

IT'S PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, ROD, BUT MAYBE NOT AS WE KNOW IT: BRITISH PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN THE 2000s

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This paper assesses what happened to academic public administration (PA) in Britain in the 2000s in the light of Rod Rhodes' gloomy prognostications about the future of the subject in the late 1990s. It argues that British PA had such a good decade in the 2000s, in funding, output, academic-practitioner interaction and institutional developments, that it could almost be said to have 'never had it so good', even if 'British PA' was probably less internationally distinctive in the 2000s than a century before. But even if the subject flourished against the odds in the 2000s, Rhodes' sombre assessment of its future cannot be dismissed. British public administration faces several potential threats in the 2010s and beyond: in funding, research, and teaching capacity. But extinction still seems an unlikely fate for British PA even when a sombre view is taken of the funding outlook and the changing balance of supply and demand.

LONGER-TERM TRENDS IN BRITISH PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: THE 'DECLINE AND FALL' THESIS AND OTHER INTERPRETATIONS

Sixteen years ago Rod Rhodes (1996a, p. 507) offered a gloomy prognosis of the future of academic public administration (PA) in Britain: 'An optimist would describe the future as bleak. A pessimist would be living and working in America' (or perhaps that should have been 'Australia'). Rhodes' bleak assessment chimed with other downbeat late-20th century accounts of the state of PA in Britain, for example, by Jim Chandler (1991) and, earlier, by another UK emigrant to Australia, the late Peter Self (1986).

Three years after Rhodes' bleak verdict, the present author (Hood 1999) offered a rather different assessment in a review of British PA's contribution to political studies over the 20th century, defining PA as the substantive activity of studying executive government and of institutional arrangements for regulation, public policy and the provision of public services, irrespective of the particular nomenclature adopted (see, for example, Bogdanor 1987, pp. 504–7), and defining 'British' work as studies by UK-based scholars. That review contrasted what it called a 'dodo' account of the British PA story over that century with two other possible interpretations. By a 'dodo' account was meant a view of PA as a subject in marked decline, and heading towards the margins of academic study and practical influence, in a way that seemed to presage eventual extinction.

One of the alternative interpretations of the way PA had changed over the century was termed a 'phoenix' account, to denote rebirth and rejuvenation of the study of executive government and public services through the adoption of modern social science methods, new disciplines and more emphasis on theory that had been lacking in an earlier generation which had been more casual and understated about such matters. The other possible interpretation was termed a 'chameleon' account, to denote a subject that had survived in some form in the face of changing intellectual fashions and political backgrounds, but by adoption of different nomenclature and analytic styles to fit the demands of the day rather than any linear and cumulative progress in knowledge.

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Public Administration Vol. 89, No. 1, 2011 (128–139)

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That review concluded that a 'dodo' account could only be plausibly sustained if heavy stress was placed on three factors (Hood 1999, p. 311). One was 'self-conscious use of the term PA rather than the substance of work on institutional arrangements for executive government and public service provision which might go under various titles (such as public management or governance)'. A second (relating to the bankruptcy of the former Royal Institute of Public Administration (RIPA) in 1992, once the central national body for promoting teaching and study of the subject and for maintaining links between practitioners and academics) was 'the existence of an officially blessed elite association linking academics and public servants'. A third (relating to coherence and identity), was 'a national intellectual community small enough to read the work of everyone else in the field, to be more closely linked with one another than to related specialists overseas, and to share a broadly common "paradigm" for studying their subject'. The essay argued that such criteria certainly counted for something, but were not the normal benchmarks of scientific progress. Indeed, it concluded that if 'normal science' criteria were applied, British PA over the 20th century looked more like a phoenix or a chameleon than a dodo.

