eye on the big picture of where their government and the country is headed, assisting with the development of strategy on government and policy questions, and providing the leader with an intellectual resource of deep, longer-term thinking.

This particular aspect, the focus of this chapter, was highlighted by an eminent Whitehall historian when he described the need for ‘a mind in reserve’, an intellectual capacity that is not consumed by the hectic daily schedule. In our interviews, we often heard that due to daily pressures, this is not something leaders can achieve without support. In discussing the particular advice that can be given by a personal appointment, one former Australian adviser in the Prime Minister’s Office told us:

“The constraints on a PM’s time are enormous, and PMs don’t get the opportunity that rational, intelligent human beings would like to have, when making a big decision, to stop and reflect, and to stop and reflect on the combination of things that represent their best interests, their party’s best interest and the best interests of the country. That’s a highly personal judgment, and I think it’s really valuable for the PM to have people who can think though those issues for them and to put themselves in the PM’s shoes”

The need for thoughtful, big picture advice on the direction of government was highlighted by interviewees across our six case studies. Indeed, interviewees agreed that assisting the head of government in providing direction is one of the most critical roles of his or her support staff, and each country we studied provided a person or group specifically focused on this function.

Despite the importance interviewees placed on support for direction setting, in each of our case study countries the total number of people explicitly tasked with this function was relatively small in comparison with the leader’s total support system. The largest is in Australia where a 40 person strong Strategy and Delivery Division in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet works on strategic policy projects reflecting the Prime Minister’s priorities. In the UK, Canada and Germany, only some 10 people work on providing strategic advice. The Prime Ministers of New Zealand and Sweden, each countries with populations smaller than 10 million, have only a very small number of advisers located within the Prime Ministers’ private offices tasked with providing advice about the government’s overall direction.

Figure 5: Types of structured direction support for the head of government

Description	Examples*	Role
A small cluster of staff , even one or two individuals, close to the Prime Minister working on general strategic issues	New Zealand, Sweden, UK,	Big picture thinking, grounded advice, political strategy
Regular strategy meetings where key officials liaise to focus on the future challenges for the government.	particularly Germany	Expert input
A Strategy Unit or Division carrying out strategic projects commissioned by the Prime Minister or senior civil servants.	Australia, taking its inspiration from UK’s former Strategy Unit	Mostly longer term and cross-cutting thinking

*Several of the systems have a combination of strategic support methods

The emphasis of advice on ‘direction’ varies among those countries with structural strategic support. Australia’s Strategy and Delivery Division (SDD) conducts projects commissioned by the Prime Minister, by Cabinet or by the department’s executive that focus on creating achievable plans for high-level goals. The division is richly integrated within government, as it is situated within the government’s central agency and participates in frequent secondments of staff into and out of the division. SDD-led teams conduct time limited projects primarily on domestic policy issues, developing policy on priority areas for the Prime Minister such as recent work force participation measures.

The Political Planning Unit in Germany has a more limited focus. Rather than conducting policy projects or research into areas of the Chancellor’s particular interest, the unit is tasked with providing the Chancellor with a big picture view, systematically keeping the Chancellor informed about the status of policies as they develop. Such a function is more concerned with maintaining direction than with setting direction for government. In each system, interviewees told us that strategic advisers must perform a challenging balancing act. They need to be sufficiently close to

the leader and to the major events of the day to have a strong sense of the leader's priorities and to gain the leader's attention when they provide advice. At the same time, they must be to be sufficiently detached from everyday events: to allow them time for deep reflection; to permit them time to be exposed to the world outside the Prime Minister's Office; and to help them to have an eye to the future – whether foreseen and unforeseen. Additionally and critically, the support must meet the leader's needs. The merits of strategic advice can be rendered entirely irrelevant if it does not receive the leader's time and attention, or if the leader feels that the work of strategic advisers is unhelpful. The story of the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit in the UK illustrates how the emphasis on different aspects of the direction function can change as leaders shift emphasis and as leaders change.

The story of the UK's Strategy Unit

Long-time observers of Number 10 have commented that its priorities and structures were highly cyclical depending on the time in the Prime Minister's premiership. It is common, for example, for Prime Ministers to begin their time in office by cutting back on perceived extravagances in their predecessor's support system, only to increase staff numbers and recreate similar functions as time passes.

The history of strategy units in the UK is a case in point. While the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (PMSU) is closely associated with Tony Blair, it was not the first unit of its kind set up by a UK Prime Minister. In 1971, Edward Heath responded to recommendations of the 1970 report *The Reorganisation of Central Government* with the formation of the Central Policy Review Staff (CPRS) under the leadership of Lord Rothschild. The CPRS was a high-powered group within the Cabinet Office that advised on government strategy and considered policy issues across government. This was at a time before the Prime Minister had his own policy unit, which was first assembled in 1975.

The CPRS survived the premierships of Harold Wilson and James Callaghan, but was disbanded by Margaret Thatcher in 1983 when she felt the unit was no longer providing her with useful advice. Almost twenty years later, the PMSU was formed in 2002 by the merger of two units: the Performance and Innovation Unit, operating under a management consulting model to provide time-limited, forward-looking projects and the Forward Strategy Unit, which had been providing confidential reports to the Prime Minister on his key areas of education, health and transport.

Throughout its history, the Strategy Unit played multiple roles for the Prime Minister. One was to 'provide a cross-departmental perspective on the major challenges facing the UK' and to consider alternative policy options. Members of the PMSU were encouraged to think in a creative and original way, and the PMSU produced strategic audits as well as reports that challenged and sometimes antagonised departments; some of which feed into the strategic thinking of the Prime Minister's closest advisers and the Prime Minister himself.

Later, based on Tony Blair's instructions, the PMSU became more focused on deciding Number 10's position on particular issues, for example spending reviews, immigration policy, and accession to the European Union.

