

<b>Institution: University of East Anglia</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 21 Politics and International Studies</b>
<b>Title of case study: Inside knowledge: informing institutions on managing and working with the European Commission</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>The research project, 'The European Commission in Question', has had impact of considerable reach and significance: It has enabled senior managers across the Commission and others to gain a detailed understanding of the backgrounds, motivation and beliefs, careers and networking behaviour of Commission officials, as well as their attitudes to the internal operation of the organization, the impact of administrative reform, and the handling and effects of the 2004 and 2007 enlargements; it has informed the EU recruitment strategy of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office; and it has contributed to the Scottish government's approach to engagement with the Commission. More generally, its findings have informed the EU policy community and the wider public about the Commission and its staff.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>'The European Commission in Question' is a landmark project that addresses key questions about the Commission and its staff. Whereas existing research focuses on individual structures and draws mainly on secondary research, the project examined the whole organization and created new primary source material. Producing original data, based on responses to an online survey (n=1901) representative of nationality, gender, length of service and seniority, and a structured programme of interviews with Commissioners (n=5), cabinet members (n=28) and managers (n=119), 'The European Commission in Question' represents the largest study of officials ever conducted by outside researchers. It has delivered new knowledge about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the educational and professional backgrounds of Commission officials;</li> <li>- the motivations of officials for joining the organization, their career trajectories, and networking behaviour;</li> <li>- officials' values, preferred vision of the EU, and attitudes toward the expansion of EU competencies;</li> <li>- attitudes within the organization to the impact of the 1999-2004 administrative reform programme and of the 2004 and 2007 enlargements.</li> </ul> <p>The project was undertaken by a multinational team led by Hussein Kassim, University of East Anglia (UEA) and including: John Peterson and Andrew Thompson, University of Edinburgh; Michael W. Bauer, University of Speyer; Sara Connolly, UEA; Renaud Dehousse, Sciences Po Paris; and Liesbet Hooghe, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The online survey was administered in 2008, the interviews conducted in 2009.</p> <p>The project exposes as myths several widely accepted wisdoms about the Commission:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Commission is neither an administration of lawyers, nor is it populated by life-long bureaucrats with no experience beyond Brussels. The Commission employs more economists and more scientists than lawyers, while at least a third of officials have worked in business.</li> <li>- Although attracted to Brussels by a 'commitment to Europe', officials are not 'federalists'. Only a minority want the Commission to become the government of Europe, and although officials would like 'more Europe' in some policy areas, they think that there should be 'less Europe' in agriculture. In other words, officials are not instinctively expansionist.</li> <li>- Political affiliation and experience in a Commissioner's private office ('cabinet') do not affect career progression. Gender does play a role - the small number of women in managerial posts reached their positions more rapidly than their male counterparts - but, recruitment associated with enlargement apart, there is no evidence that nationality affects speed of promotion.</li> <li>- The Commission is not an antiquated bureaucracy, resistant to reform. The reforms</li> </ul>

undertaken under the Prodi Commission (1999-2004) brought the Commission more closely into line with other administrations in financial management and personnel policy.

Three further findings point to future challenges for the organization: the underrepresentation of larger member states (France, Germany, Poland and the UK) threatens the effectiveness and the legitimacy of the organization; differing values between officials from old and new member states may create intra-departmental tensions on policy and may threaten settled policy nostrums; and the underrepresentation of women in management positions remains a problem.

Pathways to impact included:

- Meetings with top managers in the Commission throughout the project, regular presentations to the Secretary General, representatives of the Commission President, and senior officials responsible for personnel policy, delivery of early draft chapters, conference papers and policy briefings, as well as an advance copy of the entire book manuscript to the Secretary General;
- Invited presentations to top managers, to senior managers in individual departments, to staff groups concerned with career development, and to general meetings open to all the Commission's staff, with the aim of informing officials about the backgrounds, careers, beliefs and attitudes of officials to reform, enlargement and the Commission's internal operation (see factual statement from the European Commission Secretary General);
- Communications with the FCO and the Scottish government, leading to invited presentations and follow-up consultation (see respectively email from the FCO and Scottish government questionnaire returns);
- Targeted circulation of findings through dissemination events attended by UK decision makers, diplomats and NGOs, and policy briefings that highlight findings on key themes; and
- Presentation of findings in a form accessible to non-specialists on a dedicated project website available to the public, as well as articles in specialist press and on blogs (see section 5).

