

Ministers reflect

Liam Byrne

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Liam Byrne – biographical details

Electoral History

2004-present: Member of Parliament for Birmingham, Hodge Hill

Parliamentary Career

2013-2015: Shadow Minister for Business, Innovation and Skills

2011-2013: Shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

2010-2011: Shadow Minister for the Cabinet Office

May-Oct 2010: Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury

2009-2010: Chief Secretary to the Treasury

2008-2009: Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

Jan-Oct 2008: Minister of State (HM Treasury; Home Office)

2007-2008: Minister of State for Regional Affairs (West Midlands)

2007-2008: Minister of State for Borders and Immigration

May-June 2007: Minister of State for Immigration and Asylum

2006-2007: Minister of State for Immigration, Citizenship and Nationality

May 2006: Minister of State (Home Office)

2005-2006: Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Care Services

Liam Byrne was interviewed by Catherine Haddon and Ines Stelk on 7th September 2016 for the Institute for Government's Ministers Reflect Project.

Catherine Haddon (CH): If we could draw your memory back and think to when you first became a minister, do you remember the experience – firstly being appointed, hearing about the appointment and then going into office?

Liam Byrne (LB): Yes, absolutely, because it was my son's birthday and of course I'd only been a MP for seven months, so I think Tony Blair had sort of slightly forgotten when I got elected. So there I was happily celebrating John Byrne's birthday when the call came through about five o'clock from [the Number 10] switch[board], you know, 'Hold the line for the Prime Minister.' Tony Blair comes on and says 'We'd like you to join the Government, we'd like you to join the DTI [Department of Trade and Industry], can you give Alan Johnson [then Trade and Industry Secretary] a call?' And I was just sort of shell shocked, really, because I'd only just got elected and then the phone rings ten minutes later and it's the Number 10 switchboard again, Jonathan Powell [then Downing Street Chief of Staff] comes on the line and says 'Really sorry, it's been a very long day, the Prime Minister of course didn't mean to say DTI, he meant to say Health – can you ring Patricia [Hewitt, then Health Secretary] instead?' So yeah, it was a very early introduction to the process of doing reshuffles. [laughter]

CH: Absolutely. Alright, so what was it like then, first going in? You were Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Care...

LB: Care Services, yeah. So that particular job is often used as the first rung on the ladder for ambitious and supportive members of the government, so it was a case of just getting to the department as quick as possible, seeing Patricia, my new boss, and then just really getting the head round the brief as fast as possible. You forget, actually, that when you come in with a new secretary of state, it actually takes them a bit of time to work out who is doing what job and it takes four or five days to pin down the allocation of responsibilities – and obviously as a junior minister that is the most important thing in the world! For the Secretary of State, that's about tenth on your list of things to be worried about. So that was the first week really, and then it's just a case of immersing yourself in all the reading, taking your predecessor out for dinner, getting the lie of the land and then just banging through as many interviews inside the department as possible to build your map of the landscape and what's going on.

CH: What about support? I mean, certainly from officials, were you inducted into the role?

LB: You are given your kind of standard binder. And you're given a good sense of what your immediate parliamentary to-dos are. When I joined the Treasury we had three days to prepare for a Lords Treasury Select Committee on the Barnett Formula, which was a pretty rapid induction to the job. But I think what the civil service is less good at is structuring a process for you getting your head round the brief, but then actually thinking about your strategic priorities. So I got reshuffled a few times and actually we evolved – we thought about this quite a lot and we basically figured out a process for the first month. So the model I tended to adopt is to set a target of doing a keynote speech one month into the job, to use that speech to lay down the strategic agenda for my time in office and so we would be able to go into the civil service and the private office and say 'Right, it's T minus 20 days, there's a speech in 20 days' time, we need a venue, message and we need a research programme between now and day 20 that gets us round the analysis, the history of policy, some of the strategic problems.' And generally speaking you find that you need to speak to about 20 to 30 people in order to establish what's going on and what you might think about something and what your priorities need to be. We then found that once you've basically set that sort of strategic landscape it becomes much easier for the civil service to know what you are about and where you're going. And what we evolved was a method of then actually creating a

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delivery system on the back of those strategic priorities. Broadly speaking we would use a speech to set out four or five big, strategic priorities.

