

# The Nuffield Foundation: Grants for Research and Innovation

## One page summary sheet for full application

**Name of applicant(s)** *First name should be of applicant who will handle correspondence. In the case of joint applicants, please give full contact details on a separate sheet)*

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### Title and summary of project

#### **Making Coalition Government Work in Westminster and Whitehall**

The UK has not had coalition government for 60 years. Following our 2002 study of coalition governments overseas, we now wish to study coalition governance at Whitehall and Westminster. We do so through the prism of our earlier work, and through studies of coalition government in Europe and elsewhere. These set the central research questions: how can coalition government be stable? How can it reconcile unity in government with the need for the parties to project distinct identities?

We will examine primary and secondary literature about the new coalition, and interview ministers, civil servants and senior party figures. We will hold private seminars for Whitehall at the Institute for Government, our project partners. The main output will be a book. The main outcomes should be better preparedness for the next coalition government; better Whitehall guidance; and better understanding of how coalition government works by the media and the general public.

**When would you like the grant to begin?** 01 January 2011

**When would you like the grant to end?** 31 December 2011

**Total amount requested from the Nuffield Foundation** £76,487

**Have you applied, or are you applying, elsewhere for funds for the project?** No

*The application should be typed on A4 and should not be more than 10 sides long (including this **one page** summary sheet). CVs and bibliography may be attached as appendices. With this application you should enclose a statement from the institution saying that they will be prepared to administer the grant, as well as a letter signed by the PI to confirm that they have read and accept our standard terms and conditions of award.*

## *Making Coalition Government Work in Westminster and Whitehall*

### **Background**

The UK has not had a coalition government at Westminster for over 60 years. Surprisingly little has been written about coalition government in the UK (e.g., Butler 1978; Oaten 2007), and very little has been written about the practicalities of how to make coalition government work generally.

The Constitution Unit first did work on this ten years ago, in a Nuffield-funded project to learn the lessons of coalition government from overseas. Ben Seyd's report *Coalition Government in Britain: Lessons from Overseas* was published in 2002, followed by a later supplementary report (Seyd, 2004). Our main audience was the new coalition governments in Scotland and Wales; but we always had an eye to the possibility of coalition government at Westminster.

We now wish to do a new study of coalition governance in the UK, and how the coalition is perceived by key actors in Whitehall and Westminster. We will do so through the prism of our earlier work, and through studies of coalition government in Europe (Strom et al, 2000; 2008) and elsewhere (Boston and Ladley, 2006). These set the central research questions: how have the key actors sought to ensure the stability of the coalition government? And how have they maintained unity, while allowing distinctiveness to each of the coalition partners?

We will engage with politicians and senior officials throughout the project, through private seminars and meetings. We hope that the project will result in better preparedness for the next coalition government, whenever that comes; better Whitehall guidance; better understanding in Parliament of the requirements of coalition government; and better understanding of how coalition government works by the media and the general public.

### **The Project, Research Issues and Questions**

Our focus is strongly on *coalition governance*. 'Governance' here means "the practice of governing, and the stage in the life cycle of governments that is devoted to policy execution and implementation." (Müller et al, 2008, p 9). This includes political coordination of the Cabinet, but also the political executive's relationships with the 'administrative executive' (the civil service), Parliament and the political parties.

Coalition governments face two sets of difficulties. One is instability. Coalition governments in Europe are more short lived than single party majority governments. Half of coalition governments end because of conflict between the governing parties or within them (Damgaard, 2008). So procedures to manage conflict and resolve disputes between the coalition partners are particularly important.

The second difficulty is the unity/distinctiveness dilemma. A coalition must devise means of ensuring its constituent parts remain coordinated and coherent if it is to govern effectively—this is the problem of *unity*. But coalitions are also composed of political parties, which have separate histories and values. These political parties must devise means by which they can ensure that their own policies are implemented and identified as party policies, thus satisfying internal factions and party supporters. In short, parties to the coalition must also preserve their identity—this is the problem of

*distinctiveness* (Boston and Ladley, 2006; see also Strom et al, 2003). These competing considerations are fundamental to understanding how a coalition government acts in relation to administration and policy-making.

