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Do public servants in Ireland need an institute?

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Editor's introduction

This paper was first published in *Administration*, 2(2), in the summer of 1954. Its author, Professor Basil Chubb of the Department of Politics, Trinity College Dublin, was closely involved in the development of the *Administration* journal, and subsequently in 1957, in the establishment of the Institute of Public Administration. The original text of the paper follows.

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In the London *Times* of 16 April 1801, there appeared the following advertisement:

Five hundred guineas will be given to any lady or gentleman who can procure the advertiser a permanent situation of proportionate value in the Exchequer or any other office under government where not more than three hours daily attendance is required. Strict secrecy may be relied on if requisite... None but principals will be treated with.

The government servants so vividly illustrated by this advertisement and so castigated by that fearsome secretary to the Treasury in the middle of the century, Sir Charles Trevelyan, could not be said to comprise either 'a service' or 'a profession'. Indeed, so far as many senior officers were

concerned, a government post was but a part-time occupation which, in the well-known words of one of them, 'messes up the mornings a bit'. Such gentlemen felt no need for a professional association. What needs they did experience were fully catered for at one of those clubs conveniently situated across St James's Park from Whitehall where they foregathered at lunch or in the evenings. An institute, for them, was a place where the poor or the sick were cared for at the public expense. Public administration as a term and even as a concept was hardly known. A gentleman understood how to conduct business, though, as we all know, those damned decimal dots might fox him occasionally. The changes of the middle nineteenth century and after (what is often known as '1855 and all that') put an end to this situation and wiped out this type of servant. Beginning, characteristically enough, with superannuation schemes, and resulting from the labours of a series of great commissions, the efforts of the Civil Service Commission, and the work of successive Chancellors of the Exchequer and their permanent secretaries, a 'civil service' came into being. It was a service stamped with the hallmarks of its makers and endowed with the virtues on which they insisted, hallmarks and virtues which became traditional. Irish civil servants are in that tradition and to a large extent bear those hallmarks and share those virtues. The more recently created local government service has much in common with them. The staffs of the public corporations have perhaps less. It is true that the three groups do not have the contacts and the intercourse they might have. Whilst it is difficult to know just how far down the ranks of the various services one should draw the line, it is sufficient to note that, together, the senior servants of the public comprise an identifiable, though loose, vocational group.

Whether this group, the 'public service' as I shall call it, is strictly speaking a 'profession' or not is another matter. It is a matter, however, to which it is worthwhile paying some attention for the purpose of this paper, which is to inquire into the need for, and the place of, an institute of public administration. Where the public service resembles the professions, properly so-called, experience of their organisations and associations may throw light on the place of such an institute. Insofar as the service does not have the characteristics of the professions, the aims and organisational patterns of their associations will not be appropriate. It is by pursuing analogies, where they exist, that I intend to proceed.

The Commission on Vocational Organisation, while, as they said, 'not attempting to define a profession... took note of the following definition' which they borrowed from Sidney and Beatrice Webb who were surely strange bedfellows for that particular commission. 'A profession', the

Webbs said, 'is a vocation founded upon specialised educational training, the purpose of which is to supply disinterested counsel and services to others for a direct and definite compensation'.¹ Such a definition, of course, excludes the public servant. I note also that the *Oxford English Dictionary* would include the public servant as a profession only when it comes to define the word in a secondary and what it calls 'a wider sense', where it is 'any calling or occupation by which a person earns his living. Now usually applied to an occupation considered to be socially superior to a trade or handicraft'. Only broadly speaking, then, may the public service be termed a profession, and it differs in important respects from the professions proper such as law or medicine.

