Introduction

This paper applies the concept of Policy Advisory Systems (PAS) to analyse the provision of external policy advice at the sub-national level. The existing literature on PAS focuses almost exclusively on policy advice at the level of nation-states and, until comparatively recently, only a select group of largely Anglophone countries (Hustedt and Veit 2017). We deploy it at a different level – in the relatively nascent development of a polity in Wales post-devolution – in order to examine the theory's usefulness in analysing the development and dynamics of external policy advice in a sub-national context with institutional, historical, and ideological characteristics. The paper offers an in-depth analysis of a node of this PAS - the work of a university-based evidence centre created specifically to provide ministers with an external source of evidence and expertise. By testing the analytical value of a PAS through this organisational lens and in this particular context, we identify some significant differences in the ways that externalising policy advice has played out compared to those reported by previous studies of more institutionalised PAS, which extends and expands on the existing literature and points to the need for future research in sub-national and small country settings.

The paper first sets out key features of the PAS literature. We then describe the policymaking context in Wales. Next, we outline our research methods and data before presenting our case study and discussing the key findings. We conclude by discussing the

contribution that our research makes to the understanding of PAS and highlighting the value of extending the concept to the study of other small and/or sub-national polities.

Policy Advisory Systems

The key feature of the PAS literature is the centrality of *interactions between policy actors*. Craft and Howlett (2012: 80) define PAS as 'an interlocking set of actors with a unique configuration in each sector and jurisdiction, who provide information, knowledge, and recommendations for actions to policy-makers'. Policy actors may be members of the 'traditional' public service (such as government officials and researchers), wholly outside it, or related to it with various degrees of closeness or independence. The early PAS literature (e.g., Halligan 1995) was concerned with proximity to government, and the importance of the distinction between insiders and outsiders as an indicator of influence; and this continues to be reflected in some analyses (e.g., OECD 2017). However, more recent literature recognises that a PAS will exhibit an element of dynamism as relationships and interactions change over time.

This dynamism is unlikely to be random and uncontrolled. So, a second key characteristic of PAS is that it seeks to explain *how policy advice is organised and institutionalised*. This need not imply perfect order or intentionality and it is more accurate to think in terms of a network or cluster of advisory bodies, rather than a system because the latter implies a 'logical relation' between them (OECD 2017: 29). But while PAS can include bodies and relationships that develop spontaneously or organically, governments very commonly attempt to govern the systems from which they derive policy advice, for example by creating advisory bodies or pathways, or favouring some sources of advice over others.

Overall, therefore, all PAS are, to varying degrees, creatures of the governments that they serve.

Third, the organised/institutionalised nature of a PAS makes it likely that it will *exhibit features that are specific to the particular context* in which it is situated - a particular sector (an area of policymaking), and/or jurisdiction (usually a territorial governing institution), and as Craft and Halligan (2020) note, a particular time.

A fourth feature of the existing literature is that *we know relatively little about how a system operates at sub-national level*. As noted above, research on PAS has tended to concentrate on national governments, especially Australia, Canada and to some extent New Zealand and the United Kingdom (UK) (Craft and Halligan 2017). Recent studies have applied the concept in non-Westminster systems, the global South (e.g., OECD 2017; van den Berg 2017; Veit *et al*. 2017; Kelstrup 2017; Laage-Thomsen 2021), and the International Library of Policy Analysis series examines the practice of policy analysis systems in a multi-level governance context across twenty countries (e.g., Chaqués-Bonafont and Jordana 2022). However, with very few exceptions (e.g., Albert and Manwaring 2018; Real-Dato 2022), the PAS literature has seldom considered sub-national governments. This seems anomalous given the important contributions made by scholars from Australia and Canada, both federal systems with important roles for sub-national governments, and that there is no prima facie reason the concept cannot effectively be applied to these levels of government.

To examine whether it is possible and instructive to study PAS at sub-national level, this paper examines policy advice in Wales focusing on five common dynamics which feature

prominently in the literature: the *externalisation* and *politicisation* of policy advice (Craft and Howlett 2013), *(de-)institutionalisation* (Craft and Halligan 2017: Diamond 2020), *hybridisation,* and *centralisation* (Diamond 2020).

Craft and Howlett define *externalisation* as 'the extent to which actors outside government exercise influence' by providing policy advice (2013: 188). It is, therefore, in a sense the 'meta-dynamic' of the whole PAS concept: without the idea that traditional government bodies do not have a monopoly on the provision of policy advice, the concept would not be needed. Craft and Howlett (2013) and others (including Veselý 2013, van den Berg 2017) have identified and analysed a range of drivers of externalisation including the growth of globalised and 'wicked' problems that are beyond the capacity of the traditional public service to address (Hustedt 2019, Halligan 1995); the legacy of New Public Management (NPM), including ideological challenges to the primacy of the public service, a consequent entry of wider range of actors into the policy and advice 'market', and subsequent attempts to redress the fragmentation and diminished capacity of public services following NPM-era reforms; and a desire by politicians to exercise greater control over policymaking.