Until recently, coalition government was considered an esoteric subject in British political science, due to the perceived unlikelihood of multiparty government. Where British political scientists have covered minority or coalition government, this has usually taken the form of historical case studies (Butler, 1978; Bogdanor, 1983; Butler, 1986). Perhaps because of the limited and distant nature of British experience, these studies have tended to focus mostly on formation, duration and termination, but slide over the detailed business of making government work. The adoption of proportional representation at the devolved level and in other Commonwealth countries, and the recognition that multiparty government may become the norm in the UK (Dunleavy, 2005; Curtice, forthcoming) have led to a small number of works examining the practical issues specific to multiparty government (Seyd, 2002; Oaten, 2007; Hazell and Paun, 2009), but these remain exceptional. In short, British literature still lacks in-depth studies of how to make coalition governments work at a national level.

The literature on Western Europe is far more extensive: proportional representation is widespread and coalition government is relatively common (Strom et al, 2000). Earlier work on coalition government was mostly about ‘the wedding, not the marriage’, addressing three main questions: who gets in (which parties form the coalition); who gets what? (how do they allocate portfolios between them); and how long does it last?—and locating these within broad theoretical frameworks (e.g., Laver and Shepsle, 1995; Strom et al, 2000).

In recent years, however, there have been more systematic attempts at analysis. Strom and Müller’s work (2000; 2008) provides a comprehensive and up to date synthesis of the literature on coalition governance. Noting the peculiar problems which most coalition governments face, they have identified various mechanisms by which the necessities of unity and distinctiveness can be managed. These include coalition agreements, specifying common areas of policy and processes of government (Müller et al, 2008); coalition committees; (Andeweg, 2008); ‘watchdog’ ministers and the use of parliamentary committees to reduce information asymmetries between the parties (Verzichelli, 2008; Strom et al, 2010).

But these works are not a guide to action. The studies on which they draw are mainly large *n*, comparative studies, developing and testing theoretical models with regression analysis to achieve the best statistical fit. Many of the variables studied (the party system; ‘critical events’) lie beyond the control of political actors. The studies leave a large unexplained residue of variation between countries, suggesting that each country develops its own habits and traditions of coalition government (Müller et al, 2008, p 20). So there remains a strong place for single country, empirical studies.

Moreover, there remains a serious gap in terms of how coalition government works on a day-to-day basis. As Strom and Müller themselves acknowledge, ‘the territory remains largely uncharted’ (Strom et al 2008, p 35). There are a number of reasons for this, but perhaps the major one is the general unwillingness of coalition governments to grant access to researchers. This colours much of the literature: what is studied is that which is publicly accessible. By contrast, the day-to-day details of conflict

management, consultation and coordination of coalition activity and policy remain mostly unexamined.

Finally, the coverage of coalition governance is partial. The focus of West European studies remains on the political executive; there is little on the role of the ‘administrative executive’—the civil service (but see Boston, 1998); policy-making (for an exception, see Malone, 2008); or political parties under coalition government (but see King, 1976; Müller et al, 2010).

### **Research Questions**

Hence, coalition governance raises a number of important questions of both academic and practical interest. Academically, there are still large gaps, and there is a lack of detailed case studies of coalition governance in the UK generally. From a practical point of view, examining coalition governance now is vital. The UK appears to be moving toward a multiparty system, thus making hung parliaments more likely in the future (Dunleavy, 2005; Curtice, forthcoming): practitioners shall want to know how best to manage coalitions. Later coalitions tend to draw on the experience of previous coalitions, because of the high costs of establishing and evaluating new procedures and processes (Strom et al, 2008). These formative years may determine how future coalitions are perceived and governed.

