

Ministers reflect

Lord Green



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Biographical details

House of Lords

2010-present: Conservative Member

Parliamentary Career

2011-2013: Minister of State for Trade and Investment (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Foreign and Commonwealth Office)

Lord Green was interviewed by Jen Gold and Nicola Hughes on 10th September 2015 for the Institute for Government's Ministers Reflect Project

Nicola Hughes (NH): Thinking back to when you first started as a minister, what was your experience of coming into government like?

Lord Green (LG): Well, two obvious points. One, I am not a professional politician. I don't know amongst your [other interviewees] whether they either were or had been MPs. But I come in obviously from a different background.

On the other hand I did start my career in the Civil Service, so Whitehall wasn't a completely strange phenomenon to me. When I graduated, I took what would now be called a gap year and then went into what is now DfID [Department for International Development] and was then the Overseas Development Administration via the normal Civil Service entry route and spent five years there. So five years of working in Whitehall in the early 1970s.

Some things have changed out of recognition since then and some things have changed not at all. And it does mean therefore that I had both an advantage and disadvantage compared to many ministers who are, of course, appointed from the Commons benches.

I had a kind of running start on understanding how Whitehall works. On the other hand, the domain of Westminster was a completely strange animal and the Lords particularly was a strange part of that strange animal! When I arrived I had absolutely not been expecting it. I got the call out of the blue: 'Would you want to be considered to be the trade minister?' to which I initially said 'no'. This came from Jeremy Heywood [Cabinet Secretary] on behalf of the Prime Minister and the conversation developed because I made the mistake of saying 'Not only do I not want to but I can't think of anyone from the business world who would really want to do this' and he said 'Oh why is that?' I said, 'Well there's too much globetrotting, banging the drum and not enough, or at least the perception is, not enough real policy work attached to it: where is the strategy behind this?' We ended up having a conversation both with him and then with the Prime Minister on the strategy for improved trade performance and we ended up mocking up a job description and I ended up doing the job. So that's how I got into it and of course got put in the House of Lords for the same reason.

NH: How did you get your head around the House of Lords and the bizarre workings of Parliament?

LG: Slowly. I think the experience of the trade minister is different from being the Lords minister in other departments where you're the minister in the Lords to transact the business that needs to be done in the Lords and there is another minister from the Commons, or more than one. In this case there was no Commons trade minister. There was no legislation attached to the job; at no point was I piloting legislation through. I laid one statutory instrument in my entire ministerial career and there were relatively few questions. I think there were about six questions about Trade, maybe eight, for half of which I would be travelling overseas and therefore couldn't [answer]; somebody else had to answer it for me.

So apart from hosting the occasional debate and that small number of questions, I didn't have a whole lot of formal business to do. But you were expected to be there when you were here for votes. But that's a different experience at the House of Lords than if you've talked to others who were Lords ministers; they will have had a different experience of it, much more demanding in terms of time commitment and energy and skill set. There is something about the first time you stand at the dispatch box answering a question. It kind of throws you back. You've got your prepared questions there. You've got your prepared answer. And then you get the supplementary question from the person who has asked it and then this barrage of questions and there's only a limited amount of preparation you can do for it.

NH: Did you have any support in all of this?

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LG: I had a private office, of course. So you had all the Civil Service support you'd expect for it. Did you have any tutorial on things to expect? Not really. I mean, people can warn you by saying the things I have just said. Beyond that actually you've just got to do it. People did say 'Remember keep your opening answer to 75 words' and 'Remember what this is, they're not asking questions because they want a lecture on trade policy or the history of trade practice; they're wanting to see if they can score a point, so just treat it like that'.

NH: You talked about how your experiences earlier on in Whitehall had helped to prepare you for the role a little bit. What did you take from your business experience into government? Was there much crossover?