Politicisation is defined as 'the extent to which partisan-political aspects of policy advice have displaced non-partisan public sector sources of policy advice' (Craft and Howlett 2013: 188). Halligan (2021) argues that the spread of politicization has increased internationally due to increasing demands on executive government, growing partisanship, and higher expectations about achieving official goals. It is often associated with government attempts to increase political control and influence in the policy process by using political appointments to produce the outcomes they want (Craft and Halligan 2017).

Craft and Halligan define *institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation* as the 'systematic

formalization of practices or units within advisory systems [and] … the discontinuity of

previously institutionalized advisory organization or activity' (2017: 48). They argue that

while the common dynamics of externalisation, politicisation, and (de)institutionalisation

could be identified in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the UK, there were, crucially,

significant variations in the tempo, intensity, and sequencing of changes between the four

countries. Thus, to focus attention on the common features risks overlooking the way that

different sets of circumstances shape change. In other words, superficial similarities in PAS

changes across different systems may mask potentially different underlying dynamics an

argument that the authors develop in Craft and Halligan (2020).

Diamond (2020), testing Craft and Halligan's analysis against a study of UK Government

under the 2010-15 Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, saw externalisation in terms of

deinstitutionalisation - which he defined as a greater reliance on external sources of advice,

which allowed ministers to select the advice they prefer - and *hybridisation* - the (related)

introduction of different values and cultures into policy advice. He attributed these

developments to ministers' low opinions of permanent officials, a desire to *centralise*

executive power at both the Prime Ministerial and, in some cases, departmental level, and

to the emergence of the evidence-based policy movement. He concluded that 'the state

does not withdraw or retreat, as the earlier governance literature initially indicated; rather,

the state's role is reconfigured in an effort to better control outcomes. However, the

consequence is greater complexity' (2020: 11). He argued that Craft and Halligan's claim

about the deinstitutionalising and complexity of PAS in Anglophone countries could indeed be observed in the case of the UK government.

Craft and Halligan's concern was to identify and explain the local differences that are present beneath a common narrative of PAS externalisation. We agree that this narrative broadly reflects the experience of a number of established (Anglophone/ Westminster) national governments since the late twentieth century. But returning to our starting point, it is also clear that PAS are generated and operate in local settings and must be studied as such. Therefore, in this article we analyse the externalisation of policy advice in a jurisdiction whose trajectory has been, in important respects, different to the UK Government's: the devolved and comparatively young government of Wales.

Devolved government and policymaking in Wales

Wales is one of the four nations of the United Kingdom. Since 1999, UK Government powers have progressively been devolved to an elected National Assembly for Wales. An executive responsible to the National Assembly for Wales, now known as the Welsh Government, was established in 2001, and full primary legislative powers, allowing the Assembly to legislate independently of Westminster in devolved matters, were granted in 2011. In 2020, the National Assembly was renamed Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament). Although the devolved Welsh institutions differ in some respects from those of the UK Government, their architecture is shaped by the Westminster Model (Andrews 2021: 133).

The UK Parliament's Wales Act 2017 adopted a 'reserved powers' model whereby all matters not explicitly reserved to Westminster are devolved to Wales. However, the list of

reserved matters is lengthy. Most of the Welsh Government's funding comes from a block

grant from the UK Treasury: although some taxation and borrowing powers are now

devolved, the Welsh Government remains dependent on the block grant for over 80 per

cent of its total budget of nearly £25 billion in 2022-23 (calculated from Welsh Government

2022a: table 3.1). It does, however, have considerable discretion over how this budget is

distributed.

There are three factors which have shaped a distinctively Welsh approach to policymaking

and policy advice over the first twenty years of the National Assembly's existence and which

are particularly relevant to an analysis of the Welsh system.

First, the Welsh Government is a comparatively young institution, whose formal powers and

responsibilities have expanded relatively quickly over two decades, and whose place within

the overall governing structures of the United Kingdom - specifically, its relationship to the

Westminster Government - is still evolving. As it has acquired more powers it has had to

develop greater policy capacity. The pre-devolution Welsh Office was a small UK

Government department whose role was essentially to administer policy made in England.

When the Assembly took over its functions in 1999, it had limited resources and experience

to make the distinctive policies that its increasing formal powers and responsibilities would,

in theory, make possible. The former First Minister explained:

> "*The biggest challenge we faced was that the civil service wasn't ready to take over.*
>
> *Bear in mind that the Scottish Office had been expected to do things itself – it drafted*
>
> *legislation. Well, the Welsh Office didn't do any of that. The Welsh Office, mainly*
>
> *although not always, tended to follow whatever was done in England and stamp it*

with Wales on the front. I don't believe there was a culture of innovation there at all"

(Jones 2019).