The research questions this study will address are:

#### *The Political Executive*

- What mechanisms has the coalition government used to reinforce internal stability?
- Have the coordination, consultation and dispute resolution mechanisms devised by the coalition provided a workable balance between unity and flexibility?
- How has coalition government affected policy making, as it requires agreement between two or more parties?

#### *The Administrative Executive*

- What changes have been made in Whitehall’s working practices to accommodate the coalition?
- Does coalition government strengthen the role of the civil service, as the custodians of the collective and consultative procedures?

#### *Parliament*

- How effectively does the Government present a united front to Parliament?
- How do the coalition parties use Parliament as a forum to present their distinctive policies to the country?

#### *Political parties*

- How have the coalition parties managed the tension between needing unity in government and the preservation of ideological and policy distinctiveness to the electorate?
- Have there been changes in the relationships between the leaders, party executives, party conference and party members?

## **Research Methods**

There are two main research methods aimed at analysing how coalitions govern and sustain themselves despite the pressures inherent in coalition government: document analysis and interviews. Generally, the documents to be analysed are of two kinds: primary material, such as the coalition agreements, government reports, and party political documents; and secondary material, such as newspaper reports, and political blogs linked to the coalition parties (which may offer ‘insider’ views).

These are then to be complemented by semi-structured interviews, which are the main research method. A major obstacle to studies of coalition governance is the inability to gain access, but we have already received authorisation from the Deputy Prime Minister for interviews of Ministers and officials; and we are now seeking confirmation of the details from the Cabinet Secretary. We hope to be able to ‘triangulate’ responses to issues by interviewing three sets of actors: ministers; civil servants at ‘the centre’ (No 10, Cabinet and the Cabinet Office) and in key departments; and senior figures in the political parties.

### *The Political and Administrative Executive*

We will analyse the ‘founding documents’ of the coalition: the initial Coalition Agreement of 11 May, the Programme for Government of 20 May, and the Agreement for Stability and Reform of 21 May. Other primary literature will include Cabinet Office documents, speeches and interviews, answers to Parliamentary Questions, and statements in Parliament and appearances before select committees.

The document analysis aims to identify the various mechanisms which attempt to reinforce the stability of the coalition and strengthen its unity while preserving party distinctiveness. This would include matters like consultation processes and dispute resolution mechanisms, and the role of the civil service. It will also include the negotiation and implementation of policy on a small set of issues (see ‘departments’ below). We will conduct a detailed analysis of the Programme for Government to identify which policies are Conservative, which are Liberal Democrat, which are a combination of the two, and which are ‘neither’ (perhaps signifying departmental policy). Initial analysis in two subject areas has proved promising in identifying the respective influence of each party. We hope to track a number of these at the level of the centre, but also at the departmental level.

We will then attempt to deepen the analysis through interviews. Within the Cabinet Office (and where possible, No 10) we will interview the main Ministers responsible for coordination between the parties; and the senior officials responsible for facilitating collective consultation and agreement before any policies are signed off. In each interview we will press to see what mechanisms have been proposed; what (if any) mechanisms have been discarded or seen as unworkable, and why; how coalition policies were chosen and/or adapted; and to what extent changes are the result of coalition government rather than the reflection of a different set of players and personalities.

### *Departments*

In addition to examining the centre, we have also selected three departments for special study to see how the coalition manages itself at the ‘lower levels’: the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department of Energy and

Climate Change and the Department of Communities and Local Government. These comprise one department with a Liberal Democrat Secretary of State; one with a junior Liberal Democrat minister; and one with no Liberal Democrat ministers at all. Being three departments with overlapping responsibilities, they will also have a perspective on how the other departments operate. This may help us to distinguish between those issues and responses which occur across the board, and those which are the result of particular personalities. In each department we will seek to interview ministers, the Permanent Secretary, Special Advisers, the Director of Communications and press officers, as well as senior echelons of the civil service in selected policy areas. This will be buttressed by interviews with organisations such as the National Farmers' Union and the Local Government Association to get an external perspective.