To begin with, the public servant is usually not required to have undergone a specialised training in public administration or government, or to have satisfied a professional test before he can practise. Indeed, it is arguable whether a satisfactory pre-entry course of training, let alone a professional test in public administration designed to qualify a man as an administrative practitioner, is even possible, let alone desirable, when one comes to consider the wide variety of activities which public administrators handle. We in these islands still stand four-square behind Macaulay when he told the House of Commons in 1833 that:

whatever be the languages – whatever be the sciences, which it is, in any age or country, the fashion to teach, those who become the greatest proficient in those languages, and those sciences will generally be the flower of the youth – the most acute – the most industrious – the most ambitious of honourable distinctions.²

We do not, therefore, feel obliged to insist on courses of training or licences in an art, or science, or mystery (call it what you will) which would be a mixture of the higher refinements of the three Rs, the art of moving paper, political science and the delicate and almost unteachable art of managing human beings. In any case, in the nature of things, the public authority itself recruits its own personnel and controls them, and not the profession. Hence, the self-recruitment and self-government which distinguishes many professions is absent from the public service. Moreover, the public servant usually works for a salary and does not 'supply disinterested counsel and services for a direct fee'. This does not, of course, mark him out distinctly from all other professional men, some

¹ *Report of the Commission on Vocational Organisation*, 1943, para. 157.

² *House of Commons Debates*, 10 July 1833, col. 526.

of whom are also salaried employees. But such salaried doctors, lawyers, accountants, etc., are safe in the care of a profession which is *in essence* not salaried, and they may always go into practice for themselves if they wish. Not so your public servant. He is inevitably a salaried servant of the public, and probably for life. The consequences of this are two. First, as a *public* servant his activities are of the highest social consequence. The public interest should guide his every action and he must not engage in self-regarding behaviour designed to protect his status or privileges as against his employers, the public. Nor must he engage in activities which might lower the prestige of his all-important service. Second, as a *life* servant he must, in prudence, move with care. Hence, his activities, even worthy ones such as I am about to discuss, must be undertaken with special prudence.

I have dwelt on this point at some length, since, when we come to ask what ought to be the purposes of an Institute of Public Administration, we should not be led by a superficial resemblance into apeing blindly the associations of other professions. The public service is *sui generis*, and its vocational associations must reflect this fact. Yet, if the practices and experiences of the professions in respect of their vocational associations be examined with caution, they will, I believe, give the clue to the proper functions of an Institute.

The Vocational Organisation Commission, in its survey of the professions, reported that the major functions of professional organisations were as follows:³

1. To defend the social and economic claims of the profession, i.e., its 'trade union' activities.
2. To promote the social welfare of the members by 'mutual benefit' and social activities.
3. To secure proper standards of educational and technical qualifications in entrants, and to ensure that only those who have the proper qualifications use the title or practise.
4. To maintain standards of professional conduct and etiquette.
5. To advance the theory and techniques of the profession by promoting educational activities of all sorts.

In addition, there may be added another, closely related to the last:

6. To provide a consultant service of information and advice for the members who consult them as clients.

³ Para. 158.

These are all activities which might be, and are, among the major objects of professional associations. They are all in themselves desirable, useful, and, indeed, necessary. It does not follow, however, that an institute of public administration should perform all these activities. Some may not be appropriate to it since, as we have already seen, in certain respects the public service does not resemble other professions. Others of these functions may already be performed satisfactorily by existing associations. Yet others may be beyond the scope or the needs of the service. In deciding this question of appropriate functions, however, we have fortunately a certain amount of experience on which to draw. There exist Institutes of Public Administration V in Britain (which is perhaps our most useful guide), in Canada, Australia, South Africa, Israel, Turkey and Brazil. The Scandinavian countries have an international and yet very local 'Confederation of Administrative Sciences'. The United States is, as always, organised on a huge scale. The most useful of these American bodies for our purposes are the American Society for Public Administration, the Public Administration Clearing House and the Public Administration Service.

Which of the functions enumerated above are, then, appropriate, to an institute of public administration? Trade union functions? Social welfare and social activities? Control of entry to the profession? The care of professional standards of etiquette and ethics? The advancement of the theory and practice of the profession? The provision of consultant and advisory services?