In this manifestation, the PMSU worked on commissions of three to six months, generally collaborating with departments on how policies could be realised, and moved away from the blue sky thinking of its early years.

After 2007 the Strategy Unit's role evolved once again to provide a day-to-day policy advice function, responding to Gordon Brown's need for greater policy support.

The Strategy Unit was disbanded by David Cameron in 2010, though recent changes to Number Ten have introduced a smaller Research and Analytics unit to develop a view on cross-government and longer-term policy analysis.

Sources: Interviews, House of Lords Public Service Report, available at www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/ and the Strategy

The UK is not unique in this respect. In Canada, strategic thinking formally emerges from departments, in particular from annual policy retreats which are attended by ministers, academics and experts from the private and non-government sectors. In recent years, however, the Prime Minister has taken a far more active role in long-term planning. A more informal structure of strategic direction has emerged as a result, with government direction increasingly led by the Director of Strategic Planning and a seven-strong horizon-scanning unit in Prime Minister's Office.

The development of strategic direction functions illustrates a point that was stressed by our interviewees: assistance for a leader's strategic direction must be closely matched with that leader's personal style and priorities. As one interviewee commented, a leader's support system should meet 'the expressed needs of the person in the role rather than the theoretical needs of each Prime Minister', and direction support is most useful when it receives the close personal attention of the head of government. It is perhaps for this reason that strategic direction was generally provided by only a small number of staff (often close to the leader), with considerable variance in the structure and emphasis of advisers.

4. Policy support

When we asked each of our interviewees what a leader needs from their support system, good policy advice was the most frequent response.

In an era when policy increasingly requires handling across departments and when the public and the media expect a political leader to be more involved and informed, having the right policy advisers close to a leader can be critical to the government's success. Nonetheless, the number of policy advisers working directly for leaders varied considerably between our case studies.

We have divided the broad area of policy support into four main functions.

- **Coordination of policy processes** to facilitate decision making across government, particularly the administration and secretariat work necessary to allow the head of government to play his or her role as chair of Cabinet.
- **Critical analysis of policy proposals** from a whole-of-government perspective involves advice about the viability and progress of policies to support policy across government
- **Resolution of disputes about policy**, either between parts of government or between coalition partners; this may involve preparing the leader for decision-making meetings, but also concerns the mechanisms that allow differences to be resolved without the direct intervention of the head of government.
- **Policy origination** which describes the capacity within a leader's support system to develop new policies, rather than leaving this function entirely to other ministers and their departments.

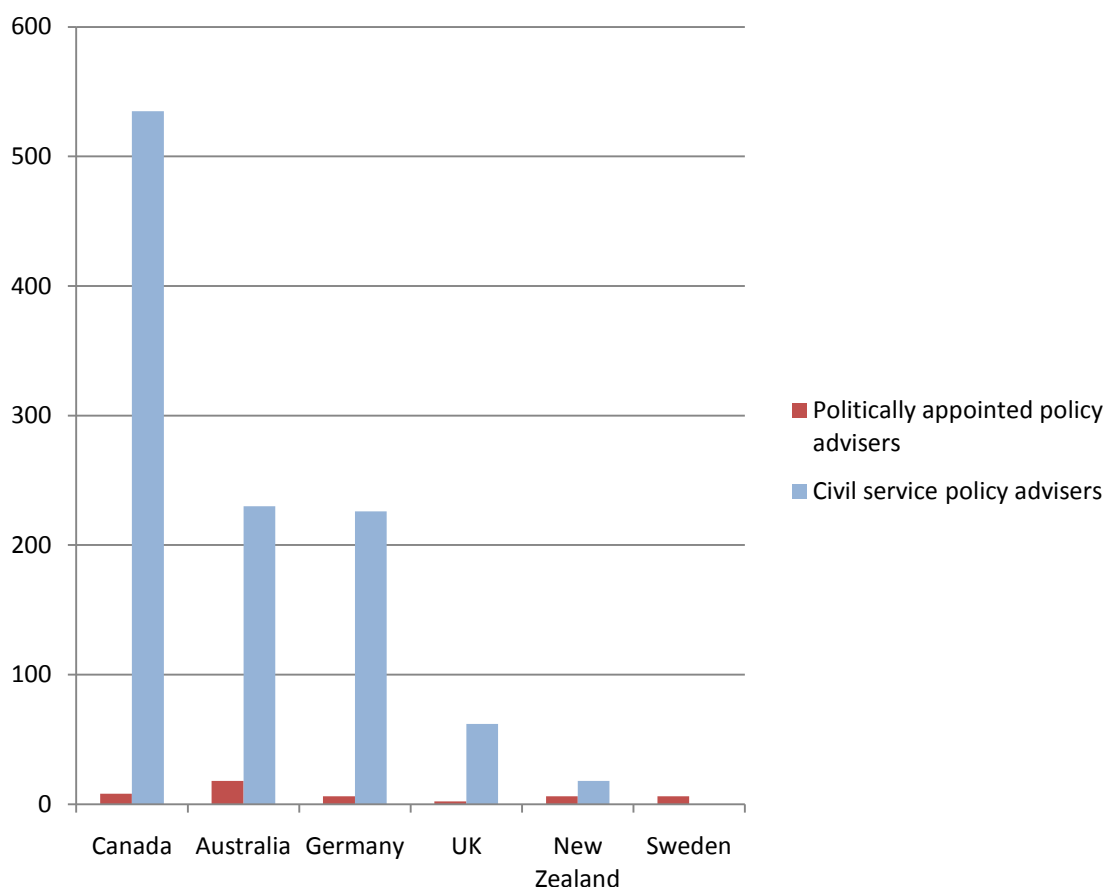
Coordination of policy processes was not a focus of our interviews, and is not considered in detail in this paper. The latter three functions are addressed in turn below, and we discuss policy implementation in the next chapter.

