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Who Meets Whom: Access and Lobbying During the Coalition Years

Introduction

There is a venerable tradition within political analysis of studying actors who seek to influence policy-makers. From interest groups to think tanks, lobbyists to professional networks, the literature has categorised a diversity of different actors and theorised about the distinctions between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', iron triangles, policy networks and advocacy coalitions (Beer, 1969; Rhodes and Marsh, 1992; Smith, 2009; Gais et al., 2009). Much of this work has come in two forms. On the one hand, there is a rich, empirically informed literature that discusses the systemic form and activities of these bodies. Denham and Garnett (1996) have studied the nature and impact of think tanks in Britain. Baumgartner and Leech (2001) have examined patterns of interest group involvement in US politics and Baumgartner et al. (2009) have traced the relationship between lobbying and policy change. On the other hand, there is a plethora of detailed case-studies that explore how particular groups in particular policy areas have interacted with the machinery of government. Somerville and Goodman (2010) have, for example, studied the role of networks in informing migration policy, Hawkins et al. (2012) have examined the influence of the alcohol industry on UK health policy, and Hacker and Pierson (2002) have explored the influence of business on the formation of American welfare policy. These traditions of study have provided key insights into the operation and influence of different groups and yet they have tended to deliver either systemic level analyses concentrated on one type of actor (i.e. studies of interest groups or lobbying organisations), or more detailed, case study accounts of influence. Less common are synoptic studies across government detailing comprehensive informal access via *meetings with ministers*, rather than access via inputs to party political, legislative and consultation procedures.

Against this background, we present a new study of governmental access in the UK that draws on systematic data covering over 6,000 ministerial meetings released by the Coalition government between 2010 and 2015. Building on initial work undertaken by Labour, the Coalition government established access to a wide range of new sources of government information (Institute for Government, 2015). Indeed, in 2016, the UK was judged to be the world-leader in the provision of open data (Open Data Barometer, 2016). In this paper, we focus upon data released by the Coalition government relating to the meetings held between ministers and representatives of outside interests. This data, published on a quarterly basis on departmental websites, allows a new perspective on debates around ministerial access and what Weiler and Brändli (2015) call 'insider lobbying'. To date, this information about meetings has provided occasional fodder for newspaper stories on the access achieved by business interests in general and by media barons such as Rupert Murdoch in particular (see Ball et al., 2011 and Martinson and Rawlinson, 2015 for examples). It has also been used, in a limited manner, by charities and non-governmental organisations to highlight trends in access.[i] Within this paper we present the first systematic analysis of this dataset, using it to show which interests get access to which ministers; resulting patterns of equality and inequality in access to ministers; and the existence of distinctive policy communities between interests and ministers in specific departments.

A key concept within the paper is access. Access is defined here as 'the frequency of contacts between interest organisations and … institutions' (Eising, 2007: 331) and is measured in terms of the number of meetings with ministers. Within the existing literature it is common to find access used as a measure for influence. Dur and De Bièvre (2007), for example, have studied access to meetings of the European Union Civil Society Dialogues on this basis and Chubb (1983), Langbein (1986) and Bailer (2010) also suggest that access can be used as a proxy for influence. We are, in some respects, wary of such claims and do not want to be seen to be suggesting that higher access is always and everywhere an indicator of higher influence. Indeed, at one point we suggest that the large number of meetings ministers held with the representatives of banks between 2010 and 2015

may be a measure not of their political strength but of their vulnerability. Yet, at the same time, patterns of access clearly do matter and are related to influence. There are two parts to our argument here. First, ministers have a limited amount of time and so, with the assistance of senior civil servants, and via their diary secretaries, must decide which groups to meet (Weiler and Brändli, 2015: 747). The resulting patterns of access can, thereby, tell us something about the importance ministers attach to meeting with particular groups. One reason ministers may think it important to meet with a group is that they judge that group to be an influential one they must at the very least listen to. Second, meetings give interest-groups a gilt-edged opportunity to persuade ministers of the merits of their case (REFERENCE REMOVED). Meetings are, in this sense, not simply a measure of influence but a source of influence. Ministers may of course choose not to accept the arguments being put to them by interest-groups during meetings. On occasions, they may even decide to meet with an interest-group in order to create the impression of wanting to be seen to listen to their views even though, in reality, they have already decided on a particular course of action. Yet, interest-groups do, nevertheless, continually push to achieve access to ministers and it is reasonable to think that they do so because they believe that meetings will give them a chance to frame policy discussions and prime particular arguments.

This paper proceeds in four sections. First, we describe how we collected and coded data on a total of 6,292 meetings between the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and Secretaries-of-State in sixteen departments with outside interests. This dataset – which wiil be made publicly available at the point of publication through [WEBSITE ANONYMISED] - offers an important foundational contribution to studying ministerial meetings. In the second part of the paper we describe broad patterns of access to ministers across the whole of government. We do not seek to test particular hypotheses about access or, more generally, arguments about the relationship between access and changes in the policy agenda or content of policy. The significance of the paper should be understood primarily in terms of the value of the data underlying it and, in particular, the fact that it has not previously been collated. In the third part of the paper we describe some of the distinctive patterns of access particular departments have with external groups. In the conclusion, we point to areas of further research with the database, in particular the lack of engagement with European and other international actors. In particular, we compare findings with the European Union (EU) 'Integrity Watch' website, which maps ministerial meetings in the European Commission with similar actors. This emphasises the importance of business as a key lobbying actor, supporting our national level findings.

1. Ministerial Meetings Database

The release of data on ministerial meetings finds its roots in the Coalition government's response to the previous Labour government. The Labour administrations of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown endured a number of scandals relating to access and lobbying culminating, shortly before the 2010 election, in the revelation that a number of former ministers were offering their services as paid lobbyists. Stephen Byers was secretly filmed describing himself as being like a 'cab for hire' who had exploited his personal relationships with Lord Adonis and Lord Mandelson, the Transport Secretary and Business Secretary, to further the interests of National Express and Tesco (Lefort, 2010). The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats argued that incidents such as this were emblematic of a culture of 'cronyism' (Porter, 2010). The incoming Coalition government promised greater levels of transparency in government and, as one part of this commitment, the Cabinet Office, shortly after the 2010 election, announced that departments would, in future, be required to collect and publish, on a regular basis, details of ministers' overseas travel, gifts and hospitality and meetings with outside interests.

