

# Ministers reflect

Jim Knight

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## Jim Knight – biographical details

### Electoral History

2010-present: Labour Member of the House of Lords

2001-2010: Member of Parliament for South Dorset

### Parliamentary Career

2011-2014: Shadow Spokesperson (Environment, Food and Rural Affairs)

2010-2011: Shadow Spokesperson (Work and Pensions)

2009-2010: Minister of State for Employment and Welfare Reform

2009-2010: Minister of State for the South West

2006-2009: Minister of State for Schools and Learners

2005-2006: Parliamentary Under-Secretary (Environment, Food and Rural Affairs)

*Jim Knight was interviewed by Nicola Hughes and Catherine Haddon on 28<sup>th</sup> April 2016 for the Institute for Government's Ministers Reflect Project.*

**Nicola Hughes (NH): So if we can start back when you very first started as a minister, do you remember much of what your experience of coming into government was like?**

**Jim Knight (JK):** Yeah, well I remember things. I haven't wiped it completely clean! So I was appointed to Defra [Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs] and as then subsequently was the way, when I was appointed to [the Department for] Education, the first thing I found out about was that I had a bill straight away. I had a Secretary of State in the form of Margaret Beckett who was quite hands off, was clear about what she wanted, and regular and effective and very inclusive ministerial meetings, but I think I only had one one-to-one with her in the whole year that I was working with her, which I took as an endorsement of trust and so on. But that first experience was getting a call from the Perm Sec [Permanent Secretary], closely followed by a call from my private secretary and a box arriving the next day with a certain amount of introduction to the department and anything urgent that they wanted me to see for the following week. And then just being swept into this whole... thing, where your diary is taken over and pretty much your life is taken over, where you're just very rapidly trying to catch up with a bunch of stuff.

I knew my brief then was landscape, biodiversity and rural affairs, that's what the really memorable title was. And I had a reasonable relationship with pretty much all of that – national parks, forestry commission, canals, horses, wildlife, and all that. Rural development crucially, but sort of tacked on to it was having to answer in the [House of] Commons on agriculture, was having to sit in the UK seat on the Fisheries Council, and a whole bunch of things that were relatively technical, which I wasn't that interested in and just had to do. So that's where the hard work was.

**NH: So how did you get your head around both the policy brief and the technical bit of it, but also the role itself and being a minister? Was it just time and getting used to those things?**

**JK:** Yeah it was really. The special advisers [spads] were important. We had, I think, good special advisers that Margaret appointed. I have a view that's about the most important decision the Secretary of State makes, is the spads. So they were good, guiding me and hand-holding and making sure I knew what was important. I had a good, well-staffed private office, and Mike in particular who was my PPS [Principal Private Secretary] was really, really helpful in running the office and sort of guiding me through and we got on well and developed a reasonable rapport relatively quickly. But working out how the Civil Service worked and how to manage the throughput of work, how to get the confidence in the chamber, particularly when mostly I was answering on things I wasn't responsible for. That just took a fair amount of operating outside your comfort zone and getting used to it. There was a certain amount of comparing notes with my mates who had also just been made ministers. It was just after the general election, there was a first wave that came in. I had a very brief handover from Alun Michael who was my predecessor in that role, but as a minister of state dealing with hunting and all the high profile of that and my job more or less was to calm everyone down and for everything to be nice. So I just did 'nice' quite well!

