I want to begin this final chapter by offering some reflections on my own practices of knowing and knowledge use in the process of producing this book, and how they compare to those of the civil servants. Inquiry is not outside of practice, and some of the ways in which I learnt how to study knowledge use in the Department of Health resembled how the civil servants themselves learnt how to make policy there. There were no codified rules which specified how I should apply to conduct research in the department or whom I could ask for help, and yet it soon became clear that there were some ways of requesting access which were considered by the department’s staff to be more appropriate than others, and that some approaches were more effective than others. Cold call style emails to very senior members of staff yielded no response at all. To secure research access, and to refine my research design, I had to learn some of the local cultural rules of the department: the ways in which the civil servants behaved differently in email exchanges compared to face-to-face interactions; the different social interaction styles which characterised the various units; the importance of securing senior sponsorship for any kind of project in the department; the means of identifying suitably powerful, and potentially sympathetic, patrons; and how to approach those patrons via less senior intermediaries.

I had to employ a range of social skills to interpret the signals I received in response to my access requests, and to gain the trust of potential patrons. I learnt that I needed to work my way through contacts of contacts to get to some target interviewees or potential sponsors for meeting observations. I received advice from sympathetic insiders, but much of this departmental know-how was gained through trial and
error; through doing. As such, my own approach to negotiating the department in order to conduct this research, and the ways in which I developed that approach, reflected how the participants themselves leant to negotiate the department in order to produce policy. I was sharing in some of their know-how.

Furthermore, when it came to understanding the nature of the civil servants' work, in the same way that personal encounters were a powerful influence on the civil servants' beliefs about the objects of policy, my own sense of knowing the nature of civil servants' practices came from being there. From observing meetings, travelling with the participants, waiting in their offices and conversing with them. These encounters, or perhaps more accurately, my interpretations of them, felt real, and gave me a strong sense of what sounded right, and what did not, when I came to analyse my data, and re-engage with the academic literature. It was through this fieldwork, and not through reading theory, that I was able to challenge my own core beliefs about the nature of knowledge.

I also used interviews for many of the same reasons the civil servants wanted to speak to people directly. Compared to drawing on official written documents, they offered a greater promise of understanding what the civil servants' work was really like. They enabled quick and basic translations ('What does this term mean?'; ‘What does that acronym stand for?'); they allowed me to direct the civil servants' accounts and thoughts to my concerns and interests; they also allowed for the discovery of unknown unknowns. Like the dialogues the civil servants engaged in with others, the back and forth of the interview conversation provided me with new ways of seeing and thinking about the objects of my inquiry. Collectively, the participants and I co-constructed knowledge on the research question and (at least in the most productive conversations) the interviewees in turn came to reflect in new ways on their own practices and those of their colleagues.

When it came to analysing my findings, I created a critical dialogue between the personal beliefs and understandings I had gained from the observations and the interviews, the corpus of transcripts and notes I had produced during fieldwork, and ideas, claims and theories from the academic literature. While I used both the corpus of data and the academic literature to think through, elaborate and challenge the understandings I had gained from being in the field, I also used them to defend, authorise and justify those understandings. Because my research data is the product of a formal research method for which I can produce an audit trail, it carries more authority than my reported impressions from the experience of fieldwork. Furthermore, quotes from interviews