LG: I think it is interesting and I don't know what others have said on this. I regularly found civil servants and indeed fellow ministers apologising saying, 'This must seem very indecisive, complex, bureaucratic compared with the life you'd been used to', to which I'd say 'You must remember that if you work in a large team, a large corporate institution, they're quite bureaucratic too!' And in some ways it is just not as different as all that, which I think is an important point.

I think that if you've been a CEO or a hands-on operating manager, the trick you have got to learn is that being a minister is more like being a chairman than it is like being a CEO. It's not the same as being a chairman but it's more like it. I do remember saying very clearly upfront to Nick Baird who was the incoming CEO of UKTI [UK Trade & Investment], which was the main body I oversaw. 'As far as I'm concerned, you are the CEO and I'm the chairman, and our relationship should work like that. I'm not going to micro-manage what you do. It is for you to put together your team, your senior team. I would expect you to discuss with me the kinds of people you're going for and why and in the case of direct reports, it would be sensible for me to meet them. But that's not in order to be the person who makes the judgment call. It is your job to run it. You are the CEO', which he took to very well. He has now left the Civil Service and has gone on to other things in Centrica. It would have been more of a challenge to some civil servants than to others, because it was a very hands on, operating role. I think it can be something of a challenge to some who have been used to CEO roles to recognise that that is not what the job is as a minister.

NH: And where did you get your idea of what the job is? You clearly had this conception of what you thought it should be like. Was this just based on looking around at others?

LG: Well I had some view of what UKTI was like, and I knew the previous CEO, Andrew Cahn. He and I had a couple of coffees on this once I knew I was going to take the job. And there was quite a long lead time because we basically announced that I was taking the job in September of 2010 to take effect in January, (because I had then to ensure the succession in HSBC). And during that period I was able to spend some time with the likes of Digby Jones and Mervyn Davis who had been the two previous trade ministers; [and] Paul Myners, who had come out of the city and had served as a minister in the Treasury and so on. So I was able to do a certain amount of that kind of preparatory homework.

And you learn a few things. You learn about some of the challenges obviously. One of the ways in which the Civil Service changed was that there was no longer any meaningful succession planning or career planning. Clearly very senior appointments get thought about and aren't just a matter of open competition, but most of it is now just a matter of 'The job's here, it's on the website, you can put your hat in the ring if you want to'. Which is a different world from most large, corporate organisations. There are some big companies that operate very similarly, but most don't. Most have career plans and succession plans and the absence of these takes a bit of getting used to. The fact is that it's much harder in the current political/Civil Service context to identify the person you'd like for a job. Or, for the person who is in a job, what their next career progression should be, in their interests. So you get these bizarre situations when senior people come out of jobs - I noticed this particularly in the Foreign Office - coming out of jobs and having serviced in major ambassadorial positions not knowing what their next job was going to be. I mean you wouldn't do that in the private sector. It doesn't feel appropriate. And certainly it doesn't feel like a good way of making sure you continue to stretch them and continue to develop them. So that took some getting used to.

That's a thing that has changed over the 40 years since I was a junior in the Overseas Development Administration. But then there were some things which have changed not at all. The way in which parliamentary questions [PQs] are answered, for example, apart from the fact that it's now done on a machine, instead of on the typewriter. There's the question, you've got to answer it in 75 words that are exactly accurate and with as straight a bat as possible. If it's a written PQ you've got to be exactly accurate and answer only the question that you're asked and make it exactly accurate and open as few avenues for follow-up as possible. This has changed not at all.

NH: What were the main things you wanted to achieve in office, your big priorities?

LG: First of all I wanted to get UKTI functioning well and that meant providing good service, particularly to small exporters trying to get into export markets for the first time. So that meant working on the way it functioned both overseas and here. An important theme of the job which did come out of that discussion about how the job should be structured was that the Trade minister has a position in BIS [Department for Business, Innovation & Skills] and the FCO [Foreign & Commonwealth Office]. Whilst that was formally true of my predecessors, there was no reality to it. I actually had an office in both places and was punctilious about spending half the week in one, and half the week in the other. And the private office moved with me. The importance of that is that it is the Foreign Office that is obviously responsible for the overseas presences and in whose embassies and high commissions, the UKTI function is embedded. And I wanted to make sure that everybody from ambassador downwards, whether or not they were actually in UKTI or whether they were in the cultural department or even the consular function, should see themselves as being responsible for being helpful to British businesses.