Like Whitehall and its own centuries-long development of an embedded administrative culture, Wales has developed its own governing culture since devolution (Kelso, 2003).

Officials of the devolved government remained part of the wider (Great Britain) Home Civil Service. This reflected a desire by the UK Government at the time of devolution to maintain a degree of stability and of communication with Whitehall, and to address concerns from officials about the possibility of political influence in appointments (Cole 2012; Cole and Stafford 2015). The absorption into the Welsh Government of most Welsh quangos in 2004 did bring in extra staff, as well as additional technical capacity in some areas (Andrews 2022: 140), but some officials were not used to working in a political environment (Andrews 2018). The Welsh Government's Civil Service is also still comparatively small with only 5,732 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff (Welsh Government 2022b). This level of staffing has remained steady over time (5,397 FTE a decade earlier) and is lower than the Scottish Government with 8,301 FTE in April 2022 (Scottish Government 2022). Furthermore, because it has only very limited ability to raise its own funds, it lacks the financial resources to pay for an expansion of its own in-house capacity - especially as the single most important extension of its powers, the grant of full primary legislative powers in devolved matters in 2011, occurred at a time when the UK Government was cutting its real terms spending and, consequently, the block grant which the Welsh Government received.

The second distinctive factor of the Welsh approach to policymaking is that as devolved powers have increased, Welsh ministers have wished to use them innovatively to

demonstrate their distinctiveness, and enhance the legitimacy, of the devolved institutions (Martin and Webb, 2009). As Wales's second First Minister, Rhodri Morgan, pointed out (Welsh Affairs Select Committee 2010) devolution in the UK created 'four living laboratories' in which different policies could be tried out, meeting different local needs. Cole and Stafford (2015) identified a discourse of 'small country governance' during the formative early decade of Welsh devolution, by which Welsh ministers looked to other 'small countries' (a flexible term, including for different purposes Ireland, the Nordic countries, Canada, New Zealand, and parts of Spain and Australia) for policy learning. Crucially, this discourse was used to distance Wales from developments in England such as league-table based approaches to education, or the use of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) to finance capital projects (Andrews and Martin, 2010). Cole and Stafford attribute Welsh ministers' hostility towards such 'English' innovations to 'Wales's status as a young quasi-polity seeking to establish its mark and define its style' (2015: 33). Nonetheless, when Labour was in power at both Westminster and Cardiff, party solidarity provided a framework for maintaining good working relationships. (Andrews 2022: 142-2). Tensions and policy differences between the Welsh and UK governments became much more pronounced in the period of the Conservative-led coalition government at Westminster after 2010 (Cole and Stafford 2015; Andrews 2021) and have been further exacerbated, with Brexit, in particular, giving rise to what Andrews (2021: 516) describes as a more muscular 'hyper-unionism' on the part of the UK Government, characterised by 'a particular agenda to undermine devolved administrations in their own backyards'.

This desire of successive Welsh Governments to demonstrate their distinctiveness has required them to develop their capacity to access advice and ideas. Although the quality of

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Welsh policy officials is seen as having improved greatly since devolution (Jones 2019), outside government, Wales still lacks many formal sources of external advice: Welsh think tanks, for example, are few, 'relatively new and…mostly relatively small' (Winckler 2020: 5). However, Welsh policymakers, and especially ministers, in many fields have been able to draw upon networks within civil society for advice and information (Rhodes, 1992). Wales is a small country with a population of just over three million, a small number of governing institutions and policy communities which are often close-knit and consist of actors who know each other well and interact frequently (Andrews 2022). In some policy areas these networks have been consciously cultivated by Welsh Government policymakers and have fed into the policy process (Connell *et al*. 2019). Andrews (2017), notes that ministers often have some previous knowledge of their policy portfolio, acquired as legislators or from previous roles in local government and the third sector, and may have long-standing connections with external actors in their field. This was particularly true of Welsh ministers in the earlier days of devolution (German 2018). So, while the extent to which channels of non-official advice have been institutionalised varies, the idea of an effective civil service monopoly of advice, which is broken by a process of externalisation, does not apply.

Finally, the political and electoral dominance of the Labour Party, which has led every Welsh Government since 1999, makes Wales unique. It has experienced an unusual degree of political continuity and favoured more traditionally social democratic positions which have placed Welsh Labour to the left of both Labour and Conservative UK governments. Overall, it has rejected marketisation, and held a positive view of the benefits of state action (Davies 2018; Hutt 2018). Because of this, externalisation of policy advice in Wales has been driven by a subtly different dynamic from that which has commonly been identified at a UK level:

the aim has been to augment the policymaking capacity of the civil service in a complementary and collaborative way, rather than in opposition to or competition with it.

The Wales Centre for Public Policy

Our analysis of externalisation of policy advice features a case study of the Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) which was created by the Welsh Government to provide ministers with access to authoritative independent evidence and expertise.

