QUANGO REFORM IN NORTHERN IRELAND: CHALLENGING DEVOLUTION, SUSTAINING DEMOCRATIC DEFICIENCIES AND ENHANCING CENTRALISATION

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Abstract

There has been a long standing process of reduction and simplification in the number of quangos operating in Northern Ireland. The extensive use of quangos had developed by the 1990s in response to political and governance pressures. A process aimed at reducing the size of the quango sector had begun prior to the establishment of devolution in 1999 and has continued under the devolved administration until the present time. This article examines the main rationales given in government narratives for reform, relating to cutting bureaucracy and reducing costs with more limited references to increasing democratic accountability. Excluded from the rationales were references to increasing the responsibilities and capacity of devolved government, promoting localism or tackling a democratic deficit. The major outcomes of the process of quango reductions are described and the characteristics of the reformed sector identified. These are noted as: the dominance of a strategy of mergers; the creation of large quangos; centralisation; and no reduction in the overall size and role of the quango sector. Attention is also paid to a range of wider factors relating to the Northern Ireland polity which explain the direction of the reform of quangos. These include: the dominance of a managerialist ethos; civil service control; the value of impartiality and safeguarding against party politicisation and conflict.

Introduction

Northern Ireland has a large quango sector. Historically public bodies were frequently used for the delivery of more specialised services, for example, the Northern Ireland Hospitals Authority, or were introduced to address failings in local government as was the case with the establishment of the Northern Ireland Housing Trust. When the UK government intervened with a reform programme following civil disturbances in 1969-1970 the quango model was adopted as an alternative to local government. Thus quangos became responsible for former local government services in the areas of social housing, personal social services, education, and libraries. By the time of the restoration of devolution the quango sector was much larger than the civil service/central government sector or local government (see Table 1). The establishment of a devolved government and parliament (the Executive and Assembly) provided the opportunity for a review of the whole structure of public administration. In practice the Review of Public Administration set up in 2002 was to focus on local government and quangos and exclude government departments other than executive agencies. The review of quangos as part of this exercise was to become a long drawn out affair, set up by the new Assembly, carried on by UK ministers under direct rule after 2002 with some final decisions announced in 2006, continued by devolved ministers after 2007 and still not finally completed by 2013.
### Table 1. Process of Reform

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review of Quangos</td>
<td>1999 – 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devolved Government Initiative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of Public Administration</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Rule Oversight</td>
<td>2002 – 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final decisions on RPA</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restoration on devolution</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation of RPA Reform of quangos</td>
<td>2007 – 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Review of other quangos</td>
<td>Continuing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This paper comments on the rationales presented in the narratives given by the key decision makers in reports, reviews and consultative and legislative documentation during the various stages in the changes made to the quango sector in the reform of public administration exercise. It then examines the outcome of the review of quangos in the context of the relationship between the reform of quangos and the three key concepts: quango reform and devolution, quango reform and a democratic deficit and quango reform and centralisation. The paper then examines explanations for the outcome of the review of quangos using a typology developed by Perri 6 and Peck (2004) which analysed public sector reform and modernisation.

### Table 2. Devolved Public Administration in Northern Ireland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Workforce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quangos</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>130,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government departments</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local councils</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Rationales and Narratives for the Reform of Quangos

*Democratic accountability and the Executive and Assembly*

The original terms of reference produced by the new devolved administration in 1999 put considerable emphasis on the need for democratic accountability and appropriate democratic oversight and a framework of political and financial accountability following the Good Friday Agreement (RPA, 2003, p. 39). The local politicians returned to power were keen to identify problems under Direct Rule caused by rule by unelected quangos, long chains of accountability, lack of representativeness on public bodies and lack of cooperation between different bodies.
Independent views and principles

The RPA exercise was assisted by a panel of independent experts who had influence in suggesting a research programme and position papers and particularly in the production of a set of principles. In practice, this was more a set of concepts associated with public administration reform at the time, emphasising efficiency, subsidiarity, coordination and new technology. The view seemed to be accepted that much of public administration was delivered through public bodies and in relation to the future of quangos existing might be incompatible with the new devolved system. It was recommended that all public bodies should be reviewed, including the option of transferring their functions to either local or central government. The expert panel had a preference for some functions going to local government. It was also expected that the number of quangos would be reduced by mergers and for those continuing to exist steps should be taken to improve their accountability (RPA, 2005, p. 98).