I think this wasn't out of the blue. The general direction of travel had been clear even before that. [William] Hague certainly made a big deal of it and I think we made some good progress on that. And I invested quite a bit of time, for instance, in working on the culture change within the Foreign Office to get them to see that commercial work is not dirty work; actually it's a major part of their *raison d'être*. So, for example, we would hold seminars in King Charles Street, where I would talk to them about the trade imperative about what a business looks for from the Foreign Office when it's trying to get into a new market. We had sessions where we'd bring in the CEO of, for example, Diageo or of Rolls Royce or of a smaller business, a specialist oil and gas business from Aberdeen, to talk to them about what it is like to be in business.

I thumped away at the tub of making sure that everybody read the Financial Times every day. Because actually if you want to be serious, if you want to have serious conversations with business people, that's the journal that you have to read. I remember one person saying, 'Well this costs £2.50 every day!' And I wish I'd known, but I didn't at that time, that it's available free on the FCO internet.

BIS know which way is up and I think BIS is now a very well run department. And I liked the fact that the trade job I was able to get on with it. Vince Cable did not interfere, he did not breathe down my neck. There was a healthy interest in what I was doing but he left it to me and that was good. And I made it my business to get around the country. I went round to every English region and Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland twice a year. There would be a hook to the visit, for example a speech at the Chamber of Commerce. Then we would visit three or four companies and then maybe give a speech at a dinner in the evening. In that way you accumulated all the evidence you needed to go on blowing the trumpet. You accumulated all the chapter-and-verse you needed to go on making the case for exporting. And, of course, to go on thumping the tub for getting more resources into UKTI. We also launched a major new initiative working with the Chambers of Commerce much more closely.

The Chambers of Commerce are unique in this country. They're the only organisation that has business networks both in this country and overseas. If you think about the CBI [Confederation of British Industry] is a lobbying body; the FSB, the Federation of Small Businesses, is a domestic network of small business. The Institute of Directors is something different. The only organisation that has partner organisations dedicated to the British business community around the world is the Chamber. So we started an initiative to support the development of chambers, particularly overseas, to help them grow their support capability for incoming businesses, providing free office space temporarily for new arrivals, mentoring, showcasing the country and its opportunities when they're back here on holiday and

such like.

Then finally, and absolutely not least, there was the Brussels dimension. Trade policy is an exclusive [European] Commission competence. So my role in the Brussels domain was to turn up to the Trade Council meetings as the British representative and participate in the discussions that led to the sign off of mandates to negotiate trade treaties – America being the big one at the moment. That I enjoyed, I must say.

The last Commission had a very good trade commissioner who was tough, occasionally bloody minded which he needed to be, both with member states and with counterparties, and sometimes he was criticised for that by various parties. But you need to be to get things done in that role.

NH: How would you describe the main roles and duties of a minister then, given all these things you were doing?

LG: Well on trade policy, it is to formulate the Government's trade policy. As I say, that is in the context of the fact that the EU Commission, has exclusive competence. It is to orchestrate the various ways in which government can meaningfully support British companies into the export markets and inward investment. My predecessors had not had the brief for inward investment and one of the things we put into UKTI was an inward investment competence run by a former senior partner of Ernst and Young and consisting of a group, some civil servants and some direct hires – who were young, very bright, very innovative and energetic people.

And then not least, I had a Prime Minister who was very active in this cause. When he travelled overseas, firstly he travelled overseas he would regularly take me and a business delegation with him. And he was always extremely good at leading events. He will turn up at trade fairs and he was very articulate, energetic, forceful. So helping him do that was clearly an important part of the job. Over a period of three years I went on several such trips each year.

