

# Ministers Reflect Lord Dunlop



10 October 2017

# Biographical details

## Parliamentary history

2015–present: Conservative Member of the House of Lords

## Government career

2016–17: Parliamentary Under-Secretary (Northern Ireland Office)

2015–17: Parliamentary Under-Secretary (Scotland Office)

**Lord Dunlop was interviewed by Daniel Thornton and Tess Kidney Bishop on 10 October 2017 for the Institute for Government's Ministers Reflect project.**

Lord Andrew Dunlop reflects on the government's approach to devolution and the Scottish independence referendum. He contrasts this with the Brexit referendum, and questions whether government really learnt from the Scottish experience.

**Daniel Thornton (DT):** Perhaps we could start at the beginning of your ministerial career. You were involved in government before you were a minister, but can you recall how you were invited to be a minister?

**Lord Dunlop (LD):** Yes, I got a phone call, over the weekend after the election, from Ed Llewellyn [Downing Street Chief of Staff], who I had worked very closely with in Number 10, asking if I would consider coming in as minister in the Scotland Office and, as a result, joining the House of Lords. That came as a bit of a surprise, because it's not something I was expecting and not something I immediately said yes to. Moving out of the shadows of being an adviser into the public domain is quite a big step to take and something I wanted to discuss with my wife.

Having thought about it, I suppose my reasoning for doing so was that I only came back into Government as an adviser to David Cameron because of a particular assignment, to do with the Scottish referendum. And I felt after the referendum, there was lots of unfinished business. When you get into an issue that is as important as that, it gets under your skin, and I was keen to see through what I saw as the loose ends of that referendum.

**DT: You were a Special Adviser in Number 10 – I suppose you had to resign during the election, didn't you?**

**LD:** Yes, I resigned during the election, although I was up in Scotland during the election and I hadn't indicated whether I was going to continue after the election. But there was an assumption that I was. As I was driving back down from Scotland on the morning after the election, I was interrupted by phone calls from Number 10 saying, "We're going to put you on a call between the Prime Minister and the First Minister of Scotland and the Prime Minister and the First Minister of Northern Ireland." So there was an assumption on the part of civil servants, if not political colleagues in Number 10, that I was going to continue.

**DT: Do you remember your first day, when you actually started as a minister?**

**LD:** I don't know whether it was because I was such a close member of the Number 10 team, but I think the manner of my appointment was slightly less formal. Having had the conversation with Ed [Llewellyn], I then went to Downing Street, and the Prime Minister was seeing people he was appointing to the Cabinet and other ministerial positions. As it happened, I bumped into the Prime Minister in the corridor and he said,

“Oh, Andrew, you're going to do Scotland for us, and I think we're going to add Northern Ireland to your portfolio as well.”

The thing that surprised me was the gap between being asked to do it and being formally announced – it was about a week. And you have to rightly go through the House of Lords appointments, which is not necessarily a done deal. I suppose I was surprised by that, because I assumed that once you'd got the call, that was it, but it wasn't. For almost a week I was still in Number 10 as an adviser, waiting to be formally appointed as a minister. Visits to Wales and Scotland were early items on the Prime Minister's post-election diary, so I was continuing to work on all of that.

I drafted something that could be released when I was formally announced. In retrospect, it could have been handled better. I was preparing to go down to meet the Prime Minister in Wales and then travel up to Scotland with him, and it was while I was on a train that Number 10 released my name into the public domain. I wasn't forewarned, so the thing that I had carefully prepared never got issued and I wasn't in a position to do anything about it. It had one practical consequence, in that the SNP, and others, immediately latched onto my biography and had seen that I'd worked for Margaret Thatcher, and alleged that I'd invented the Poll Tax, which was not the case at all.

That wasn't a great experience to start with. But having said that, my first outing as a minister was with the Prime Minister meeting the First Minister of Scotland, to talk about how we went forward. I attended the meeting with Nicola Sturgeon and John Swinney [Deputy First Minister]. It puts you in a good position as a junior minister that you're right at the centre of what's going on from the outset.

**DT: When you first arrived at the department, how did that go?**

**LD:** The civil service does a great job in looking at various scenarios as to what's going to happen in the election and preparing briefs for the incoming minister. But I think it was slightly strange for them, in the sense that I was an incoming minister with whom they had worked very, very closely on all the issues. I did get briefings coming in, but it was almost hitting the ground running and picking up where I'd left off, because as a Downing Street adviser I had been quite hands-on with the Scotland Office. In that sense, it was probably slightly different.