**NH: You then went to Education from Defra. A couple of questions about reshuffles. Firstly what was that like going to a new department? Did you have to go through a new learning process there? And also was there a big difference between the under-secretary role and then the minister of state role that you went in to?**

**JK:** Yeah there was. I mean the reshuffle itself, on that occasion, it was really straightforward. Tony [Blair] rang me up, I had a job I was really enjoying but wasn't political, so I knew that I could very happily stay there and be very happy, but I wasn't going to get anywhere politically. Because in the end

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people didn't care that much about what the Parliamentary Under-Secretary in Defra was doing, unless it was something stupid. So it was a big promotion, so I was bound to say yes. At the time it was also in the spotlight, we had the Education Inspections Bill in committee, when I was appointed, that I then became the bill minister for. It was off the back of a highly controversial education white paper where the government backbenchers were revolting at the idea of taking schools away from local authorities, in the form of trust schools on that occasion. It all seems fairly familiar. The department also had the small task of the tuition fees issues that were still rolling around and Alan [Johnson, then Education] was very good at dealing with, but principally I had to worry about this trust schools bill. And trying to keep rebellious Labour backbenchers like Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell at bay. The call came on a Friday night, Tuesday at 9.30 am I was up in committee being scrutinised on what was possibly the most controversial bill of that session. So it felt like a big leap. And where the workload was – just in terms of answering parliamentary questions, dealing with correspondence as well as a major piece of legislation – it was pretty intense. By then I'd done two bills at Defra, one was quite a big bill, one was a very, very nerdy, techy bill reforming the law relating to common land. So that meant that I was relatively familiar and comfortable in the committee but I'd not read the white paper. I knew a bit about the issue because it was controversial and what Jacqui Smith [who had been Schools Minister] had been doing. I had a call with Jacqui, she was then the Chief Whip, she didn't have much time to do any handover, and I just had to spend two days reading and prepping. But I knew a little bit more about how to deal with civil servants and get the most out of them to get better prepped, but that's the familiarity with having done two bills by then. And everyone in that circumstance knows that you are kind of flying by the seat of your pants and people are fairly generous, and Nick Gibb, my opposite number is fairly generous about all that. And we sort of got away with it and just built confidence. Yeah, schools at another level feel familiar to everyone, even though it's quite technical in some aspects and people aren't as familiar as they think they are but a constituency MP who normally, and I certainly did, would visit a fair number of schools in the course of what they do. So in that respect, maybe it's a softer landing than if you'd landed in the middle of a highly controversial pensions bill or something like that.

**Catherine Haddon (CH): And how did you find the support from the civil service in the two departments then? You said you were more familiar with one.**

**JK:** Well people who were around at Defra at the time might not thank me for saying so, but it still felt a slightly dysfunctional department. It had merged MAFF [former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food] and DETR [former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions] within recent history there and so you had two very different departments culturally, different rates of pay. One was very old, one was very new, one had attracted new bright young talent, one had established talent, let's put it that way, and it was pretty apparent when you dealt with officials in Defra whether they were ex-MAFF or ex-DETR. It was a very scientific, very technical department, whereas Education was much more a single culture, there is a lot of very motivated civil servants there who really just wanted it all to work, wanted everything to be really successful and wanted to work really hard. There were very, very few 'special' officials as I used to describe them to my private office when I was being indiscreet, and generally if there were officials that I knew that [I] wasn't going to work that well with, I would quietly let it be known that there might be a problem.

**NH: Did that work?**

**JK:** Normally. It depended how senior they were. Generally the more junior ones were particularly good actually. I liked to ring them directly if I had a query about a submission and occasionally that ruffled a few feathers, because the hierarchy liked ministers to deal through them, but that was fine. So I really liked them. The bill team, I'm still in touch with one or two of the bill team on the education specials bill so, got on really well with them. And they did a great job in getting me through it.

