Making Policy in British Higher Education: how is it made and who makes it?

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Introduction

• How is it done elsewhere: France, Germany, the USA
• The nature of the policy process in the UK—a complex bargaining process
• The unusual David Willetts
Rationality and the policy process

“...My experience of government was shocking for me. I had expected that the nearer one got to the commanding heights, the more rational it would all be. The more calmness, the more rationality, the more careful consideration, looking at evidence. I discovered the opposite. Ministers were in a constant state of mild panic rushing from one thing to the next, never having time to grasp any issue, needing to make a decision in extraordinary short periods of time and often trying to make decisions without grasping the issues. The officials tried to rush around to clear up the mess” (Kogan interview 1995)

“...most of the significant developments of the decade [1980s] happened in a piecemeal fashion. There were certainly overall trends in policy, though these could by no means be assembled into any kind of grand strategy. Indeed in my judgement, the creation of an embracing strategy was always beyond reach...” (Bird 1994)
What are the underlying policy drivers?

- Student numbers
- Research
- How to pay for them
- Post 2010—interest rates
- The consequences: reactive not proactive policy making
The roles of officials and Ministers

- 1980
- 1986
- 1992
- 2003
- 2010
The role of the Treasury

- 1961 the Plowden Report *The Control of Public Expenditure* Cmnd 1432: the creation of PESC
- The Cabinet decision on public expenditure
- Comprehensive Spending Reviews
- The allocation process—the Dept, PES, the Star Chamber
- The Browne Report and the 2010 CSR
What constitutes the distinctiveness of British higher education policy making?

• The a-political character of most HE policy making; the peripheral nature of HE within educational policy making and within government

• The absence of a single policy making focus: the interplay of policy networks; policy change driven by Treasury (PES); the Department(s); Cabinet Office; intermediary bodies (Funding Councils, Research Councils); representative bodies (UUK, Russell Group, NUS); very rarely, Parliament; even more rarely, HEIs