Jen Gold (JG): In terms of the day-to-day reality of being a minister, I appreciate quite a bit of your time was spent overseas or on visits across the UK, but in terms of your time in London, you mentioned that you were splitting the week between the Foreign Office and BIS. Can you give us a sense of how your time would be spent when you were actually in London?

LG: Miscellaneous things. There was the occasional bit of House of Lords business as discussed. There were a number of ministerial committees, Cabinet committees or subcommittees that I sat on. In fact I chaired one. For a while we had a trade committee which I thought would be a very important way of getting a relevant minister from each of the government departments around the table, because another objective which I have not mentioned was getting other departments focused on this issue.

In health services, for example, we've got a lot of health competence which gives rise to export possibilities: consulting in how you run hospitals and how you run GP services and so on. So the Department of Health or the Department for Education, or the Ministry of Defence – all had export possibilities. And we set up a Trade Subcommittee of the Economic Affairs Cabinet Committee, which I chaired. We would meet once a month and we'd have very action-oriented agendas. So each minister could go away saying, 'Here's something I can bang the table about when I get back to the Department of Health' or whatever. It never worked all that well.

I also sat on the Economic Affairs Subcommittee, the Olympics Committee during and then immediately after the Olympics.

My abiding impression of these ministerial meetings is they are not the most productive part of ministerial life. I can't remember a single meeting where it wasn't the case that at least three out of 12 people had sent their apologies and another three would turn up late and a further three would leave early.

I mean it was very rare that you had any real, meaningful discussion in those meetings. In fact the only real value of them often, was in the five minutes before it and perhaps in the five minutes afterwards when you could have a quick chat with somebody who you'd otherwise not meet from one week to another; or if you did it was only at some formally structured meeting that the private offices have put together and with the civil servant taking notes.

NH: So apart from the people coming and going, what was it about them – I mean why did you think they didn't work?

LG: Because the agenda was always too crowded. Typically they were one hour long, starting five minutes late. A good deal of the people [attending] had gone before the hour was up. So there was often quite a full agenda of papers that were a bit too long and you're asked to agree to something. Either it's blindingly obvious you should agree to it, or it doesn't really matter whether you do or don't agree to it. And if you have a departmental position that doesn't like it, you will have been given the brief to say your bit. But the chance of having a real discussion about what's a good idea, in this or that particular situation, was close to zero.

JG: Given the various commitments that you had, did you have any particular strategies for coping with those competing demands on your time?

LG: Yes. Like running my own diary! I don't mean that because the private office did. But I had the luxury compared with the majority of other ministers, of having no legislative drivers. That's quite an important point because quite a lot of ministers spent a lot of their time getting stuff through the parliamentary machine. I didn't have to do that. An awful lot of ad hoc meetings: a business group wants to see you, a trade organisation wants to see you or they want to invite you to lunch and be the speaker at their quarterly dinner or whatever. And from the point of view of being trade minister, these are generally speaking good things to do because you can bang your drum, you can listen to concerns and issues, you can catch somebody who you know you want to see over something.

And how do you know if you ever succeeded? I think is a good question. The answer is you don't and it's a long haul. My favourite mantra with anyone who would listen is that this is a marathon and not a sprint. We have a trade problem; we've had it for 50 years. There are no magic wands. You're not going to cure it in the lifetime of one Parliament, or even two or three. But unless we stick at it really wholeheartedly over a 10-20 year period, we'll still be in the same position after the end of that. I am not under any illusions that we made a radical change though I do think there is now a much better recognition of the importance of the trade position as a source of growth, a source of jobs creation. We did actually get some work done in BIS, some economist work, which is quite compelling. I've used it again and again: it showed that companies that export are more efficient and become more efficient than the ones that don't. So you're strengthening the backbone of the economy. The case is very robust.

