

Ministers Reflect Lord McConnell



6 September 2018

Biographical details

UK parliamentary history

2010–present: Labour Party Member of the House of Lords

Scottish parliamentary history

1999–2011: Labour Party Member of the Scottish Parliament for Motherwell and Wishaw

Scottish government career

2001–07: First Minister of Scotland

2000–01: Minister for Education, Europe and External Relations

1999–2000: Minister for Finance

Lord McConnell was interviewed by Akash Paun and Tess Kidney Bishop on 6 September 2018 for the Institute for Government's Ministers Reflect project

Lord McConnell reflects on managing the first Budget of the new Scottish Government, sending signals of change when he became First Minister and promoting an outward-looking Scotland.

Tess Kidney Bishop (TKB): Going back to 1999 when you first started as Minister for Finance, what was your experience of coming into government like?

Lord Jack McConnell (JM): In many ways, it was quite a unique experience. I suppose the only thing that would be comparable in a UK sense would be if someone was appointed to the House of Lords and started work as a Cabinet minister within a couple of days of their introduction. Which I suppose has happened in the past, but even they might have had more warning than we had.

I had spent the campaign in 1999 as Scottish Labour's Environment and Rural Affairs spokesperson. I'd been campaigning on everything from dolphins to sustainable development. Then 10 days after the election in '99, I got a call to go to Bute House to meet Donald Dewar, expecting maybe to have that job or something at a similar level, one of what you might call the second-tier positions in the Cabinet, the smaller departments with more specific topics, or even a junior minister job, only to find out that I was about to become Minister for Finance in the first Scottish Government. I also discovered very quickly in the course of the conversation that this was not a job that was very well thought through.

Akash Paun (AP): Did they just notice you were a maths teacher and thought: "We need someone who can count"?

JM: That was exactly what he said!

TKB: What did Dewar say to you about the role?

JM: The impression I got from him was that he had been persuaded that he needed to have a finance minister, rather than that he genuinely wanted to have a finance minister, which was an interesting position to start from. I then discovered, over the course of the next day or so, that he had been persuaded that there was a need to have somebody who would essentially perform two roles, if you think in terms of the UK Government. One was effectively the Cabinet Office Cabinet Minister – somebody responsible for the civil service, general co-ordination, anything that didn't belong anywhere else I suppose. But also, somebody who would be responsible for budgets and for budgeting. Not least because the first piece of legislation that was due to go before the Parliament, about six weeks after the Parliament received its full powers on

1 July [1999], was going to be the bill that established the financial rules for the Parliament.

Having been persuaded that he needed to have a Finance Minister, it was then agreed apparently that liaison with Europe and external relations generally would also fall within the remit, because there wasn't any other obvious place for that to go.

It felt like this was a job that was not really perceived to be a full-time job, and therefore it had to be filled. But of course it proved to be the most difficult job because there wasn't a department and there wasn't a permanent secretary and there wasn't initially cohesion between the remits. There was the finance section, there was a general administration section that did the civil service type stuff, and there were a couple of other sections that had been thrown in. I found myself, in the first few weeks at least, working with four or five different sections in four or five different departments in the Scottish Government, including the European Office, which was about to open in Brussels, and dealing with everything from the memorandums of understanding with the UK Government that had to be signed off, agreed and then signed with each government department, to what we called the Public Finance and Accountability [(Scotland)] Act [2000], which was basically the financial rules for devolved government. And then there was all this other 'stuff' about the civil service, staff negotiation, and general administrative and other matters.

The European Social Fund was another add on. That was when I first met Michel Barnier, as he was the Commissioner for Regional Affairs, responsible for reviewing all the European development and social funds. Part of my remit – because it was partly European and partly financial – was to negotiate on behalf of the Scottish Government with Michel, for a decent deal for Scotland on the European funding.

So we had this incredible selection of remits in different departments, and it took me most of the first year to shape that 'department' with a cohesive work plan, that ministers could explain and also could be held accountable for, but also get some things done. Which proved to be another interesting challenge!

