6 Civil Service Cross-Border Cooperation

Bureaucratic responses to cross-border cooperation have not been overwhelming in the past (see Chapters 2 and 3). The Lemass–O’Neill talks were greeted with a mixed response by particular civil service departments and there was a perception that economic conflicts of interest existed in certain areas. Similarly, in the previous chapter, it was shown that business groups have responded positively to the incentives for cross-border cooperation, but that levels of cross-border trade were low and that Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland were competitors in some economic areas.

In this chapter the approach of civil service departments in the 1990s to cross-border cooperation is examined. In the first part of the chapter the reasons why bureaucratic cross-border cooperation might be expected to increase are examined by highlighting the breadth of departments potentially affected by EU and Anglo-Irish initiatives. In the second section the administration of cross-border cooperation is examined. Thirdly, bureaucratic obstacles to cross-border cooperation are examined and in conclusion, the question of whether the bureaucratic relationship between Irish and Northern Irish civil services hinders or advances cross-border cooperation is determined. Four main points emerge from this examination of civil service behaviour. First, the reform of EU regional policy and the introduction of CAP reform proposals have not dramatically increased levels of civil service cooperation. Second, change that has occurred is limited to a small number of specific divisions and does not spill over to other divisions, despite the existence of overlapping policy interests. Third, there is a general perception among the civil servants interviewed that cross-border cooperation is primarily the responsibility of the Inter-governmental Conference and of those civil servants in the Anglo-Irish Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs. Finally, the above findings lead to the conclusion that, for the civil service at least, economic cooperation is primarily the response to political rather than economic concerns. The chapter begins with an examination of why evidence of change in the bureaucratic relationship might be expected.
I THE REASONS FOR CHANGE IN THE CROSS-BORDER BUREAUCRATIC RELATIONSHIP

The EU and the Anglo-Irish agreement (AIA) had potential implications for civil service behaviour (see Chapters 3 and 4). Both provided money for particular cross-border schemes which necessitated bureaucratic involvement (see Chapters 3 and 4). Moreover, the AIA provided scope for political cooperation between Irish and Northern Irish civil servants (see Chapter 3).

EU Cross-Border Programmes

Various EU programmes increase expectations that administrative cross-border cooperation will increase, for example rural development, Leader, Interreg, Transport and Tourism (see Chapter 4). These schemes necessitate civil service involvement, encroaching upon the work of various civil service departments. The scheme with the most obvious implications for cross-border bureaucratic cooperation is Interreg (see Chapter 4).

Similarly, the Operational Programme for Rural Development was approved by the Commission in December 1990. This programme followed the Pilot Programme for Rural Development, which was completed in 1990. The Rural Development Programme is defined as being part of an overall strategy for rural development and works in conjunction with all the other programmes. Indeed, the Commission intends that all the above initiatives should complement each other and form an integrated plan for the overall development of the economy (Chapter 3).

More specifically, the rural development programme aims to diversify the rural economy to increase employment and raise income levels. Emphasis was placed on the ‘bottom-up’ approach, i.e. on the principle of subsidiarity (see Chapter 4). This emphasis implies that statutory authorities and local communities should work together. The important factor in the context of this study is that the Less Favoured Areas (LFAs) receive a greater amount of aid from the scheme (successful applicants from the LFAs receive 50 per cent of the cost of the proposed scheme as opposed to 40 per cent in the other areas). However, although the Less Favoured Areas in the North West of Ireland adjoin Northern Ireland, there are no special provisions for cross-border cooperation. Emphasis is placed on the Leader programme (see below) and in this way there is an indirect link to cross-border initiatives.