The civil service and joined up government

This outlines the powers and functions of the various British offices of state, there are two sides to power; there is authority and then influence. But they are not the same and having one does not mean you have the other. There are two parts to the executive; ministers and civil servants whilst the legislature consists of the House of Commons and Lords.

How does it work? Policy making: the executive develops policy and it submits legislation to westminster which then enacts it, after that its ratified by royal assent by the monarch and finally becomes an official act of parliament. It is then implemented by the departments of state such as Home office, Minister of Defence etc. whitehall is the centre of all these offices and is the administration that sees policy is implemented.

Sometimes referred to as the centre of government, whitehall has various departments e.g. justice, health, home office. Although these names fluctuate through time as the department of business became the board of business. This can cause disruption especially when offices merge.

Each department has a similar structure with the cabinet minister for that office at the top and then a number of junior ministers below them, whilst civil servants provide admin to the departments.

There are three sides though: political, administrative and external. The political side can originate within the party manifesto, but also from individual ministers, these can change by mid term reviews by the government. Administration can come from any department and report if there is any need for change such as the need to build more schools or prisons. External factors can be influenced from pressure groups or the public through petitioning and demonstrations, other external factors could be inter governmental organisations such as the EU or WTO.

Civil servants consult interest groups, and may produce one or more suggestions for ministers. Arguably the executive holds the most power but its not clear whether it lies within the PM, cabinet or civil service. Civil servants are selected on merit whilst MP’s who are ministers are elected,