Direct Rule demands

The Northern Ireland Office ministers who became responsible for the Review of Public Administration after 2002 placed the main emphasis in rationales for reform around the claim that Northern Ireland was over-governed and this justified a reduction in the number of quangos. Peter Hain as Secretary of State stated that there is no doubt Northern Ireland was over-administered and government needs to be smaller to avoid wasteful layers of bureaucracy. (Hain, 2006, p. 3), and the Northern Ireland ministers, advocated a smaller more efficient system, and a reduction in the amount of bureaucracy. More attention was paid to savings that could be made in reducing bureaucracy. There was much less reference to public accountability or improving the quality of services delivered by public bodies. The Executive’s claims of the primacy of the consideration of better services for the public disappeared from the final statements on the Review of Public Administration (Knox, 2008, p. 355). The new policy approach was important as Direct Rule ministers became impatient with the political impasses over the restoration of devolved government and took a more assertive position on disregarding local opposition to some of the planned reforms (Birrell, 2009, p. 236). Subsequently the Executive’s Budget Review Group launched a review of arm’s-length bodies, numbering some 100, across all departments.

The Bureaucratic view

The role played by civil servants can be seen as critical to the outcomes for quangos in the Review of Public Administration. The process was dominated by civil servants who took a dominant role and had primacy over the panel of experts. After the restoration of devolution in 2007 the new RPA steering group was composed entirely of permanent secretaries with a tightening central grip on the levers of change (Knox, 2008, p. 353). It was suggested that the producer side of the RPA had been captured by civil servants who were resistant to major change (Knox and Carmichael, 2005). This was expressed in a resistance to increasing the powers of local government which meant largely leaving the functions of the quango sector intact. There was support for larger and more centralised quangos which could be seen as more under the control of the civil service departments. Much of the research and evidence base was set aside or forgotten as the final decisions on the RPA approached.

Devolved Government Narratives

With the restoration of devolved government in 2007 the final implementation of the restructuring of quangos fell to the devolved Executive and Assembly. In practice a lead role fell to the individual ministers of the relevant departments. Overall the main emphasis of ministerial approaches in departmental narratives, consultation documents and ministerial
statements was on financial savings through a reduction in the number of quangos rather than on any other issue. In the health sector the substantial reorganisation was already under way but the minister did make a decision to review some of the proposals. This did lead to a number of changes leading to some minor representation for councillors on quangos but also the creation of further centralised quangos.

His successor as minister, who was from the DUP, was even more committed to cost saving outcomes and efficiency savings accompanied by some references to transferring administrative savings to frontline services. Although an agenda developed around improving services through a Transforming Your Care strategy (DHSSPS, 2012) this was not perceived as having implications for structural and governance issues. In the Education sector ministerial statements and the department’s position was strongly in favour of one large centralised quango to administer education and youth services and for a separate single library board, actually changing the Direct Rule administrations preference for two bodies. The main element in rationales presented in narratives related again mainly to financial savings, although some bodies did dispute the validity of these claims. While the single library authority was speedily set up, the proposal for a single Education and Skills Authority ran into political difficulties. These did not relate to any principle about quangos as a suitable form of public administration but concerned issues of church representation on the quango board, the powers of individual schools and unionist hostility to the Sinn Fein minister. The consequence is that by 2013 the Education and Skills Authority has not yet been established, despite expenditure to date on preparation of £12 million. A proposal originating with the direct rule administration on social housing to transfer some housing management powers to local councils and abolish an advisory Housing Council were reversed by the new devolved minister. More recently there has been a proposal to transfer housing management responsibilities of the Housing Executive, the centralised housing quango, probably to housing associations and place the remaining housing functions with a new centralised housing body. The main rationale is presented is ministerial statements as financial. Since 2012 the Executive has been taking forward a review of 100 continuing quangos. Significantly this has been carried out by the Executive’s Budget Group and is looking at further mergers or absorptions with resultant efficiencies and savings.