Those two assessments were not necessarily as contradictory as they might seem. Rhodes' comment, implicitly at least, related to the later part of the 20th century whereas Hood's review attempted to take account of the century as a whole. Rhodes was particularly concerned about the way he saw public choice and managerialist doctrines or dogmas displacing older approaches to PA, while Hood was more agnostic as to what paradigm was to be preferred. Moreover, both assessments led to the same (rather dismal) conclusion of the state of affairs at the end of the last century if the stress was to be placed on the three 'dodo' items that were mentioned above (that is, nomenclature, elite linkages and a well-defined national intellectual community). But in any case, both of those assessments may be outdated now, not only because they are more than a decade old but also because both reviews were concerned essentially with the contribution of PA to political studies rather than with the broader range of disciplines concerned with PA. So both assessments are ripe for another look. How do those *fin de siècle* views of the state of British PA stand up in the face of 21st century developments?

To explore that question, this essay focuses on what happened to British PA over the past decade or so. Does its fate in the 2000s bear out Rhodes' view of a subject whose more optimistic members were destined to face a singularly bleak decade and whose pessimists would find themselves decamping to supposedly greener academic pastures in the United States? Did the alternative 'chameleon' or 'phoenix' views of the status of the subject at the end of the last century continue to have any plausibility, and if so, was the chameleon or the phoenix the more appropriate analogy for the way PA changed? Or – as so often happens with grand visions of 'yesterday's tomorrows' (Corn *et al.* 1996) – did developments in the first decade of the new century confound both of those late-20th-century assessments?

BRITISH PA IN THE 2000s: (MENTALLY) LIVING AND WORKING IN AMERICA?

As it turned out, the decade of the 2000s was not marked by a substantial exodus of British PA talent to the United States, following the more 'pessimistic' view suggested by Rhodes. It is true that in the 2000s a handful of very distinguished British scholars of PA (such as Christopher Pollitt, Keith Dowding and Rod Rhodes himself) were working overseas, though mostly not in the USA. But that was hardly the first time that had happened, and it does not represent an obvious increase in the rate of academic emigration as compared to previous periods. For instance, there were several distinguished academic PA emigrants

during the 1940s and 1950s, including Herman Finer (Chicago), Dick Spann (Sydney) and Jack Grove (Queen's Ontario). Nor was the story over the 2000s only one of outflow from the UK: indeed, British universities in the 2000s were full of younger scholars from other countries working on PA or PA-related subjects and adding to the diversity of approaches and backgrounds brought to bear on the subject, even if they were not necessarily settled in Britain for life. Since Rhodes' 1996 article, there have been a few notable 'returners' as well such as Michael Keating and Martin Laffin.

However, even if there was not a widespread academic exodus of British PA scholars to the US over the decade, 'living and working in America' might still have occurred in a certain sense. It may well be true that more British PA academics came to live and work 'mentally' in the United States as it were. Jean Monnet (1978, p. 259), the architect of the European Union, once memorably described 'modernization' as 'not a state of affairs but a state of mind', and the same could perhaps be said to apply to 'living and working in America'.

If the interpretation of 'living and working in America' is to be stretched to include that Jean Monnet sense of 'state of mind' rather than 'state of affairs', does it describe the position British PA scholars found themselves in during the decade? There are at least two reasons for supposing that it might have done. One is the pressure to publish in 'international' journals arising from the UK government's management system for the British universities and in particular its successive Research Assessment Exercises (originating in 1986 and repeated thereafter approximately every five years, but with tightening criteria for research excellence). Those periodic reviews put British academics under the lash of regularly producing evidence of 'international' top-level scholarly quality to obtain dedicated public research funding for university departments, and that might have been expected to push British PA academics under more pressure than their counterparts of 50 years or so before to publish their best work in top US journals. Another possible pressure for such a mental shift might have been the need for UK PA academics to teach more students from outside the EU (indeed, the higher fees of those non-EU students were a key prop to British university finances throughout the decade). That in turn might have been expected to expose UK-based PA academics to the challenge of producing analyses of executive government and public services to appeal to an international audience and student body rather than a largely UK one.