It was part of the job to go on hammering away at that case amongst the policy makers within Whitehall, in a Brussels context, against those who wanted to be more restrictive about opening up for trade. And, of course, with business people.

JG: Was there ever a time during your role as trade minister that you had to deal with an unexpected event or even a crisis in one of the departments? We're interested in how you went about dealing with that?

LG: As somebody who is not a professional politician, it takes some getting used to the degree to which you're in the public eye, even as a junior minister. The fact that The Sunday Times, right at my appointment, went through the accounts of HSBC and started to look at pension contributions, for example. It was very intrusive. I'm not saying they don't have rights to do that, they do; and in any case it is in the public domain and as far as I'm concerned there's nothing embarrassing about it. But it takes some getting used to that you are suddenly in a position where they are looking for things they can dig up.

NH: As well as someone who didn't have as political a background as many of your peers, did you stay connected to what was going on in the party as a whole or did you feel a bit more disconnected?

LG: No. On that point, I remember saying to the Prime Minister when we had our first conversation, 'There's a couple of things you ought to know about me before we go too far down this track. One is that I'm not a member of the Conservative Party or indeed any party. And I'm a floating voter. I have voted for all three of the main parties over time. Is that a problem?' To which he said instantaneously, 'Absolutely not and certainly not in the context of a coalition government'. And so I never did. I'm not a member of any political party although I sit on the Conservative benches in the Lords. I said plainly of course, I'm going to take the Government whip. You can't be a member of the Government and not take Government whip, and there's a Coalition Government whip.

I went only once, for one day to a Conservative Party conference, and that was because I'd been invited to sit on a panel to talk about trade and I took the view that I'll go anywhere to talk about trade. But I made a big effort to say to any parliamentarian, 'If you've got a constituency anywhere in the country you will have businesses, small businesses who have export potential and I will come and stand with you on a panel and talk about it'.

And we did do some great things - for example with Iain Wright who was then my shadow, my opposite number in the Labour party opposition. We went up to Hartlepool, which was his constituency. We had a great 24-hour programme that he put together with Hartlepool businesses. I said I would do this with anybody. I'm not at the least interested in this being a party political thing. And therefore I said to Vince Cable I will come to either or neither of the two party conferences and talk about trade. That never eventuated in anything with the Lib Dems but it did with the Conservatives and that's fine.

JG: In terms of the coalition dynamic in your role as trade minister, did that impact on the role in anyway?

LG: I thought the coalition dynamics worked very well. When I first started going to these ministerial meetings that I mentioned, I didn't know who everybody was. You sat round the table and they've got names and departments, but it didn't tell you which party they were. And in most cases you couldn't tell from either the content of what was being said or the body language, which of the two parties they were from. I thought there was a remarkably good fraternity and collaboration. I thought the dynamics were good. There were clearly moments at very senior levels when that wasn't always true. But nonetheless for working purposes I thought it was extremely good. I can't think of any reason why there would have been a difference in view between the two that impacted trade. The Liberals are by definition liberal about trade and Cameron was certainly, and Osborne. So no, the short answer is no, I thought it was a very effective government in all sorts of way.

Again, I was impressed by the way people work extremely hard. Ministers who really care about doing a very good job. My fellow ministers in both BIS and in the Foreign Office who were the ones I saw most of, were working hard - extraordinarily hard - particularly the ones who've got constituencies on top of all this Whitehall and Westminster stuff. They were trekking off each weekend to their constituencies. I remember Jeremy Browne, who was a good colleague in the Foreign Office, talking about how every weekend he was going down to Taunton and doing stuff at the constituency - turning up on a Saturday night at functions - whatever it is. You're immunised from that as a Lord's minister.

I thought the same about the senior civil servants. That old image of the Civil Service as bunch of Sir Humphrey Applebys; it's very unfair. These were intelligent hardworking people who cared about the work that they were doing. And, of course, incorruptible. We take this for granted at our peril but that's a feature of British public life that I was privileged to see close up and frankly I was very impressed.