On a more practical issue, I was presented with, “Here is your Private Secretary, here is your Diary Secretary.” I was probably a bit naughty because I said, “Actually, this is the person I want to come in as my Private Secretary, and we need to deal with this early on so that the person who's currently allocated to me doesn't think it's a personal slight to them”, as it was not. I just felt that we were going to be dealing with very sensitive issues, and I wanted to work with somebody I had already built up a relationship with and had complete trust in.

I think for ministers it's about the bandwidth. You've got to give direction, give a lead, but you are very reliant on your Private Office to interact with the rest of Whitehall and with the department, to communicate what it is that you want to get done. When I was in Number 10 as an adviser, the Cabinet Office very kindly lent me a very good civil servant to work, if you like, as my Private Secretary, and I was very keen to have her working with me in the Scotland Office. That probably caused a bit of fluttering in the dovescotes, but I think it was the right thing to do to ease my transition from special adviser to minister. I wanted people around me who could help me transition, and I felt this civil servant could do that.

**DT: You obviously had the confidence of the Prime Minister coming into this role, you had knowledge of the subject. What was it that the Prime Minister wanted you to do? What did you find challenging about the new role?**

**LD:** I think it was the public side of it. I would probably say I'm not a natural politician. The House of Lords is a very unique institution and a very different environment to anything I had previously been used to. My maiden speech was made from the frontbench, opening the Queen's Speech debate on the constitution. Obviously, in other walks of life, I had made speeches, but I was not a regular speech maker. To get up in the House of Lords, a full chamber and you look around to see Nigel Lawson sitting off to your right, Neil Kinnock sitting opposite... You're conscious that the subject matter was one that the House of Lords cared deeply about and had been pretty hostile, at times, to the way the Government had been handling the issue, particularly people on my own side. In a maiden speech, people are very kind and all the rest of it. But that was the biggest challenge, how do you transition from being an advisor operating slightly in the background to being suddenly up front.

An amusing thing early on was the *Daily Record* splash, a front-page picture of me and the Secretary of State for Scotland [David Mundell] in the role of Laurel and Hardy, "Another fine mess you've got us into" [laughter]. You sink or you swim.

The civil servants in the Scotland Office were superb in supporting me during that early transition, particularly as it was going to be a busy time. There was quite a lot of legislation that I was going to have to take through the House of Lords, again quite a daunting prospect, but they were very good at supporting me through that.

**DT: You end up dealing with quite a lot of business as a Lords minister don't you? You have to represent the whole spectrum of what the department's up to.**

**LD:** Yes. One of my colleagues always used to joke, "If you wanted to keep a secret, make a speech in the House of Lords." I don't know whether that's true or not, but the Government doesn't have a majority in the House of Lords, it doesn't really have control of the timetable in the House of Lords. As a Lords minister, or spokesman, if you're at the dispatch box you have to represent the Government no matter what you are asked. You can't say, "That's not my brief." I suppose that was something I hadn't really taken on board.

I remember on one occasion coming out of a meeting, my Private Secretary said to me, “Do you want the good news or do you want the bad news?” I said, “Let's have the bad news first.” And it was, “You've got to go and answer an urgent question in the House of Lords.” I said, “Okay, what's the good news?” “Well, it's not for another half an hour” [laughter]. I was literally handed a piece of paper on a topic, I think it was on Northern Ireland. You're very conscious on Northern Ireland that a word out of place can have consequences. I was met just before I went into the chamber, I quickly read the brief, asked some questions of the civil servant and then you're on. You very quickly have to learn the techniques for operating in that environment.

**DT: I guess some issues are inevitably last minute and you're not going to get a full briefing, but did you feel the department was keeping up and preparing you in sufficient time for issues that weren't already part of your brief?**

**LD:** When I was in Number 10, I interfered quite a bit on what I would call the machinery of government issues, because dealing with the Scottish referendum we were in effect dealing with an existential crisis that Whitehall had not really faced before. Although it was the department charged with looking after all of this, the Scotland Office is one of the smallest departments in Whitehall. If it was squaring up to the MoD [Ministry of Defence] or Home Office, where we needed to work with them very closely, it needed – as is the case with most departments – to build a coalition of support across Whitehall to achieve what was required. So we constructed a new way of working. Number 10, The Treasury and the Cabinet Office working with the Scotland Office, creating almost a new cross-Whitehall team to manage all of this.