First, it is clear that trade union activities are not appropriate to an institute. Public authorities are a very special type of employer, and these matters are already cared for elsewhere by specialised institutions in the form of civil service and local government associations and by the Whitley machinery or its equivalent. If it works well, there is little need to add a fifth wheel to the coach; if badly, then the remedy is to perfect the specialised institutions. There are few reasons for suggesting that an institute should absorb the associations or vice versa. On the other hand, there are cogent arguments against combining trade union functions with others. The performance of other useful functions by an institute might well be actually impaired by attempting to engage also in trade union activities. It will be argued below that the good will and cooperation of political leaders and the most senior public servants are vital to the success of an institute and must be carefully cultivated. This will not be easy if an institute appears to be engaging in trade union activities. The Royal Institute of Public Administration in Britain⁴ was very conscious in its

⁴ Before May 1954 known as the Institute of Public Administration.

early years of the suspicions it might arouse in high places. It wisely took great pains to avoid trade union activities and to make its position clear. Its first president, Lord Haldane, took the earliest possible opportunity to state, in his inaugural speech, that 'the body over which I have the honour to preside is not a trade union organisation brought into existence to further the interests of a class. It is a society formed on the basis of rendering fresh service to the public...'⁵ One year later he repeated that 'its purpose is not, I think, to be a mere body for looking after the interests of individual members; that can be done otherwise'.⁶ The history of Irish civil service staff relations gives good grounds for believing that such protestations would be no less necessary here and now.

The second group of possible activities of an institute is social welfare and social activities. Social welfare activities fall naturally into the field of trade union activities. While they are less open to suspicion on the part of employers or the 'official side', they are customarily an adjunct of trade union activity, and experience indicates that they are probably best conducted by that association which guards trade union interests. The term 'social activities' is, of course, a vague one. All the activities under discussion here are in a sense 'social' for all give rise to social contacts. An institute, whatever it does, contributes to the social activities of the profession. In the narrower sense of recreation and social intercourse *as ends in themselves*, social activities, while desirable, fall much more under the head of social welfare and are best dealt with in the same way. Often such activities are highly spontaneous, unorganised and local. On the other hand, your public servant may well seek his social intercourse *outside* the bounds of his profession, and he repairs to his club, whatever it is, there to mix with a wide variety of occupations. Under this head, then, there is little justification for an institute.

One of the major activities of many professions is undoubtedly connected with the securing of proper standards of education and training for entrants, and with ensuring that only those who are qualified use the title and practise. The work of the King's Inns, the Incorporated Law Society and the General Medical Council springs at once to mind. Autonomy in respect of standards of training is very much a feature of them. It is clear, however, that no such function exists to be performed by an association of public servants. No specialised education or training is demanded of the candidate for the public service, and, hence, no standards of technical proficiency in administration have to be fixed and maintained.

⁵ *Public Administration*, vol. i, p. 7.

⁶ *Public Administration*, vol. vi, p. 331.

The most that might be demanded is experience in *administration*. Moreover, our tradition and our experience are likely to cause us to continue in this way. (For those who are perhaps wondering about the qualifications demanded of the engineer or the doctor or the agriculturalist entering the service, it should, perhaps, be added that, when I speak of standards and tests of technical proficiency, I am referring to proficiency in administration.) Furthermore, public authorities as employers must recruit their own personnel and, in the case of civil service and the local government service, have specialised, autonomous, and efficient organisations to do it.

Since, however, the training of public servants is, in view of our recruitment practices, an 'in-service' job, it might also be a function of an institute. An institute might devise technical training and conduct examinations. Some qualification such as the passing of an examination might, indeed, be demanded as the condition of membership of the institute in the manner of the institutes of accountants and secretaries. Such a scheme would not preclude a man from entering the service (no voluntary public service institute could do that); it would confer a status on those who were of sufficient calibre and energetic enough to pass the institute's membership or fellowship examination. Whether or not such an activity would be a desirable one will be considered below. It is sufficient for the moment to notice that the regulation of educational courses and examinations to enter the profession or secure promotion is not a proper job for a voluntary institute. It is, however, worth noting that an *officially sponsored* institute, partly or even wholly financed and controlled by public authorities, might be given such functions. This occurs in France where those who intend to enter the higher ranks of the public service go, first, to one of the institutes of political studies which are run jointly by the universities and the state, and then, for three years to the *Ecole Nationale d'Administration* which is controlled by the Office of the Prime Minister.⁷ In this connection, mention might be made also of two other official institutes, one in Ankara and one in Rio de Janeiro, under the aegis of the United Nations. They exist to conduct programmes of training, mainly for serving officials.