Outcome of review of Quangos
The final outcome of the Review of Public Administration produced a reduction in the number of Quangos through a mix of methods, covering similar methods also used in England, Scotland and Wales. Implementation was largely completed by 2009.

Table 3. Reduction in Quangos 2005-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amalgamation</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer to devolved government</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer to local government</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer of some functions only</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abolition</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declassification</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>58</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Amalgamation was the main mechanism used and involved mainly health bodies. Overall 32 health quangos were reduced to 12 with the major developments relating to; four health and
social care boards responsible for commissioning and planning reduced to one, 18 delivery
health and social care trusts reduced to five and four health and social care community
councils reduced to one Patient and Client Council. Five education and library boards were to
be reduced to a single library authority, and two centralised boards for education
administration. Transfer to government departments did not figure prominently, involving
only a few bodies, for example, the Fisheries Conservancy Board, and some functions of
other bodies, for example, the Museums Council and the Rural Development Council. The
transfer of functions to the existing limited range of functions of the local government system
exercised was discussed by the RPA experts’ panel and politicians in the devolved
institutions, particularly in relation to some housing management functions and community
development. By 2008 some quangos lost local funding responsibilities including; the Arts
Council, the Tourist Board and Sports Council. However, there was no major transfer of
functions from quangos to local government. The total abolition of a quango was rare.
Among the few examples were Enterprise Ulster and the Northern Ireland Agricultural
Wages Board. Declassification means the ending of a body’s status as a quango and this
applied to three administrative quangos.

The implementation of these measures meant the number of quangos reducing from with 58
bodies affected. However, a highly significant feature of this outcome was that the overall
functions and scope of the quango sector and the size of the workforce changed very little.
Plans to abolish two bodies, The Advisory Housing Council and The Local Government Staff
Commission, were set aside after lobbying campaigns (Knox, 2010). The overall outcome
was less than a cull or bonfire of quangos, which was not a very different scenario from what
happened in Scotland and Wales. The nature of the changes have been described as an
example of ‘bureau shuffling’ and devoid of a wider modernisation approach (Knox and
Carmichael, 2008). It can also be noted that during the period of consultation and
implementation a number of new quangos were established, including an Advisory Group for
Architecture and the Built Environment and the Learning and Skills Development Agency.
The quango sector thus remains large with some 120 devolved quangos listed in 2013
(Commissioner for Public Appointments, 2013) (see Table 4, over). In 2011 some fifteen
quangos transferred from the NIO to the Department of Justice after the devolution of Justice.
Table 4. Types of Quangos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Quango</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland Executive sponsored</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-departmental public bodies</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health bodies</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisory bodies</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribunals</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public corporation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devolved but not NIE sponsored</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland Office</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-border implementation bodies</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK quangos covering Northern Ireland</td>
<td>20 (approximately)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some eleven years on from the start of the process in the context of the experience of developments in England, Scotland and Wales it is possible to present an analysis of the problems involved in the relationship between devolution and quangos. Three areas are particularly significant: 1) the compatibility with devolved institutions; 2) the issue of the democratic deficit, and 3) the issue of centralisation.

Compatibility with devolved institutions
The establishment of devolution raised issues about the role of quangos, especially the major centralised quangos. This is a dimension which has received little attention in Northern Ireland government discourses. A number of specific issues can be identified. Devolved central administration and large centralised quangos can be seen as occupying the same space as intermediary bodies between UK national government and local government (Birrell, 2008). Thus in some respects quangos are in competition with the devolved administrations for control of areas of decision-making and delivery and this may apply to bodies such as the Health and Social Care Board, the Housing Executive and the proposed Education and Skills Authority. Secondly was the perspective that the absorption of quangos into the devolved administration created a larger mass and capacity of the devolved administration. This was an important factor in considerations in Wales particularly and also in Scotland but not so much
in Northern Ireland. Thirdly, the devolved governments could view the large quango sector that was accountable to them as important policy tools in key areas. In Northern Ireland as in Scotland and Wales health quangos attracted the attention of the devolved administrations as a vehicle for implementing changes in health delivery. Even in this context quangos do present a buffer zone between elected politicians and action (Flinders, 2004).