In the case of outside meetings, departments publish details of meetings held by ministers, junior ministers and, in the case of many but not all departments, personal private secretaries and permanent secretaries. Data has been published on a quarterly basis and lists the dates of meetings, who the meetings were with and the purpose of the meeting. The data we report on here relates to a total of 6,292 meetings held by the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister for the Cabinet Office, the Chancellor, the Foreign Secretary and 13 other Secretaries-of-State. Table 1 lists the departments we have studied, the names and party affiliations of the relevant ministers and the number of meetings reported to have occurred between May 2010 and March 2015. What is immediately striking here the variation in the number of meetings held by each department. The average number of meetings was 377. The largest number of meetings were held by the Secretary of State for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (670 meetings), the Chancellor (646 meetings) and the Prime Minister (609 meetings). The fewest number of meetings were recorded by the Foreign Secretary (117 meetings), the Justice Secretary (140 meetings) and the Secretary of State for Defence (106 meetings).

How can we account for these differences in the number of meetings? There are a range of possibilities. On the one hand, variations could be an accurate representation of differences across government and so be revealing of differences in the extent to which departments are willing to grant access. On the other hand, these differences might reflect shortfalls in the quality of the data provided by departments and so reveal the existence of challenges in implementing the Coalition's transparency program. It is certainly the case that internal documentation from the Cabinet Office (2014) reveals a struggle to establish best practice in transparency reporting and that previous studies have pointed to differences in the willingness of staff within departments to implement policies relating to open access and transparency (Zuiderwijk and Janssen, 2014). We also know that particular departments have not posted data on meetings for particular periods (see the note at the end of Table 1). Such possibilities suggest that publicly available data may not fully capture the number of meetings which occurred.

Table 1: Meetings with Outside Interests: Departments, Ministers and Party Affiliation, June 2010 – March 2015.

Department	Ministers	Party affiliation	Number of meetings declared
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills	Vince Cable (2010-15)	Liberal Democrat	670
Treasury	George Osborne (2010-15)	Conservative	646
Prime Minister's Office	David Cameron (2010-15)	Conservative	609
Department for Transport	Philip Hammond (2010-11) Justine Greening (2011-12) Patrick McLoughlin (2012-15)	Conservative	607
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	Jeremy Hunt (2010-12) Maria Miller (2012-14) Sajid Javid (2014-15)	Conservative	585
Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General	Frances Maude (2010-2015)	Conservative	407
Department for Education	Michael Gove (2010-14) Nicky Morgan (2014-16)	Conservative	344*
Department of Health	Andrew Lansley (2010-12)	Conservative	330*

	Jeremy Hunt (2012-15)		
Department for Communities and Local Government	Eric Pickles (2010-15)	Conservative	309
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	Caroline Spelman (2010-12) Owen Patterson (2012-14) Elizabeth Truss (2014-15)	Conservative	299*
Department for International Development	Andrew Mitchell (2010-12) Justine Greening (2012-15)	Conservative	287
Department for Energy and Climate Change	Chris Huhne (2010-12) Edward Davey (2012-15)	Liberal Democrat	266*
Home Office	Theresa May (2010-15)	Conservative	214
Deputy Prime Minister's office	Nick Clegg (2010-15)	Liberal Democrat	203
Department for Work and Pensions	Iain Duncan-Smith (2010-15)	Conservative	148
Ministry of Justice	Kenneth Clark (2010-12) Chris Gayling (2012-15)	Conservative	140*
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	William Hague (2010-14) Philip Hammond (2014-15)	Conservative	117
Ministry of Defence	Liam Fox (2010-11) Philip Hammond (2011-14) Michael Fallon (2014-15)	Conservative	106

**Denotes missing data. Certain Departments did not have available data for this entire time period. Exceptions to note are: (1) the Department of Energy and Climate Change (May 2010- March 2012); (2) Department for Education (May 2010 – December 2010); (3) Department of Health (May 2010- June 2011); (4) Ministry of Justice (May 2010- June 2011; in addition (5) the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs lacked data for the period (April-June 2012).*

The data provided by government departments allows us to identify the organisations which achieved the most access to the most senior ministers in government. We also wanted, more generally, to see what levels of access were secured by different *kinds* of organisation. On this basis, we coded each of the participants in each of the 6,292 meetings as belonging to *one* of the 21 categories of organisation listed in Table 2.[ii] Note that the coding categories here are ordered so as to distinguish between 12 major kinds of organisation. Within this, however, we distinguish, in the case of business (code 1), the third sector (code 2), education (code 3), the media (code 5) and international bodies (code 13) a number of sub-categories.

The coding system employed reflects – like all coding systems – the research interests of those who devised it as well as the nature and limitations of the data being coded. Our coding scheme was inductively generated rather than being deduced from a prior set of theoretical categories. We chose a small set of basic categories to start out – business, third sector, trade unions, the media, and so on which are often employed in academic discussions of interest-group influence – and then added new coding categories when it was appropriate to do so. As we proceeded, we also developed a new set of coding 'rules' for placing organisations in one category rather than another and, where necessary, re-coded existing work accordingly. This inductive approach was employed because there was, in our judgment, no prior set of coding categories which we could have adapted for our purposes. Existing studies provide a theoretically rich set of categories. These include, for example, distinctions between 'cause' or 'sectional' groups (Klüver, 2012), specific verses diffuse interests (Kollman, 1998) and corporate versus public interest groups (Binderkrantz, 2008). Budge et al. in *The New British Politics* (2007) distinguish between interest groups, cause groups, new social movements, episodic groups, fire brigade groups, peak

associations, insider groups, outside groups or crossbench groups. The Comparative Policy Agendas Project which documents and measures changes in the policy agenda (the set of issues to which political actors are, at any given time, paying serious attention) uses a set of codes distinguishing between different functional areas of policy-making: macroeconomics, education, health, defence and so on to code material (Dowding et al., 2016). Whilst theoretically rich, these distinctions were too rigid to capture the variety of organisations found in our dataset. Coding all of the organisations on the basis of one of these schemata would have also required us to undertake a detailed investigation of each outside interest to determine whether it could be best classified as, for example, a cause group or a sectional interest or, in the case of the Policy Agendas Project codes, as operating primarily in the area of defence policy rather than health policy.