**NH: You later went to DWP [Department of Work and Pensions], how did that compare to the others?**

**JK:** Yeah there's that other cultural difference, I was going to say. That was most stark actually with the contrast with DWP. So education, schools, big thing, really big issue, we care quite a lot about schools. 25,000 schools that you have, you've got your levers of accountability and inspection and so on, although the inspection service [Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted)] is a non-government department, so you can only influence inspection, you influence accountability and curriculum. But however much we are accused of centralising everything, these were 25,000 different employers, 25,000 different units, it wasn't a machine that you could just drive that easily. You had to try and bring school leaders and teachers with you. I spent a lot of time working with the unions. Whereas at DWP you arrived in this sort of more Soviet feeling building, Caxton House – it didn't have light and rainbows and little munchkins flying around, as it did in the Department for Children [Children, Schools and Families] and so bleaker, more austere and I was responsible for an organisation that employed 80,000 people. And massively different culture, it felt a lot more like a big super-tanker that is just going to be hard to manoeuvre. Clearly, we only had a year before the election, clearly we'd just come out of the crash, clearly Gordon [Brown] needed Yvette [Cooper, then Work and Pensions Secretary] and I to deliver on reducing our unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, in time for the election, clearly we had to really drive it hard. And I think I got a reputation for being quite high maintenance because I did try and drive it quite hard and try and deliver for Gordon who, at times, was impatient in the National Economic Council if we weren't doing very well. And quite rightly. So I missed the sense, the culture in Education, which was a lot more can-do, even though it didn't have the same level of control.

**CH: And how did you find the role of the permanent secretary in those different departments? What did you see the role vis-a-vis minister and permanent secretary?**

**JK:** So to some extent I guess the Perm Sec at Defra was changed while I was there from Brian [Bender] who then went to BIS [Department for Business, Innovation and Skills] or whatever BIS was called at the time...

**NH: DTI [Department of Trade and Industry]?**

**JK:** Yeah might have been the DTI. It became BIS at some point...

**NH: It changed a lot, didn't it?**

**JK:** Yeah! Helen Ghosh took over and I had a warmer relationship with Helen than I did with Brian who was a lot more old school, traditional sort of civil servant. Whereas Helen, I think she only worked four days a week, there was a sense that she wasn't a normal civil servant. And similarly, David Bell at Education had come from local authority and then being the Chief Inspector at Ofsted into Education so he, to an extent, had a different vibe to then Leigh [Lewis] at DWP who I really liked, but he was a lot more like Brian, he was a lot more old school civil servant and so it was more deliberative and there was a process and a way of doing things. Leigh would push back on simple things with me, whereas David would manage me more. Probably. Beautifully, so I never really noticed, but I imagine he did! [laughter]

**CH: Did you or your secretaries of state take any interest in the management of the organisation of how to make the department work better? Or did you not see that in your role?**

**JK:** Well, so Margaret didn't really, Margaret just was very trusting and I know would have shouted if there was a problem and used her spads to help manage me I think. Alan Johnson, the first year in Education, I think he used his spads and then there was a lot more from Number 10, so Connor and then Andrew Adonis [then a junior education minister] was there too, who obviously was very close to Tony so there was a sense of quite a few eyeballs on you. And it didn't really need Alan, because there were so many other eyeballs. Whereas once Ed [Balls] took over, to some extent it became, it was just very

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different, partly because the schizophrenic nature of government was over. We didn't have to answer to Number 10 and Number 11 on everything and try and second-guess everything, suddenly we had a lot more political capital, because of Ed's closeness to Gordon. Because in the end we really only had to worry about what Number 10 wanted and Ed also looked to me as being someone with more experience on the brief than him, so he trusted me to be able to drive that more. And there just wasn't the same... Andrew [Adonis] was probably renegotiating a relationship with the Prime Minister and the relationship I then had with Nick as the Number 10 person was just more straightforward. At DWP, Yvette [Cooper] was interested in broadly the same things as me so we worked pretty closely together and we just had the same level of impatience of just delivering on Future Jobs Fund, delivering on what we had to get done, which was - to some extent there's a bunch of other stuff that you just had to make sure happened and that was OK - but it was just all about unemployment. There was just a ruthless focus on that. In some ways that was good though, so she was managing systems whereas I wasn't.