Casual observation suggests that British PA academics in the 2000s (and indeed PA academics from many other countries) seem to have become more prominent than in the past as attendees and presenters at APSA, the American Political Science Association annual meetings, though there seems to have been no noticeable increase in UK participation in ASPA, the American Society for Public Administration. But it is hard to put that into numbers, and the same goes for the other US conferences focusing on public administration, such as those of the Association of Public Policy Analysis and Management, created in 1979, and the Public Management Research Association, created in the early 1990s. Of the two major US-based PA journals today, a comparison of the UK content of articles excluding book reviews in *Public Administration Review* (PAR) in the half-decade 1950–55 with a 50 per cent sample of the issues from 2000–2005 shows no appreciable change. About 2.5 per cent of that journal's articles involved at least one UK-based author in both periods. But a comparison over the much shorter life of the other leading US-based PA journal, the *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* (J-PART), which started in 1991, yields a different story, perhaps as a result of the marked growth of 'public management' style research within the UK. There were no articles at all

involving at least one UK-based author in the first five volumes of J-PART (1991 to 1995), while the corresponding figure for the five most recent complete issues (2005 to 2009) was just over 10 per cent of the 156 main articles over that period.

There may thus be something in the 'Monnet' sense of 'living and working in America'. But it seems likely that European links increased over the decade to at least an equivalent extent: for example, in the close involvement of British PA academics in the European Consortium for Political Research and the European Group for Public Administration and in European journals such as the *European Journal of Political Research*. And the journal *Public Administration*, as a national journal of record founded in 1922, itself came to include a dedicated 'European Forum' from 2003, to describe itself on its cover as an 'international journal', and to include markedly more articles with at least one author based outside the UK in the 2000s than it had had in the 1950s. Although contributors' affiliations were not consistently recorded until 1951, a comparison of 1951–55 articles with those of 2001–2005 reveals that only 11 per cent of the articles in the earlier period included at least one author based outside the UK, while the equivalent figure for the 2000s period was some 41 per cent. However, such evidence as there is of increasing international orientation and involvement does not necessarily mean that British PA turned it into some sort of branch plant of an enterprise headquartered elsewhere. Influence may well have been more of a two-way street, and indeed at the time of writing the presidents of two key international public management research associations (the International Research Society for Public Management and the Public Management Research Association) were PA scholars based at UK universities. In any case, from a 'phoenix' perspective, it might be said that the response of British PA to the opportunities presented by a more international world of political and social science was evidence of successful adaptation to the general globalization of scientific activity and the increasing involvement of once nationally specific research and teaching communities into international networks and forums.

Even if 'living and working in America' seems to describe – but only at most in a certain Monnet-type metaphorical sense – British PA in the 2000s, it must obviously be conceded that the absence of significant emigration of British PA academics to the United States over the decade does not necessarily prove that conditions in the UK were not bleak. After all, such an outcome might just have meant that conditions in the US turned out to be just as bleak for some reason, or (in a future even worse than the one Rod Rhodes' 1996 comment implied) that even the best of British academic talent in PA was simply not of a sufficient standard to obtain satisfactory positions in the US universities even if they might have wanted to. Now it is obviously hard to establish evidence on matters such as where British PA academics might have been mentally living and working over the decade and who might have been in play for what US job offers. But it is difficult to square the ultra-pessimistic conclusion that all that prevented British PA academics from going to live and work in America *en masse* in the 2000s was that they were not capable of obtaining positions there, with the substantial UK presence in J-PART in the late 2000s, as noted earlier.

BRITISH PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN THE 2000s: A BLEAK DECADE AT HOME?

If 'living and working in America' happened at most in a metaphorical sense in the 2000s, was it a 'bleak' decade for British PA in other ways, as Rod Rhodes' gloomy 1996 prognostication might have led us to expect? Again, the answer must depend on what

criteria are used to assess developments over that decade, and how much bleakness counts as 'bleak enough'. There is some evidence of chameleon-type developments, in the sense of changing terminology and disciplinary bases for the study of executive government and public services. There is also some evidence of 'phoenix'-type developments, in the sense of refinements in method and analysis that go well beyond the traditional practico-descriptive approach to PA. And there is even some evidence of 'dodo'-type revival, at least in the sense of distinct signs of more practitioner-academic interaction and more resilience in the terminology than might have been expected from the vogue for 'public management' in the previous decade.

Chameleon developments: new colours for new times?