Critical analysis of policy

The heads of government in the six countries we studied may request or receive policy advice from all manner of sources, including the broader civil service and external advisers. There is nonetheless an important role for advisers who work explicitly for the leader, either in the leader's capacity as head of government or in their personal capacity as head of their party. Such advisers critically analyse the policy proposals that come from the rest of government to give advice to the leader about which policies are in an acceptable state to proceed and about the progress of policies underway.

This policy analysis is related to the advice the leader receives as head of the Cabinet, but is far broader in scope. The critical analysis of policy ultimately helps to fulfil the leader's responsibility to direct and monitor policy across government. In addition, it may assist the Prime Minister's Office to act as the control centre of the government's broad policy narrative.

Figure 6: Total number of policy advisory staff reporting to heads of government



Sources: interviews and government websites

The critical analysis function provides a quality control check on the policy documents that reach a Prime Minister's or Chancellor's desk. This includes spotting potential technical and political issues before they arise, and ensuring that all policies reflect a wider, coordinated perspective, rather than one department's focus.

In this key area, the UK Prime Minister does not have in either Number 10 or the Cabinet Office the number of civil service policy advisers at the disposal of his counterparts in Australia, Canada or Germany.

In Australia, Canada and Germany, the heads of government have several hundred civil service staff in addition to the politically appointed policy staff in their private offices. Civil service policy advisers at the Prime Minister's Department in Australia, the Privy Council Office in Canada and the Chancellery in Germany provide advice to leaders across the whole range of government policy and activity. The New Zealand Prime Minister also receives whole-of-government policy advice from his own department, but with a smaller number of senior civil service advisers.

In these four countries, leaders generally receive civil service policy advice from their own departments, rather than from the departments of their Cabinet colleagues. Advisers in these

leaders' departments have the special responsibility of considering policy from the perspective of the leader, such as identifying clashes between policies, noticing opportunities to combine initiatives or helping to decide which policies are of particular priority. Leaders' departments may challenge the advice provided by other departments.

One senior Australian official commented that the ability of the Australian Prime Minister to receive advice from her own department helps in three main ways. First, the department ensures that the right policies are brought to Cabinet. Second, civil service advisers help the Cabinet to discuss the most important aspects of those policies. Third, the department provides the important contestability function of ensuring that someone other than the Prime Minister has spent time analysing the merits of a proposal after it was created. The same official commented that the knowledge that there will ultimately be an extra pair of eyes and ears from a central agency evaluating a proposal should also improve the quality of original policy proposals.

The non-partisan policy briefing for the UK Prime Minister is generally written by staff in line departments, with steering briefs from the Cabinet Office and input from Number 10. Some of those we interviewed from the UK suggested that the Cabinet Office now operates as a de facto Prime Minister's department.⁵ But whilst the British Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister exercise considerable control over the structures, operation and even everyday work of some parts of the Cabinet Office, the Cabinet Office does not exhibit all the characteristics of Prime Minister's departments as they exist elsewhere. The Cabinet Office does not employ policy advisers to shadow every line department and so does not provide the capacity for critical, whole-of-government analysis of policies to brief to the Prime Minister that exists elsewhere.

To some extent, this critical analysis is provided by the staff in Number 10. But as we stated above, Number 10 has an unusual and challenging double role to play as the primary source of both whole-of-government and political advice to the Prime Minister.

In Australia, Canada and New Zealand, separate Prime Ministers' Offices provide political policy advice to the Prime Minister, and may act as competing sources of policy influence. This advice is given in addition to the substantial amounts of non-partisan, whole-of-government advice which leaders receive from their departments.

In countries with leaders' departments, changes in heads of government are managed differently. The same civil servants who gave whole-of-government policy advice to one leader immediately start to give policy advice to his or her successor in areas of expertise. Continuity at Number 10 currently takes the form of private secretaries who stay on from one government to another, while it is very rare for policy advisers to remain in place following a change of government.

There was disagreement among our UK interviewees about whether there was a need for the UK Prime Minister to have a larger number of policy advisers. While some commented that there would be no need for additional voluminous briefing to the Prime Minister, others said that the Prime Minister does not currently have the policy support he needs in order to drive his agenda or to provide the critical, cross-government advice he needs.

⁵ Debates about the constitutional implications of such a Department in the UK have been covered extensively and expertly elsewhere, and need not be repeated here.

Dispute resolution functions

“It’s exhausting for a PM to be resolving disputes all the time as there are a lot of emotions involved when people don’t get what they want... so we try to keep that away unless people really need the help of the Prime Minister.”

Former Swedish adviser

Structures that resolve the disagreements between departments, ministries or even coalition partners for a leader can contribute to good policy decisions and give a head of government more time to spend on critical issues. This time management is critical because, in the words of a former UK civil servant, “the Prime Minister’s time is a precious resource: the fuel of Number 10 and the fuel of government”.

A vital part of an effective dispute resolution function is to prevent disputes from occurring. Advisers can form part of an early warning system for leaders, pre-empting and defusing potential problems so that the head of government is not distracted unnecessarily by preventable political disputes or media controversies.

We “try to identify all kinds of potential conflicts, and preferably disarm them but also pull the alarm when the Prime Minister needs to get involved.”

Swedish interviewee in the Prime Minister’s Office

As a senior German civil servant explained, detecting “political hot potatoes” is one of the most important roles of the German Chancellery, which may then direct other ministries to address a particular issue without involving the Chancellor so as to protect her time, energies and political capital. The coordination processes followed by the Canadian Privy Council Office have a similar effect. It ensures that issues and initiatives originating from line ministries for Cabinet approval have been thoroughly vetted, and that only a few (if any) final decisions remain which require the Prime Minister’s involvement.