**NH: Did you ever have much of a sense of working as a ministerial team, not just with your Secretary of State but with the other ministers and junior ministers in departments?**

**JK:** I think in every case we had a good sense of team. At Defra there were some issues where we had to work as a team, so badgers was a perfect example. Where I was responsible for healthy badgers so I had to worry about if we were going to kill them, would we kill healthy badgers? Ben [Bradshaw] was responsible for sick badgers and sick animals, so he worried about that aspect of TB. And Willy Bach was responsible for cows, so he was worried about the cows that were healthy getting the TB, I don't think Elliot [Morley] had a direct responsibility for badgers but... so there were some issues like that that brought you together. But Margaret got a very good sense of team because partly her management style was very, very bonding. Then in Education both Alan and Ed built that up, Ed did really well with the sense of collaboration around the Children's Plan in his early time as Secretary of State and that really pulled the team together well I think. Although there was always a sense that those of us who worked on schools and those of us who worked on children and families, and whilst we got on well as a team, still a sense that there were some things that, that Bev [Beverley Hughes, then Minister for Children, Young People and Families] and whoever her junior minister was, were a bit separate. Then in DWP we came in after a succession of secretaries of state and ministers of state who just didn't get on and had their own advisers at different ends of the same corridor, to coming together and working well and closely together and there's no way we could have got the job done if that hadn't been the case. And yeah I think we were a good team.

**NH: And so you were speaking about bills and legislation and that taking up quite a lot of your energy, particularly at the start in Education. What else do you see as the main roles and duties of a minister?**

**JK:** Well it's a fundamentally important role in respect of Parliament and being able to both be the voice of the executive in your area and be scrutinised as such. And pay proper respect to adjournment debates and giving evidence at various select committees of various arcane natures about things that are actually... I think at DWP I had to go and give evidence to a Lords select committee, so much more formidable in many ways than a Commons select committee because they tended to have really got to know the subject much better. I had to go and talk to them about the European Social Fund with my DWP hat on, which I'd not had any meetings or briefings about in my time as a DWP minister at all. It's just something that happened and suddenly I had to know everything about it. It was highly technical and I knew they would know more about it than me and that was all. So you have to respect that relationship with Parliament. So that I think is really important in the executive role as much as the legislative one.

There's going out and just trying to engage and sell the actions of the executive to the public and that might be through the media, which is the day-to-day grind to some extent. But we did, when I was in Education we had a whole thing around the Olympics, once the Olympics [bid to host in London] had

been won, going around talking to kids with Olympians about the Olympic values and that, sort of, roadshow. Then I did a big, 'Backing Young Britain', that's what it was called, roadshow at DWP around employers taking on young people, getting young people back to work. So yeah, and there would be various occasions when you would be doing that very much more, going out selling, public fronted role. And then within government there's... it was hard not to think that a lot of the Cabinet committee work was a waste of time and it was just a box-ticking exercise, because really the decisions were being made somewhere else. But again, you'd have to respect all of that alleged cross-government working.

**NH: What was it about them that didn't work?**

**JK:** In the end I'm not sure we ever actually made any decisions collectively. It's more, in some sense an information sharing exercise a bit. I think as a regional minister there was a bit that felt more important because we were in the middle of a very difficult time, as a regional minister you were out trying to pull things together and present things back to your region and we needed the opportunity to come together and know what each other were doing and what generally we were supposed to be getting up to in a role that wasn't much supported by the Civil Service and to some extent we were having to do that a little bit more on our own.

**NH: Could I hear a bit more about that role actually? It's quite interesting now as we've still got devolution very much on the agenda. What, as a regional minister, what were you tasked to do in that role and how did that work?**

**JK:** So, obviously we did have a civil service in the form of a government office in the region. So my civil service, if you like, was in Bristol largely. But it was having a very tight relationship with the regional development agency [RDA], a tight relationship with other economic players, including public-sector players, within the region so that if there were problems that they had – if the agenda was getting more people back to work, for example, particularly, and you wanted to get public sector employers to take on apprentices, you wanted them to take on Future Jobs Fund people, but there were things that, barriers that needed to be unlocked. If there was investment that the RDA wants to make but there was some problem over here in another department, then you just had a job to go around fixing things. To an extent, [we were] a voice of the region back in Westminster, we played around a bit with having oral questions from the regions ministers which we did in Taunton one day, which was fun. And just starting to give the region a sense of an engagement with government centrally, in whatever form really. To some extent I think different regional ministers made of it their own thing really. But I saw myself just as a sort of conduit and an unblocker.