Where our coding scheme does coincide with existing usages, the EU Integrity Watch website (http://www.integritywatch.eu) provides a very similar effort at classifying political meetings. Based on data made available by the European Commission, it maps all meetings by European Commissioners by types of organisation met. This covers corporate actors, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), think tanks, churches, local government and consultants. Our coding covers a broader range of organisations, but it does provide some opportunities for comparison (see Conclusion).

Table 2: Coding Categories

Code	Form of organisation	Explanatory notes and examples
1	Business	Private sector and profit-making organisations including overseas-registered firms. We used the on-line register maintained by Companies House to distinguish between for-profit business not-for-profit social enterprises. Large media companies like News International have been coded under the category of media. **Available sub codes:** 1a) Banks and financial services 1b) Arts businesses: We listed arts organisations like The National Theatre, the National Gallery and the Barbican as arts businesses rather than as social enterprises and coded the organisation *Which?* as a business.
2	Third sector	2a) Non-profit charities and cause groups dedicated to promoting a particular cause. We included bodies promoting parts of the country as tourist destinations. 2b) Social enterprises which operate on a for-profit basis but whose primary purpose is to promote the welfare of a particular group of people as either employees or customers. 2c) Co-operatives operating on a for-profit basis but with an interest in promoting cooperatives as a form of organisation. 2d) Religious leaders, churches or groups promoting an interest or cause distinguished by their religious basis.
3	Education	3a) Meetings with Universities or particular research centres within a university 3b) Named academics or groups of academics working in universities. 3c) Publicly funded (state) schools 3d) Privately funded (independent) schools
4	Think-tanks	Non-profit and non-university affiliated organisations conducting and seeking to disseminate the results of research with a view to influencing the policy-making process.

5	The media	5a) Private media organisations (privately owned media e.g. *The Guardian*, the *Telegraph*) 5b) Public media organisations (the BBC, Channel 4) * We coded meetings held with major media organisations such as News International under this heading.
6.	Unions	Organised associations of workers in a trade, group of trades or profession, formed in order to protect and further the interests of employees. *We coded the National Farmers Union and the British Medical Association as examples of unions.
8.	Quangos and other UK state bodies	Non-departmental public bodies funded through tax revenue which are not a part of the system of local government. Examples include Quangos such as the Civil Aviation Authority, The Charity Commission and the National Audit Office and other governmental bodies such as the Metropolitan Police, the NHS National Alliance and the Bank of England.
9	Local government	Meetings held with representatives from UK Parish, City, County or regional levels of government, City Mayors and the Local Government Association.
10	Individuals	Individuals who are either unaffiliated to any particular organisation or attending the meeting independently of that affiliation. Also, representatives of particular groups of consumers, citizens, tenants, or service-users who are not named individuals and are not presented as representatives of a particular named organisation.
11	Miscellaneous	Either meetings where the description of who attended the meeting was not sufficient to identify the organisation or where the organisation did not clearly fit into one of the other categories (examples including the Conservative Friends of Israel and the Aircraft Carrier Alliance: the latter a public-private partnership).
13	International bodies	13a) Foreign governmental bodies such as Ambassadors and High commissioners 13b) Transnational non-governmental bodies such as FIFA, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and the European Investment Bank.
14	Professional Associations	Non-profit organisations seeking to represent the interests of a particular profession and the interests of the individuals engaged in it. Examples include the Bar Council, the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Royal College of General Practitioners and the British Veterinary Association.

Note: during data collection we included codes for specialist lobbying firms (7), other UK state bodies (12) and schools (15). These are not included in the final coding categories as there were either no results (7) or the code was merged with another to more accurately reflect the group of actors we aimed to capture (15 merged with 3 and 12 merged with 8). We have kept the original coded numbers to ensure data transparency.

Before describing the results of our analysis, it is important to recognise limitations in the data we have collected. First, and most obviously, the data only relates to a particular period in British politics. We cannot use the data to draw any general conclusions about how patterns of access have changed over time as a result of, for example, the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats replacing Labour in office or particular issues assuming a more prominent role within the policy agenda. Second, our data does not include details of meetings held by junior ministers or senior civil servants with outside interests. It also does not incorporate details of meetings held by the Department of the Attorney-General or the Departments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Third, the data only covers 'official' meetings held by ministers in their department. It cannot tell us

anything about the frequency or nature of meetings held by ministers in office corridors, at party conferences or at social events and dinner parties. Finally, the data we have collected cannot tell us anything much – if anything – about why a meeting was held; what was discussed at that meeting; and what was finally agreed. Departments are required to declare the purpose of the meetings held with outside interests. They have however learnt to fulfil this requirement in the most limited way possible: describing the purpose of meetings as being to 'discuss developments' or to have a 'general meeting'. Publishing details of who ministers have met with has led to greater transparency, but it is a small step forward from a low base. As the Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts, Margaret Hodge (2012), has argued, information about ministerial meetings has not been released in a way that is 'accessible, relevant and easy to use'.

2. Patterns of Access

Ministers held 6,292 recorded meetings with outside interests between May 2010 and March 2015: an average of around six meetings each working day. A majority of these meetings (5,211) were held with representatives from just one *kind* organisation. The rest were held with representatives of more than one group. Table 3 lists the organisations which were present at the largest number of meetings. The list is dominated by meetings with journalists and with businesses or the key business peak organisation the Confederation of British Industry (CBI). What is perhaps most striking about the number of meetings held by these organisations is just how little access they had. The CBI attended more meetings than any other organisation and held meetings with every single senior minister apart from the Secretary of State for Health. This is an impressively high level of access. Yet, at the same time, it is worth noting that the CBI only attended, in total, around 2.5% of the meetings held by ministers. Indeed, the ten organisations listed in Table 3 between them only attended 14% of the meetings held by ministers. The market for access is actually, in this respect, quite fragmented with no single organisation or set of organisations holding a dominant position.