In the UK, avoiding controversies and disputes has traditionally been a key role of advisers at Number 10 rather than the Cabinet Office, partly because most Cabinet Office staff do not form part of the Prime Minister’s direct support system. One expert British commentator told us that a key test of a successful policy adviser in Downing Street is their ability to spot (and neutralise) upcoming controversies.

Where an issue has not been pre-empted or cannot be neutralised, leaders’ support systems can also play a vital role in resolving disputes with minimal input from the head of government.

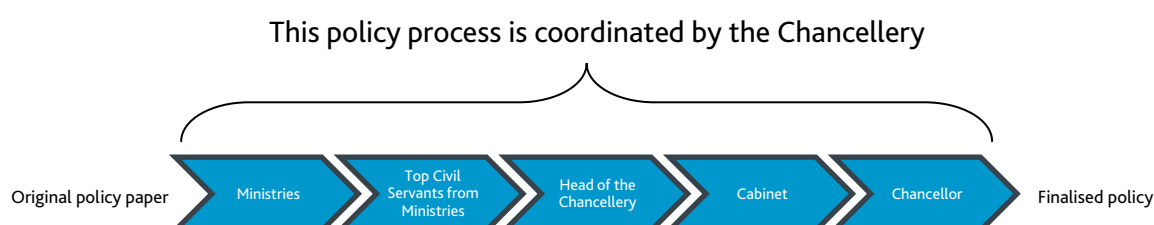
In Sweden, the Prime Minister's direct support system itself is carefully designed to aid the process of reaching compromises within the governing coalition, as well as coordinating which policies need to reach the Prime Minister's desk for decision. An issue is only placed on the agenda for a Formal Government Meeting when it has the agreement of the Political Coordination Secretariat which is located within the Prime Minister's Office (see organogram in the appendices).⁶

Within the Political Coordination Secretariat, each of the coalition parties are represented by a State Secretary, supported by their own small policy staff. These policy advisers and the State Secretaries try to reach agreements on upcoming policies and issues without the party leaders, who are only involved when the members of the Coordination Secretariat fail to reach an agreement or when they feel that a specific issue requires the early involvement of the leaders.

Sweden differs from our other case studies in its explicit management of coalition policy coordination within the leader's office. In Germany, for example, one interviewee commented that coalition disagreements are usually managed in the Parliament rather than by the Chancellor's direct support system. Instead, the Chancellery plays an important role brokering between ministers and departments to determine a cross-government stance on particular issues.

The Chancellor's support system resolves policy questions through a finely tuned process of meetings (see figure 7 below). In the first instance, the Chancellery decides which ministries need to be consulted about certain aspects of a policy, with input sought about certain parts. Senior civil servants will meet and discuss a disputed issue. If they have not come to an agreement then the Minister for the Chancellery mediates. According to one German interviewee, unless an agreement has been reached at this stage it is unlikely that it will proceed further through the process to the Cabinet.

Figure 7: the policy process and dispute resolution function in Germany



Source: interviews

⁶ <http://www.sweden.gov.se/sb/d/12082/nocache/true/dictionary/false>

Unlike Sweden or Germany, managing disagreements between coalition partners has not generally been a task for the UK Prime Minister's support system until recently. Even now, there have not been significant alterations to the Prime Minister's support structures in order to accommodate this change. Instead, several established dispute resolution methods may be used depending on the circumstances.

While disagreements may be solved at the Cabinet level, both Number 10 and Cabinet committees also play a major role. Modern UK Prime Ministers usually have a number of dispute resolution functions available: those in which they are directly involved (direct meetings with a Secretary of State, through the Cabinet or through certain Cabinet Committees) and those which function without their presence (negotiations by other ministers, Cabinet committees and Number 10 staff).

The most prominent roles have often been played by powerful policy units or by trouble-shooting ministers used by the Prime Minister to solve Cabinet disagreements.

Creation of policy by the head of government's support system

Some heads of government have a number of means of driving their own policies, including through appointing or firing ministers, creating and dismantling departments, the budgeting process and wider financial management. Direct policy origination within the Prime Minister's support system, however, is unusual. In the Australian Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, such new initiatives are often managed by the Strategy and Delivery Division. One Australian official explained that a Prime Minister needs to have 'the ability to commission and to have led out of your own department in-depth policy work on topics that are particularly important to you, and that often that don't sit particularly well in other places'.

Some heads of government have used their position to drive through a personal agenda; for example, through private projects the UK's Strategy Unit and its predecessor the Forward Strategy Unit originated a number of policy ideas. However, in case studies other than Australia, heads of government do not themselves have institutional support to create policy but instead relied on outsourcing this function to Cabinet colleagues (although some political parties may be able to provide this function through their own resourcing).

5. Implementation support

In this section, we describe the systems for monitoring implementation in our case studies and outline some of the differences between them.

The formal support available to the head of government to monitor policy implementation differed considerably between the countries we studied. While in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the UK it is an important function of the head of government's support system, in other countries it was not a function provided by the leader's staff, and was outside the scope of our original interviews. However, at the end of this chapter, we outlined the monitoring structures in Sweden as well, based on further research.

In some of our interviews, we heard that an important part of the implementation function was direct intervention by the support system after the discovery of an unsatisfactory level of performance. This is not an area we have researched for this paper, but we look forward to seeing work on this area.

Direct monitoring by leaders' support system

In Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the UK, the head of government's direct support system has a role in explicitly assessing implementation. Indeed, according to one senior Australian civil servant, 'providing close protection on the implementation front' has become a key capability for the Australian Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C).