After initial interviews in our three case study departments we will select four-five policy topics for detailed study. We will seek out a Conservative policy, over which the Lib Dems had doubts; a Liberal Democrat policy, where the Conservatives had doubts; a policy which is 'business as usual'; and a policy which is disputed. In each case we will explore how policy is developed and negotiated within the department; within Whitehall; with the parliamentary parties; and the wider world.

We recognise we will not get access to discuss very sensitive policies. But in two recent studies of the impact of freedom of information legislation (which has some similarities with this project) we interviewed over 60 officials and ministers, and they were candid about the operating difficulties they faced. And some policies may be worth studying even if the inside story is not disclosable.

We will also study the work of the Cabinet Office Constitution Unit, and the policy development and implementation of two high profile policies: fixed term parliaments, whose explicit purpose is to stabilise coalition government; and the AV referendum, where the coalition parties will campaign on opposing sides. Nick Clegg is in the lead on both policies, and we have good contacts with him and his senior officials.

### *Parliament*

The coalition government will want to present a united front in Parliament, but the coalition parties will attempt to use Parliament as a forum to project their distinctive identities. We will study documents related to those policies selected at the central and departmental level, including: PM and DPM's Questions; Parliamentary Questions, statements and other parliamentary business of our three case study departments; backbench rebellions; hostile questions and early day motions. We will interview the whips, parliamentary officials, the chairs of the parliamentary party in each House, and chairs of the relevant backbench subject committees which shadow those departments.

### *Coalition government and political parties*

The coalition parties are constrained in presenting their distinct messages in Parliament, but party members outside Parliament are not. They may become the main mechanism through which the parties seek to project their distinct identity. The documentary analysis will focus on those party documents touching upon the policies selected at the central and departmental level; newspaper articles and interviews; and party political blogs. We will interview ministers; the parties' negotiating teams who

founded the coalition; the party chair and chief executive; press spokesmen; the Whips, chairs of backbench party groups, and party spokesmen on policy subjects. Our aim here is to probe how the key tensions of unity and distinctiveness are managed within political parties. We will also probe to see how specific policies developed by the coalition parties may change under the conflicting pressures of requiring unity and distinctiveness.

### **Outputs and Outcomes**

The main output will be a book, to be published at the end of the project. We will summarise the book conclusions in an academic article for *Public Administration* or *Parliamentary Affairs*.

Interim outputs will include talks and seminars (see Engagement below); articles in the specialist magazines aimed at Whitehall (*Public Service*, *Civil Service World*) and at Westminster (*House Magazine*, *Government Gazette*, *Parliamentary Brief*). We will also write articles for the general press, and do radio and TV interviews. We are already doing interviews for the BBC on how the coalition is working.

The key outcomes will be

- Better preparedness for the next coalition government
- Better guidance in Whitehall through changes to various executive guidance documents (such as the new Cabinet Manual)
- Better understanding in Parliament of what is needed to accommodate coalition government
- Better understanding in the media, and by the public, of how coalition government works.

We recognise that not all the lessons will be generalisable: many of our findings may prove to be particular to this coalition. But if there are future coalition governments at Westminster, the participants will inevitably look back to the 2010 experience. Some systematic guidance, with health warnings, is better than none, especially since the large academic literature on coalition government provides very little practical guidance for practitioners.

### **Evaluation**

The success of the project cannot be evaluated in a short timescale. We may be able to suggest some changes to Whitehall procedures or guidance, as we successfully did on our Hung Parliaments project. But the long term impact cannot properly be tested until we next have a coalition government. We hope then that our work will become one of the standard works of reference.

### **Engagement with target audiences**

We will engage with politicians and officials through a combination of public and private events, as we did on our Hung Parliaments project last year. With the Institute for Government (our partners on that project) we will organise a series of private seminars on how the coalition is working in Whitehall. In 2011 we plan to organise four private discussions with senior officials on the do's and don'ts of coalition government, capturing their experience and turning it into research findings for us, and professional guidance for them. We will design the seminars in consultation with the Institute, who have a lot of experience of organising such events.