The WCPP is based at Cardiff University and is funded by the university, Welsh Government, and the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Established in 2013 and known initially as the Public Policy Institute for Wales (PPIW), the WCPP works directly with ministers and public service leaders to identify evidence needs and then synthesises and mobilises research to meet them (Martin 2023). It was created in response to a Labour Party manifesto commitment in 2011 to establish a policy institute that would 'create greater critical mass in high quality, strategic public policy making and research' (Welsh Labour 2011: 22. Andrews (2017: 3) identifies this as 'a deliberate attempt to bring evidence-based policymaking into the heart of government' and notes that the creation of the Institute was discussed at the highest levels, with the First Minister presenting a paper to Cabinet. This specific commitment was part of a broader focus on the importance of 'delivery' which in turn reflected a concern among Welsh ministers about civil service capacity (Cole and Stafford 2015). A former Minister reflected that: 'Certainly in Wales, the quality and capacity of the civil service is a huge issue' (Davies 2018).

Since its inception, the WCPP has typically completed 15-20 projects a year for ministers on a wide range of topics including the economy and skills, health and social care, poverty,

equalities, education, tax policy, welfare, transport, agriculture, fisheries, land management, Brexit, recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, local government and health service performance, loneliness and social isolation, and multi-agency working to support looked after children. It undertakes rapid evidence reviews and collaborates with leading researchers to provide analysis and advice on topics identified by ministers and officials. Its outputs, which include policy briefings, reports, commentaries, podcasts, videos, and social media posts, aim to present a balanced and comprehensive assessment of the best available evidence (Martin 2023).

In terms of taxonomies of actors employed in the early literature on PAS, the WCPP occupies an intermediate position between an 'arm's length' and an 'external' model. As a university body which receives substantial funding from non-government sources, it clearly sits towards the 'external' end of any continuum. On the other hand, it is not financially independent of the Welsh Government and was created by it with other funders coming on board once the model was deemed to be a success. Following Stone (2004), a distinction may be drawn between *financial* and *scholarly* independence. Scholarly independence – described as being '*reliant upon certain practices within an institute, for example, the processes of peer review and a commitment to open inquiry rather than directed research*' (Stone 2004: 4) is a value which the WCPP asserts strongly. It seeks to safeguard it by publishing its work programme and subjecting its outputs to peer review and publishing them within six weeks of presenting them to ministers so that they are available to all political parties and other policy actors.

Methods and Data

Our empirical data are drawn from four sources which, taken together, provide a breadth of perspectives on our case study of externalisation of policy advice from well-placed and expert informants and allow for cross-checking between them.

The first source is a series of semi-structured interviews with Welsh Government officials, external experts, and WCPP staff, which focused on a sample of four contrasting projects for ministers at different stages in its development. Projects were chosen via a rapid review of the Centre's extensive documentary archive. The initial criterion for case study selection was to focus on projects conducted by WCPP that involved Welsh Government officials or ministers, and brought together expertise and evidence to bear on an issue, such as developing their understanding of the nature of the problem, the availability and value of evidence to address it, and/or the range of possible options. A second requirement was that between them the four projects represented a variety of different types of evidence need. These criteria produced a shortlist of nine potential case studies, from which we selected four, on practical grounds including the availability and willingness to participate of potential informants:

- The development of Sustainable Development Indicators (SDIs) in connection with the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015, a statute which requires forty-eight public bodies including the Welsh Government, to act in ways which promote long-term and sustainable wellbeing.

- A review of ways to rationalise Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs) designed to produce a more coherent and purposeful set of impact assessments.

- An analysis of ways to support performance improvement in 'failing' Health Boards (IHB).

- An assessment of the feasibility of devolving responsibility for the administration of social security to the Welsh Assembly (DASS).

A total of fifteen interviews with key government actors who had been involved in these projects were conducted by Zoom or Microsoft teams (because of the Covid-19 pandemic). Interview participants were sampled in a way that would reflect as many views as possible and we designed open-ended interview questions that enabled civil servants and ministers to express their positive and negative experiences of the projects and provide a dispassionate view of their impact (or lack thereof). The interviews were conducted, recorded, transcribed, coded, and analysed by a dedicated team within the WCPP who had no prior involvement in the four projects. Their funding is independent of the Welsh Government (it comes from Cardiff University), and they are tasked with analysing the ways in which it works in order to encourage critical reflection and improvement within the WCPP. This means that they were able to maintain a degree of distance and 'external' perspective.

The second source of data was a series of four semi-structured interviews with senior and experienced WCPP staff, which focussed in particular on how the WCPP operated within the wider context of political mechanisms and agendas. These interviews were also recorded and transcribed.

The third source was a review of the WCPP conducted by researchers within the Welsh Government (Welsh Government 2022c) which was undertaken to test the value of the WCPP's work. Importantly, in addition to the report, we were given access to notes of twenty-one interviews with Welsh Government officials and other stakeholders that were conducted by the review team. The review was entirely independent of the WCPP, which had no input into its design, and the interview data therefore provide an invaluable source of officials' and ministers' views of the external policy advise it provides.