There is an argument for some advantage to governments in having quangos to be at arms-length from government. This had an appeal in Northern Ireland to Direct Rule ministers, exemplified in such initiatives as the Parades Commission to adjudicate on controversial parades. The justification for quangos in terms of the recognition of the desirability of protecting certain activities from political influence has not been particularly attractive to devolved politicians. Thus devolved ministers have been keen to exercise their authority over quangos rather than adjust to an arms-length approach. The approach of ministers is also strongly influenced by the perceptions of the public and media who see the devolved ministers as directly responsible for the activities of quangos. The view has also been expressed by backbenchers that it is easier to hold departments to account than quangos.

The democratic deficit
It can be argued that the quango sector in Northern Ireland has served to maintain a substantial democratic deficit despite the operation of devolution. This arises from the unelected nature of the composition of the boards of quangos. This feature is accentuated by the large size of the sector and the shift to very large quangos through mergers. Consequently there has been a reduction in the number of people who are able to participate in decision-making. The proposals for an Education and Skills Authority would mean a board of 20 replacing 160 members of the five existing Education boards. The board of the Housing Executive has only 12 members. The Northern Ireland Equality Commission has drawn attention to the equality implications of the quango sector both in terms of the general issue of lack of opportunity for public participation (Equality Commission, 2009) and in terms of a lack of diversity. The membership of the boards of public bodies does not reflect the makeup of the population. Traditionally the proportion of women appointed to boards has been low although the Northern Ireland Office for Public Appointments has worked to increase the numbers, at present 33 per cent (OFMDFM, 2012). Overall the change to larger quangos reduces the number of opportunities for appointments. A further dimension of the democratic deficit is that the members of the boards, other than the chairs, tend to be anonymous, unknown to the public, not accessible and rarely speaking in public on any matter. To an extent it had been anticipated that the democratic deficit caused by quangos would be remedied by devolution and the exercise of democratic accountability. Strong feelings had been expressed before devolution about the lack of accountability of quangos to local elected politicians (Carmichael and Knox, 2002). In practice the committee system of the Assembly has not been really used at all to exercise routine scrutiny over the quango sector, for example, in relation to their annual reports. The attention of Assembly committees is only drawn if there is a crisis which receives public comment or the Audit Office publishes a report which the Assembly Public Accounts Committee picks up. The devolved ministers on taking office did appear to examine the issue of the need for more democratisation of the quango sector. The outcome of this has been fairly minimal but did result in a single place on a number of health boards reserved for a local government councillor. These councillors and others appointed, for example, to the Libraries Authority are not nominated by local councils or the Local Government Association but apply through an open competition and the successful applicants are finally appointed by the minister. After complaints by MLAs the proposed composition of the Education and Skills Authority was changed to include political
party sector members, which again only creates confusion between the respective roles of the Assembly and the quango. If it is thought necessary to have party representatives on the board that would point to the relevance of the narratives produced in Scotland and Wales for absorption of the policy related activities into the Assembly/parliament setting.

While quangos can be seen as contributing to a democratic deficit an alternative view has been expressed in Northern Ireland that there have been advantages to the depoliticalisation which the system of quangos has brought. It has been suggested that quangos have had a particularly useful role to play in a divided and polarised society when action could be taken to balance representation of the two communities (Morison and Livingstone, 1998). Thus boards of quangos were less likely to take up party political or communal or sectarian positions but take a more objective, technocratic or modernising approach. Arguments used in favour of this approach would cite, in particular, the success of the Housing Executive in establishing a reputation for fair housing allocations and improving housing conditions and housing management. Although there have been some indications of some decisions by ministers based on communal interests the Assembly does work on the basis of checks and balances. In moving to stabilise the Good Friday Agreement and develop post conflict arrangements there is a case for action to enhance public participation and reduce remaining elements of democratic deficits.