On the 'chameleon' view, PA understood as the study of executive government and public services adapts to changes in its political and social environment by altering its nomenclature and analytic styles to fit the temper of the times rather than exhibiting a cumulative normal-science pattern of linear progress. And there is certainly some evidence of that. As already mentioned, 'public management' continued to be heavily used in the 2000s, but there were other 'chameleon' developments as well. One, that Rod Rhodes (1996) himself partly helped to initiate, is the increasing use of the term 'governance' to refer to the activity of governing or providing public service across multiple institutions through partnership or network arrangements rather than command-and-control systems. Indeed, 'governance' was argued by some (such as Osborne 2010) to be displacing what was by then thought to be the *passé* idea of 'New Public Management' in the 2000s in the same way as the latter term was said to have put 'administration' in the shade in the 1980s and 1990s. Examples of university chairs and research units flying the colours of 'governance' in the 2000s include Manchester's chair of Urban and Regional Governance, Oxford's chair of Internet Governance and Regulation, de Montford's Centre for Local Governance and the Centre of Environmental Policy and Governance at the London School of Economics (LSE).

'Regulation' also had a good decade as a label for academic activity, and public service metrics likewise became a new (or perhaps that should be 'renewed') focus of study and practitioner-academic exchange somewhere on the boundary lines of econometrics, scientific method, statistics, sociology and PA (see, for example, Royal Statistical Society 2005; Hood 2006; Holt 2008). Even if the term 'PA' did not figure in such developments, the activities and intellectual preoccupations they involved were precisely what would have been likely to have been called PA at an earlier time.

Phoenix developments: never had it so good?

On the 'phoenix' view, British PA is to be evaluated on conventional scientific criteria of advance and progress, rather than on nomenclature or national cohesiveness, and on that criterion it might be said to have had a surprisingly good first decade of the 21st century for a subject said to be facing a bleak future at the end of the previous century. Research and teaching in the field of executive government and public services in Britain by no means dried up in the 2000s, leading – as might have been feared from a 'dodo' perspective – to a dwindling and elderly research base pursuing tired and outdated agendas on a shoestring.

On the contrary, continuing demand for research augmented research capacity and led to the creation of new research communities. Far from walking away from a moribund PA in the 2000s, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Britain's main publicly funded peer-review funder for academic social science, funded a major research centre

(Bristol's Centre for Market and Public Organization) and a five-year research programme (the Public Services Programme, 2004–10, directed by the present author) comprising nearly 50 projects. The latter alone comprised nearly four times as many projects as the Social Science Research Council (as the ESRC was titled until 1983), according to Richard Chapman (1973, p. 18), had funded in total in PA three decades before. Both of those enterprises were devoted to the study of public services and their performance in a more direct way than earlier generations of PA research had done. They created or at least reflected new communities and styles of research in the subject, for example in drawing economists into the study of public services performance far more than previous ESRC PA programmes had done. (It is worth mentioning that the application of economics to PA was one of the key ambitions of the Institute for Public Administration when it was founded in Britain in 1922). These institutions also helped to develop new research communities running across disciplinary boundaries, for instance, in the study of public service metrics, as mentioned above, and in the study of what shapes the performance of doctors, a subject that suddenly opened up in the 2000s because a series of dramatic instances of medical malpractice and incompetence made new forms of medical regulation a political imperative.

Nor did the demand for more PA research come only from the ESRC. It could also be argued that the New Labour 'project' (as it was portentously called in its early days at least) to modernize and improve the performance of Britain's (and particularly England's) public services in the late 1990s and 2000s, gave the study of British public administration a valuable if possibly unintended fillip – just as Thatcherite reforms had done in a sense in the 1980s. Whatever those reforms did for public services themselves (and evidence suggests the effect was patchy), they arguably boosted the study of PA in several ways.