The fourth source was documentary materials including the impact case study submitted by Cardiff University for the UK Government's 2021 Research Excellence Framework exercise (REF 2021) on the work of WCPP. This presented written evidence from policy actors about the impacts of a range of projects that had been conducted by the WCPP which was subject to peer review and validation as part of the REF process.

Data from all four sources were coded manually to identify initial themes relating to the relationships between the WCPP and other key parties, and the role which the WCPP had played in the cases being studied, and then further refined in order to analyse in detail specific dimensions relating to externalisation and other key themes from the PAS literature. Table 1 shows the interviews from all sources.

Table 1 here

The fact that around half of the interviews from which our data are drawn were conducted by a team from within the WCPP brought both challenges and benefits. Literature on the

topic of insider-research and researching one's own organisation discusses issues such as power dynamics, impartiality, criticality, and access to different sources than external researchers (Costley et al., 2010; Tietze, 2012). But it also highlights the opportunities provided by such projects, crucially that of access to sources, trust of participants, and position to interpret and critique how different practices emerge and evolve in a specific organisational context. In our case, being part of the organisation brought the significant benefit of direct access to key policy actors and to the interviews conducted by the Welsh Government review. These had not previously been made available beyond the Welsh Government team that undertook the review and they provided important insights into how senior officials within and around Welsh Government see the role of external policy actors such as the WCPP, as well as their framing of the policy advisory system in Wales.

Findings

Drawing on the evidence from our four sources, this section analyses the extent to which the creation and operation of the WCPP represents externalisation before examining sub-themes of politicisation, (de)institutionalisation, hybridisation, and centralisation which are central to the literature on PAS.

Externalisation

Externalisation is the extent to which non-government actors exercise influence by providing policy advice and can be seen as comprising two elements - the extent to which government creates opportunities for non-government actors to provide policy advice, and the extent to which that provision of advice can be identified as having an impact on policy making. The UK Government has a long tradition of drawing on external expertise, especially

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in economic policy. In Wales, the WCPP works to create space for non-government actors. It acts as an evidence broker working between policymakers and external expertise, providing a 'landing point' (WCPP 1) for the latter and enabling the former to hear from researchers who they would not normally have (readily) been able to identify and access (MTR 8, MTR 11).

To what extent does this amount to enabling non-government actors to influence the policy process? Certainly, some of the WCPP's work has had a direct and discernible influence on policy (REF 2021). But the data we gathered shows that it has also, crucially, helped shape the *process* of policymaking in Wales in ways which respond to and reflect some of the contextual factors which we noted above. First, the WCPP fills a gap in a limited independent advice sector. It is 'by far the largest evidence-oriented think tank in Wales' (Winckler 2020: 12). The PPIW had a budget of £450,000 per annum. The WCPP has twenty staff and a budget of £7 million for the five years 2023-2028, which dwarfs the two other leading Welsh think tanks (the Institute for Welsh Affairs and Bevan Foundation which both have only seven staff members). Importantly, in addition to its significant budget, the WCPP has the benefit of not regarded by policymakers as having agendas of its own, or a lobbying role, and this is particularly valued by them (RIA 4, DASS 2). Second, while the Welsh Government does have internal research and analytical capacity, our informants suggested that it did not have the in-depth knowledge that the WCPP was able to marshal by collaborating with leading researchers (MTR 8, MTR 16). Nor is it able to respond to Ministerial evidence needs as rapidly, at the same low cost, or with the same agility as the WCPP because it is required to follow lengthy tendering processes to procure external research (MTR 10).

Third, the WCPP's external status and ability to access independent experts, as well as its non-partisan status, make it an especially valuable policymaking resource in relation to policy ideas which relate to the powers, status, and/or development of the Welsh Government as an institution. For example, the Well-being of Future Generations Act is a 'flagship' policy for a Welsh Government seeking to demonstrate its distinctiveness and capacity for innovation on an international as well as a domestic stage (Jones 2019). Although the Welsh Government 'got a good, warm round of applause from the UN, and there were other NGOs who thought, "Blimey, this is a small country really doing something very interesting indeed."' (RIA 4), there remained some doubt about it within Wales, particularly from public bodies upon which it would impose new duties. It was therefore important to policymakers that sustainable development indicators should be seen as a truly national rather than as partisan or as an imposition from above on local public bodies: 'we wanted to make sure this is for Wales, not just a Welsh ministerial led, kind of, policy' (SDI 4) and seeking advice from the Centre supported this desire. Similarly, the devolution of elements of social security administration was a highly contentious issue which ministers were under pressure from the Assembly to respond to. Having the WCPP generate and publish independent evidence on the feasibility (as opposed to the perceived desirability) of Welsh institutions taking over responsibility for the administration of benefits took much of the 'heat' out of the debate in a way in which could not have been done by the civil service. Officials also lacked the specialist knowledge of this policy area precisely because it had not been devolved and was not therefore something that civil servants in Wales had expertise in (DASS 2).