The Cabinet Implementation Unit (CIU), within the PM&C, develops implementation plans based on an assessment of the government's policies and a timeline for achieving progress on the execution of the Prime Minister's priorities. This process begins with an extended dialogue with the Prime Minister about her priorities for government. The CIU then monitors policy and progress against the plans, preparing monthly reports for the Prime Minister to provide her with an integrated, whole-of-government view detailing how the delivery of the government's goals is proceeding. The CIU also provides the Prime Minister with the capacity to commission implementation assessments in areas of particular concern, and gives advice about where resources might be better allocated to address high-risk or problem areas.

Explaining the importance of the work of the CIU to the Prime Minister, a senior Australian official highlighted two factors: 'citizens have increasing expectations that a government will do precisely what they said they would do and hold them to account... and governments are trying to do more challenging things that really stretch the bounds of what government can achieve.'

Another country where the leader's support system plays a significant role monitoring implementation is the UK. Traditionally, the Treasury and Number 10 have been the key players in cross-government monitoring of implementation. But just like support with

direction and focus, the nature of the implementation function within Number 10 is heavily dependent on the personality and preferences of the Prime Minister. One former adviser in Number 10 commented that one of his key roles as a policy adviser was not just to inform the Prime Minister but also to drive the implementation of specific policy priorities from the centre.

We were told by another senior figure from the time that the success and nature of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit between 2001 and 2005 'was very much a function of the Prime Minister's focus on delivery, and his personal relationship with Ministers and his personal relationship with Michael Barber... We did a lot of stocktake meetings to which the PMDU did quite elaborate briefs. The reason that was necessary and that worked effectively was because that was a key priority of the Prime Minister.' Those stocktake meetings formed one part of the 'deliverology' approach developed by the PMDU; they operated alongside monthly updates to the Prime Minister and Priority Reviews, where a rapid analysis of a high priority area was produced over 5 – 6 weeks.

Speaking about the current situation, several UK interviewees mentioned the Coalition Agreement as the new means of measuring the success of the UK government, and the Business Plans reflect this understanding: they monitor whether departments have implemented 'actions' in line with the Coalition Agreement and the Program for Government.

Since its creation at the start of David Cameron's premiership, the Implementation Unit in Number 10 (now the Policy and Implementation Unit) has performed the leading role in centre-led implementation, managing the Business Plans and reporting to the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister on which actions have not been achieved on schedule. The Treasury is playing a less prominent role than it did under the previous regime of Public Service Agreements, as Business Plans have been formulated separately from the 2010 Spending Review (which, of course, has its own significance to departments).

The nature of the Business Plan regime has been seen as a reaction to the former Delivery Unit's method of using the influence of the Prime Minister and then the Treasury to improve results against targets. Business Plans allow departments to articulate their future actions themselves, and they are then held to account for their performance against the plans by the public, with serious failures being escalated within Number 10 to the Prime Minister (and the Deputy Prime Minister).

In New Zealand and Canada, the leader's support systems also monitor implementation, but on an informal basis. In case of the former, one of the many roles of the Policy Advisory Group, based in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, is to produce a paper for the Prime Minister approximately every 6 weeks, which informally assesses the state of particular policies and grades them using a traffic light system. These advisers are said to be the Prime Minister's first port of call if his or her interest in the implementation of a policy increases, such as in a crisis.

The example of Canada is similar. Both the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and the Privy Council Office (PCO) provide support to the head of government in this area. Close advisors in the PMO keep abreast of the implementation of key policies by departments. Additionally, the Operations Secretariat in the PCO provides a formal support structure monitoring operational issues of policy or program delivery for the Prime Minister.

Indirect monitoring

All the countries we studied had monitoring systems outside of the Prime Ministers support system. We outline here the monitoring systems in Sweden where the Prime Ministers' direct support structures do not play a major role.

In Sweden, reporting on the progress of different policies was carried out by agencies or finance ministries instead. This disparity between our case studies results primarily from differences between the governance structures the countries.










For instance, the Swedish government is characterised by a high degree of agency autonomy and decision making, as well as regional and local governments which have responsibility for areas including health care, social services and water supply. In general, while the government and line departments are responsible for policy and setting goals by performance budgeting, agencies and devolved governments alone are responsible for implementation.

Taking schooling as an example, local governments or interested groups (in the case of 'free schools') are responsible for the implementation of policy within a broad framework set by the national government. Their performance is evaluated by an independent agency (the Schools Inspectorate) whose objectives, guidelines and resource distribution are decided by the national government, but which is otherwise independent and is held responsible for monitoring performance.⁷

Feedback on agency performance in Sweden comes primarily from informal dialogues between the ministries and agency director generals and from annual reports. Thus the Prime Minister's Office is largely removed from monitoring, with the exception of a small team of three people led by a senior Head of Planning maintaining general oversight of performance reports.

⁷ <http://www.skolinspektionen.se/PageFiles/1854/SwedishSchoolsInspectorate2009.pdf>