When I went into the Scotland Office, I was very keen not to lose that force multiplier effect, so when I took the job I said to Number 10, “I'll take the job on the understanding that I retain my role as a special adviser to the Prime Minister and to the Chancellor.” Because when I was in Number 10, I was a special adviser to the Chancellor as well and that was very deliberate on my part to have the leverage to get things done. It was probably an unorthodox approach, but I think as a junior minister at the Scotland Office, my ability to get something done would probably not have been as great.

**DT: They didn't appoint another Scotland special adviser in Number 10 or to the Chancellor?**

**LD:** No, I don't think they did. That led to some interesting sophistry, if I can put it that way, because at the time we were negotiating what was called ‘the fiscal framework’, between the Scottish Government and the UK Government. The Chancellor obviously had the overview of the whole thing, but day to day the negotiation was carried out with the Chief Secretary [to the Treasury]. I used to attend all those negotiations, and the Scottish Government could not get their head around it. When I attended meetings, I was there as a special adviser to the Treasury not a minister and therefore had access to all submissions going to the Chancellor and the Chief Secretary on issues in the devolved sphere.

**DT: This really was a constitutional innovation, it sounds like. I haven't heard of that sort of thing before – it highlights the flexibility of the UK constitution.**

**LD:** We had a debate yesterday in the House of Lords, and I think I was a bit of a lone voice extolling the virtues of pragmatism and flexibility. When you're dealing with a big challenge, sometimes you can only make it work by unorthodox means. But I had tremendous support, not just on the political side but from the Cabinet Secretary and the Permanent Secretary in the Treasury as well.

**DT: In terms of this cross-Whitehall team, was it a network of special advisers in key departments or was it some officials, some special advisers and some ministers? Was it ever constituted as a team or was it more of an informal network?**

**LD:** I don't know whether it was constituted but we certainly thought of it as Team Scotland, with everybody leaving their cap badges at the door for the most part. It was a mixture of civil servants and special advisers. It was a slightly odd situation because you were in a coalition. In a sense, when I was a special adviser, I was mandated by the Prime Minister and the Chancellor to represent the interests of the Conservative side of the Coalition. Latterly, it was Danny Alexander who represented the Liberal Democrat interest, and then you had the Labour Party outside Government, but crucial to delivery. It had to be slightly unorthodox, I think.

But when I became a Minister, the Secretary of State was happy for me to convene cross-Whitehall groups. The civil servants were always very anxious as to who their ministerial sponsor was. During the Coalition, the Chancellor was Chairman of the Scotland Cabinet Committee and the Prime Minister was involved, but they could only be intermittently involved. When I became a minister, it was easier for me to convene cross-government groups, and I think because I'd been working with all of the people as a special adviser, there was less resistance, less territorialism to that.

**DT: What were the differences with the Liberals and how were they managed?**

**LD:** I think when Michael Moore was Secretary of State [2010–13], he had a particular view that he should be managing all of this; that the Conservative brand in Scotland was still damaged and that visits to Scotland by Conservative politicians should be limited. That did cause some tensions, because that's not at all how the Conservative side of the Coalition saw it. The integrity of the United Kingdom was central to the Coalition and the Prime Minister was clear it needed to be owned across the political divide. That's where the Quad was really important, and worked exceedingly well if there were any tensions of that sort. There seemed to be very open relationships. It was about getting a consensus on what the right way forward was.

There weren't huge amounts of tension on the policy issues. At the outset the key question was "How do we negotiate with the Scottish Government an agreement on how you hold the referendum?" There were different views about the best approach. But a consensus was agreed that we should do this by agreement with the Scottish Government. That was controversial in some parts of the Conservative Party who

thought the Prime Minister gave too much away. Particularly when you look at what's going on in Catalonia, I think it was right to build up the credibility and legitimacy of the process by having an agreed way of running the referendum. It has allowed the current Prime Minister to refuse to hold a second referendum.

**DT: In terms of the campaigning for the Referendum, there was a lot of controversy about, amongst other things, the role of the civil service. What's your reflection on that?**

**LD:** Well, it wasn't an election. All the conceivable alternative Governments of the United Kingdom were agreed on the approach. I think the mistake that is sometimes made is that somehow the UK Government or the civil service acting on behalf of the Government didn't have a view. We were not neutral in this. The same was true of the Scottish Government, of whom another part of the civil service were working very hard to put together the independence white paper and all the rest of it. So I think using the resources of the civil service to produce the UK Government's evidence-based Scotland analysis papers was entirely legitimate. There was a restricted period in the run-up to polling day and the civil service completely withdrew at that point.