While some civil servants saw a tension between their roles and that of the WCPP, others emphasised the complementarity of the two. Some expressed this in terms of the WCPP's evidence providing an external sense-check of what officials were doing: 'an opportunity just to push the pause button, take half a step back, and just reflect and think, "Am I content that I am advocating the right approach, having listened to other people and other experiences?"' (IHB 2). Others identified the value of being able to have informed and confidential conversations: 'I think also the relationship between the WCPP and the Welsh Government is quite an honest relationship, and you can have open and honest conversations. Whereas, if we went to [name of think tank] and started perhaps saying some of the things (laughter) that we have said to your colleagues, then they are a lobby group…' (DASS 2). A former senior Welsh Government official who had been involved in establishing WCPP spoke in terms of it operating 'with civil servants in the room', bringing together internal and external expertise 'in a non-hostile [way], not a competition, but just a collaboration' (RIA 4). This is different from the competitive model of externalisation observed in Westminster contexts.

Politicisation

The data from our four sources did not provide any indicators that the WCPP had contributed to the *politicisation* of policy advice, in the partisan-political sense in which Craft and Howlett (2013) use the term. This was a surprise because in a polity dominated as long and consistently by one party as Wales, it is almost inevitable that a government-funded body is open to accusations of being partisan - particularly by political opponents of the government. But while we found that some government officials were concerned that ministers and special advisers were by-passing them by going directly to the WCPP and

thereby seeking political control, there was no suggestion in our data that this was for politically partisan reasons. The instance of an attempt at politicisation was an early suggestion from special advisers that the WCPP should effectively become a private source of advice for ministers. But this was successfully resisted by both the WCPP - 'I couldn't see…that that was an independent institute' (WCPP 1) and the civil service - 'from my point of view as a civil servant, I wouldn't want to set up a system involving people or an organisational setup or background that would cause an incoming administration of a different political complexion to want to chuck it out as they didn't trust it, or because it was felt to be too aligned with a previous administration' (RIA 4).

The Welsh Government review report emphasised that the WCPP's work needed to be relevant to Ministerial priorities: but it also found that 'interviewees noted the importance of WCPP's independence that gives extra credibility to the outputs' (Welsh Government 2022b), and the WCPP's advice was seen as being politically useful to ministers precisely because it is *not* partisan-political.

(De)institutionalisation

It is difficult to recognise deinstitutionalisation, in the sense of a disruption of an established pattern of institutionalised policy advice, because in Wales the civil/public service quasi-monopoly of advice, which the term usually implies to in the literature, has never really existed. As we have noted above, Welsh ministers have been able to draw on informal sources of advice which reflected their own political and social connections: 'ministers knew that from their contacts with people in Wales that a small country minister is rather more grounded in the geography… than ministers from much larger countries can be… it's a bit of

exaggerating for effect, but ministers would sometimes feel they were getting better advice in the pub on an issue than they were getting from official sources' (RIA 4). What we see with the WCPP is rather an *institutionalisation* of advice, a means of bringing expert advice formally into the policy process and importantly the Centre has drawn primarily on expertise from beyond Wales: 'the need to really enrich and also to go outside Wales, to go outside the UK, small country comparators are elsewhere around the world' (RIA 4).

The one aspect of deinstitutionalisation that we did identify from the data was that, as Diamond (2020) notes in his case study of UK Government, ministers in Wales could choose whether and how they used external evidence. For example, in the case of the SDIs assignment undertaken by the WCPP, 'one of the really important things with the national indicators were that they were not seen as just the responsibility of ministers. They were the responsibility of everyone. And we did not want them to feel like there were things the ministers were laying on public authorities or anything like that…. So, having that voice [from the WCPP] …was really helpful in sort of saying, "This is not just us saying it"…' (SDI 5). But interviewees reported that if ministers found evidence from the WCPP inconvenient, it was easier to ignore than official advice. Interestingly though, there have been occasions when opposition parties have publicly taken ministers to task for failing to heed evidence in WCPP reports.

These aspects of institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation are not in themselves peculiar to Wales or to small, developing, or subnational governments, but the ways in which they operate do reflect important aspects of the Welsh context. These include the pre-existing importance of informal sources of advice which challenged the idea of an

earlier official quasi-monopoly; the desire of policymakers to institutionalise access to sources of advice which were external, not only to government but to Wales itself; and the appeal to formal external advice and evidence by ministers and policymakers seeking to enhance the standing of the Welsh Government as a national institution, inside and outside Wales.