Generally speaking there is very little delivery management and project management capability in the Civil Service, certainly back in those days. And so what we found that we had to do in parallel was basically build a ministerial delivery unit that had project plans, KPIs [Key Performance Indicators], and which I then used as the kind of monthly meeting with officials to say ‘Right, this was the speech we made, those were the priorities, that’s the timetable we set out – how’re we doing? Are we on track, off track? Where do we need to go?’ And that was a bit of an innovation in most of the departments I worked in. But officials, good officials came to welcome it, because once a month they sat down with a minister for four or five hours. So, you know, we did it extensively. You went through all of your project plans, you looked round corners, you saw where the problems were. And we tended to use those monthly meetings to then structure my follow-up meetings. So we would come out of those board meetings with ten to 12 issues that were, you know, that looked problematic or needed a bit more poking and I would then organise my meetings on the back of those issues. And obviously, in Care Services, there wasn’t a massive amount of stuff going wrong, although we had a big focus to deliver for the Prime Minister Individual Budgets. So we drove through Individual Budgets in the face of quite a lot of opposition, actually, in Whitehall. Once you got to the Home Office, you absolutely needed those delivery management systems. And that’s how I survived for two years as Immigration Minister.

CH: And so were you always relatively clear, in the different jobs you had, about what the priorities would be?

LB: Yeah, you had to be. You spent the first month figuring out the answer to that question basically. So that people had a roadmap. So that one month in speech – that’s the roadmap speech.

CH: Yes. But they were either things that had been in the manifesto or things that were urgent in the department... was there ever any sort of ground clearance of thinking what might be areas that hadn’t been looked at?

LB: Yes, there was. So my kind of instruction to deliver from Tony Blair in DH [the Department of Health] was Individual Budgets – get Individual Budgets done. But there were a couple of policy areas that were pretty messy. So there was one around children’s health, where the initial examination just revealed quite an inchoate state of policy. But the other, more troubling one and more politically important one was dignity in care. So I did quite a lot of work with the Number 10 team looking at the issue of ageing and we began to think through ‘OK, how do we contribute to that wider policy agenda in DH?’ And so we invented the ‘Dignity in Care’ campaign. It was based on a lot of visits and some great work actually with Ian Philp [Professor of Health Care for Older People]. So that was an area of policy that was a bit messy, where our policy research helped us structure a policy deliverable, which actually was then in the instruction letter to my successor. That was one of the things we were proudest of. So Dignity in Care actually became a mainstream campaign based on the work that we did.

CH: Going back to that first ministerial ride, was there anything in your previous career that you felt had really prepared you for it or that you could draw upon?

LB: Yeah, I used everything! I mean, I’d been a strategic consultant for blue chip companies. I had been an investment banker for two years. I had done my MBA at Harvard, I spent four years setting up a dot-com [company]. I used every single ounce of my experience from what was a very diverse managerial past to do my job. The discipline of setting a roadmap, setting strategic goals, communicating those goals and then building a delivery system around the delivery of those goals, those are the most important things that you learn, I suppose, in business.

CH: And did you get any advice or were able to look at any of your colleagues as role models for how to do the job?

LB: No.

CH: You just worked it out for yourself?

LB: Yeah, yeah.

CH: OK. Going back to reshuffles, you talked about how you got the new brief and the new priorities going. But, I mean, you went through quite a few – what was it like as a process? Do you think it's on the horizon that you might be moved on?

LB: Yeah. I mean, you get to learn that there's, certainly in the Labour days, there's kind of three inputs into the Prime Minister: you've got the Chief Whip, you've got the Political Secretary and you've got the Head of the Civil Service. And about a month out, as the drums start beating, you begin to get a sense of what's going on.

CH: Were you able to get any influence over where you might want to move?