First, the Blair government's declared commitment to 'evidence-based' reform and practice, however hollow it proved to be in practice whenever evidence ran up against political convenience or bureaucratic interest (see, for example, Squires and Measor 2005), helped to boost PA research capacity in at least three ways. One was the effect of the large number of commissioned research studies by government departments on PA topics in the decade, which perhaps unintentionally provoked a new generation of mostly sceptical work on the politics of evaluation of public services (see, for example, Taylor and Balloch 2005). Another was the policy of devolution to elected parliaments and assemblies in Scotland and Wales, and the reshaping of government in Northern Ireland after the 1998 Good Friday Agreement between the British and Irish governments. Although devolution to Scotland did not achieve the Blair government's declared political purpose of depriving nationalist parties of their *raison d'être*, the policy divergence that was associated with it in methods of providing public services created a new basis for 'natural experiments' that produced some important new research of a kind that had never been done before. Examples include Propper *et al.*'s (2008) study of the effectiveness of the tough English health waiting list targets in the early 2000s as against their softer and less draconian Scottish counterparts at that time, and Curtice and Heath's (2009) study of the alignment (or rather lack of it) between public attitudes across the four countries of the UK and the policies for public service delivery that were developed by their various governments.

Third, the regime's enthusiasm for shiny new performance measures across the public services through its emphasis on targets, Key Performance Indicators and league tables, paved the way for some key PA research on the validity and reliability of such measures and their intended or unintended effects. Examples of new discoveries provoked by the government's emphasis on PIs and rankings include Jacobs and Goddard's (2007) estimation of the volatility of health and local government rankings, McLean *et al.*'s

(2007) assessment of the validity of the 2002–9 ‘Comprehensive Performance Assessment’ system for rating English local authorities as an indicator of performance, and Wilson and Piebalga’s (2008) demonstration that even ‘contextual value-added’ school league tables could not meaningfully help parents choose schools in most cases, even though they could help individual schools to assess their performance over time.

Nor could it very plausibly be argued that normal-science opportunities for more detailed empirical case studies on critical topics such as performance measurement saw a decline in broader ideas and big-picture accounts of the public administration picture. Just to take three key examples: Michael Moran’s (2003) *The British Regulatory State*, Patrick Dunleavy *et al.*’s (2006) *Digital-Era Governance* and Tim Besley’s (2006) *Principled Agents* were all cases of intellectual contributions to the subject broadly conceived that could easily stand comparison with major publications in any decade in the subject’s supposed golden age from the 1950s to the 1970s. Indeed, Tim Besley’s work was an indication of a new generation of economists interested both in theory and in empirical case study of institutional arrangements for delivering public services. For a discipline that not much more than 50 years ago still treated firms as if they could be understood as single individuals and much more recently disdained empirical study as a second-class activity compared to mathematical modelling and theory, this ‘new political economy’ grounded in close empirical work represented a notable addition to PA research capacity.

The dodo: a partial comeback?

Even from the ‘dodo’ perspective, it might be argued that the 2000s were far from a bleak decade for British PA in several respects. The term PA did not disappear completely under alternative titles, as might have been feared from the apparently inexorable rise of the term ‘management’ in the 1980s and 1990s, or of ‘public policy’ in the 1970s and 1980s. Master’s or diploma postgraduate courses titled ‘public administration’ continued or came to be offered by a number of universities, including the LSE, Warwick, Birmingham, Manchester, Nottingham, York, Exeter, Northumbria, Greenwich, Portsmouth, London Metropolitan, Robert Gordon’s and the Open University. In fact, that was substantially more than the eight British universities offering diplomas in Public Administration in 1959 according to William Robson (1975, pp. 71–2), and more or less the same number as those listed by Richard Chapman (1973, p. 11) as operating in the late 1940s. Indeed, during the 2000s, the LSE (in collaboration with Columbia University of New York and Sciences-Po in Paris) introduced a new two-year Masters of Public Administration Programme (on top of its existing one-year Masters in Public Administration and Policy) that comprised four different MPA streams. That meant LSE was offering more graduate teaching badged as ‘PA’ than at any time in its history, and indeed had gone back to the two-year Master’s structure it had abandoned in the 1960s. Nor did the term PA survive only in academic offerings: it was adopted as the name of one of the Westminster Parliament’s liveliest and most-commented-upon select committees in the 2000s, which frequently figured PA academics in its hearings, often used them as expert advisers, and drew heavily on their ideas.