TKB: How did the civil servants approach that challenge? Obviously it was all new for them too.

JM: It struck me from the first day that this was not a job that had been planned really, by anybody. Undoubtedly, there had been a view in the civil service that there had to be a minister who was responsible for finance and budgeting, but I don't think anybody had planned what the remit of that job would be, and nobody had restructured the civil servants to create a cohesive unit that could work with the minister.

For the first six months or so, the job of co-ordinating those different sections and the senior officials in each section was very time-consuming. There was the Head of

Finance, who was obviously quite a senior civil servant even in the pre-devolved Scottish Office, Head of External Relations, Head of European Funding, Head of something like 'Corporate Services, Administration and Human Resources', and Head of Modernising Government was another one that was thrown in there somewhere. At first it was really just my private secretary, a guy called Donald McDonald, and I who coordinated that. We met each one separately, and I tried to keep a sort of balance of importance between them all.

The bill to establish the financial rules of Parliament was the number one priority, and we had to get that through by Christmas, otherwise we wouldn't have agreed a budget for the following financial year. So that was a major issue. Getting Scotland House up and running in Brussels, which we opened in October, was a major priority, and getting the memorandums of understanding agreed with the UK government departments. So those were the three really big priorities. But I was very clear that they were just responding to the fact that the Parliament had just been created. I wanted there to be a strategy for that European office in Brussels. I wanted there to be a strategy for the budget round the following year, not just a set of rules. I wanted there to be a modernising government plan. And obviously we had to get involved in the negotiations on the social fund. So what we were trying to do was balance all the priorities while meeting all these different sections.

By about the early autumn, I insisted, and got the backing of the First Minister and the permanent secretary for the whole Scottish Government, to have at least a grouping of these senior civil servants in charge of these different functions, who would meet with me once a week in a management committee, to at least manage the portfolio. That allowed me to try and set some direction, get some linkages between the two. Because, for example, what was happening in European Social Funds affected the budget, and what was happening in the budget affected modernising government. What was happening with the memorandums of understanding affected the budget. There were linkages between the different functions. They were not always obvious, but I was trying to turn it into a cohesive department, with limited success maybe...

TKB: How did you go about setting up the financial rules and procedures, leading up to the first budget?

JM: The good news was that on the rules there was a blueprint. So although it was ambitious to try and agree the bill by Christmas, we were fortunate in that there had been a working group that had met over the previous 12 months that had been established pre-devolution. It looked at the way in which similar kinds of legislatures, particularly those that had a proportional system and therefore might not have an overall automatic majority of government, how they budgeted, and also looked at systems where the budgeting process was more transparent and in the hands of Parliament rather than simply in the hands of a Treasury. My remit was basically to turn that into legislation; it wasn't really to question it. So fairly soon after I took over there

was a draft bill, and whilst there were some choices to be made in all of that, it was certainly possible to publish a bill quite quickly.

The other thing we did, which was in the bill in addition to the budget process, was the establishment of a body called Audit Scotland, which was to become the major public sector auditor in Scotland. There were some options on that, but I liked the idea of a streamlined national audit function for Scotland, that merged the current audit functions for local and national government and raised the standard, but also had a direct route into Parliament, independent of ministers. So we created Audit Scotland as a sort of independent voice that would be a check on government. I was quite proud of that – that was one of my first steps.

The budget legislation was pursued through Parliament in a fairly simple way, because that had been the subject of debate over the previous 12 months. There were some arguments around some of the detail, but it wasn't too hard to get agreement on that. Audit Scotland was a slightly different prospect because that was quite challenging to the status quo, but it was a good thing to do. We set up an independent body that was separate from ministers that Audit Scotland would report to, so Audit Scotland was not reporting to ministers, it was reporting to an independent body that was appointed by Parliament rather than by us. And I think that was a very healthy thing to do.

TKB: So you felt like you got quite a lot done in that first year and a bit, by the sounds of it?

JM: We never stopped!