LB: None. [laughter] But because of my background I got all the problems. Once I'd cut my teeth on the Individual Budgets, I then moved into the Home Office as Minister for Police and Counter-terrorism and then it was on the back of Charles Clarke's departure [as Home Secretary], John Reid had just gone in and he just took one look at IND [Immigration and Nationality Directorate] and said 'Look, I'm really sorry, but we need your skills reorganising the immigration system' and I did the Home Office reorganisation as well for John. So I did the departmental reorganisation with John and then did IND for two years – created the UK Border Agency [UKBA], introduced the points system, developed the idea of earned citizenship. Now, by that stage, by the time I'd finished that gig, Number 10 was in a state of some meltdown and so I was then drafted into Number 10 to reorganise it for Gordon. And by that stage, we then needed a deficit reduction plan, so I had to go and do the deficit reduction plan. So it was one thing after another.

CH: I might come back to one or two of those. What about, then, different departments, how did they compare?

LB: So basically they got... There's only one department in Whitehall that has its own kinetic energy and that's the Treasury. The discipline of two fiscal events a year mean that the Treasury is quite a seasonal department, and is capable of generating its own momentum. So you had to work quite hard to get a lot out of your officials in the quiet seasons, but actually in the run-up to fiscal events the Treasury has a momentum of its own. Most other departments the minister has to put the kinetic energy in and where you've got low-priority areas... We created a hell of a lot more profile to social care during my tenure there, but it was a fairly sleepy part of the DH and you had to put in a hell of a lot of energy.

The Home Office is obviously very different, because the Home Office is basically Britain's risk management business. And so again, going into the Home Office, I mean there was a certain amount of reorganisation that we had to do, but then what we really had to create were monitoring systems. I mean, if you look back on what we were doing there, we were basically transforming the Home Office's ability to monitor and manage risk of bad things happening – from the wrong kind of people coming into the country through to things going bang. So yeah, the needs of different policy areas were different, I suppose. And the less said about the Cabinet Office, I think, the better really! [laughter] 'Wolf hall' is how one official described it to me last week. It's a pretty good description.

CH: Very good. What we'd like to get is your description or experience of what you think the main roles and duties of a minister are?

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LB: Yeah. So there's four or five key ones. First, the most important: setting political and policy direction for your department and you need to do that reasonably quickly, so that people can crack on with delivering for you. But then as your office extends, it's important to carry on the process of research and exploration to develop and refine that policy direction, calibrate it ever better. Second, you've got to communicate that agenda to the public, I mean, you are a public leader. You are, for your particular part of the government the Communicator-in-Chief and good politicians devote a large amount of time to the inspiration business. Good politics is about inspiring people to seize change and increasingly in a complex and interdependent world, without direct command-and-control systems, your influence is through quite complicated ecosystems and so your ability to mobilise those systems in a certain direction rests on your ability to inspire and that's why you have to be a good communicator.

Third you are obviously accountable to Parliament, good politicians take Parliament very seriously, not least because they learn a lot there by listening. Fourth, unfortunately, I found, you do have to oversee the project management and delivery of your brief. Tony Blair was often, I think, guilty of the politics of wishful thinking and change through edict. And it's a very lawyerly approach to change: you change the law and then you just expect change in the world to happen. Complex change doesn't happen like that, that's why he learnt that you had to set up things like the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit and the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit. Every minister needs a delivery unit and actually that should be based in your private office. I tended to have an assistant private secretary [APS] actually devoted to delivery management. So in most departments I worked in we created delivery units with an APS that was basically in charge of monitoring it, making sure people were doing what they were supposed to be doing.

The fifth big job is the job of curiosity. It's listening and it's bringing insight, intelligence and information into the department. So you are also kind of Listener-in-Chief for your department. That's why visits are so important. I tended in all of my jobs, apart from the Number 10 job and I suppose a bit in the Treasury, to try and spend about a day a week on the road. If you are spending a day a week on the road and a day a week in your constituency, you've just got 40% more input than most of your civil servants. So your radar is just much, much better than theirs. When you have to do immigration casework in some difficult circumstances, in a church on a Saturday morning, you learn an awful lot about the immigration system that many delivery officials just don't get to learn. But those visits have to focus on listening to frontline staff because in all government, as in all complex systems, the wisdom is on the front line. Very often you do find this reflective layer in government, no light bounces down and no light bounces up. And the minister's job is to kind of smash that reflective layer, to help make sure the organisation is permeated by the light and the wisdom from the front line. So those are the five big jobs.