I suppose the most controversial thing that has been criticised by the Public Administration Committee was Nicholas Macpherson's [the Permanent Secretary to the Treasury] letter. The currency issue was probably the single most important issue in the referendum. The Treasury had done a lot of analysis that had suggested that a currency union would give rise to all sorts of difficulties and would be fundamentally unstable. The Chancellor made a speech in 2013 launching the analysis. He said it was "unlikely" that an independent Scotland and the rest of the UK sharing the pound could be made to work. The speech fell just short of ruling it out completely. The nationalists saw this as evidence that if Scotland voted for independence an agreement would be reached on sharing the pound. The Treasury undertook further, more detailed, analysis of the economic implications of a currency union and the official advice was clear that they would not recommend a currency union. This is the context for Nick Macpherson's letter covering the more detailed piece of analysis, which led the Chancellor in 2014 to definitively rule out sharing the pound. It may have seemed a bit unorthodox but the times, the circumstances, were unprecedented.

**DT: Were you clear about what your priorities were as a minister? Did you ever set out "These are my priorities. This is what I want you to do at the Scotland Office?"**

**LD:** Yes. Our priorities in the first year were very clear. We had to get the Smith package through, so there was a big legislative challenge there. We weren't going to get the legislation through unless we had reached agreement on the fiscal framework with the Scottish Government, because the two things went hand in hand. And that pretty much consumed my first year as a minister. For a small department, that was quite a big set of issues to deal with. The second year was much more dealing with Brexit and dealing with what I think will increasingly become the important mission for the territorial offices: yes, there has been a lot devolution, but what is required now is to attend to, as one of my political colleagues put it, "more union". If you look at when we pressed the

button on the 2014 referendum, all the polling suggested that a lot of people in Scotland are emotionally attracted to independence but many of them wouldn't take that step because of the risks attached to it.

So there is a big job. It's something that will have to happen over time, to re-establish the relevance of UK institutions and the role of the UK Government in Scotland. That will not be an easy task, but that is the big challenge, and that's what we were starting to do in the second year. Being quite proactive, pursuing initiatives like City Deals, for example, that could show the UK Government on the ground, in the buzz phrase 'Delivering for Scotland'. The other thing is, Brexit is presenting lots and lots of challenges, but the opportunity for the UK Government is Brexit has made it more relevant to stakeholders in Scotland than it's been for a very long time. Handle it correctly and there's an opportunity to build on that going forward.

**Tess Kidney Bishop (TKB): I think we'll probably come back to Brexit, but in Scotland you knew the issues, you knew the people. What about on Northern Ireland? How did that work?**

**LD:** The first year I was not a Northern Ireland Minister, I was the Spokesman in the Lords, and there are a lot of very knowledgeable people about Northern Ireland. We've got people who were involved in the Good Friday Agreement like David Trimble, Lord Alderdice, Reg Empey etc. We had quite a lot of legislation to take through, and my approach to it in the beginning was to say, "I know what I don't know therefore I'm going to draw on the huge amount of experience and wisdom in the House." That served me well, we didn't have any problems. There is a consensus of the importance of Northern Ireland and, broadly speaking, all the parties in the UK take a similar approach to dealing with it.

When I became a minister, Northern Ireland was stumbling from cliff edge to cliff edge. We had the implementation of the Stormont House Agreement. The Secretary of State at the time [James Brokenshire] was very tied up dealing with the parties, and therefore his junior ministers were very much deployed to support other aspects of the portfolio. For example, I deputised for him on a lot of the Brexit policy, which I enjoyed. All submissions would come to me and I would be in discussion with officials and then work out what the department's line should be. Then with outreach, the Secretary of State rightly wanted the NIO [Northern Ireland Office] to be much more visible on the ground in Northern Ireland, consulting stakeholders. Particularly when it became the case that the [Northern Ireland] Executive was no longer functioning, I think he felt it was very important that we were seen to be able to communicate to colleagues in Whitehall what the unique and particular interests of Northern Ireland were.