### 3. References to the research

The research underpinning the impact was conducted as part of the project, 'The European Commission in Question', which was funded from three sources:

- ESRC RES-062-23-1188: Hussein Kassim (PI), John Peterson, Andrew Thompson (CIs), August 2008-December 2010, £259,543.62;
- EU-Consent Network of Excellence, funded through EU Framework Programme VI, June 2005-May 2009, €38,000; and
- private donation, 2010, \$75,000.

Research findings were communicated to users through presentations tailored to the requirements of audiences in the Commission, the FCO and the Scottish government (slides were forwarded in all cases; keynote presentations in the Commission were also videoed for reference and training - see section 4 below), with early transmission of draft book chapters and a copy of the full pre-published manuscript to senior managers in the Commission. Policy briefings were circulated to dissemination event attendees and to Commission managers and posted on the website.

- Hussein Kassim, John Peterson, Michael W. Bauer, Sara Connolly, Liesbet Hooghe, Renaud Dehousse, and Andrew Thompson, *The European Commission of the Twenty First Century*, Oxford University Press (2013)
- Liesbet Hooghe (2012) 'Images of Europe: How Commission Officials View their Institution's Role in the EU', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 50 (1): 88-111
- Michael W. Bauer (2012) 'Tolerant, If Personal Goals Remain Unharmd: Explaining Supranational Bureaucrats' Attitudes to Organizational Change', *Governance*, 25: 485-510. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-0491.2012.01572.x

Testimony to the quality of the underpinning research lies in the provenance of the research funding (ESRC), the evaluation of the end of award and impact reports by three rapporteurs nominated by the ESRC (two 'Very Good'; one 'Outstanding'), and the peer-reviewing to which the publications were subject. The monograph was described by Professor Edward C. Page, LSE as 'a landmark in developing our understanding of how policy-making bureaucracies work and how such

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*bureaucracies should be studied*, by Professor George Ross, University of Montreal, as *'a new starting point for those who need to know about the institutions of the European Union'*, and by Professor Guy Peters, University of Pittsburgh, as *'the most comprehensive and sophisticated examination of the Commission available in the literature ... [A] major advance in the study of the European Union and its governance capacity'*.

#### 4. Details of the impact

'The European Commission in Question' has had impact on three institutions. First, the research team was able - as outsiders - to ask questions that management could not put to its own employees and was granted unprecedented access within the organization. It delivered detailed analysis of the backgrounds, beliefs and attitudes of staff to managers and others in the European Commission. In the words of the Secretary General of the European Commission, the findings of the research *'informed management thinking and fed into discussions within the organization on recruitment, career progression, reform and reform management. On attitudes to reform, including appraisal (the CDR), financial management and the new role of the Secretariat General, the project produced data that contributed to [our] understanding of staff views and feedback on the processes concerned.'* Further, the *'breakdowns by department, nationality, gender and level of seniority . . . provide[d] valuable new information to senior officeholders . . . enabled managers in the Commission to develop a more fine grain understanding of the views of staff.'* (see below, 5.5) For similar reasons, President Barroso commented in January 2010, following presentations to senior officeholders, that the project: *'will help us make the Commission a more efficient and effective administration that better serves European citizens'* (5.4 below). Lunchtime presentations were videoed for training purposes.