The next purpose of a professional association to be considered is that of maintaining standards of professional conduct. Here again the public service differs from the older professions. The public servant does not give services to a series of temporary employers or clients but, like teachers,

⁷ See P. M. Gaudemet, "The Teaching of Public Administration in France", in *Public Administration*, vol. xxviii, pp. 90–5.

insurance men, and bank officials, he works for a single employer. The employer's needs or whims determine his employment and dismissal. There does not arise, therefore, any disciplinary function to be performed by the profession for its own good health and good name. That does not mean, however, that there is no need to foster standards of professional conduct and etiquette. The performance of any professional man depends not only on education and knowledge but on spirit and traditions, and since the service is the *public* service, it is specially desirable that its prestige should be high. Fortunately, in these islands, very high standards of professional conduct have been inherited and the prestige of the public servant is at least adequate, though it is declining. The stereotype of the civil servant, a funny and officious, yet timorous, little man with his prehensile bottom warming a chair for forty years and 'hanging his hat on a pension' is no laughing matter. In Ireland especially, for historical reasons, officials are 'bad news'. The need to maintain and raise the already high standards as part of a campaign to raise the prestige of the public service is much to be desired. While it is difficult to point to precise activities which an Institute of Public Administration might undertake under this head, it would almost certainly serve as a guardian of the good traditions of the service and it might also endeavour to improve the profession's public relations.

To advance the theory and techniques of the profession is probably one of the purposes of a majority of all professional associations, and there can be no doubt that it is the primary aim of all the existing institutes of public administration. This is natural and inevitable for three reasons. First, though the public service is not a self-governing, self-recruiting profession, its members are engaged in a very definite art or science. To manage and conduct the public's business is a specialised function, or rather a collection of specialised functions bound together by some common elements and some common characteristics. Secondly, this is a very important field of human activity. Common sense surely dictates that we should pay very special attention to the skills and procedures of those who (at the public's bidding, it is true) spend close to one-third of the public's total income for them and on them. Finally, this is, if not a new field of academic-type study, at least one much neglected in Britain and Ireland until recently. The view is, I admit, not now common that a man who took a first in 'greats' or Celtic studies and passed the civil service. 'Admin' is inherently capable of performing all the tasks put before him or will learn the tricks of the trade in time, and, hence, does not need to study public administration. It is still all too common though to find that the tricks are yesterday's tricks and that the daily round is performed in the

way it always was, without conscious attention to its techniques or thought about its principles, without fertilising discussion or the stimulus of learning how others cope. While the engineer, the architect, the doctor, or the lawyer, tends to, and indeed must, 'keep up' with his subject, I wonder how many higher civil servants take pains to acquaint themselves with new developments in their own field? While we have progressively removed the practice of health and engineering, etc., from the empiricism of the amateur, we have been slower to adjust our practice in regard to administration. It is only recently, for example, that 'in-training', which in principle is the obvious corollary of employing men with no previous knowledge, has been given serious attention. 'The civil service', said Lord Beveridge, 'is a profession and I should like it to become and realize itself to be a learned profession'. It is not suggested, of course, that here is a well developed, clearly defined field or branch of knowledge with its principles exposed, its basic techniques settled and its boundaries well defined. It is suggested, however, that the public servant might at least learn with profit from his fellow practitioner and possibly even acquire and pass on important truths by leisured reflection about his work and by the academic study of government. In this respect, then, there is a useful function and a definite need for an institute.