Table 3. Ten Organisations with the Highest Levels of Recorded Access

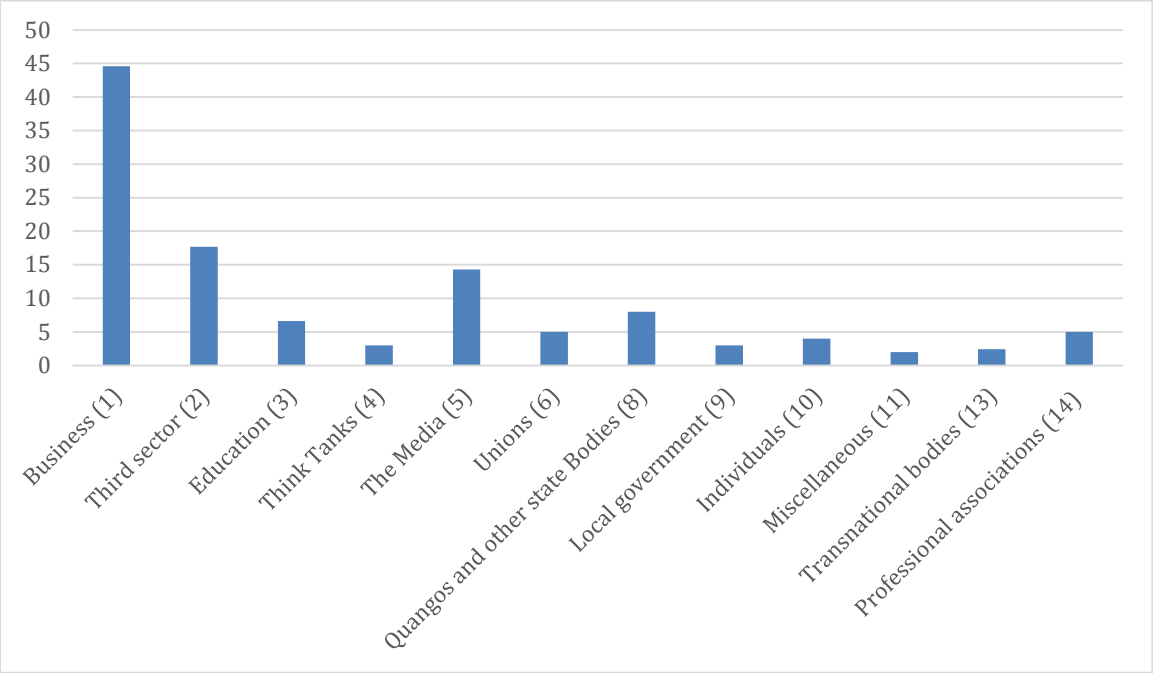
Organisations	**Number of Meetings**
Confederation of British Industry:	158
Journalists, editors or the owner of the *Daily Telegraph* / *Sunday Telegraph*:	131
Journalists, editors or executives at the BBC:	124
Journalists or editors at the *Times* / *Sunday Times*:	89
Trade Unions Congress	82
BAE Systems:	78
Shell (including the Shell Foundation)	64
Journalists, editors of the owners of the *Daily Mail* / *Mail on Sunday*:	62
Journalists, editors or the owner of the *Evening Standard*:	60

British Telecom	58

When we switch from looking at the access achieved by specific organisations to looking at the access achieved by different *kinds* of organisation using the coding categories listed in Table 2, the picture changes dramatically. Figure 1 shows the proportion (0-100%) of meetings attended by each of the 12 major kinds of organisation (we have ordered this data in such a way as to prevent double-counting in those cases where organisations from different sub-categories of the same major code were present at a meeting).

Figure 1. Levels of Access Achieved by Different Kinds of Organisation (%), 2010-2015).

% of meetings attended.



Source: constructed by authors.

Note: the figures here relate to the % of the total of 6,292 meetings attended by each of the 12 major organisations coded. The total % figures for the columns do not sum to 100%. This is because in many cases meetings were attended by organisations from different categories: for example, business and unions. Imagine a situation in which there are just three meetings. One is solely with a representative from business; one is solely with a representative from a union; and the third is attended by both a business and a union. Business and the unions, on our measure, attend 66% of the meetings.

In a classic contribution to political science, Charles Lindblom (1977) argued in *Politics and Markets* that business occupies a 'privileged' position within the policy-making process in democratic countries. A wide body of literature has, since then, documented and sought to explain the varying levels of access achieved by business (Bouwen, 2004; Drope and Hansen, 2006; Yackee and Yackee, 2006). This focus, a perennial concern in the discipline, has gained renewed vigour since the Global Financial Crisis of 2008. As Culpepper (2016: 459) writes, summarising recent literature, 'the question of business power is once again returning to the forefront of debates … shifting emphasis from the institutional roots of political equilibria to the power resources of business and their exercise in politics'.

Our analysis shows that the intensity of the focus on business power continues to make sense for political scientists. Business organisations attended 2,694 meetings: nearly 45% of all the meetings held by senior ministers. Furthermore, on fully 81% of these occasions (2,195 meetings), business was the only kind of organisation in attendance at that meeting. High levels of access were secured not only by the CBI, BAE systems, Shell and British Telecom (listed in Table 3) but by the Virgin conglomerate (including Virgin Rail, Virgin Airways and Virgin Media) (54 meetings); The Royal Bank of Scotland (51 meetings); HSBC (50 meetings); Network Rail (49 meetings); the British Chamber of Commerce (including regional branches) (48 meetings); and Barclays Bank (47 meetings). In addition to this, ministers held regular meetings with three other collective business lobbying organisations: The Institute of Directors (40 meetings); the British Bankers Association (36 meetings); and the little-known Business Advisory Group composed of Mark Carney (Bank of England), Sir Roger Carr (Chairman, BAE Systems), Sir James Dyson, John Cridland (CBI) and Sir Andrew Witty (GSK) amongst other (13 meetings).