On the second of the three ‘dodo’ criteria – institutionalized interaction between practitioners and academics – the decade was also far from bleak for PA and there is evidence of new kinds of links being made in the 2000s. It is true that the RIPA as a scholarly and public-interest institution had gone bankrupt in the early 1990s, and the name survives today only in the form of an acronym as the title of a training and consultancy company that is a subsidiary of Capita plc. It is also true that Oxford’s Redcliffe-Maud club

(a termly dining club intended as a forum for high-level interactions among Oxford (and later London) academics and senior civil servants and set up in the early 1980s on the initiative of Sir (later Lord) Robert Armstrong when he was Cabinet Secretary) was wound up after its final meeting in 2004, when its civil service members felt it had outlived its usefulness. But it can nevertheless be argued that over the decade more and possibly more powerful forums for links between PA academics and public service practitioners took the place of these defunct institutions.

One notable example of such a forum is the Institute of Government, created in 2008/9 with a major endowment (indeed, far larger than the RIPA had ever had) from the Gatsby Foundation (one of the Sainsbury family trusts), to function as a public-interest body to promote research and dialogue among practitioners and scholars in executive government and to assist policy-makers to govern better. The Institute's charitable objectives were 'the advancement of education in the art and science of government...' and 'the promotion of efficient public administration [*sic*] of government and public service in the UK by providing programmes of education, training, research and study for the public benefit and on a non-party political basis (see <http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/content/45/objectives-and-strategy>).

A second example, coming directly from government, was the Sunningdale Institute, officially described as 'a virtual academy of leading thinkers on management, organisation and governance' and set up in 2005, as a result of an initiative by the then Head of the Civil Service to be a forum for exchange of ideas and research between the academic world and the senior civil service, and to produce occasional reports on topics such as leadership across the public sector and the link between front-line professionals. At the time of writing the Institute had some 42 fellows, including about 23 individuals who could be considered as career academics, approximately eight retired or former senior civil servants, and the remainder a mixture of private sector managers, consultants and directors of public organizations or public-interest groups. Out of those approximately 23 academic fellows, seven were based overseas, five in the USA and one each in France and Australia, reflecting an aspiration to go beyond the UK-based professoriat. Most of the Institute's academic fellows were management professors or based in business schools, but just under half of them were specialists in public sector organization or public services rather than general management professors (see <http://www.nationalschool.gov.uk/sunningdaleinstitute/index.asp>).

A third is the Better Government Initiative (BGI), set up in 2006 on the initiative of Sir Christopher Foster, a long-term observer of British government and policy whose career over more than four decades has spanned the civil service, academia and the private sector and who in the previous year had chronicled what he saw as serious and growing deficiencies in the processes of policy-making (Foster 2005). The BGI was directed by an organizing committee of a dozen or so former senior civil servants, including Lord Butler (former Cabinet Secretary), and the group was concerned to find ways of improving the quality of policy-making, legislation and the conduct of executive government. The BGI worked through meetings that involved members of all three main British political parties (though not the Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru, Sinn Féin or the Ulster unionist parties), and included some academics as well as present or former practitioners. Its 2010 report argued for ways of embedding the traditional values of the career civil service, changing the ways that departments operated (including better record-keeping), improving the quality of parliamentary scrutiny of the executive by means such as 'green budgets', limiting interventions by central agencies into the operation of departments, and stricter standards for the drafting of legislation (Better Government Initiative 2010).

A final example of a new forum that brought together academics and practitioners in the 2000s is the 2020 Public Services Trust, based at the Royal Society of Arts (RSA), which was established as a non-partisan public-interest charity in 2008. One of its 12 trustees was a PA academic specializing in local government (Professor Gerry Stoker of Southampton), and the Trust described its general aims as 'to stimulate deeper understanding of the challenges facing public services in the medium term [and] through research, inquiry and discourse. . .to develop rigorous and practical solutions, capable of sustaining support across all political parties' (see <http://www.2020publicservicetrust.org/page.asp?p=3125>). The Trust set up a Commission on 2020 Public Services, chaired by Sir Andrew Foster, to make recommendations about the future design and delivery of public services in Britain.