Finally, professional associations might provide a service of information to their members, acting as consultants to clients. But such a service can only be performed where there is quickly available great masses of information of a very practical character, immediately applicable to specialised circumstances. Such a 'bank' of information can only be built up slowly, and, in general, only accrues when the experience of a large number of units is consistently recorded and when huge resources of staff and money can be devoted to the project. The justly famous Public Administration Clearing House and the Public Administration Service in Chicago are only possible because the scale of activities is very large. These organisations owe their success in no small measure to the fact that a good number of associations of public servants of one sort and another have existed for many years in the United States. As long ago as 1929 certain of them established their headquarters side by side in Chicago. In 1938 they began to live all together in the now well-known 1313 E 60th Street, and, now, no less than twenty-four of them have their headquarters there. In circumstances such as these, clearing house activities and consultant services work well. We should not rule out entirely the possibility of an Irish Institute of Public Administration giving very modest services of this type, but on any scale likely to be possible here we cannot expect a '1313'.

It is concluded that the possible functions of an institute of public administration are, first and primarily, to advance the theory and practice of public administration; secondly, to act as a guardian of the good traditions and professional standards of the service; possibly, thirdly, to act as a clearing house of information and to give a service of advice, although such a service could not but be embryonic in Ireland to-day. Finally (and this remains to be argued) an Institute might impose qualifying tests for membership, thus giving members a professional status, although it could have no direct connection with entry to, or promotion in, the profession.

These conclusions are confirmed by the experience of existing institutes. Writing in the first number of *Public Administration* in 1923, a founder of the British body, Mr H. G. Corner, explained its genesis. 'The senior public servant', he said, was:

beginning to realise that he was a member of a profession of growing importance, and that central and local administration were essentially one, yet he could not be quite sure that it was recognised as a profession at all. Indeed, he could not fail to ask himself where were the repositories of its traditions (which he knew to exist in considerable richness), the keeper of its professional conscience, the students of its history, the exponents of its technique.⁸

The institute then formed was essentially an educative body and a learned society and not a protective or social welfare body. Its purposes were (and are):

1. To maintain the high ideals and traditions of the public service and to give its views on questions of public duty and etiquette;
2. To promote an interest in, and a study of, the structure and procedures of administrative organisations and the history and principles of government, not only of the home country but of other countries too;
3. To facilitate the exchange of information on administrative questions with a view to increasing the efficiency of the public service and to creating a well-informed public opinion;
5. To promote good relations between the different branches of the public service.

⁸ Vol. i, p. 49.

The editor of the first *Journal* remarked wisely that 'Not the least valuable work of the Institute will be to encourage individual thought throughout the public services. If each individual servant can be imbued with the spirit both of learning and of contributing from his (or her) experience we may gather precious enlightenment'.⁹

The Nordic Confederation of Administrative Sciences, while it is not an Institute with permanent headquarters and a clearly defined scope, has similar aims. Its objectives are to promote contacts between public officials of all types in Scandinavian countries;¹⁰ to acquaint them with administrative conditions, problems and developments in the different countries; and to promote uniformity of reforms in the five countries. It sponsors meetings and conferences, both international and national, and publishes a journal. Its national sections grant fellowships to young members for study tours. The American Society for Public Administration resembles the British in many respects. Its aims are to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and the result of experience among those interested in, or engaged in, public administration; to encourage the collection and dissemination of information; and to advance generally the science, processes and art of public administration.

While there is little doubt that in principle an institute is desirable, the questions of the status and membership of such an institute in Ireland raise serious problems. Closely connected with Britain as we are, geographically, economically, in our culture, and in our political and administrative traditions and practices, it might be argued that an Irish institute should be connected with the Royal Institute of Public Administration [RIPA] as a 'regional' or 'overseas' group, or, following normal Anglo-Irish precedents, in some unique connection. Such an arrangement would have great advantages. Britain's Institute is well-established and has great prestige. It is if not rich at least comfortable. It has a membership big enough to make possible a good range of activities. Nor would the Irish public servant feel lost when he read its journal or attended its meetings. Nevertheless, such an arrangement would not be desirable even if it were possible. First, and obviously, questions of national prestige arise. While the civil service here has friendly contacts with the British service, it would not be politic for an association of Irish public servants to become a regional group of a British Institute. This would put it on a level with, for example, the west of England or (perish the thought!) 'Northern Ireland'. To have the status of an 'overseas group'

⁹ *Public Administration*, vol. i, p. 4.