We should be wary of concluding that the high levels of access secured by business relative to other kinds of organisations constitutes evidence of overwhelming political influence. Businesses like Virgin Media and British Telecom are likely to have both shared and competing interests. The fact that both attend a large number of meetings with senior ministers does not mean that each will be able to secure its objectives. Furthermore, particular businesses sometimes attend meetings with ministers from a position of weakness. Between 2010 and 2015 Ministers – particularly the Secretary of State for Business Innovation and Skills – held large numbers of meetings with representatives of banks (sub-category 1a) including HSBC, The Royal Bank of Scotland, Barclays and the British Bankers Association (listed above) and with Lloyds Banking Group (44 meetings) and Standard Charter (31 meetings). These meetings occurred in a 'noisy' political environment in which the reputation of the banks had been shredded by the financial crisis and a succession of scandals relating to the payment of bonuses, the manipulation of interest-rates, the miss-selling of payment protection insurance and money-laundering (Culpepper, 2011). No doubt bank executives were able to use these meetings to remind ministers of the important position the banks continue to occupy within the British economy and to rehearse arguments against what they regarded as over-intrusive regulation. Yet whilst the fact that ministers were willing to continue to meet with bank executives rather than declaring them to be *persona non-grata* is notable, it is also significant that on a range of key policy issues – the 'ring-fencing' of the assets of the commercial and investment divisions of banks, the 'electrification' of that ring-fence; the introduction of higher capital ratios and a new overall leverage ratio and the effective opt-out from the European Union's maximum capital ratios – the government and the Bank of England eventually adopted positions which the largest banks had opposed (REFERENCE REMOVED). The fact that, in this instance, ministers held so many meetings with banks was a measure not of their influence but of the fact that the light-touch regulatory system they had been influential in promoting during the 2000s was crumbling.

Other than business, the two types of organisation to secure the highest levels of access were third sector organisations and the media. Third sector organisations attended nearly 18% of all meetings with ministers. Within this broad category, the largest number of meetings were attended by charities and cause groups (sub-category 2a) including Save the Children (40 meetings); The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (31 meetings); Oxfam (also 31 meetings); Christian Aid (25 meetings); the National Trust (also 25 meetings); The Wildlife Trust (22 meetings); Hacked-off, Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth (20 meetings); and Age UK (19 meetings). In total, representatives from non-profit charities and cause groups attended 877 meetings with ministers and were present at 14% of all meetings. By contrast, representatives from churches and other religious organisations (sub-category 2d) secured very little access: attending less than 2% of the total number of meetings held between ministers and outside bodies. What is particularly noteworthy here, given how often ministers underlined their commitment to religious tolerance and support for the Muslim faith, is just how infrequently ministers met with representatives from Muslim organisations. Whilst the Archbishop of Canterbury alone held 14 meetings with senior

ministers, groups representing the Muslim community and faith collectively held only 10 meetings with senior ministers.

Whilst still in opposition, the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats derided Labour's obsession with news management and 'spin' and its habit of granting privileged access to particularly supportive newspapers and journalists. We cannot use the data collected here to judge whether Coalition ministers spent less time talking to journalists and the press. What we can say is that ministers invested a collectively significant, although individually very different, amount of time in meeting with journalists. In total journalists and representatives of media organisations such as News International were present at 14.3% of all the meetings held by ministers. Breaking this down into the two sub-categories we employed, journalists, editors and the management of the BBC (including representatives of the BBC Trust) were present at over 2% of meetings (no doubt this figure includes meetings relating to the renewal of the BBC Charter) whilst journalists, editors and owners of private media organisations were present at 12% of meetings. The media organisations which secured the highest levels of access were the *Daily Telegraph* and *Sunday Telegraph* (131 meetings), the BBC (124 meetings), *The Times* and *Sunday Times* (89 meetings), the *Daily Mail* and *Mail on Sunday* (62 meetings), the *Evening Standard* (60 meetings), ITV and ITN (55 meetings), the *Financial Times* (54 meetings) and the *Sun* and *Sun on Sunday* (49 meetings). To complete this list, journalists and editors from three consistently left-wing newspapers which opposed the Coalition, the *Independent* (32 meetings), *Guardian* (30 meetings) and *Mirror* (23 meetings) secured relatively lower levels of access as did journalists and editors from the *Daily Express* (20 meetings) whose owner and editorial team were also very critical of the Coalition.

During the Coalition's period in office, the access to government achieved by one particular newspaper owner, Rupert Murdoch, once again became a political story in its own right: most notably during a meeting of the select committee on media and culture at which Rupert Murdoch was cross-examined about his knowledge of phone hacking and his access to senior ministers (O'Carroll and Halliday, 2012). Yet this is another case where the relationship between access and influence is unclear. Perhaps because they were reluctant to be seen to be meeting with him for fear of being seen to be according him too much influence, Rupert Murdoch actually only attended 11 recorded meetings with ministers: three of these with Michael Gove, two with David Cameron, one with George Osborne and one with the then Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport, Sajid Javid. Yet it is perhaps also notable that Murdoch attended two of David Cameron's first three meetings on the 10th of May 2010. In addition, Rupert Murdoch's son, James, attended a further 8 meetings at which his father was not present whilst Rebekah Brooks who was Chief Executive Officer of News International from 2009 to 2011 (prior to her resignation and subsequent arrest on charges of perverting the course of justice) attended a further 8 meetings at which neither Murdoch was present (5 of which were with the Prime Minister). To put this into some kind of context, Rupert Murdoch and other News International Executives secured a significantly higher level of access than representatives from a large FTSE 100 engineering company like GKN (7 meetings).

Beyond business, the third sector and the media, no other kind of organisation achieved notably significant levels of access. Representatives from other central state organisations attended nearly 8% of meetings. A considerable body of literature has, in recent years, pointed to the growth in the numbers of and the uncertain democratic credentials of quangos and other state bodies (REFERENCE REMOVED). Our data shows that ministers met most often with representatives from The Bank of England (22 meetings), the Arts Council (20 meetings), The London Organising Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games (17 meetings) and the NHS Alliance (11 meetings). Representatives from local government attended over 3% of meetings with the highest level of access being secured by the Local Government Association (51 meetings). In addition, representatives from either foreign governmental groups (sub-category 13a) or from transnational bodies (sub-category 13b) were present at a total of 2.5% of meetings: most notably (in terms of the second of these categories) with representatives of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (15 meetings).