While the bill was challenging because it was the first bill that had gone through Parliament – there were a lot of inexperienced MSPs [Members of the Scottish Parliament], the whole Parliament was just finding its feet – getting the bill through was quite enjoyable because we were doing something new. We were agreeing these quite progressive budget procedures that have actually stood the test of time. And it was nice to be part of the modernising government effort, creating this new transparent system of budgeting, I felt good about that. But that was nothing compared to how difficult it was to actually organise a proper budget exercise amongst a group of ministers who had varying degrees of experience, and in which there wasn't a great deal of collective responsibility.

TKB: Did the collective responsibility develop more as time went on?

JM: It certainly did when I was First Minister, but it was a real shock to the system for everybody, the politicians as well as the civil service. I think there was a general view before '99 that what you had was the old Scottish Office of the UK Government being transferred over to report to this Parliament, but essentially to do things the way they had always been done. That was never going to work, and my view at the time was the

whole purpose of devolution was to do things differently and govern in a better way than had been done before for Scotland. The resistance to that was quite strong. Every Chancellor or Minister for Finance has the challenge of departmentalism amongst his or her colleagues, both within the civil service and with ministers, not working for the team but more defending their own department and their own budget. I think if you combine that with inexperience, which we had a bit of in Scotland, it was quite a difficult environment to get collective decision making on a budget.

But also, if I'm being honest, the First Minister was used to being Secretary of State and making all the decisions themselves, not having a Finance Minister and certainly not having a Cabinet. So that was a real challenge. The First Minister's special advisers saw themselves very much as Labour special advisers. If I was trying to get an agreement across the [Labour-Liberal Democrat] Coalition for a budget, then that could also pose its own difficulties.

TKB: Then in October 2000, Donald Dewar died. What are your memories of that day and the weeks following?

JM: We had had a very turbulent year and a half, I don't think there's any hiding from that. I think, whilst Donald Dewar had the capacity to provide a vision and inspire the nation, he had also found the business of governing quite challenging, in every respect. Working with Parliament rather than just working with the department, the Cabinet rather than a small ministerial team that he knew well and trusted. Setting out an agenda that was more than just doing what we'd always done. I think he found all that really quite challenging, but then it all obviously came to an end horribly, and dramatically.

At that point, and I think it's well documented, there was a very definite attempt to create a smooth succession to another former Westminster politician, who appeared to be next in line. Some of us felt that it was important to have a contest, and to have a debate about the direction we were going to choose following the death of our leader. We had that debate and it was very quick. I was ultimately unsuccessful, but it did allow us to move onto the next phase. So what came after Donald died was not just a continuation of the first 18 months, but was then a debate about devolution in practice rather than the process of creating devolution. But there were a lot of ministerial tensions obviously, about such an event.

TKB: And you then switched to the education portfolio while keeping the Europe and external relations roles?

JM: Yes. I wanted to keep the Finance Minister job, because by that point I felt I was creating a department, I'd been through a budget and I wanted to continue to do that. I felt that I'd made a number of quite significant decisions pointing a way ahead on things like modernising government, on the European strategy, and I'd set up the budgeting

process that I wanted to see through. I felt it would be good if I had the chance to take that all a step further and use the knowledge that I had gained in the first 18 months to good effect. Henry [McLeish, the new First Minister] took a different view. And because of the significant crisis in the education system in Scotland at that time, he wanted me to basically rescue the system, which I agreed to do. But I think as a way of persuading me, he offered to add into the ministerial portfolio a continuation of my role in Europe and external relations, which I'd done a lot of work on. I was making all sorts of contacts around Europe for us as a government and setting out a strategy. It was a bit of a strange portfolio, mixing the two, but on a personal level it kind of made sense. A bit like in the UK Government at the moment for example – Penny Mordaunt is the Equalities Minister as well as the International Development Secretary, which are not necessarily roles you would automatically put together. But you can see how she as a person fits that combination very well.

TKB: Beyond managing the crisis in the education system, did you have particular priorities in that role?