**NH: So did you think that worked as a post?**

**JK:** I do. I think given how siloed government is, I think it's quite helpful. It does then depend on the individuals and quite how much respect they've earned with their colleagues across Whitehall I guess, as to how effective that then can become. Politics aside, particularly of devolution, I'd always thought it would be an option to have a department of the nations and the regions where you'd put a lot more emphasis into that sort of function that would seek to join things together and would be quite a useful form of scrutiny within government of what departments were doing and how they were acting against each other's interests. But to some extent that would have been a luxury I suppose, because it's creating a bunch of ministers that you'd have to take away from someone else.

**NH: Yep. And you were fitting that job in with the DWP job, and all the roles and duties you just mentioned...**

**JK:** Yeah. And also for six months coordinating digital across Whitehall as well and then trying to hang on to a marginal seat choice, I singularly failed to do that, but there you go.

**NH: So how did you fit all these things in?**

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**JK:** To some extent you, because that was my fifth year as a minister so you get better at dealing with this stuff. I think you get slightly better at managing the system and therefore getting more value out of it.

### **CH: And also your own time?**

**JK:** Just doing your best with the time. I probably shouldn't have taken as much on as I did, if I thought I was going to hang on to my seat and there might be... I never consciously thought 'well, I'm not going to win again, so I might as well just take on as much as I can because it will be interesting', but there might have been something subconsciously going on which just thought this feels... you know once the crash happened it just feels impossible. And Gordon wasn't popular. I mean when I first got elected I had a majority of 153, in 2001, it was never going to be an easy seat so I'd always had the view if I spent all my time just trying to hang on to my seat and not spend any time trying to make the most out of being in Westminster, then I'd be an idiot. So maybe I just maxed out on that really.

### **CH: Were there any times in all of this where you had either a crisis or some kind of unexpected event or something that hit the department, hit you – how did you manage that?**

**JK:** Yeah I really liked crises, because that's when you get things done. At a minor level at Defra we had bird flu, so I got to look at that, what that looked like as a day-to-day cycle of something where there's a lot of news interest. There was potentially a really big problem, happily it didn't turn out to be so, it kind of went away again but that was a good introduction to what a crisis looks like. I then had a SATS [National Curriculum tests] marking crisis where that all went wrong. We ended up getting rid of the Chief Executive of the Qualification and Curriculum Authority, Ken Boston, because of the way that they handled it. There was then a subsequent independent enquiry led by Lord Sutherland into our handling of it, which potentially was career limiting. But there was something invigorating, thinking 'OK, shit. We have to do something, we have to do something now, we have to have all hands to the pump, we've got to get this sorted.' And in that case Ed looked to me to sort it out and we kind of got there.

### **NH: How much of it is managing the external face and the media pressure and scrutiny versus actually getting in on the ground and fixing the problem?**

**JK:** There was more fixing than presenting. I think the presenting just followed but in that case in order to be credible on the media you had to have got your sleeves rolled up and really be involved with sorting it. Because there's all sorts of questions they can ask you and unless you really are involved you're going to come unstuck. And you know that it's all on the record and this is quite serious and so you can't afford to obfuscate, you just have to do it. So that's fine. I was also in the department when Baby P happened, but I largely was outside of that, so that was just one where I kind of observed and provided whatever friendly support I could. The DWP was just aftermath of the whole international banking crisis, so there was an extent to which there was the same vibe of 'It's a crisis, we've just got to get things done and not worry so much about the politics, not worry so much about anything but get it done, do the right thing.' And actually, that's great.