Four of the Trust's 20 Commissioners were career academics (two economists, one management professor specializing in public services and one professor of government) and it drew widely on commissioned papers from academics specializing in public services. The Commission's interim report, published ahead of the 2010 general election (2020 Public Services Trust 2010), argued for a remodelling of public services based on a change in culture from social security to social productivity (by which the Commission meant more active public engagement with and co-production of public services); a shift in power from the centre of government to citizens (by which it meant fewer central ministers and departments, less supervisory activity from the centre and more emphasis on local control and varying patterns of delivery); and a shift in finances 'reconnecting financing with the purpose of public services' (by which it meant more earmarked taxes and more co-payment for public services).

Now those various developments might reflect little credit on the UK and its system of governance, given that several, perhaps all, of them were responses to the many political scandals, fiascos and widespread perception of failures of government and public services that surrounded UK government in those years. But they nevertheless provided new opportunities for links between PA scholars and practitioners. It is not the aim of this article critically to assess the quality of these various exercises (though it would seem hard to argue that they could not stand comparison in coherence and rigour with their equivalents in earlier decades). The four examples merely serve to show that, far from drifting apart in the 2000s, as the 'dodo' model of PA decline might suggest, the worlds of practice and scholarship in PA seem to have been brought together at least as much as they were in the supposed 'golden age' of the subject, when the RIPA was functioning at its height and when Royal Commissions sometimes involving PA academics were a more common way for policies and structures to be reviewed than they are today. (Though it can also be noted that even 40 years ago, Fred Ridley (1971, p. 5) claimed that few PA academics at that time felt 'wanted' or 'valued' by practitioners.) In fact, the developments described above might be thought to have brought matters to the point where many PA academics would have been hard pressed to meet all the practitioner demands for their advice and ideas.

As far as the third criterion for the 'dodo' account is concerned, namely that of a coherent national PA intellectual community sharing a broadly common paradigm for studying their subject and marked off from other national traditions, the picture is rather different. There was not much sign of any return to an age when there could be said to have been a distinctively 'British philosophy of administration' (in the title of Thomas's 1978 book claiming that a group of early 20th century British scholar-practitioners developed distinctive and relatively common ideas about administration that contrasted with prevailing American ideas of that period). Nor was there much sign of a return to the

earlier intellectual style of British PA when it was marked by a widespread tendency to conceal explicit theory or when (in Ridley's (1971, p. 4) words) most British postgraduate PA courses in universities were 'attached to Politics departments and taught by Politics lecturers whose main function [was] generally the teaching of British Government as a humanities subject to undergraduates'. Moreover (though it did not figure in the 'dodo' criteria mentioned earlier), the Masters-level teaching developments mentioned earlier and the growth of interest in PA among a new generation of economists have to be offset against a decline in vocationally oriented teaching of PA undergraduate teaching, mostly in the new (post-1992) British universities and undergraduate public and social policy courses in some other courses (see, for example, Chandler 2002).

CONCLUSION: 'NEVER HAD IT SO GOOD' OR PLUMBING FURTHER DEPTHS IN THE 2000s?

It seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that British PA in the 2000s, far from experiencing a bleak decade, had a remarkably good one as a research field, if that is measured by funding and output, interest by practitioners in academic views and knowledge, and institutional developments in the field. A verdict of 'never had it so good' would not be implausible, and at least we can draw a Mark Twain-type conclusion that rumours of PA's death at the end of the 20th century seem to have been exaggerated.

There was some terminological 'churn' and new angles on old problems (such as metrics) that seem chameleon-like, but the sheer quantity of research and empirical and theoretical or interpretative discoveries relating to government and public services suggests that the 'phoenix' model is at least equally justified as a way of characterizing PA's development over the decade. As for the 'dodo' interpretation of PA's putative decline and fall, the term by no means disappeared from the face of the earth (even if it did not make a dramatic comeback), and formal links between academics and high-level practitioners seemed to have strengthened rather than weakened. So the only real basis for sustaining a 'dodo' verdict on the subject in the 2000s is the decline of older undergraduate courses and the absence of '... a national intellectual community small enough to read the work of everyone else in the field, to be more closely linked with one another than to related specialists overseas, and to share a broadly common 'paradigm' for studying their subject' (Hood 1999, p.311). 'British PA' did seem to be less internationally distinctive as a paradigm or in its philosophic underpinnings in the early part of the 21st century than it had been a century before, and there was not much sign of a coherent return to the sort of 'philosophy' described by Thomas (1978). But that runs up against the normal criterion of scientific progress, encapsulated in the 'phoenix' view, that internationalization and specialization is in fact a key test of such progress.