The results of the research were communicated by several means. Kassim and Peterson presented provisional results to the Secretary General, members of the President's cabinet and senior officials from DG HR throughout 2009 and 2010. Following completion of the analyses, Kassim made invited presentations to senior officeholders at the Directors General weekly meeting, 1 July 2010 (50 top managers, chaired by the Secretary General), the Commission's Lunchtime Seminar on 12 July 2011, attended by 40 officials, the European Commission Careers Network, 13 July 2011 (15 officials), senior management teams in DGs MARKT, Secretariat General European Personnel and Selection Office, COMP, JUST, TAXUD, EMPL, INFSO (12 July to 12 October 2011), as well as to Vice President Šefčovič's private office (24 July 2012). Kassim also addressed the Commission's Senior Management Seminar, 13 September 2012, attended by the Commission's top 400 managers and addressed by President Barroso, Vice President Šefčovič, and Secretary-General of the Council. According to the Commission Secretary General: *'Slide presentations of provisional findings at regular intervals throughout the project and an early copy of the manuscript . . . provide[d] important insights into the backgrounds of staff, their motivation for joining the Commission and career mobility'*.

Impact was not limited to officeholders at the very top (see 5.8 below). The Secretary General writes that findings concerning *'the characteristics and challenges of each department in terms of staff, motivation, perceptions and mobility/career patterns, as well as the origins, composition and outlook of the personnel in each department... These findings have been of particular use to managers across the organization, especially since senior managers are subject to rotation. They have found it helpful to have an analysis of the workforce in the departments for which they have taken recent charge.'* They also observed that: *'the project has been useful in challenging widely accepted myths about the Commission and its staff'*.

Second, analysis of the nationality and career profiles of Commission officials contributed to FCO reflections on how the UK can improve the recruitment of British nationals to the European administration at a time that the UK is severely underrepresented. Kassim delivered a presentation at the FCO to an audience of 40 civil servants from across Whitehall. The FCO official from the European Directorate who organized the visit, wrote afterwards (5.4, below): *'The event was deemed to be a great success . . . Your findings have since been circulated widely throughout government. We received a lot of positive feedback on the event and on the research that you provided, including at Ministerial level. I also wanted to let you know that your research has had a*

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*policy impact. Your findings served to confirm or crystallise a number of important points for us, enhanced our understanding of the key issues, and the policy advice you gave on the back of your research has provided valuable food-for-thought. . . [Y]our research will feed into HMG's policy analysis and formulation regarding how to take forward the recruitment agenda over the next 6 months.'* Connolly and Kassim subsequently participated in a 'brainstorming' meeting with senior FCO officials on the future of recruitment policy.

Third, at a critical juncture in Scotland's politics, when the Scottish government increasingly needs to engage with the European Commission, presentations on 4 November 2012, made by Peterson and Kassim in the External Affairs Division of the Scottish government, attended by officials from 7 divisions, delivered findings designed to assist officials in better engaging with the Commission. A questionnaire completed by attendees confirmed the value of session in adding new knowledge about the organization (see below, 5.7).

Impact among the wider EU policy community and the general public is more difficult to measure, but key findings were summarised in *European Voice*, 3 April 2012 (Economist publication; weekly circulation 4,540 – see below 5.2), policy briefings circulated to a policy mailing list, and the dedicated website 'The European Commission in Question' (<http://www.uea.ac.uk/politics-international-media/european-commission-in-question/>) which has recorded more than 5,000 visits.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

Reports, reviews, web links or other documented sources of information in the public domain:

5.1 Project website (UEA) <http://www.uea.ac.uk/politics-international-media/european-commission-in-question>

5.2 Kassim, H. 'Putting Myths to the Test', *European Voice*, 1 March 2012, p.14

5.3 Kassim, H. 'The European Commission is stronger and better equipped to meet Europe's challenges than is often thought', EUROPP, LSE blog, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2013/06/27/european-commission-strengths> (sic)

5.4 Factual statement from the President of the European Commission

5.5 Factual statement from the Secretary General of the European Commission

5.6 Email from European Directorate, UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office

5.7 Scottish Government questionnaire returns

5.8 Email from Learning and Development, Human Resources and Security Directorate-General, European Commission