Within the broad category of education, in total, and across sub-categories, representatives from the education sector attended 6.6% of meetings. Representatives from universities (3a) were present at 3.7% of meetings. Within this sub-category, two peak organisations, Universities UK (27 meetings) and The Russell Group (8 meetings), secured the highest level of access. The individual universities with the highest level of access were the London School of Economics (16 meetings) and Imperial College (13 meetings). The individual named academics who attended the largest number of meetings were the economist and Professor Energy Policy at Oxford, Dieter Helm (4 meetings) and the local government expert at the London School of Economics, Tony Travers (4 meetings).

Given the influence sometimes accorded to them by political scientists and the pride they take in having high-level contacts and offering tailored policy advice, it is striking that think-tanks were present at less than 3% of meetings. The think-tanks which achieved the highest levels of access were those specialising in particular areas of policy: The Sutton Trust (education policy) (13 meetings) and The King's Fund (health) (11 meetings). Despite only having been established in 2008, representatives from the Institute for Government also achieved a significant level of access (11 meetings). It is also notable in this respect that three think-tanks closely associated with the Conservative Party and, more generally, the development of neoliberalism, the Adam Smith Institute (0 meetings), the Centre for Policy Studies (3 meetings) and the Centre for Social Justice (3 meetings) secured relatively low levels of access.

Representatives from unions attended 304 meetings with ministers and were present at fewer than 5% of all meetings. What is perhaps most notable in this respect, is the relatively high level of access secured by the Trades Union Congress (82 meetings). The only other traditional trade union which secured relatively high levels of access was Unite (28 meetings). By contrast, the GMB, which has over 600,000 members, only attended 6 meetings whilst USDAW, The Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, which has over 400,000 members, attended no meetings. The two other organisations which we classified as unions because they exist primarily to protect their member's interests and which secured relatively high levels of access were the National Farmers Union (NFU) (52 meetings) and the British Medical Association (24 meetings). Overall, whilst trade unions were not cast into the political wilderness during the Coalition years, it is notable that professional associations were able to secure an equivalent level of access.

In regards to individual access, there are some notable findings. The data here is, perhaps, less informative as civil servants are under no obligation to record when a meeting with an organisation is attended by a single individual. This means that it is eminently possible that a meeting could be coded as either with Tata Steel or with Ratan Tata (the company owner). These differences can distort the data and make it important not to draw too many conclusions. What is perhaps most notable is that whilst famous individuals such as TV chef Jamie Oliver, Nicola Roberts from Girls Aloud and author Hilary Mantel did gain access to ministers, their contact was limited to a single meeting. Relatively few individuals met with ministers on more than one occasion. The notable exceptions to this general rule are the former Prime Minister Tony Blair (4 meetings) and Rosa Monckton (a business woman and charity campaigner with extensive links to the establishment) (3 meetings). The property developer and Conservative Party donor Nick Candy was also present at 3 meetings whilst Gerry and Kate McCann met with Teresa May twice. These findings suggest that individuals are granted less access than collective organisations, suggesting that the power of celebrity may not be as influential as sometimes claimed.

3. Meetings Across Government Departments: The Salience of Resource Dependency

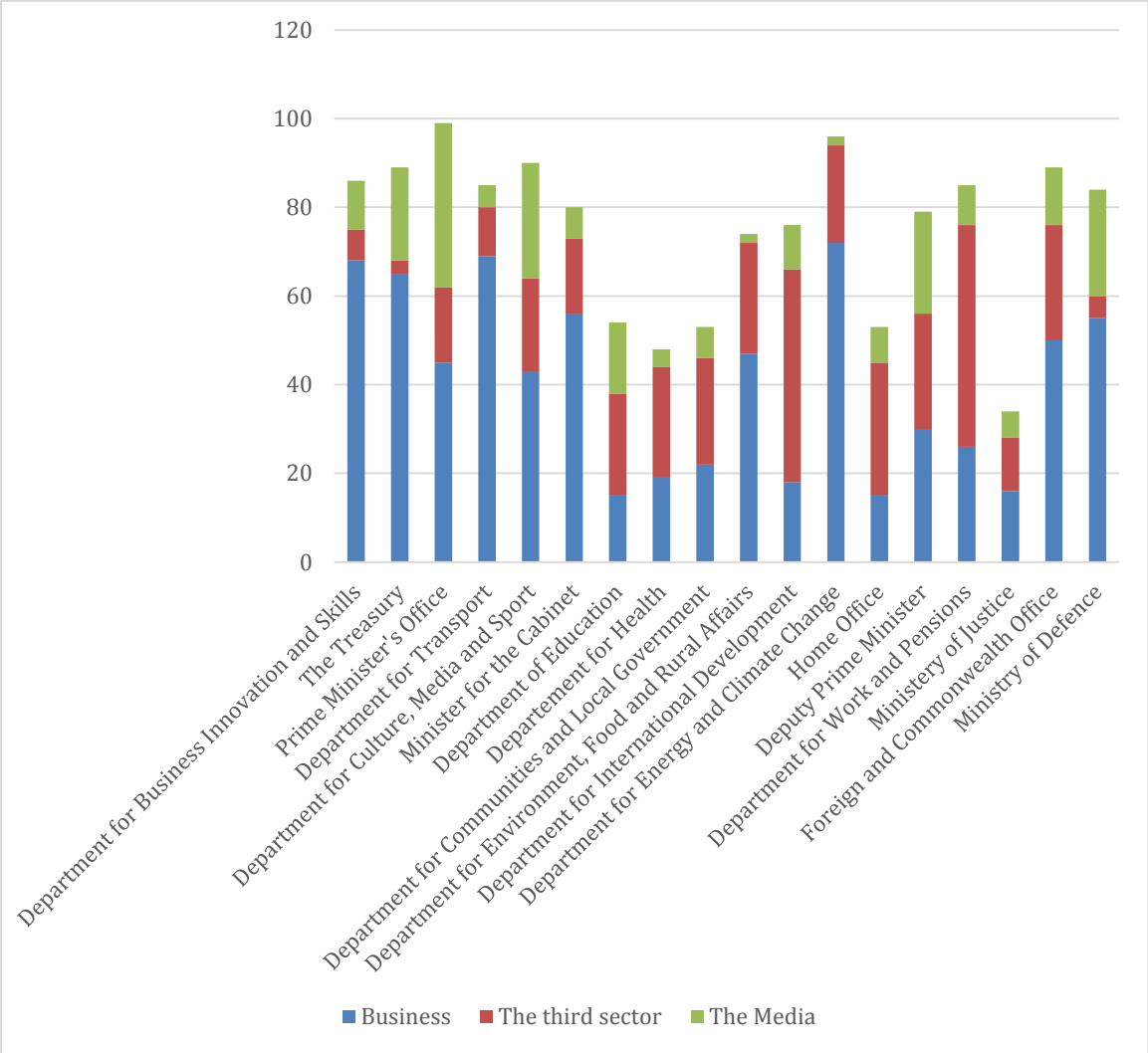
In describing patterns of access, we have, so far, treated government as the relevant unit-of-analysis: looking at patterns of access across all government departments. Yet it has always been an important part of the pluralist account of interest-group politics that patterns of access are likely to vary significantly from one part of government to another; that organisations or types of organisation which are accorded 'insider' status in one part of government are likely to be treated as 'outsiders' elsewhere; and that the relevant unit-of-analysis for the study of, for example, policy networks is therefore the departmental or sub-departmental level (Richardson et al., 1978; Smith et al., 1993). In this manner, McFarland (1987: 133) has argued that 'politics tends to be fragmented into decision-making in various specific policy areas, which are normally controlled by special-interest coalitions'. Different departments of government are characterised by distinct resource dependencies and exchange relationships (Marin and Mayntz, 1991), and therefore political scientists should expect different 'coalitions' of interests depending on the department in question.