¹⁰ It includes public officials from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

would put Ireland in company with the Australian states, and shades of the Commonwealth might seem to be closing once more upon the growing state. There are other reasons too. The major activities of the RIPA are based on London, and although its journal has a place for contributions on administrative practices anywhere, the Institute is mainly and inevitably concerned with British problems. We in Ireland tend already to look all too often to Britain because it is convenient. A connection with the British Institute might well increase this tendency to be content to adapt British solutions to Irish conditions without analysing fully our own problems or looking for solutions to other countries with more closely analogous situations.

Such a conclusion has, however, important consequences. Indeed, it would not be going too far to say that it makes doubtful the possibility of having an institute in Ireland at all. However desirable in principle such an institute is, it might well not be a viable proposition. This is a mere matter of arithmetic. The British Institute draws from a group many times bigger than that on which an Irish institute could hope to draw. It is impossible to give exact figures, but it is significant to note that in the British civil service the administrative and executive classes number 65,000 in Ireland they number 2,700. Even with a pool of potential members many times larger than the Irish, the RIPA did not find it easy to attract enough. In 1933, after ten years, it was noted in the *Journal* that 'all too few public servants' had joined. Even now, the membership is only three thousand six hundred, of whom some thirteen hundred and fifty are overseas members. There is no doubt at all that an Irish institute dependent on its own resources would be hard put to it to attract enough members to keep going at any worthwhile level. Nor is it a question merely of numbers. To begin with, members mean subscriptions. An institute is at a grave disadvantage if it cannot finance visiting lecturers or sponsor, however modestly, some research. It will inevitably be limited if it must depend wholly on spare-time and honorary officers. Perhaps more important is the fact that most members of societies such as this are passive, not to say inert, and an institute depends on the abilities, the enthusiasm and the achievements of the few. While it is impossible to say what is the smallest practicable number, it is clear that, in a small country with a very small potential membership, it is bound to be difficult to find enough people to read papers, to take a part in meetings, to contribute articles and to attend conferences.

There is, too, another aspect of membership. Who is to be admitted? The question of whether or not such an institute as this should accord a status to its members and, to this end, conduct examinations for

membership or fellowship was, it will be recalled, left open. The practice of institutes elsewhere is to make membership open to all who are employed in the public service or who are engaged in studying or teaching public administration. Although the RIPA at first had grades of membership, each depending on a test, experience led it to abandon them. Indeed, it is difficult to see how an institute serving all public administrators could devise suitable tests. Diplomas in Public Administration as at present organised in Britain and Ireland cover background subjects and do not test administrative capacity as accountancy examinations test the ability to perform the duties of an accountant. A diploma to test professional skill would be almost impossible to devise and conduct. It would be possible, of course, to restrict membership to men above certain ranks, but, since the potential membership is so small in any case, it would be unwise to do so. Moreover, it might exclude valuable men.

Connected with membership is the problem of the types and level of activities to be attempted in an institute such as I have outlined. The possible range is vast. It might sponsor research into governmental problems at a high level, as for example the relations between parliament and the executive or the structure of local government. At the other end of the scale, it might concern itself with instructing officers at a much lower level in the procedures of their work. It might confine itself to lectures and a journal, while, on the other hand, it might sponsor full-scale research projects and publications. The need to cater adequately for a wide variety of members of different ranks and in different services is ever present because all members must have something for their subscriptions. There are, however, important limitations. First, financial resources are always a major limiting factor and would operate to make a very modest level of activities imperative in Ireland. Secondly, there already exist a number of professional bodies in the field of public administration or to which public administrators who specialise in certain fields might well belong. It would be wise not to encroach on their territory too much, although an institute such as this is the only one that can take a broad view.