However, if British PA could be said to have flourished against the odds in numerous ways in the 2000s, as has been argued here, does that mean that Rhodes' sombre assessment of the state of the field in the late 1990s was unduly pessimistic? Not necessarily. Although it does not seem unreasonable to set Rhodes' 1996 prognostications against developments in the subsequent decade, Rhodes did not specify exactly when that gloomy future could have been expected to start. Indeed, his vision could still prove to be accurate even if in the late 1990s it seems to have been premature. There are still plenty of good reasons for worry about the prospects for British PA in the 2010s.

Indeed, Rhodes' 1996 assessment might prove to be the correct one for the longer term in several ways. First, the state of the UK public finances at the end of the 2000s, with a

swollen structural deficit arising from bank bail-outs and high borrowing during boom years formed the backdrop to plans for 'fiscal consolidation' on a scale greater than any cutbacks since the aftermath of World War II (Hood *et al.* 2009), even if the debt is mostly inflated away, as has commonly occurred in the past. In addition, as in the 1970s, heavy cuts were announced in public funding for university teaching in subjects such as public administration, and there was every likelihood of reduced public budgets for commissioned research and tighter funding for conferences and even executive training in the public service. At the time of writing the ESRC had not announced any successor to its 2000s programme of PA research (the Public Services Research programme) for the 2010s, though many of the ESRC's other centres and programme-type 'investments' have a potential or actual PA dimension. The 2020s Public Services Trust's funding ran out in 2010 and it must be at least an open question whether the Sunningdale Institute will survive the inevitable cutbacks of the 2010s unscathed. Moreover, when spending cuts get sufficiently deep, the agenda will tend to move away from questions traditionally central to PA – how to reorganize or reshape delivery – towards priority questions about what to cut and what to keep for which PA as such has no particular comparative advantage (Beck Jørgensen 1987).

Second, and not entirely separate from the funding issue, PA capacity may well also prove to be a problem for the future. The still relatively small number of PhDs in PA or PA-related subjects produced in British universities – particularly of British students or students likely to stay and work in the UK – suggests that that future research and teaching capacity is not necessarily secure. Numerous attractive career avenues other than university teaching and research (such as work with NGOs, consultancies or indeed other jurisdictions where research funding might be more plentiful than in the UK) compete for that relatively small pool of trained PA researchers. Demographics will play a part too, in that many of the senior players currently in British PA are in or around the 'baby boomer' generation that Rhodes himself belongs to. They are therefore likely to be moving towards retirement in the 2010s and in a context of severe cutbacks in the university sector, their replacement cannot be taken for granted.

Such threats to the discipline are far from imaginary. But extinction still seems an unlikely fate for British PA even when a sombre view is taken of the funding outlook and the changing balance of supply and demand. Some of the creations of the 2000s, such as the Institute for Government with an endowment that, as has been said, would have been the envy of the original founders of the Institute of Public Administration in 1922, are destined to remain, and the same seems likely to apply to many of the initiatives and training programmes funded by NGOs and international bodies such as the World Bank. Some of the research advances of the 2000s – for example, in medical regulation and performance – are less likely to be affected by general spending cuts than those other areas may experience. Those ageing baby-boomers may even turn out to be an asset for the 2010s rather than a loss, if they continue to contribute in a different way. And even if issues of priority among policy areas becomes a central policy question in a decade of austerity, many types of PA expertise are still likely to be as much in demand as ever.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful to David Butler for providing information on the history of Oxford's Redcliffe-Maud Club, to George Jones for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper, to Ruth Dixon with help in analysing articles in *Public Administration Review*

and *Public Administration*, to Patrick Weller for advice and encouragement, and to two anonymous referees for valuable corrections and pointers.

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Date received 6 April 2010. Date accepted 8 June 2010.

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