Then you'll have specific tasks, fronting up to the Treasury, winning the resources for your department and increasingly piecing together partnerships with other governments, partners abroad and partners at home. So coalition building and management is increasingly part of how good politicians look at complex change. So it's sort of seven reasonably chunky roles there.

CH: What about the relationships with the Secretary of State then? How varied was that between different secretaries of state and what was key to that relationship?

LB: Well, the key to that relationship is always no surprises. And forward guidance on what you're doing. I got into the habit of writing a weekly note to my boss, every week, that's about three years' worth of weekly notes... So we would basically get into the spin of sending a note to the Secretary of State on a Friday and we would try and meet the Secretary of State on a Monday, Tuesday, the next day, on the back of the note. You need those meetings in order to understand what your political parameters are, but as quite a sort of initiative-based guy, I was often ahead of what was politically possible. So I often needed restraining with my various schemes and ideas for making the world a better place. So yeah, transparency, no surprises, regular communication.

CH: And did some of them seem to operate as if the whole ministerial team was a team? Or were you just having that bilateral, individual relationship?

LB: It was pretty bilateral, actually. I think secretaries of state do their best to try and build and manage teams but they are rarely the team, they rarely have the team that they'd like. So sometimes that is easier, sometimes it's harder.

CH: And what then about the relationship to the department, particularly with the Permanent Secretary [Perm Sec]? As you got more senior would you see more of the running of the department and take more of an interest in that? Obviously you'd have your own in terms of a ministerial delivery unit, but were you thinking about those issues of how the department's run and what the role of the Permanent Secretary was?

LB: Yeah. You definitely see the Perm Sec. I would generally see the Perm Sec once a week at least, and that was true in all of my jobs. And, you know, my relationships with permanent secretaries was often not very brilliant, because I was often in departments to fix a problem that had emerged in the department and in the case of the Home Office some of those problems were pretty serious. So permanent secretaries were sort of wary of me as a very delivery-orientated person. There would often be an unspoken question of 'Why am I having to manage the delivery in this department when you ought to be doing it?' And equally, I'm sure permanent secretaries thought of me, why am I going to these extraordinary lengths to get a grip on things? But when you're trying to rebuild the immigration system, you've just got to take a very hands-on role, really.

Now, the mistake I made was to then try and take that approach to the Cabinet Office, where it was a complete disaster, and I should have been much more thoughtful about my priorities in the Cabinet Office and my delivery approach and the time that I had available to me to change things and so I took in a very delivery-orientated approach to a department that didn't really deliver very much. It was principally a coordinating department, had 27 permanent secretaries in it and didn't take very kindly to this young man trying to get them all organised. So we did have a number of wars of attrition in the Cabinet Office, which were probably a bit pointless. In retrospect I should have done a much better job at calibrating the management approach to the political realities of the moment, the time that I suspected was available and the kind of department that I was in.

Ines Stelk (IS): OK, great. You mentioned you did visits once a week and you spent a day a week in your constituency, but just thinking about the day-to-day, how was most of your time spent as a minister?

LB: So most of my day was spent in meetings on issues that I was trying to get to the bottom of, or try to understand. People have different approaches to things – I tend to work and make decisions in conversation rather than simply on paper. I think it's incredibly difficult to write submissions with all the information that a minister is going to need, and expect a decision. I almost never made a decision just on a submission, because there would always be 20 questions that I'd have and so I would have maybe about 14 hours' worth of meetings a day. You might have between 12 and 16 meetings in that day, so you would start off with prayers in the morning, you would begin the day with a meeting with your private office, just very short, just making sure that everyone knew what they were supposed to be doing that day, just checking if there was stuff in the media that needed to come up and be dealt with.

The jobs I was in, there was quite a lot of media work involved. So you might be doing an hour's worth of media, just doing rounds of radio, and that kind of thing. But then most of the day was then on meetings I had asked for, either on the back of submissions or meetings that flowed from our monthly project board. So it was a very structured sort of day and then Thursday I'd be on the road, basically.