### **CH: And so what achievement are you most proud of achieving?**

**JK:** Not eradicating an entire species of duck! [laughter]. Because that didn't work very well, but it was quite fun. I think, historically, to initiate and take through the legislation and actually not have the current government overturn raising the education participation age to 18. Something that had been around for 100 years and we got done and it was the right thing to do. Home Access Programme; we got half a million kids online who were offline because they couldn't afford it. I think that was really important. And the Future Jobs Fund at DWP.

**CH: In terms of your role, what do you think was most crucial in achieving those successes?**

**JK:** So raising the participation age was my policy really. Alan obviously approved it and wanted it and so he can take the credit for instigating it I guess, but I saw it all through and worked it through. Home Access was completely mine, and then Future Jobs Fund was a delivery achievement for me, with Yvette, that was conceived of by my predecessor. But it was a great thing to do.

**CH: And did you have any reflections on the policy process in government more generally? We talked about Cabinet committees not working that well, but what about the rest of the machine and how it formulated policy?**

**JK:** So I've only just been thinking about this more recently, but talking to civil servants what I hadn't properly appreciated was a sense that what's valued in the civil service is policy making – which is what politicians think they do. And they think civil servants implement their policy, but of course that's not what the Civil Service thinks at all. So I don't think politicians are as directly involved in policy making as they should be. There's an extent to which political parties delegate too much of that to think-tanks and then it gets tweaked and sorted by the Civil Service. And I think we can be closer to it... because in the end, largely as representatives, we have a direct relationship with the public which we should use to test policy ideas more, rather than just promote policy answers. So I think there's something flawed there, almost in design. I think the civil service is getting better at managing itself, managing talent, implementing things and delivery – probably thanks to the good work of the Institute for Government. But I think there's still a bit of a confusion of role. And then I think our side focuses too much on the House of Commons as where the executive is formed and where all the executive action is, where all of the representative action is, and it thinks that it's leading on legislation as well. And I think that's putting all of our eggs in one basket and is a vulnerability. Obviously there is a reality that I now better appreciate in terms of the Lords role in legislation, but the fact that that's under-appreciated by most members of the executive I think is problematic.

**NH: Can I just dig in a bit to the implementation and delivery side of things? So maybe on the Future Jobs Fund or participation age you do the legislation but then as a minister, what's your role in the implementation and the delivery and how do you ensure that the policy you formulated actually works on the ground?**

**JK:** Well a good minister is worrying about how this will actually work. It's easy... very, very early in my ministerial career at Defra, an official in a meeting about access and rights of way successfully pitched to me the idea that we might have a coastal path for England. So yeah, 'that's a good idea but come back with some more on that, great idea, let's do that.' But being very early on, I just thought 'well, if someone is suggesting that we might want to do that then they must have worked out enough that's viable to even suggest it.' That's a false assumption. It's very complicated to have a coastal path for England. And that is a fairly regular thing that people would say, just float an idea, and you'd think 'I can see how that could be a good idea'. But you don't think enough about, 'so then exactly how are we going to make that work? Why would anyone use that? Why would anyone do that thing? What's the behavioural change that we are going to need where to make that happen?' And then just remind yourself, what is the problem we are trying to solve here? Is it just a good idea because we like it? Are we just legislating because we need to have another bill in the Queen's Speech or could we solve that problem another way that doesn't involve legislation and is actually easier and cheaper for everyone?' I don't think ministers ask those questions enough. I didn't.

**CH: Were there any other frustrations that you found being a minister? Things that you felt in retrospect you wished others or that you'd done differently?**

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**JK:** Legislating was frustrating. Because we did far too much of it. The whole system seemed geared towards legislation, it seemed addicted to legislation and would want to just put more things into your bill. And me, I got better at trying to, well I got more conscious of trying to stop them. I'm not saying I was that successful, because they'd always find their way in somehow or other. But that's probably my biggest frustration because legislation takes up huge amounts of time. And so much of it is unnecessary. That Education and Inspections Bill, trust schools, we talked about that why? It was a massive thing at the time.

