

Part II The Commissioning System in Action

In this part of the book, from Chapter 4 to Chapter 10, we describe how the DHSS attempted to recruit the help of science and the structures, roles and relationships that resulted between 1974 and the beginning of 1981, although we take the history back to its natural starting-point of 1972 where necessary. Each of these histories yields generalisations which have starting-points in the theories of science and government which are examined in the preceding chapters.

We first describe the DHSS as an organisation for making and implementing policy. Our analysis of its structure displays the ways in which it embodied the multiple values and policy initiatives emerging from the time in which it had to work (Chapter 4). In Chapter 5 we take up the first of our detailed cases: the creation, working and eventual abandonment of the Chief Scientist's Research Committee and two of the Boards beneath it. Here our dominant theme is the nature, and the limitations, of macro scientific policy. The case also enables us to scrutinise in some detail the nature of the exchanges made between policy-makers and scientists. This latter theme is, indeed, further exemplified throughout the rest of our empirical data of observed cases.

If the story of the Chief Scientist's Research Committee is that of uncertainties on both sides, the story of the DHSS's relationships with the research councils, as particularly exemplified in the bizarre story of the Panel on Medical Research (Chapter 6), demonstrates the contrast between the uncertainties of the policy-makers and the certainties of internally-governed and imperially-defended medical science. In sharp contrast to the stories of disappointed expectations is our account of the Research Liaison Groups (Chapter 7) and the Small Grants Committee, where the differing values, epistemologies and institutional structures of policy-makers and scientists did not, after much work and committed effort, inhibit a rapprochement and working relationship between both sides. This causes us to ask why policy-science relationships work at particular levels of problem-setting and solving and not at the more abstract levels.

In the final chapters of Part II we analyse the nature of the research units established from the 1960s on DHSS grants. In Chapter 8 we first illustrate the enormous range of publicly related science undertaken by the units. In Chapters 9 and 10 we explore the twin but sometimes competing concepts of scientific merit and

policy relevance. These abstractions come into political and institutional interplay in these chapters as we recount our findings from our study of the Department's reviews of research units. In these chapters we make good our generalisation about the multiple criteria for science that can and should be set and the ways in which its institutionalisation can narrow the range of scientific acceptability. Different kinds of scientific activity generate different networks and different degrees of power and authority.

In these chapters, we show how the DHSS threshed and turned in its attempt to make a good match between science and policy, and we believe that both its successes and failures yield generalisations that are likely to apply to similar attempts in other domains of public policy.