Given these ideas it is informative to consider whether patterns of access vary across government and whether there is support for the idea that different policy areas are dominated by different groups. To see whether and to what extent patterns of access vary from one department to another, Figure 2 shows the % of meetings attended by the kinds of organisation with, overall, the highest level of access, business, the third sector and the media, on a department-by-department basis in the order in which they were first presented in Table 1.

In analysing the results, it makes sense to start with business: which, as we have seen, attended nearly 45% of all meetings between ministers and outside interests. There are a number of departments – including Energy (72% of all meetings), Transport (69%), Business, Innovation and Skills (68%), The Treasury (65%), Defence (55%), the Cabinet Office (56%) and The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (50%) where business is present at more than 50% of all meetings. There is however some diversity in representation here. There are seven departments (the Home Office, Communities and Local Government, Education, Overseas Development, Work and Pensions, Health and Justice) in which a kind of organisation *other* than business is present at the largest number of meetings. Indeed, there are a number of departments in which business is present at a relatively low proportion of meetings: including Education and the Home Office (15% of all meetings), the Ministry of Justice (16%) and Health (19% of all meetings). Business may, overall, enjoy a 'privileged' position within the policy-making process but its access is not uniform.

Third sector organisations – which, as previously noted, include charities and cause groups, social enterprises, co-operatives and religious groups as distinct sub-categories – achieve the highest levels of access in The Department of Work and Pensions (50% of all meetings), Overseas Development (48%) and the Home Office (30%) and the lowest levels of access in the Treasury (3%) and Department of Defence (5%). Finally, there are also significant variations in the attention ministers devote to meetings with journalists. The Prime Minister (37% of all meetings), the Deputy Prime Minister (23%), the Secretary of State for Defence (24%) and the Chancellor (21%) hold the largest number of meetings with journalists. At the other end of this scale, it is perhaps not surprising that the Secretaries of State for Energy (2% of all meetings), the Environment (2%) and Transport (5%) do not meet as regularly with journalists because these are, for the most part, politically less high profile departments. It is however perhaps more noteworthy that the Home Secretary (Theresa May throughout this period) (8% of all meetings) and the Secretary of State for Health (4%) should also have largely eschewed devoting large parts of their diary to meetings with journalists.

Figure 2: Levels of Access Achieved by Business, Third Sector and Media in Departments (% of total meetings attended)



Source: Constructed by authors

Looking across a broader range of organisational categories, we have identified four further instances of significant diversity in access. First, whilst think-tanks were present at only 4% of meetings, they were present at 11% of the meetings held by the Deputy Prime Minister. Second, whilst trade unions were present at only 5% of all meetings, they were present for fully 16% of the meetings held by the Secretary of State for the Environment and 14% of the meetings held by The Secretary of State for Education (despite the overt hostility of Michael Gove - who was Secretary of State between 2010 and 2014 - to the teaching unions). Third, while representatives of local government were present at only 3% of all meetings, it is not surprising that they were present at fully 32% of the meetings held by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. Finally, whilst professional associations were only present at 4.6% of all meetings, within the Ministry of Justice, they attended 39% of meetings (with representatives of the Bar Council and the Law Society each attending 18% of meetings).

Digging further into this data it is possible to identify differences in the levels of access achieved by individual organisations and, at times, levels of access which are consistent with the existence of policy communities characterised by the existence of 'frequent and high-quality interaction' between particular interest groups and a department or sub-departmental unit (Marsh and Rhodes, 1992). First, within the Department for Environment, Food and Rural affairs the National Farmers Union was present at 49 meetings (16.3% of all meetings). This is compared with just 3 other meetings the NFU held with ministers in other parts of the government. To effectively

understand the extent to which the NFU still qualifies as the quintessential example of an 'insider' group, this level of access need to be compared with that achieved by potentially rival groups representing the interests of retailers and supermarkets or environmentalists. The Food and Drink Federation and the British Retail Consortium were present at, respectively, 14 and 13 meetings. Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and the Campaign to Protect Rural England were only invited to attend 13 meetings in total and between them. Even the National Trust – traditionally regarded as the exemplar of environmental respectability – only attended 10 meetings with the Secretary-of-State. Second, at the Department for International Development, the large aid organisations are accorded high levels of access: often being invited to attend the same meetings. Action Aid, Save the Children, The Gates Foundation, Christian Aid and Oxfam attended 41 meetings with the Secretary of State (15% of all meetings). By contrast, the World Bank – a key international organisation with a development mandate – was only present at 3 meetings: once again suggesting that access is not evenly distributed. Finally, the defence, security and aerospace company BAE systems, which was identified in Table 3 as one of the organisations with the highest overall levels of access to government, attending 19 meetings with the Secretary of State for Defence (18% of all recorded meetings). In contrast, large US-based arms manufacturers like Boeing (3 meetings) and General Dynamics (1 meeting), with which BAE regularly competes for defence contracts, do not appear in as many meetings. Again, comparing these internal findings with variation across departments it appears that a company like BAE is not uniformly dominant. Whilst influential within Defence, BAE only had 7 meetings in the Department of Business Innovation and Skills and with the Prime Minister's Office, 3 meetings in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and 2 meetings with the Department of Education and Skills. Looking in more detail at this data it therefore appears that whilst classes of organisation such as business can be seen to have access across government, the precise access secured varies across department and there is significant variation in which specific organisations gain that access