It was quite challenging. But I didn't make any pretence that I came to the job with a great background in Northern Ireland affairs, because I think it would have been a great mistake to try and pretend that you did. I think people appreciated that openness. You're very conscious that you have to be very careful with what you said. The NIO would give you a list of do's and don'ts: "What do you call it, Londonderry or Derry?", as

an example. You are conscious that it's a very unique place. My reflection on it would be that, perhaps even more than places like Scotland, personal relationships in Northern Ireland are very important. Taking the time to invest in those relationships pays a lot of dividends

**TKB: In the weeks after the [EU] referendum, was there lots of media attention on the Northern Ireland Office?**

**LD:** No. The Secretary of State has a profile in Northern Ireland, but I don't think junior ministers, particularly one like me who was only on Northern Ireland issues for part of the time, had a massive profile in Northern Ireland. But with stakeholders, I would be known, and that's where I was deployed, particularly with the business community.

**TKB: How did you balance the Scotland and Northern Ireland work?**

**LD:** That wasn't easy, but the bulk of my time was spent on Scotland because there were only two ministers in the Scotland Office, whereas there were three in the Northern Ireland Office. We agreed an allocation of time, and I had a regular drum-beat of visits to Northern Ireland, which was all programmed in. I was broadly trying to get out there every other week, or for two days in one week. That was the way we operated it. But quite tricky when you're in London, up in Scotland, in Northern Ireland...

**DT: You were in government for the Scottish referendum and for the Brexit referendum. How did they compare and contrast?**

**LD:** I just wonder whether the lessons that we learnt in the Scottish referendum could have been drawn on more fully in the Brexit referendum. There was a Brexit Unit set up in the Cabinet Office. On a couple of occasions, I was asked to go and speak to this team and give my reflections on the do's and don'ts.

I know that the Scottish referendum has the reputation that it was very full on with the economic risk, but I think we modulated it carefully. We were always concerned in the Scottish referendum not to be seen to overreach, and to pace ourselves. Whereas I think in the Brexit referendum, all the ammunition was fired and expended before the short campaign began. I also felt that some of the interventions lacked credibility because they were just a bit OTT.

There were things in the Scottish referendum that we felt we could justify intellectually but we didn't use, because it didn't pass the 'common sense test': would somebody in Maryhill think that was a credible thing to say? In the Scottish referendum, we didn't major on border controls or anything like that, because even though the logic of the Scottish Government's position might lead you down that direction, we just didn't think anybody would take that seriously. Although we were accused of scaremongering, we were actually quite careful. When we came out with a number for what we thought the cost of independence would be, it was a very, very conservative number. You can make all sorts of assumptions to come up with a number, but we were very, very conservative

on the assumptions. It was very important to get third parties to validate the figures we came out with as credible, which for the most part I think they did.

**DT: And this was a position agreed across the parties, the campaign for the Scottish referendum?**

LD: Yes.

**DT: And I suppose the position in relation to the Labour Party had changed by the time of the Brexit referendum?**

LD: Yes. Speaking to colleagues I know that was a big difficulty for them. We had a very good, open relationship [during the Scottish referendum campaign]. It helped that Alistair Darling, a highly respected figure, was running the campaign. Because I was special adviser, I had more scope to act as a go-between. But I think even people in the Labour Party found it difficult during the EU referendum to get the Labour Leadership to play an active role.

**DT: You saw both sides of the Brexit referendum in government, the run up to it and afterwards. What changed after the referendum, in terms of what you saw coming across your desk and the way government was operating?**

LD: Again, pretty significant machinery of government changes, with DExEU [Department for Exiting the EU] being established. From a Scotland Office point of view, we were concerned as these new structures were being developed, how did we make sure that we were able to exert influence? I chaired a group that met weekly with senior officials from DExEU, Cabinet Office and the Scotland Office, all in the same room discussing the devolution implications of all of this. That worked well. But Brexit obviously began to dominate policy making.

**DT: I suppose the relationship with the Scottish Government was coloured heavily by Brexit from then on?**

LD: Yes. After we had negotiated the fiscal framework in Scotland in 2016, there was then the Holyrood election. If you talked privately to senior figures in the Scottish Government, I think the expectation on both sides was that we were about to move into a period of relative calm in our relations. I think both sides were quite weary of the trench warfare and were looking forward to normalising relationships and building a more co-operative relationship. There's no doubt about it, Brexit upset that quite a bit. It was very tricky for a period. I think we've now moved into another phase because of the way things have gone in terms of public opinion in Scotland. I'm no longer a minister, just observing from outside, I think there is another opportunity to build a more co-operative relationship to get sensible agreement on where UK frameworks, for example, are required, and how you go about repatriating powers. That remains to be seen, but I'm an optimist, so I hope that will take place.