IS: And then how did you balance that with being in Parliament and...?

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LB: I probably spent too little time in Parliament, actually. So I was a predominantly departmentally focussed minister. And again, in retrospect, should have spent more time in Parliament. I went to Parliament when I had a job to do, like the political management of a lot of our immigration reforms was quite tricky. I should have spent more time on that, I think, but again the jobs I had were so big. At one point I was doing three ministerial jobs when I was at the Home Office. It was all a bit mad really.

IS: Yeah. And could you talk us through an occasion when a crisis hit one of your departments and how you handled that?

LB: Yeah, all the jobs I did were in responses to crisis really. So, I suppose, a good example is a break-out from an immigration detention centre. And there's just not a better approach to just getting officials together very, very quickly. Trying to get all the facts on the table, clarify what you think your lines are to take, checking them off with the spads [special advisers] and Secretary of State and then getting them out there as fast as possible. The challenge in a department like the Home Office is that very rarely did the facts that you were originally presented with turn out to be true. So very often you would find the facts changing several times over the course of three or four days and that was very difficult to deal with at the Home Office, but, you know, all you can do is just try and get the facts on the table as fast as possible.

IS: Did you change your approach, noticing that after you'd been there for a while?

LB: Yeah, you were just a bit more careful. You learnt who to trust. You learnt to smell uncertainty and you knew that if something just didn't sound right or plausible you were going to need to direct a lot more resources into understanding the problem much faster. But actually the communication system in both the Blair and the Brown days worked really well, actually. The kind of integration of comms across government from Number 10 was pretty good and pretty quick and pretty clear.

IS: OK. What do you feel is your greatest, has been your greatest achievement in office across the roles that you did?

LB: Well, creating the UK Border Agency, actually – because IND was a pretty shambolic organisation and so creating UKBA, bringing in visas from the Foreign Office, incorporating IND from the Home Office, bringing customs in from HMRC, putting everyone in uniform. You know, I still feel a sense of pride when I cross the border and you see the 'Byrne Blue', as it was known. When you see people in uniform, when you see the level of professionalism in the staff. And many of the systems that we put in place there were pretty revolutionary – introducing biometric visas that were checked abroad, so basically the strategy of exporting the border, using biometric ID to conduct those checks before anyone came near Britain. That was a very satisfying thing. In a funny way I wish I'd been able to stay there for another year, because what was really needed was a complete overhaul of the law. We actually wrote a 200 clause immigration consolidation bill that would have consolidated all legislation since the '40s and that is desperately needed. It was frustrating that the UKBA was then kind of broken up, because people took their eye off it in a way. Just because you create an agency doesn't mean it then just becomes self-propelling and fixes the problem. I mean it was terrifically under-resourced, you had some big data issues like e-borders go badly wrong subsequently and it just, it suffered actually for not having the same kind of ministerial grip that it had in my day. So that is the thing that I'm most pleased about, because it was a proper government transformation job.

The deficit reduction plan was a great plan, it's a shame Gordon Brown didn't want to ever talk about it, but figuring out how you halve the deficit in four years was a good thing to do. But the odd thing is, when I look back on delivering change in government – and I teach this as a case study occasionally – I give the contrast between the UK Border Agency and Individual Budgets. So the UK Border Agency – top-down, executive legal force – is an agency that lasts a couple of years before getting broken up. If you look at Individual Budgets, Individual Budgets are what – a billion, two billion quid's worth of cash now,

growing at about 30 to 40 percent a year. It's a grassroots, individually-based set of decisions. And so when I look at policy reform I've been responsible for, objectively, individual budgets is more successful, because it is now part and parcel of British policy, it's driven by individuals, it's unstoppable, it's a grassroots movement and it started from scratch in 2006. So it's quite, it's quite interesting when you're thinking about change models in government, actually the bottom-up models probably prove to be more sustainable in the long term, because the kinetic energy doesn't rely on a command-and-control minister with a good delivery unit. If you can create the momentum for change out there, in the ecosystem, it becomes self-propelling. So objectively, individual budgets, much more successful than the UK Border Agency.