**NH: I suppose now when we look back on the 1997 to 2010 government it seems like a time of quite a lot of Whitehall reforms...**

**JK:** A time of plenty and joy! [laughter]

**NH: [laughter] I couldn't possibly comment! But you had lots of changes in Whitehall itself, for example Public Service Agreements (PSAs) and a lot of people see it as a target-driven culture. Did you observe much change within government over the time that you were working there?**

**JK:** Not really. I guess, well you had the big change from Tony to Gordon. So that felt really tangible and that would have been magnified by Ed being my Secretary of State and his close relationship with Number 10. But to suddenly move away from not having to worry about two masters to only one was a really big change. Obviously the crash and everything that followed then was the second change of 'oh shit there's no money'. And just having to justify everything a lot more tightly and the PSAs became a lot more important. But also I became more senior so I might have got closer to some of that anyway.

**CH: And you mentioned that Number 10 and Number 11 relationship, but what about the more institutional relationship of the Treasury to departments? How did you see that from within departments?**

**JK:** To a large extent I was only really exposed to that when Ed was my Secretary of State and Yvette was the Chief Secretary because in that circumstance then the direct ministerial negotiation between the department and the Treasury was done by me, with Yvette, because it was inappropriate for Ed to do it with Yvette [they are married]. So then I saw that more starkly around, to an extent, having to put a number on everything. And some things which didn't feel like they had a number on, they didn't feel like financial questions, so we set up a School Support Staff negotiating body around what it sounds like, and that took quite a lot of negotiation with the Treasury. Kind of obviously, in the end because they were worried about inflationary pressures on public pay, and there's quite a lot of school support staff. But to me it just didn't feel like a massive public spending issue, it felt like a, I guess a labour relations issue – which is slightly different. And a justice issue and sorting things out for a bunch of people who had no real protection and who needed it.

**NH: OK, so final couple of questions. What would be your top tips? Your top pieces of advice to someone starting as a minister now?**

**JK:** I guess politics in this country certainly is not one that manages talent very well, despite your best efforts. And be really conscious of that, be really conscious that you're being expected to be good at this by intuition and by making it up as you go along. Work out what you think you're going to be good at and work out what you know your weaknesses are and then be really clear about how you're going to address your weaknesses. And that will be by drawing on other people's experience, by asking for help, by just having a grown up conversation with the Secretary of State about what your needs are.

**NH: Do you have any examples of where you tried to address any of the things that you perceived as weaknesses?**

**JK:** No. Because I'm learning from hindsight! [laughter] I mean reshuffles and the inability of prime ministers, none of whom had been junior ministers, so they didn't understand what being a junior minister was, I don't think, and reshuffles are all generally a cock-up. And any kind of sense of managing the talent properly and really aligning people and their skills and strengths to where they'd be best deployed as opposed to sort of trying to promote and deal with the patronage and some of the sort of less edifying sides of politics. That's a big frustration.

**NH:** Is that changeable though, or do you think that's just politics?

**JK:** I don't see why - the Chief Whip probably is the right person, but it might be someone in Number 10 - shouldn't have a process of every six months, every year, having an appraisal with a minister and finding out how they're getting on, what they think they're good at and what they think they're not so good at. What they would like their next job to be, whether they would like a move soon or whether they would like to stay where they are. Who else they think is any good, who could do their job. All those conversations are grown-up conversations that other people have, I don't see why political parties are incapable of that. Patronage is patronage and power is... you know I'm enjoying the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Shakespeare's death and watching some of those brilliant plays about power. So some of those are perennial issues, but there are some basic good HR, talent management that I think we should be just doing properly.

**NH:** Anything else that we haven't asked that you wanted to raise?

**JK:** No that will do me.

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Transcript, [Name of Interviewee], [Date of Interview], Ministers Reflect Archive, Institute for Government, Online: [Web Address of Transcript], Accessed: [Download Date].  
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