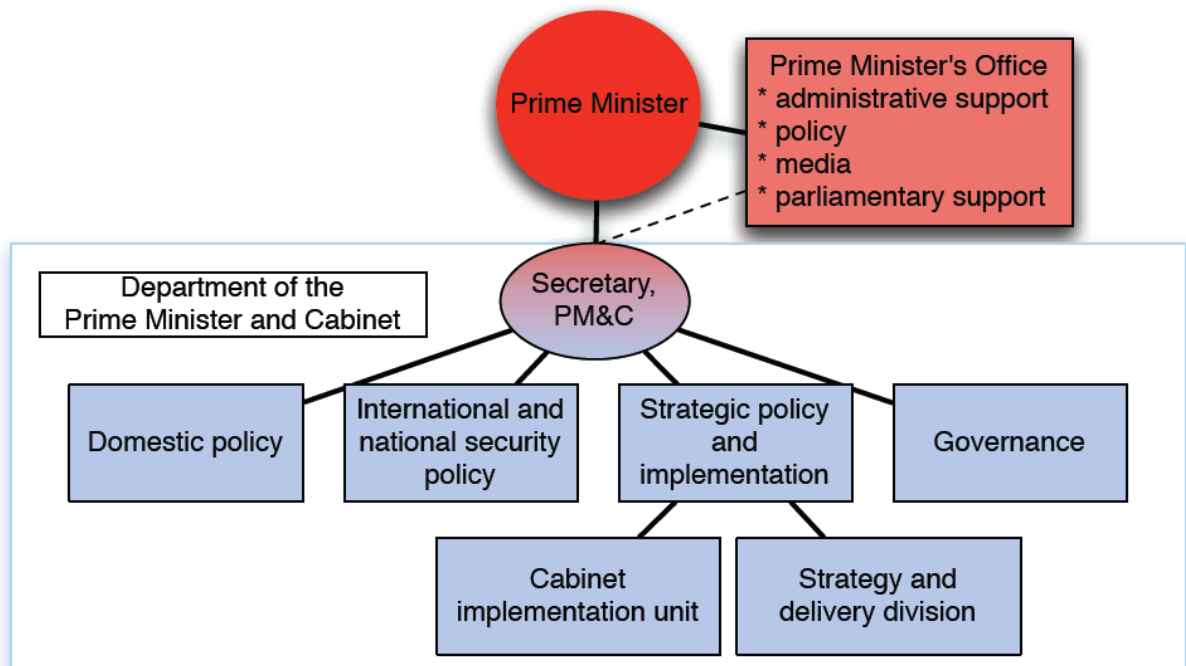
6. Organisation charts and descriptions of the six countries

	Head of government
	Minister/s
	Politically partisan (party of head of govt)
	Politically appointed civil servant
	Civil servant supporting head of govt
	Civil servant in related role
	Politically partisan (other party)
	Organisation, unit or group
	Individual

To illustrate leader’s support systems in more detail, the pages that follow contain organisational charts and brief descriptions of each case study country.

The key to the right explains the significance of different colours in the organisational charts.

Australia



The Prime Minister's Office

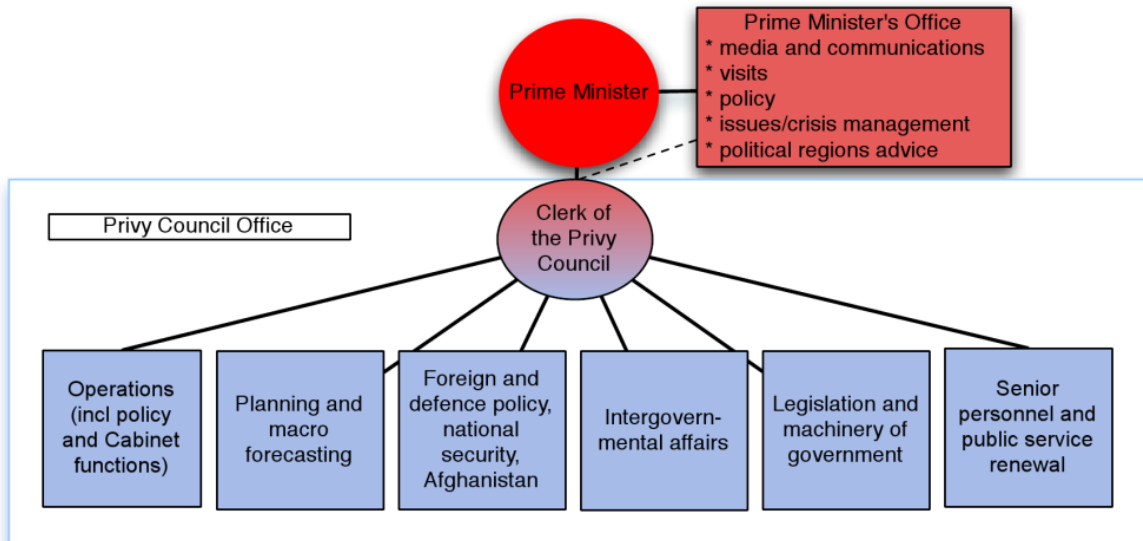
The PMO is staffed by approx. 50 people personally appointed by the Prime Minister or her party who do not have tenure, with the exception of a small number of civil servants who manage the relationship between the Office and PM&C. The PMO contains units to advise the Prime Minister on policy, strategy, media and her parliamentary duties and also performs administrative functions.

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's (PM&C's) staff of 530 provide everyday policy advice and support to the Prime Minister on all areas of government policy. It acts as both the Cabinet secretariat and the Prime Minister's source of non-partisan whole-of-government advice. The Secretary is a civil servant on a temporary contract.

PM&C also undertakes longer-term strategic policy projects and monitors the implementation of government priorities.