Centralism
The system of quangos has developed in Northern Ireland with a predominant ethos of centralisation. Of the major bodies only the health and social care delivery is organised into a sub-structure with five delivery trusts. Even then these five bodies are among the largest health related bodies in the UK with populations in the region of 350,000 to 460,000. Almost all quangos operate without a localised sub-structure apart from a few local offices for administrative purposes. Localist perspectives are largely ignored and receive little comment in any government narratives dealing with the reform or organisation of quangos, including the areas of education, health, social care, youth services or libraries. This means that the localism agenda is omitted in terms of local responsiveness, meeting local needs, local diversity, increased local participation, or the relationship of localism to better performance, improved services and more efficiency. There is an assumption that centralised structure or large bureaucracies save money while more localised structures do not. Centralism has also been promoted by the tendency for departments to often regard quangos as sub-divisions of government departments and subject to strict scrutiny and direction. This has been described as departments exercising effective oversight and clear channels of management, accountability and communication, and that “departments cannot afford to have an insufficiently hands-on and insufficiently interrogative relationship with arms-length bodies” (Northern Ireland Audit Office, 2007). This is an approach encouraging departments to take a corporate approach and treat quangos as at the heart of a corporate relationship. Such an approach is more suited to executive agencies, rather than arms-length bodies.

The guide on public bodies emphasises the importance of compliance with financial requirements laid down by the sponsor department (Department of Finance, 2009). An centralised command and control model tends to dominate and this has been reflected in, for example, the five health and social care trusts producing almost identical implementation plans for the new Department strategy on Transforming Your Care (DHSSPS, 2012). Relationships occasionally have proved difficult and outcomes problematic. The entire board of an Education and Library board was dismissed and replaced by commissioners for now a seven year period. On the other hand legal advice indicated that a Chief Executive of a Health
Accounting for Approaches to Reform
Having identified three main themes in the reform process undertaken in relation to quangos and the final outcomes it is possible to give a more conceptual based account of the approach in Northern Ireland to the review and reform of quangos. The final outcomes of the Review of Public Administration appeared in 2006 under Direct Rule by New Labour. A useful framework of analysis was developed by Perri 6 and Peck (2004) in analysing New Labour’s style of public management reform noting five main approaches to understanding public service reform which can be applied to the case of quango reform in Northern Ireland. Five different concepts characterised these accounts: inconsistency and incoherence; ideology; managerialism; continuity; and centralism.

Inconsistency and incoherence – The Review of Public Administration itself displayed some inconsistencies; in the absence of a final report; in excluding government departments from the exercise; and in not producing principles for the relationship of quangos to devolved institutions. Further deliberations and government narratives displayed some incoherent features; in advocating democratic accountability but not producing a strategy to achieve this and in assuming a cost-based case for having very large quangos. In reality management costs under the legacy structure of 18 delivery trusts were 15 per cent less than the 2011-12 year costs (Northern Ireland Audit Office, 2013) contradicting the prediction of £30million savings. Other inconsistent features can be identified; the aim of reducing the number of quangos but not their functions, in matching democratisation with depoliticalisation; and in reconciling ministerial control with arms-length operation.

Ideology – Approaches or ideas on quango reform or public sector reform do not occupy a major position in the ideological positions of the Northern Ireland parties. No party has a distinctive approach. Overall the two main unionist parties may be more enthusiastic about reducing the size of government and therefore may be adopting a more conservative approach but it is not a strong ideological stance on the issue and the reform of quangos is not rated as a priority. Local government reform attracts more attention because of the electoral implications as do suggestions that the number of government departments should be reduced as this would impact on five parties being able to share out the ministerial portfolios. It can also be noted that under Direct Rule in 2005-7 the UK government took a practical rather than an ideological approach to the Review of Public Administration, initially arguing for a reduction in the perceived large size of the public sector and then offering the final decisions to a restored devolved Assembly and Executive as an incentive to encourage the parties to return to Stormont.