NH: I mean coalition dynamic aside, you obviously had two Secretaries of State that you were working with, how did you develop effective relationships with both of them?

LG: Well I saw them both regularly. In both cases there was a weekly departmental meeting. Hague and Cable are different characters for sure. Hague is a born extravert and Vince Cable is almost at the other end of the spectrum. So that differentiates them and meant the dynamics of the meetings were different. But having said that, they were both very able people. Clearly Vince had his arguments with other members of the Government from time to time. But they didn't bear on me. And as I said he would let me get on. In neither case did they attempt to breathe down my neck.

I spent three years at the job. I said upfront I would not do less than two years and not more than three. Not less than two, because you shouldn't do anything for less than two and not more than three because it is quite a gruelling job to be frank – in particular the travel. And I had done that for a long time before with HSBC. On top of which, I think if you come from outside you're either going to have an impact in that sort of timeframe or you're not. The conclusion is the same in both cases. If you're not you should go and move on. And if you are, then by that time, it's actually somebody else [who] needs to routinize it and take it to the next stage because this has got to keep going over a decade or more.

So I said three years is the maximum, and I did three years, which was, by the way, three times the average of the previous nine trade ministers. That tells you a bit about the fact that it's gruelling and about the fact that so often it had been used as a stepping stone to something else. I think that's a real problem with it. But I will say of that three years that I've never enjoyed anything more. It was just hugely stimulating and interesting and varied.

NH: What do you feel was your greatest achievement in those three years?

LG: The establishment of this link with the Chambers of Commerce. We got initiatives going initially with 20 of them in different countries around the world. And then we ramped that up to 41 I think which then got scaled back after my time to 37. If they stick with that, that will over time make a tangible difference to the ability, particularly at small companies, to get into exports for the first time in less straightforward markets.

NH: On the other hand, was there anything you found frustrating about being a minister? Were there areas that you thought you could be more effective?

LG: Anything that didn't go right? Nothing specific. I mean clearly there is the bureaucratic side of it. Every now and then you run into Sir Humphrey Appleby, it isn't all perfect. Every now and then [the mentality was] thinking of good reasons to do nothing. You sometimes saw the sort of behaviour on the part of ministers about which they should've known better. I've been, and I mean it, very complimentary about the niceness of the colleagues you find yourself working with. But there were some exceptions, people who were arrogant and brow-beat their civil servants. In any other environment the civil servant would have shouted back. They were more tolerant of that than you would expect in the private sector. But that's rare. It was not the norm.

But none of that adds up to major sources of dissatisfaction. I can honestly say there's at no point, certainly no point I can remember, where I wished I hadn't done the job. Even when there were times of media intrusion, which was pretty unpleasant. I remember saying to my wife that it would not have led me to say I wish I hadn't taken the job. It was a great honour to be asked to do it.

JG: So you mentioned the abilities of your colleagues and obviously your own experience, how would you go about defining an effective minister?

LG: Well I think a bit depends on what the job is. I do think that not having legislation meant that this is a different sort of experience and a different job.

So the answer to the question has to be limited to the job that I was doing, which is quite operational. You are actually there to supervise a body, UKTI, which has a job of work to do. You have to have an interest in policy. For this kind of role though you have to have an interest in how things work and not just in policy.

As to other characteristics you need, I think you need to be able to get on with people. You need to recognise that nobody is perfect. But if you ask me the question about what makes a successful CEO in a company, the answer is not different. In a company you typically have more precise objectives and more precise measures of how well you're doing – you have to grow profits and return on the capital. The objectives and the metrics are easier. In the public sector, there are more stakeholders. But, to go back to something I said before, people are constantly overestimating the simplicity of life in the corporate world. So they assume the objectives are all very simple. Actually the whole point about modern times is that the objectives are becoming more complex for public companies. It is no longer true that you can simply say 'My only job is to maximise the profits', no. Therefore there are more stakeholders in what a company does than you would have thought to be the case fifty years ago.