Hybridisation

There is a dynamic of *hybridisation* - where different values and cultures are bought into policy advice - which can be identified through the development of the WCPP. Some of the Welsh Government actors interviewed for its mid-term review of the WCPP spoke of the benefits of having a different pool of talent involved in policy advice, and of the value of being challenged and made to think. Others reported a wish for WCPP's work sometimes to be disruptive (MTR 9, MTR 14, MTR 18); and a former senior Welsh Government official spoke of it bringing in 'a richer mix of advice' (RIA 4). In the SDIs case study, for example, both WCPP and Welsh Government informants suggested that the value of the expert who worked on it was that it challenged existing assumptions about prosperity and wellbeing based on GDP. But part of the purpose of the Wellbeing of Future Generations agenda, of which SDIs were part, was already to challenge such models of wellbeing and 'there would have been people in ONS [the UK Government's Office of National Statistics] and KAS [the Welsh Government's Knowledge and Analytical Services] who might have had that view, but I think, actually, just bringing somebody else in allowed for a different discussion to be had' (SDI 4). Overall, however, in line with the more collaborative model of externalisation which we identified above, hybridisation appears to have been less adversarial than might has been reported in the PAS literature. In fact, as noted above, WCPP advice was sometimes

valued by policymakers as providing 'confirmatory impacts' which 'strengthened their position and provided a sound footing for moving forward with a policy, backed by credible, independent evidence' (IHB 2; Welsh Government 2022b).

Centralisation

Finally, the process of *centralisation* of Welsh Government policymaking can be traced in the development of the WCPP. Its creation can be understood as an early step towards that process, originating as it did in the context of a desire to increase the policymaking capacity of the Welsh Government in response to a substantial expansion of devolved legislative powers. And centralisation has also been evident in the subsequent development of the WCPP. It originally generated its work programme through meetings with individual Welsh ministers, each of whom identified their evidence needs. Over time, however, a much more centralised approach was adopted with a stronger focus on the priorities of the government as a whole and the First Minister's office acting a conduit between ministers and the WCPP (WCPP 1). This development was welcomed by several respondents to the Welsh Government's review, who were critical of what was seen as the ad hoc nature of the earlier way of working.

Like all the other processes which we have discussed, centralisation of policymaking is far from unique to Wales. But, as with the other processes, it has been generated and shaped by imperatives and circumstances which are associated with the Welsh context. As one informant who had observed the Welsh Government both internally and externally observed, the 'Welsh Government [is] a very activist government… Partly it flows from their politics, partly it flows from the whole devolution ethos, and at a certain level, not for the

sake of it, but it's important to show that one is doing things a bit differently, and all of that'
(RIA 2). With this activist ethos, as powers have increased, came a growing desire for a more
coherent and centrally controlled policy programme, to demonstrate that devolved
government was making a difference.

Discussion

This paper validates Craft and Halligan's observation that similarities in PAS across
Westminster systems can draw our attention away from real and significant differences in
the nature of change and dynamics underpinning them. Our study both demonstrates the
value of the PAS framework in analysing developments in a new and evolving subnational
system and extends and expands on the extant literature by highlighting ways in which our
case differs from those featured in previous studies.

Externalisation is, as we have noted, the meta-dynamic of the PAS concept; and as such it is
the dynamic which the other dynamics (e.g., politicisation, deinstitutionalisation etc.)
explain and analyse. In the Welsh case, some of the factors which the existing literature
identifies as driving externalisation can be identified: but they take forms which are shaped
by the institutional development of devolved government in Wales. Thus, limitations to
policy advisory capacity within government have been less the result of a 'hollowing out'
and the legacy of the NPM era, than of the origins of the Welsh Government on a small and
largely executive UK government department. Similarly, any growing presence of 'wicked'
and complex problems on the Welsh Government's policy agenda has partly been the result
of the expanding responsibilities of the devolved institutions: the more policy areas a
government is responsible for, the greater the likelihood of complexity. If Welsh politicians

have wished to exercise greater control over policymaking, this has at least in part been driven by a desire to demonstrate that they, and the devolved institutions, can use their newly acquired powers creatively and effectively.

The study of the WCPP highlights five key features of patterns of policy advice in Wales. First, while to some extent the WCPP has a role in challenging policymakers, contrary to the existing literature, the process is not adversarial. The WCPP is seen as complementing and extending the Welsh Government's internal policy advice capacity, rather than competing with or disrupting it. This reflects two significant features of the Welsh policy landscape: the limited direct resources which the Welsh Government has always had, and ideological preferences within successive Welsh Labour Governments which have mistrusted privatisation and outsourcing. Externalisation has therefore been concerned with bringing in external actors who can work with internal government policymakers 'in the room.'

Second, the WCPP is not an example of politicisation of the Welsh Government' policy advisory system, at least in a partisan sense. In fact, policymakers set great store by its 'independence' by which they mean it is non-partisan and not politicised. This freedom from political control increases its value as an asset to Welsh ministers because if they accept its advice, they can present themselves as following the evidence about 'what works' and acting in the national interest. Although this is far from being unique to a Welsh context, it is particularly valuable for a comparatively young government which still needs to assert its authority, legitimacy, and distinctiveness as a national institution.