With the Study of Parliament Group we will organise a seminar on how the coalition is working in Parliament. Other presentations will include talks to the Hansard Society and National School of Government. Robert Hazell is already giving talks in 2010 about coalition government to conferences for Whitehall and Westminster audiences, with four engagements in July, two in September, and more requests coming for Autumn.

**Research team**

The team leader is Robert Hazell, and the researcher Dr Ben Yong. Both have solid links with Westminster and Whitehall. Robert Hazell worked in Whitehall for 14 years, and has worked closely with the civil service on many projects since. Last year he engaged with the Cabinet Office in a project on Hung Parliaments and the Challenges for Westminster and Whitehall, which helped them prepare for the 2010 election and produce a new Cabinet Manual as part of that preparation, based on the New Zealand Manual.

Ben Yong is an expert on coalition government in New Zealand, and wrote the NZ chapter of the Constitution Unit’s 2009 report on Hung Parliaments. From February to June 2010 he was seconded to Whitehall to work on the new Cabinet Manual.

Robert Hazell will lead the project, ensure delivery of all the outputs, conduct some of the senior interviews, do conference presentations and media interviews, and be co-author of the book. Ben Yong will collect all the primary and secondary literature, do most of the interviews, maintain the project web page, and write most of the book. We hope that Akash Paun (Institute for Government) will also work on the project, but cannot confirm pending a review of the Institute’s priorities. If he does that will be a bonus, and no additional funding is required.

**Budget and Timetable**

The project will run for 12 months, from January to December 2011.

Date	Work and outputs
Jan-Mar	Literature search. Initial departmental interviews; determine case study policies
Feb-Jun	Four private seminars at Institute for Government for Whitehall officials and special advisers
April-May	Conduct most of the interviews
May	Seminar and interim report: the coalition—1 year on
Augt-Sept	Complete any outstanding interviews
Oct-Dec	Write and complete book
Nov	Seminar: Coalition governance lessons

The main budgetary item is the salary cost for Dr Yong for 12 months at 100%. There is also teaching buyout for Robert Hazell (£7000), and the administrator’s costs (20%). The seminars and other events, and any publications arising from the project will all be provided free of charge by the Institute for Government, as their contribution to the project.

<b>Making Coalition Government Work in Westminster and Whitehall</b>					
<b>Prof Robert Hazell, University College London</b>					
<b>01 January - 31 December 2011</b>					
	<b>Basic</b>	<b>LA</b>	<b>NI</b>	<b>Superann</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Staff costs</b>					
Dr Ben Yong (RA), Grade 7 pt 30 100% FTE	29,348	2,795	2,380	5,143	39,666
Teaching Fellow (term 2 2010-11), Grade 7 pt 33 20% FTE	2,699	231	222	469	3,621
Teaching Fellow (term 1 2011-12), Grade 7 pt 33 20% FTE	2,735	234	224	475	3,668
Victoria Spence (admin), Grade 7 pt 33 25% FTE	8,258	699	679	1,432	11,068
<b>Other costs</b>					
Conferences (PSA)					1,000
Books					200
Advertising					480
<b>Estates costs</b>					16,784
<b>TOTAL CONTRIBUTION</b>					<b>£ 76,487</b>

**Ethics**

There should be no ethical problems associated with this research. The documents to be analysed are all publicly available. We have already received consent from the Deputy Prime Minister's Office to carry out interviews. Interviewees will be offered anonymity; where their comments are quoted, this will be cleared in advance and/or made non-attributable. Interview notes will be stored in a password-protected file.

## Appendices

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**Curricula Vitae**  
**Professor Robert Hazell CBE**  
**Professor of Government and the Constitution at University College London**

**Education**

- Called to the Bar (1973)
- BA Hons 2:1 in PPE (1970) and Law (1972) from Oxford University
- Scholar at Eton College (1961-66).

