

How Can We Stop Reinventing Policies?

"The consistent message you get is to 'do something.' In some ways, it is remarkable anything sticks."

Rachel Wolf, former adviser to David Cameron

In our recent report – All Change – the Institute for Government argues that the UK government tries to reinvent old policies on an alarmingly regular basis. In the areas of further education, regional government and industrial strategy, this can cost a great deal to individuals and organisations across the country. Here is what we can do about it.

Further Education



48 Secretaries of State

Responsible for Further Education since 1981

13,000 qualifications

In the Further Education space, as noted by Philip Hammond in Budget 2017

Regional government



17 years

Government Offices, 1994-2011

12 years

Regional Assemblies, 1998-2010

1 year

Local Authority Leaders' Boards, 2009-10

1992

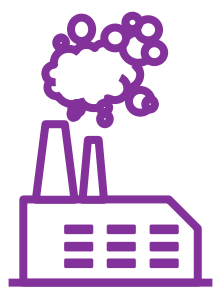
'New' unitary authorities created

2009

'New' unitary authorities created

Source: Phil Swann, 2016

Industrial strategy



2008

Mandelson's 'new activism'

2012

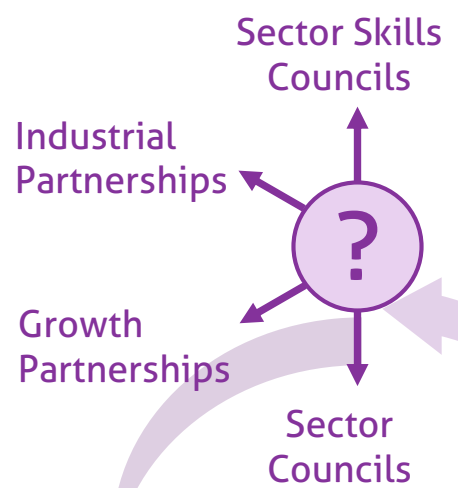
Cable's industrial strategy

2015

Javid's 'industrial approach'

2016

May's industrial strategy



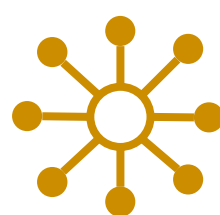
Ways to address the problem

1 Strengthen institutional memory



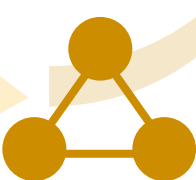
- ✓ Heads of policy profession should be held accountable for institutional memory
- ✓ Key officials should be kept in post over the longer term
- ✓ Repositories of previous work must be made available

2 Strategy from the centre



- ✓ No. 10, Treasury and Cabinet Office must set firm and enduring priorities for officials and ministers
- ✓ Cabinet Office and secretaries should play a greater role in scrutinising policy proposals which propose major change

3 Make organisational change harder



- ✓ The Treasury and NAO should analyse past organisational change costs and challenge new proposals
- ✓ Parliament should scrutinise business cases for new organisations

4 Strengthen policy development process



- ✓ Policy announcements should include their evidence base
- ✓ Departments should acknowledge previous experiences in all new proposals
- ✓ Outsiders should be involved in the policy process

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