Canada



The Prime Minister's Office

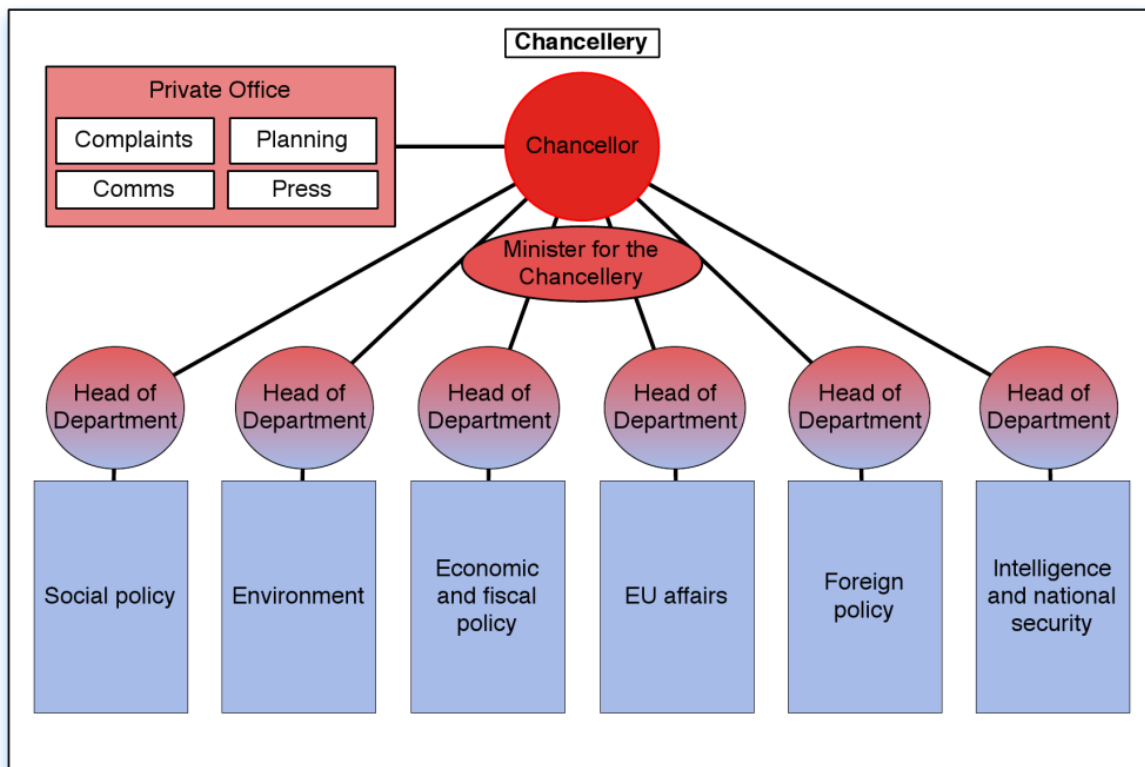
The Prime Minister's immediate office is separate from the Privy Council Office. Its precise organisation can vary considerably between Prime Ministers, but will generally contain units for media, visits, policy, issue/ crisis management and political regions advice.

The PMO is a partisan organisation intended to serve the PM exclusively. Its approx. 125 staff are political appointments.

The Privy Council Office

The Privy Council Office (PCO) employs approx. 1000 public servants and reports directly to the PM. It is headed by the Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet, a Public Servant chosen in practice by the PM. The PCO is both the Cabinet secretariat and the PM's source of non-partisan civil service advice across policy and operation issues facing the government.

Germany



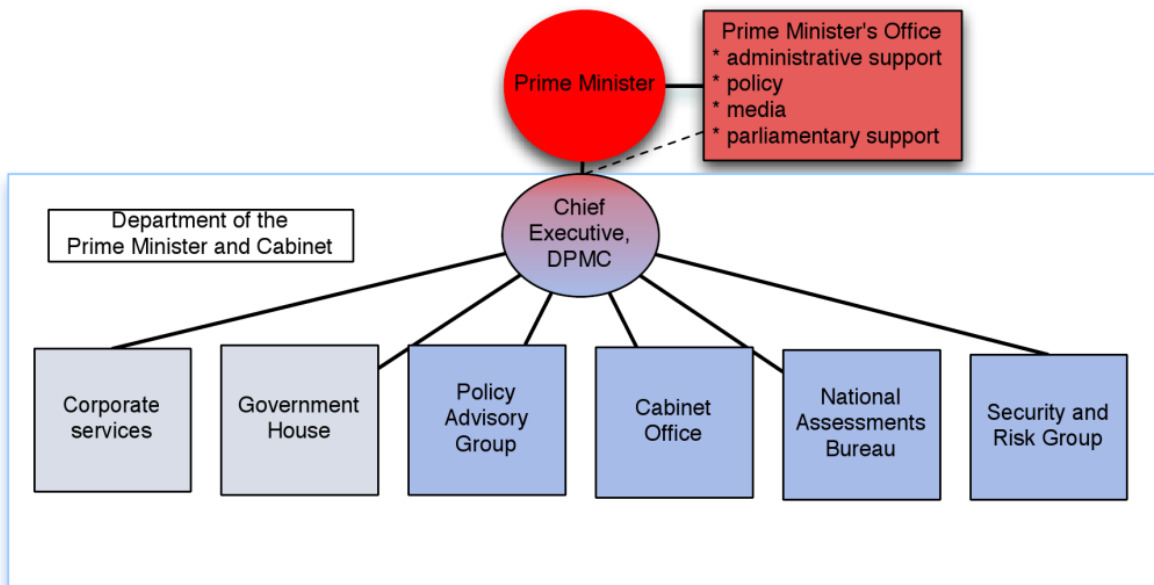
The Chancellor's office

The Chancellors office is small at around 20 but powerful. It is generally staffed by party officials who have been close to the Chancellor for many years, and a small number of political appointees

The Chancellery

The Chancellery employs around 600 civil servants. The most senior civil servants in the Chancellery are generally 'political civil servants' appointed by the Chancellor's private office. It advises the Chancellor on all areas of government policy, coordinating work across government including the Cabinet and brokering between departments when disputes occur.