**Employment**

- Director of the Constitution Unit, UCL (1995-date)
- Director of the Nuffield Foundation (1989-1995)
- Senior civil servant in the Home Office (1975-1989)
- Common law Barrister at Middle Temple (1973-1975)

**Research Council grants**

- Future of the UK's top courts (1999-2001, with Prof Andrew le Sueur)
- The Law and Devolution disputes (2001-2005, with seven other law professors)
- Devolution monitoring reports (2000-2008, with 25 research partners)
- Evaluation of freedom of information (2007-2009, with Sarah Holsen)
- Freedom of information and local government (2009-2011)

**Awards and professional recognition**

- Political Studies Communication Award 2009
- CBE for services to constitutional reform 2006
- Council member JUSTICE 2000-date
- Council member of Hansard Society 1998-date
- Magistrate 1976-1994
- Haldane Silver Medal of RIPA 1978

Robert Hazell founded the Constitution Unit in 1995 as a multi-disciplinary research centre specialising in constitutional reform. The Unit has produced over 130 reports, covering every aspect of the government's constitutional reform programme. Robert Hazell is the author of over 20 of the Unit's reports, and of c 100 other publications.

He has plenty of experience of leading big research programmes: the Dynamics of Devolution, a £1m five year programme with 30 partners in 12 universities; the Devolution monitoring programme; the Law and Devolution project, and others. In addition to ESRC awards, Robert Hazell has won more than 30 other research grants totalling over £3m from government and research charities.

The Unit has close links with the Ministry of Justice and the UK Parliament, and Robert Hazell is well known to government and the research communities in Canada, Australia and New Zealand. He has lectured in all their parliaments, and been a guest lecturer at 25 universities in the UK and overseas. He is a frequent commentator in the media on constitutional and legal issues, reflected in the PSA Communication Award. He has four times acted as Specialist Adviser to parliamentary Select Committees, and served on several government advisory groups.

## Dr Ben Yong

### Education

- 2002-2008: successfully defended PhD thesis in Law at London School of Economics. Thesis title: “Becoming National: The Construction of the New Zealand Nation-State”.
- 2001- 2002: studied Mandarin under Chinese Government scholarship at Nanjing University, China.
- 1999–2000: LLM (1st class honours) at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.
- 1994 –1998: LLB(Hons) 2(1), Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.
- 1992-1995: BA, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, majoring in English Literature, minoring in Mandarin.

### Employment

- *June 2010-*: research associate on Ministers outside Parliament project, Constitution Unit, University College London.
- *February 2010-June 2010*: constitutional policy adviser on UK Cabinet Manual project, Constitution Directorate, Ministry of Justice.
- *July-December 2009*: researcher for the Constitution Society, a newly-established charity with the aim of educating the British public about the UK constitution.
- *April–July 2009*: intern at Constitution Unit, University College London, working under Professor Robert Hazell, working on multiparty government in NZ.
- 2004-2006: occasional work editing for the European Law Journal.
- 2001-2002: Part-time English teacher in Nanjing, China.
- 1998- 1999: Research assistant to Dr Andrew Ladley, Senior lecturer in law, Victoria University of Wellington and chief of staff, Deputy Prime Minister.
- 1998-1999: Part-time research assistant to Dr George Barton QC.

### Published Work

- Ben Yong “New Zealand’s Experience of Multi-Party Governance” in Robert Hazell and Akash Paun (eds) *Making Minority Government Work: Hung Parliaments and the Challenges for Westminster and Whitehall* (Constitution Unit and Institute for Government, London, 2009)
- Constitution Unit and Institute for Government submission ‘Opening the door to the secret garden: a plea for revised public guidance on how governments are formed and operate’ to the Justice Committee hearing on Constitutional processes following a general election, 24 February 2010.