IS: Do you have any reflections on how you can build that in if you do come from the top-down...?

LB: No... I mean, well I think the challenge for ministers now is that change is much more complex and so you do have to think about change now in much more system terms than I think we expect and so with a smaller civil service, the civil service has got to be much better at system management and understanding incentives in the system and figuring out and advising on how those incentives get aligned, so that change becomes self-propelling. So a good example of that is HE [Higher Education] reform. Higher Education is a very complex policy space [with] some pretty well organised protagonists. The Blair reforms actually have been highly successful, because it empowered a group of institutions and it created this self-propelling model of change which was basically students with a voucher which they have to repay, given a choice as to where they might like to go. That kind of system analysis is going to be increasingly important for all complex change, whether it's tackling extremism, whether it's obesity and I suspect new horizons like personalised healthcare will also rely on actually thinking through a system. And so I suppose the lesson for me, and this is actually the lesson that emerges from [my new book] 'Dragons'... So 'Dragons' is a history of British capitalism, but told through the lives of ten entrepreneurs – but funnily enough, the lesson that emerges is the role of institutions in British economic development. So I've now become a bit of a devotee of new institutional economics, because there would have been no British miracle without Parliament, the Royal Navy, the Royal Mint, the Royal Society, the Royal Exchange, the Royal Courts of Justice and the proto welfare state creating places like Bourneville and Port Sunlight. It was institutions that actually helped change happen, if you like. And so understanding how institutional reform happens and how systems work is now much more important to delivering change than before. This kind of command-and-control model, it's not really terribly viable.

IS: OK, great. Then, moving on to what you found most frustrating as a minister...?

LB: Well, the lack of delivery capability in the Civil Service. I mean, it was appalling. I had a reputation for being a tough bastard and often I was overly aggressive and demanding, but it really was born [out] of a frustration. My low point was teaching a bunch of Treasury civil servants how to do a discounted cash flow model in my office, because they just didn't have the basic skills that you get as a first year investment banker. If I think about the training I got when I joined strategic services in Andersen Consulting [now Accenture], I probably spent a third of my first year in training. I spent probably a month, well, three weeks to a month in training in my subsequent years. That's not unusual in an investment bank either, and so basic analytical tools and techniques are just missing from the Fast Stream Civil Service. I mean, it's absolutely bonkers. Absolutely bonkers. They're just, the training that a Fast Stream civil servant gets is a mile behind what you get in a world class consulting firm. And that is deeply, deeply frustrating and it shouldn't be like that. And that's why when jobs came up at the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit, everyone jumped at them, because it was the only place in government you could actually learn some skills to do your job.

CH: Well, talking about that then and reforms and so forth... You came in obviously 2005, part way through, you've already had, as you mentioned, delivery units, strategy units and so forth, you've also got PSA [Public Service Agreements] so there were a lot of reforms

that the Labour government over those years tried to institute. Were there some during your period that you thought were successful, were starting to have an effect in terms of getting the kind of civil service that would then deliver? Or was it then on the micro-level of things you were doing?

LB: No, I think Gus O'Donnell [then Head of the Home Civil Service] understood the need for greater specialism and so that could have been implemented a bit faster I think. I think there was also a change in culture and certainly we pushed this very hard at the Home Office, around delivery and the importance of delivery experience and so when we created UKBA we made very clear that you weren't getting to the top of the organisation unless you had delivery experience, because in the Home Office above all, delivery is policy and policy is delivery. There isn't some great divide between them. What we found though is that when we went out to hire grade fives and sevens we were inundated with the best and brightest in Whitehall, because that generation of civil servants really wanted to find a place in Whitehall where you could make the transition from policy to delivery. So we had policy officials who were applying for jobs around Heathrow Airport, Border Control at Heathrow Airport. That was fantastic, and it made them much better civil servants. And very often ministers do have more delivery experience, just because they meet the customer for 20% of the week.