Third, the creation of and continued support for WCPP can be seen as the

institutionalisation rather than deinstitutionalisation of advice. The pre-existing limited internal advice resources of the Welsh Government, and the position of Welsh ministers as 'grounded in the geography' of a small nation and policy community, mean that there was never really an internal public service monopoly of policy advice in Wales: Welsh ministers always looked beyond their officials, albeit often informally. The WCPP represents an attempt to create more formal routes into the Welsh Government policy process for sources of advice that are themselves more formal.

Fourth, the WCPP brings some degree of hybridisation into the Welsh Government system: but in line with the collaborative nature of externalisation which we have identified, this has not really been about bringing in radically different or challenging views and values. What we do see is the tactical value to ministers of having advice from outside government, to which they can accord as much or as little weight as they please because it does not have an official status. Hybridisation in this case is more a hybridisation of *sources* than a hybridisation of *values*.

Finally, there has been a process of centralisation of policy advice in Wales, as there has been elsewhere. But this has been connected, not so much to shifts in the location of power and influence within government, as to moves - specifically by successive First Ministers - to reposition the Welsh Government within Wales and, to some extent, the UK and the wider world. There is a sense here of centralisation accompanying and expressing a growing confidence and ambition on the part of what is still a comparatively young and developing institution, which has been working out what it can do and how it can do it.

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These five elements are, of course, interconnected. The collaborative nature of Welsh policy externalisation, the absence of explicit partisan politicisation of advice, the institutionalisation rather than deinstitutionalisation of advice patterns, and the hybridisation of sources rather than values, all reflect the longstanding ideological and electoral hegemony of a single political party in Wales. Welsh Labour, relatively assured of its continuing position as the party of government, and ideologically committed to the active role of the state, can see the externalisation of policy advice as a technical rather than a disruptive exercise. Having governed Wales throughout the devolution period, and in recent years become more sharply differentiated from the Westminster government, it can present itself as a national rather than a partisan champion. Externalisation, in this case, becomes a matter of extending, rather than fundamentally challenging, existing relationships and practices.

Conclusion

The specifics of the Welsh case may be interesting to scholars in their own right, but the more important contribution is that it demonstrates that one of the great strengths of the PAS approach is that it both requires and enables us to think about policy advice in *specific contexts*. This is because it grounds analysis in settings where the governance of policy advice (and indeed of policymaking more widely) is shaped by political and administrative traditions and the historical trajectories which have influenced them, the ideological and other preferences of key actors, and the actions of individuals and institutions. While the broad contours of some of these factors may be similar in many polities, their details, dynamics, and consequences of the relationships between them vary. The potential influence of international trends should not be underestimated. However, in the end, policy

is made by actors working within particular structures, responding to context-specific imperatives, and bringing to their task particular beliefs, aims, and sets of relationships.

The value of the PAS approach is that it not only directs our attention to this contextual specificity, it also gives us a transferable analytical framework to examine contexts which are, potentially, significantly different. In our case, language and concepts from the PAS approach - specifically, concepts of *externalisation, politicisation, (de-)institutionalisation, hybridisation*, and *centralisation* - have all helped us to analyse and understand the use of external policy advice by a small, subnational government which has largely sought to augment (rather than challenge) internal policy capacity which was always small in size (rather than having been 'hollowed out'), in order to support and develop an expanding direct role for government (rather than develop alternatives to it). At the same time, our case study of WCPP has shown how externalisation, and the other concepts which we have applied, can have different meanings in different settings, even within the same nation state (in this case, between the Welsh and the UK Governments (Diamond 2020)).

There is increasingly interest in 'place-based' policy advice to respond to the specific needs, priorities, political culture, and challenges found in sub-national settings and significant levels of public funding are being devoted to creating them. For example, the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) has made a commitment to invest in 'major place-based What Works Centres such as the Wales Centre for Public Policy' (ESRC 2022a: 15) and established a £20 million programme to support a network of 'Local Policy Innovation Partnerships' (ESRC 2022b). This makes understanding the role of external policy advice in sub-national polities a live issue for policy makers and researchers.

Our paper shows the importance of understanding the specific political and policy contexts in which such organisations operate. It may be that a sub-national PAS with similar characteristics to Wales – a small polity, with a relatively nascent sub-national government, possessing limited resources but big ambitions combined with a preference for statist politics – will have similar experiences of external policy advice. However, this needs to be tested empirically by future studies in other parts of the UK and other countries. Our hope is that our paper provides a stimulus for research in other settings and demonstrates that the PAS framework can be deployed by future studies to analyse the ways in which demand for external policy advice is created, shaped, and mobilised in other polities.

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