It is not possible in this article to discuss programmes of lectures, discussion groups, week-end conferences, summer schools, guests from overseas, essay competitions, research projects, or publications. Two points should, however, be made. First, institutes of the type under discussion depend a great deal on their journals. The journal above all provides a link and a service which all can share. Reviewing the activities of the RIPA in 1944, Mr F. R. Cowell considered that the Institute has been

held together as much by the Journal as by any single activity'.¹¹ Such a journal, ADMINISTRATION, already exists in Ireland. It has started well but it cannot continue for ever on the papers prepared for the discussion group of the Association of Higher Civil Servants or on the symposium. Nor are there enough academic research workers in the country to produce a flow of research papers. Even if there were, the papers they would produce would probably not be the most valuable papers possible. Until a mass of pioneer descriptive papers have been written, research work will always be difficult in Ireland. The editor of *Public Administration* was surely right when he told his readers 'It is your job; you are the people with the inside information', and when he asked them to record for the journal the important developments in their departments, arguing that 'the slow accumulation of apparently isolated facts has been an essential feature of the vast progress made in... the natural sciences, and public administration must make use of the same method'.¹² Only in this way can we in Ireland build up a tradition of research, the value of which will surely serve to eradicate the foolish, unnecessary and unenlightened tradition that administration is not an activity to be written about and discussed with profit. The second point which should be stressed is the importance of co-operating with the universities.

In this connection it is sufficient to repeat the words of Lord Haldane spoken in 1923. 'For my part', he said, 'I hope that if this Institute develops into a real school of thought, it will work in close connection with the universities, and enlist the universities in its service'. As a matter of historical fact, the Institute did so, and it is abundantly clear that this has been a most fruitful partnership.

The final matter which will be considered in this article is the relationship of an institute to the government and other official bodies. It is imperative that an institute of this type should enjoy a high degree of independence. The members must be able to report their experience and express their views or it will not be a learned society. On the other hand, there is no escaping the fact that public servants work under conditions which necessarily, and in the public interest, call for restraint in their activities. It is axiomatic that 'ministerial' policy should not be criticised and that great caution should be exercised in treating minister-civil servant relations. Special care, not to say reticence, would be necessary at first, at least among civil servants. A careful study of the development of policy by the British Institute would well repay the effort, since the body has

¹¹ *Public Administration* vol. xxii, p. 50.

¹² *Public Administration*, vol. xxv, p. 2.

succeeded in weaning the doubtful and in establishing itself as a commentator on government at almost all levels. Success here is of the greatest importance because the fact is that, whatever the rights and wrongs may be, in practice an institute must rely on the good will of the government and of senior officers. If an institute is set up in Ireland, it should and can afford to go slowly at first because time is on its side. A law of increasing returns operates. In time its members reach high places. In time its work, if it is of any value, will be recognised. It would be wise, then, to go slowly and hope. The words of the present Director of the RIPA are very relevant. 'One can', he wrote, 'only rely upon an enlightened outlook in high places and an acceptance of the view that nothing is perfect in this world and that serious work by an institute can lead to beneficial results to a government that is willing to be receptive to constructive and well-meant criticism'.¹³

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In this article an attempt has been made to inquire at length into the proper functions of an institute of public administration, bearing in mind the peculiar conditions of work and status of the public servant. Having concluded that useful functions exist to be performed, and that, therefore, there is a case for an institute in principle, I have tried to discuss briefly some general problems of such an institute in Ireland. More detailed problems remain. No attempt has been made to discuss, for example, financial problems or the possibilities that lie in corporate membership. There remain also such problems as that of providing services for men of widely varying interests and spread over the whole country. I conclude, as I say, that in principle there is a case for an institute of the learned society type, to include civil servants, local government officers and servants of the public enterprises. Its primary function should be to advance the theory and practice of public administration. It would naturally act as the guardian of the traditions and standards of the service, it ought to do its best to improve the prestige of the service, and it might act as a clearing house of information. It ought to be an Irish Institute, though it should, of course, establish cordial relations with other institutes. Its activities will inevitably be governed by financial considerations and it is to be hoped, by prudence. It must be independent, but must have the good will of the government and senior officers. It will, therefore, have to take great care in its early years. Above all, it will face great difficulties in attracting a sufficient number of members, and especially active members, in a state the size of Ireland.

¹³ In a letter to the author.

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