So I think there were some changes, but I'm afraid the training and HR development has never been good and it got worse. You could see that when you looked at the DG [Director General] level and just the number of people being sourced from outside at that level. The Civil Service was just not good at giving people that sort of professional track of development that gave them the range of resources that allowed them to be good DGs and then to go on to the top of the organisation. And it's not rocket science because, I mean, it's not cheap, but it's not rocket science and every global consulting firm has been doing it for the last 80 years, so it's not...

CH: What about then the structure of government and how that operates – the relationship with Number 10, the Treasury, the Cabinet Office? What are your reflections, looking back, on how well that allowed you to work as a cohesive government?

LB: Well, it's a very interesting question, this. So there is now a new premium on coordination and integration of policy and policy delivery. It's always been important, but now it really is mission critical. And when you're trying to change a country's direction, it becomes one of the most important things. So under Tony Blair we could afford quite a top-down system of Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, Number 10 Policy Unit, Prime Minister's Delivery Unit, stock-takes. That suited Tony's style well and I think it worked quite well.

It actually took us about six or seven months to find Gordon's preferred style of managing that coordination and integration. So when we reorganised Number 10, we realised through the creation of the National Economic Council that actually that really suited Gordon's way of working. So creating a structure where you had the war room at Number 10 with Gordon in the middle of it and his key people around him, and then you had the National Economic Council, the Domestic Policy Council, the National Security Council and then the Democratic Renewal Council was the weakest bit of it, but you had regional ministers... actually that was a pretty good system for Gordon to manage very quickly integrated policy development and delivery. Unfortunately, it took kind of six or seven months to figure it out, by which time there wasn't an awful lot of time left. But when you look back at the incredible burst of policy creativity at that time, you can see how effective the system was. So we basically overhauled... we transformed fiscal policy, planned half the deficit, but also created the Fiscal Responsibility Act, we should have gone further and created an OBR [Office for Budget Responsibility] life structure. But – well-coordinated fiscal policy, the return of industrial policy and the creation of a department that looked after the supply side in the round. There were some pretty aggressive plans for democratic renewal, House of Lords reform, written constitution, British Bill of Rights. We transformed the

approach to public service reform, so we had studied consolidations globally, since the '70s, we realised that the challenge for public services in the future was basically how do you put standards up when budgets are going down?

We realised that that meant that you had to drive up innovation, you can't audit innovation, the centre has to let go. Therefore we had to retire shed-loads of public service agreements, but because we're socialists we believe in equity, so how do you preserve equity in an innovative system? Well, the answer was what a lot of the Scandinavians and Dutch did in the '90s, was they created rights. So we began to figure out what the public service rights and entitlements look like, how do you create some transparency around whether those rights are being delivered? What are the forms of redress? And so we created this kind of bottom-up approach to public service guarantees and entitlements that was actually a revolution in the way public service reform was conducted. So in fiscal policy, in industrial strategy, in democratic renewal, in public service reform, we created a national infrastructure commission. There was an awful lot of very original and new policy that rested on well-integrated policy and Gordon's governing institutions helped us move at that speed. And the story's not really been told of that period, that year, basically between April 2009 and Gordon at the G20 and May 2010 when he leaves Downing Street. That kind of 11 to 13 month period – incredibly creative, but what it lacked was a strong enough story about the future. And of course it pulled its punches on what was needed to be done on fiscal reform. So when you go back to the document 'Building Britain's Future', and you look at the three-page Gordon introduction, it's quite hard to see some of the golden threads and that was the weakest part of it and it reminds you that when you are, when you are trying to reboot a country, when you're trying to change a direction for a country, actually the national story is the most important bit.

CH: Alright, fine. Final question then, really. Basically, what advice would you give to a minister entering government for the first time? What would you tell them to focus on, how to be an effective minister?

LB: Spend the first month listening. If you have the luxury of time, spend the first month listening. Remember, you'll learn more on the front line than anywhere else in your department, so spending a lot of time on the front lines. If you have customers: listening to the customers, and then moving quite quickly to set direction and then second, build a delivery assurance system that works for your particular style. Those are the three essentials. And then stay listening, because ultimately you are a communicator, you are Communicator-in-Chief and communication is a two-way process.

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