So if you like, there is a kind of a convergence between the practical experience of the two kinds of worlds. And therefore a convergence of the kinds of skills you need. They're not identical and it will probably never overlap. The parliamentary domain gives ministerial life a dimension that is just different - though even then, of course, senior business people get summoned for select committees where they have to learn how you deal with the parliamentary domain. But it's not a bread-and-butter part of their experience, which it is for ministers. So it's not that they've converged completely but the gap has narrowed and the differences are less obvious than they used to be.

JG: So if you were to sit down with an incoming trade minister, are there any particular tips that you'd give them, which aren't obvious to someone coming into the role?

LG: Well it would be a digest of a lot of what I've said now I think. Don't be under any illusions about what ministerial committees can achieve. Remember that they will churn out great amounts of paper for briefing for you. Don't assume you've got to read it all. If you've come from a senior business position, you've already learned the art of skimming and you know which bits you've got to really focus on. If you're the kind of person who reads everything that's put in front of you line by line, you will drown.

Don't underestimate the Lords. You've got to take your role in the Lords seriously. The one thing that I remember doing where I think I was not properly prepared, and just didn't realise quite what it involved, was when I did go before the Trade Select Committee in the Lords. I wasn't prepared for the degree of grilling you were going to get there, including on subjects which were only tangentially related to trade. I would have dealt with that perfectly well if I'd properly focused on what it was. As it was, it was okay, but I was conscious at the time and in retrospect, that I hadn't been as well prepared for it as I should have been. And I think I would remind any incomer: at any parliamentary occasion, make sure you're well prepared for it.

I would clearly make the point, if they're coming from the private sector world, that you are suddenly in the public eye which you will not have been used to. There is a degree of scrutiny that you will not have previously had on your private life. Be ready for that.

NH: Any areas we haven't covered or anything you'd like to add?

LG: I'd been the chairman of a large public company. I was very comfortable in telling myself this is a retirement job – meaning not that it's a job in which you can coast, it plainly wasn't that, but it's a job that doesn't lead to anything. Nobody was going to make me a secretary of State. There is no next step that follows from this job. It is what it is. You know in your mind how long you want to do it for.

The value of saying that is to anybody who worries about what this is doing to his or her CV. I was able to say that because I had been a chairman and I was in my mid-60s. I think it's quite important to be able to say that. It gives you a calmer objectivity about what is going on around you and so on than you might otherwise have. I do not mean by it therefore you can be indifferent to what is happening or that you coast through the role. Absolutely not, it's far too demanding for that to be possible. But it does keep things in perspective.

NH: I recall one of our other interviewees saying there was a natural ceiling almost for Lords ministers because you're not trying to become leader of the party or whatever, it's a different perspective to MPs.

LG: Exactly. That's related. It's the same sort of point. I'm not trying to achieve anything for myself. Certainly not trying to achieve anything politically. But also I don't need to prove anything in business terms. I've not gone back into the commercial world. I said I don't want to chair another company to the various head hunters that made suggestions. And it's certainly true politically that I have zero political ambition. If I were a cat with nine lives I wouldn't use a single one of them to go into parliament!

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- We carry out research, look into the big governance challenges of the day and find ways to help government improve, rethink and sometimes see things differently.
- We offer unique insights and advice from experienced people who know what it's like to be inside government both in the UK and overseas.
- We provide inspirational learning and development for senior policy makers.

We do this through seminars, workshops, talks or interesting connections that invigorate and provide fresh ideas.

We are well placed for senior members of all parties and the Civil Service to discuss the challenges of making government work; and to seek and exchange practical insights from the leading thinkers, practitioners, public servants, academics and opinion-formers.

Copies of all the interviews undertaken as part of this project are available at:

www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect

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