Having said all of that, I think a big effort was made to work very closely with the Scottish Government on non-Brexit issues. I mentioned earlier City Deals. I know the

Scottish Government felt slightly bounced into the first City Deal, and they were very cross about it, but I think gradually, with each deal we did, it got better. It was a good example of inter-governmental co-operation. Similarly, on the Industrial Strategy there's a rich seam of common interests. Overall, the devolution settlement is more complex now with lots of shared competencies on things like welfare. My view is that for all the grand-standing in public, there's a lot of good day to day work that goes on between the Scottish and UK governments.

One thing I think is relevant to the quality of inter-governmental relations is devolution capability within Whitehall. When you've got the threat of an independence referendum, it does concentrate people's minds. Whitehall did a fantastic job in rising to the occasion. But when that threat recedes, how do you make sure it's part of the DNA? The Cabinet Office has done a lot of work on devolution capability, but I think that's still work in progress. I don't think it's helped by the way the civil service promotions work. You get somebody who's in a job, and just as they're getting to grips with a particular issue, they're promoted. How do you create a cadre of people who feel confident, knowledgeable about these issues? I don't think we've cracked that yet.

**DT: Moving on, you had the chance to see the Thatcher Government in operation as well as the Coalition and later governments. What do you see has changed from your experience at Number 10 about the way the Government is working?**

**LD:** It was fascinating coming back into Number 10 having been there many years earlier. It was a very, very different place. Technology, 24/7 media has had a huge impact on the way government works. When I was at Number 10 you had the Private Office, you had the Policy Unit, you had Bernard Ingham [Thatcher's Chief Press Secretary]. So there were individual baronies within Number 10. When I came back, structural divisions between the different bits of Number 10 were less. Probably that started when you were working at Number 10 with Blair, and followed through in the Cameron era.

I think there was a tremendous team spirit at Number 10 with David Cameron. You had multi-disciplinary teams working on things, which I think was a positive. The way business was conducted was a bit more real time and informal, a lot of business done over email. Whereas I remember when I was working for Margaret Thatcher, the Private Secretary letter recording what was said in a ministerial meeting became like tablets of stone. It was a bit more free-flowing when I came back. Although, I think there was a pulling back from the sofa government of the Blair years; more structure was required as one of the by-products of managing a coalition.

**DT: You talked yesterday in the Lords about social media and the [Scottish] referendum. As you said, the campaign was rather heated... I'm interested in your reflections on being a minister in the social media age.**

**LD:** I wouldn't pretend to be a great exponent of how you use social media. As a minister, I used to tweet but it was all pretty tame. The people who use social media most effectively are a bit more edgy. It has a spontaneity, an instant impact that you

need to be very mindful of. Issues can take off much more quickly because of social media, and you have less control through the traditional channels of communication. But a lot of work has gone into the professionalism of the Government Communications Service, and I think gradually the Government's use of social media has got a lot better.

**DT: I'd be interested to hear what you consider your greatest achievement while in Government, and what frustrated you most about government?**

**LD:** I like to think that helping to make sure that the referendum was won was a pretty big deal. A lot of people felt it was unnecessarily close. Working with David Cameron, he always thought it would be much closer than the early opinion polls suggested. Then tying up some of the loose ends in terms of legislation, financial settlements, I think that all helped to create the conditions, certainly from a political point of view, in which the Conservative Party in Scotland could recover. Others may disagree, but I would say those were the most significant contributions.

The biggest frustration is I was used to running a business where the chains of communication are very short. You press this button and something happens immediately. Whereas in government it takes longer, you need to understand how the system works and how you get the best out of the system. There have been people who've worked in government, no names no pack drill, who had tremendous ideas, but what's the point in having tremendous ideas if you haven't worked out how you get the system to work with you to deliver those ideas?

**TKB: What would you say to someone that has just been asked to be a minister? What would your advice be?**

**LD:** Although you don't really have the luxury of time, I certainly think in the early days listening is almost as important as speaking. The civil service often gets criticised, but I'm a great supporter of the civil service. I think what the civil service wants is ministers who have a clear sense of direction, communicate that clearly and, by and large, if you work with the civil service, they will help you deliver what it is you're trying to achieve. So that is the advice I would give to an incoming minister – don't see the civil service as the enemy, be clear in your own mind what it is you want to achieve and work with them to try and achieve it, rather than saying, “Right, I'm over here in this political box and here's this great group of people who are trying to frustrate what I'm doing.” Because, by and large, I don't think they are trying to frustrate what you're doing.

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