4. Conclusion

In reporting on this data on access to ministers between 2010 and 2015, we have not attempted to test particular hypotheses or arguments about the nature of interest-group representation. Rather, we have presented and begun to demonstrate the insights from our newly-constructed and now available dataset of over 6,000 ministerial meetings. In reporting our findings, it appears that this work does, however, speak to established debates within the political science literature. In particular, it resonates with work on the distribution of power within the state, specifically the power of business, and work which highlights variations in access (and potentially influence) across departments. Our data has consistently shown that certain types of organisation gain far higher levels of access than others when we consider government as a whole. Whilst there are variations within departments it appears that businesses, alongside the media and third sector organisations, gain considerably more access than think tanks, other governmental bodies or individuals.

When compared against the EU Integrity Watch database, there are clear parallels that support our findings. Analysis of the 2014-17 Juncker Commission shows 'Corporate' actors predominate to a similar extent as in our dataset. Corporate actors make up nearly 75% of organisations attending more than 5 meetings with European Commissioners, since the beginning of the Juncker Commission. Of the top 10 groups attending the most meetings, Corporate actors again predominate, taking up 6 out of the top 10 places, with key organisations including Google, Microsoft, BUSINESSEUROPE and DIGITAL EUROPE. NGOs such as Greenpeace and the World Wildlife Fund take up the remaining spots. This replication of corporate dominance of meetings with Commissioners adds validity to our findings, but there are also interesting points of difference for

potential comparison. The media, for example, do not feature at the EU level to a great extent (they are not coded as a single group in the Integrity Watch database), whereas they represent a significant group at the UK level. The similarities and differences between our dataset and EU level data provide significant potential for comparative analysis.

In terms of existing scholarly research, placed in the context of debates around corporatism, policy networks and pluralist theories of power, our findings suggest that 'power is concentrated rather than dispersed' (Richards and Smith, 2002: 173) and that it is possible to identify elites who 'to some degree exercise power or influence over the actors in the system' (Dahl, 1958: 463). The high levels of access secured by groups like the NFU within the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and BAE within the Ministry of Defence suggest the significance of certain organisations for departments tasked with developing and implementing complex agendas. Our data also reveals that these organisations do not however achieve access across the governmental landscape, appearing to support pluralised elite theories of power (McFarland, 1987, Christiansen and Dowding, 1994). The CBI is the only organisation which secures consistently high levels of access across a range of different departments. The requirements and dependencies of specific departments in their policy areas seemed to tie in with the groups ministers met with. Further research is, of course, needed to examine the substance of these meetings and the influence exerted through such interactions to gain a fuller understanding of the significance of this finding. And yet, we argue that this data provides a fruitful foundation for exploring the role of business and the relative distribution of meetings within different departments.

Turning more generally to consider the insights this data holds for debates about interest groups and lobbying, it is interesting that our data does not confirm a widely-diagnosed shift in interest representation. Numerous scholars have diagnosed the growing significance of professional lobbyists, new forms of group mobilisation – often linked to social movements - the Europeanization of representation (Moran, 2015: 97) and the growth of international pressure groups (Richards and Smith, 2002: 190-191). Whilst our coding framework was not developed explicitly to test this proposition, our data demonstrates surprisingly little evidence of these trends. Our attempts to code for professional lobbying organisations produced no results, suggesting that these organisations may not be as significant as proposed when considering ministerial meetings. The rise of social movements was, to some extent, picked-up in our coding of third sector organisations where groups such as Citizens UK (6 meetings), 38 degrees (2 meetings) and Unlock Democracy (1 meeting) did gain access, but this was more limited than access gained by more familiar interest groups such as Greenpeace or the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. Finally, the emphasis on international and European organisations is particularly interesting. The existing literature emphasises the growing significance of international bodies such as the European Union or World Bank and emphasises the growth of new interest groups that target these transnational organisations (Richards and Smith, 2002). From our data, it is not possible to disaggregate internationally from domestically focusing organisations, but it is possible to note that relatively few international bodies themselves gained meetings with ministers. Only 152 meetings were coded as being with foreign governmental bodies or transnational non-governmental bodies. This suggests that whilst the international arena may provide a new platform for interest groups, those same forums are not regularly utilising meetings with ministers to attempt to secure influence over domestic politics.

This database accordingly opens the door to a rich array of questions concerning the relationship between different organisations and the state. Our initial descriptive overview is intended to encourage other scholars to mine and explore this data with a view to casting new light on debates around corporatism, elitism, pluralism, policy networks and much else. Paired with detailed qualitative analysis or used to facilitate historical, comparative analysis this data therefore offers a new resource for researchers interested in the intersection between the state, interests and political governance.

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[i] *Transparency International UK* has published the details of meetings held by ministers over a three-month period between April and June 2014. This has been published by *Transparency Matters* (see http://transparencymatters.transparency.org.uk/). The organisation *Who's Lobbying* has also collated and published departmental records of meetings (see http://whoslobbying.com/uk/departments).

[ii] The coding process was multi-levelled to ensure the reliability of findings. Having devised the coding scheme the authors test-coded one department and compared their findings to refine the coding scheme and ensure consistency. Six paid researchers (all PhD students in politics) were then recruited to code the data. All coders initially coded the test department and were only allowed to code individual departments once they had coded with less than a 5% margin of error as checked by the primary researchers. Upon completion of the initial coding the authors then checked 10% of each department to ensure reliability. Where multiple errors were found, entire departments were re-coded by an author.