New Zealand



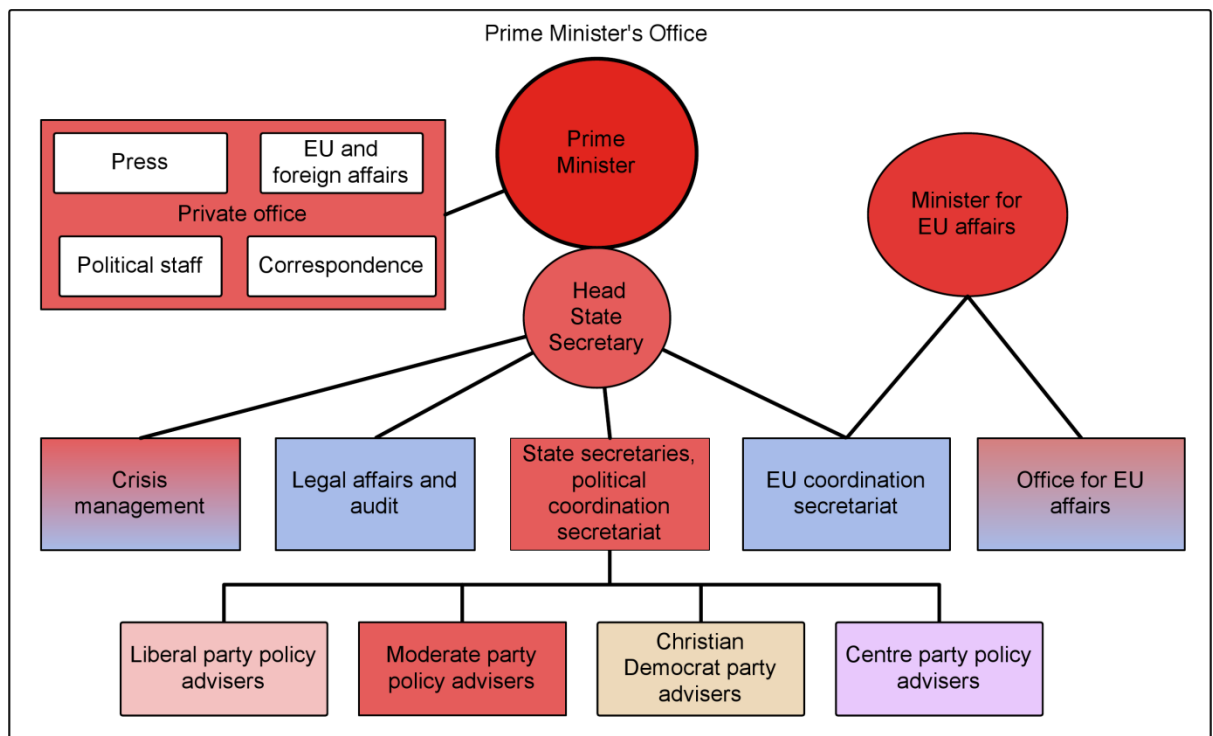
The Prime Minister's Office

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) is staffed by approximately 30 political appointments who do not have tenure and whose roles include administration, and policy and media support. The PMO is located in the same building as the majority of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, one level above the Department's policy advisers.

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) is a central agency of the New Zealand government employing around 120 civil servants in ongoing roles. It functions as the Cabinet Secretariat as well as the Prime Minister's primary source of non-partisan, civil service, whole-of-government advice. The Chief Executive is a Civil Servant employed on a temporary contract, chosen by the PM on advice from the State Services Commission. Only 17 of its 120 staff make up the Policy Advisory Group who give advice to the Prime Minister on all areas of government policy

Sweden



The Prime Minister's office

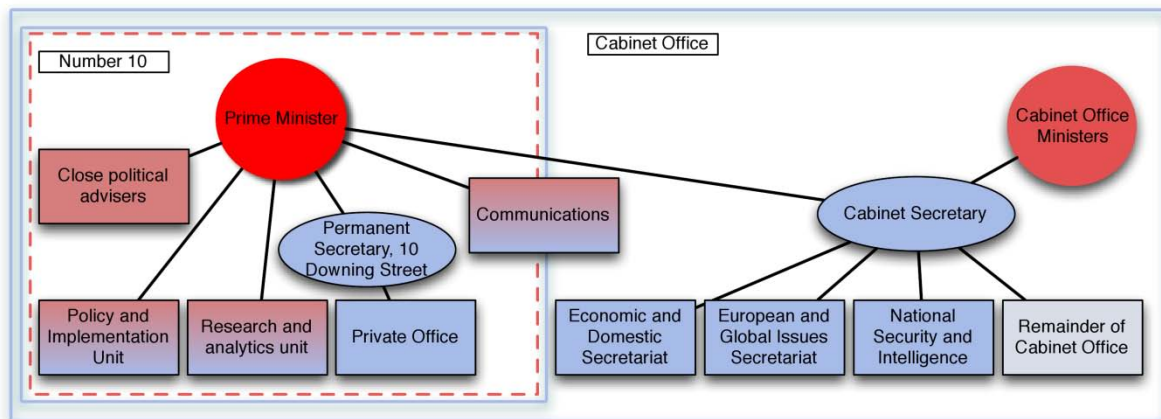
The Prime Minister's office contains around 200 people of whom 60 are political appointments including four state State Secretaries. The Prime Minister's office oversees work on crisis management, legal affairs, and the European Union, as well as coordinating the views of the various coalition partners. The Minister for EU Affairs and his staff also form part of the Prime Minister's office.

The Head State Secretary is a political appointment to whom the PM largely delegates his functions of leading the Prime Minister's Office and the civil service.

The four parties which make up the governing coalition each have a state secretary and a small staff to shape the direction of coalition policy.

The Prime Minister's private office contains approximately 10 senior political appointments, plus their support staff.

United Kingdom



Prime Minister's office

The Prime Minister's office (Number 10) has a staff of approximately 200 and currently includes a policy and implementation unit, a research and analytics unit as well as other functions. It retains a focus on a number of areas across government especially those that reflect the Prime Minister's priorities. The majority of its staff are civil service appointments, with some on short term contracts.

The Cabinet Office

It has a staff of 1322 and supports the Prime Minister and Cabinet, working via departments to coordinate the delivery and efficiency of government.

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June 2011

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