Managerialism – A managerialist ethos has strong roots in the public sector in Northern Ireland. Greer (2004) in examining the operation of health and social services and comparing the four countries of the UK describes Northern Ireland as having a distinctive approach which he calls permissive managerialism. The essence of managerialism was an emphasis on keeping the system going and services running with minimal policy activity. It gave importance to technocratic and administrative approaches and to avoiding party politics as much as possible. Quangos facilitated managerialism with decisions on their operation in the hands of boards largely comprised of people from professional, management, financial and business backgrounds, in partnership with civil servants. With the restoration of devolution it was easier for the managerial ethos to continue in relation to quangos than in relation to the
operation of government departments or to local government reform where political parties had a much closer involvement.

Continuity – The major role for quangos represents a continuity of a role that has existed over a long period of time. During the period of devolution under the old Stormont parliament prior to 1972 the quango model of public administration proved useful to make up for deficiencies in the existing institutions, for example, with the establishment of the Housing Executive to supplement the building of social housing by local councils, or in order to introduce innovations, for example, the special care service with joined up services for people with learning disabilities. When the UK government intervened in 1969 after civil disturbances with a programme of public reforms it turned to the quango model to assume responsibility for key areas of former local government services. The outcome of the Review of Public Administration and related reviews has not been marked by radical change in the scale and role of the quango sector’s staying power and institutional endurance of quangos has also been noted in relation to Scotland and Wales (Flinders, 2011). There have been no major demands by the public, the media, politicians or lobbying groups for any major reduction in the functions or operation of the quango sector. This acceptance of the sector may reflect such factors as disrespect for politicians and the perception that some quangos performed well, for example, the Housing Executive.

Centralism – Devolution has brought the increasing dominance of ministers and the Executive in the oversight of quangos and a trend to issue directions to Boards, chairs and chief executives. A centralist ethos has been encouraged by the fact that the public, users and the media and Assembly hold the minister responsible for problems that emerge related to the delivery of day to day services. This in turn encourages ministers and departments to strengthen their direction and control over quangos. There is recently some evidence for increased ministerial avoidance of the code for appointments to boards. Where a decentralised structure exists all the quangos may find that they have little room for autonomy, as with the five delivery health and social care boards. This centralist approach is also promoted by the creation of backroom quangos to provide common services, for example, procurement of support services for all decentralised quangos in health and social care and education. The centralist ethos has had an influence in bringing quangos under department and ministerial control without changing the quango structure or officially absorbing quangos into central administration.

Conclusions

Northern Ireland has followed Scotland, Wales and England in making commitments to reduce the size of the quango sector but many of the aims have not been achieved or little action has been carried out to realise the set objectives. A specific set of action was undertaken as a response to the Review of Public Administration, initiated by the devolved administration, largely implemented under Direct Rule and finally shaped by the restored devolved government. The reforms that did happen have been characterised by a merger of quangos in the major areas of health, social services and education into centralised or very large quangos. The rationales given and the actual outcomes have demonstrated a number of problems; paying little attention to the configuration, functions, scope and powers of the quango sector in relationship to devolved institutions of government; in sustaining forms of democratic deficit in not addressing issues of increased democratisation, forms of democratic accountability or role for depoliticalisation in a limited way; and promoting centralisation at
the expense of more localised structures as well as stronger central control from departments and ministers. Basing the major element of change on establishing very large quangos and centralised quangos has been justified on a broad-brush, but dubious, calculations of savings on cost and with little consideration given to negative aspects in terms of service improvement, local responsiveness and public and user participation. The dynamics of this approach can be explained by the influence of several factors, particularly the tradition of extensive use of quangos, a dominant managerial ethos, parties taking a practical cost cutting approach, as opposed to an ideologically determined position or an articulated view of public sector delivery and form of public administration, an acceptance of a view that large bureaucratic quangos save money and a preference for central control by ministers and civil servants. Decision making in Northern Ireland on the relationship between devolution and quangos has not to date been based on a comprehensive debate on the major issues involved.

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