JM: Yes. The one benefit of taking on the education role was that I had actually given it a lot of thought. Over the previous months, I'd become increasingly concerned that the system in Scotland was in deep peril. We had a massive crisis of teacher morale and recruitment, we had crumbling buildings, we had a major crisis of behaviour in the schools, we had started to slip back in modern languages and science and technology. There were all sorts of problems. Over the previous weeks, on an individual level with a series of former colleagues and people that I knew in education, I had been discussing these problems and I had been thinking about writing something or making an intervention with colleagues, to say: "We really need to do something about education, we've got a really bad crisis on our hands here." It just so happened that I suddenly became Education Minister.

Now I had a department, which was quite a change from being Finance Minister. The day I was appointed, I had my first meeting with the Permanent Secretary equivalent of the department, the senior press officer who was going to handle the announcement, my private secretary – I had a new private secretary by that time from the one I'd started with, but I asked her to come with me to the new job – and a couple of other senior officials from the department. I think they were quite surprised when they came in to brief me on the department that I told them the six things or so that I planned to do and that in the next seven days, we were going to announce two of them, and we planned to have some of the others resolved by Christmas. But I think they were very pleased that they had a clarity of direction.

AP: Did you have that much leeway over policy, given the coalition agreement?

JM: I just did it. I probably wasn't as cautious with the need to get coalition agreement on the education policies as I would have been on finance and I was as First Minister. I

think that was partly because I had built a good relationship with the Liberal Democrat leadership as Finance Minister; I knew they trusted me. And I had a Liberal Democrat deputy. So I kind of worked on the basis that as long as I got him signed off, it was his job to sign them off.

And I was moving so fast, it was quite hard for people to keep up, I think. We had this major crisis in the exam system, and within six days of being appointed I had ensured that the whole board for the Scottish Qualifications Authority [(SQA)] had resigned and appointed a new acting chair. I got the permission of the civil service commissioners to do that outside the rules because it was such a crisis. I'd made the announcement that I would appoint a discipline taskforce.

One of the beauties of the education job was that so much of it is about leadership. It's not about getting specific permission for individual decisions or legislation. It is about how you lead the system, how you inspire the system, how you address the crises. I just loved it.

AP: You talked about crumbling buildings and so on, but by that point you were getting quite a lot more money via the Barnett formula...

JM: There were phases. The things I announced in the first few weeks were not financial. My initial announcements as Education Minister to change the board of the SQA, to set up the discipline taskforce, and a number of other things that were announced, were all done without an awful lot of financial impact.

One of the big decisions made in the course of the year, that did have significant financial impact, was the resolution of the teachers' pay and conditions dispute that had been going on for a while, with strikes and so on. Negotiations had started before I became Education Minister, so I wasn't involved in setting up the negotiating team or the remit. I was very surprised to find out some of what had been agreed when I took over, a lot of which hadn't been costed, but I changed some of that. I was able to use the goodwill that had been created in my appointment and by my assertive approach to discipline and the [Scottish] Qualifications Authority. I was able to use that goodwill and momentum to then steer the pay and conditions negotiations to a slightly better conclusion than they would have otherwise had. When I took over, the negotiations had reached a point where they were giving an awful lot to teachers without much real change in return, in my opinion. I insisted on a few things being added in, that made the package work well.

AP: And you having been a teacher presumably helped in negotiations.

JM: It did help. They knew that I knew what I was talking about. So when people said to me there were no bad teachers, I could name a dozen that I worked with! I was able to talk with some credibility on that.

The challenge then was to get that through the Cabinet. I knew the deal was likely to be opposed by the Finance Minister who'd been appointed, so I went to the First Minister directly and said: "You asked me to sort this out, I've sorted it. I've improved the position from where it was when I took over just two months ago. I need your backing." And he said: "Okay." So, again, I kind of used the momentum that I'd managed to create in the position. I think momentum counts for so much as a minister. If you've got momentum, you can achieve so much more.

Subsequently, on the crumbling buildings issue, I had to wait until the following September before I got agreement on that. It took a much longer time. And we had to have a credible plan because that was going to be a long-term financial commitment. But we did get it eventually.

AP: That's very interesting. So then, sooner than anyone would have expected, you did get the second chance to take over as First Minister...

JM: Absolutely. The night before Henry McLeish resigned, I told reporters that he was going to stay. I was absolutely convinced he was not going to go. And I didn't want him to go. I was loving the education job, I was so enjoying it.

AP: But when the opportunity did arise, contrary to your expectations, you took over. What taking the step up to suddenly being responsible for the whole of government?

JM: I think if there was a level of shock in becoming Minister for Finance in 1999, you could multiply that by quite a substantial number in terms of becoming First Minister in November 2001. Taking over mid-term is a really, really challenging thing to do. If you look back through British history at the challenge that faced Jim Callaghan, John Major, even Gordon Brown. It's challenging if you are somebody who is prepared for it, like Gordon Brown. If you hadn't prepared for it... I didn't have my team of advisers, I didn't have a press strategy, I hadn't had a manifesto ready on the shelf of what I'd do if I suddenly became First Minister. I found myself, almost overnight, having to conduct myself as First Minister, and then becoming First Minister inside of about a week. I had to re-organise the advisory team, I had to sort out the Cabinet. Then slowly but surely, having got a bit of stability into the Government, which was the number one priority at that point, I had to start looking forward to do the things I'd always wanted to do, to turn them from ideas and vision into concrete policies.

I think that mid-term changeover is one of the great unstudied challenges of British politics, and now devolved politics. Whoever takes over from in [Carwyn Jones](#) [First Minister of Wales] in Wales this year will face a similar challenge. In different circumstances, because they'll be taking over from a period of relative stability, whereas I was taking over from a period of instability. That challenge deserves more attention from academics and historians, I think.

AP: And the difference with Gordon Brown and Callaghan, for instance, was yours was a coalition. To what extent did you come in and then feel you were bound by what was already agreed, as opposed to being able to really set out a new direction? Because by then it was only a year and a half until the next election.

JM: Well, it's a different system from one where the leader's 'tapped on the shoulder' by the Queen, as they are in the UK. There were two or three days between the Scottish Labour Party electing me as their leader and therefore as candidate for First Minister, and the actual election of a First Minister in the Scottish Parliament. This was not automatic! There may be a coalition but that coalition was agreed under the previous leader. The Liberal Democrats wanted to meet me.

I vividly remember the meeting. I met with the whole Liberal Democrat group. Obviously, I knew Jim [Wallace, Deputy First Minister], Nicol Stephen and Ross Finnie well from working with them as ministers. Fortunately, I had good relations with a few of the more independently-minded backbenchers in the group. I had a good relationship with Donald Gorrie because he was a great believer in local government, and I think I had been a sympathetic local government minister when I was Finance Minister and had demonstrated a commitment to local government that he quite liked. I also knew John Farquhar Munro personally from years before. When I was a very young councillor, I met him as an older councillor and we'd sat next to each other in committees on COSLA [the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities]. And he was a local councillor for a couple of members of my family in the Highlands. So I had a little bit of a personal connection. In politics sometimes those little connections matter, having listened to somebody's genuine concerns about a policy in the past. This helped me in a big moment. So although one or two members of the group were quite challenging to me when I took over, there were other members who could have been challenging who were quite sympathetic to me, as a person they felt they could trust. And in a coalition trust is 99% of the story.

AP: So you passed the interview and took over!

JM: We got there.

AP: You talked about the lack of departmental organisation in finance. What was the First Minister's Office like? Were there more political advisers?

JM: I'm a strong believer in symbolism. I don't believe in change for its own sake, I'm certainly not a believer in instability, I like to be working from a stable platform. But I do believe in symbols of change very strongly, and I think if you're going to lead any organisation, you have to send out very strong signals right away, about where your instincts lie. Because a lot of the advice that you get, a lot of the forward planning that

goes on, is influenced by where people think you're trying to get to. So I think the initial signals are very important.

I was distressed at the way things had gone over the previous two and a half years. It was at times chaotic. I didn't agree with a lot of the decisions that had been made. I felt that we needed to take a new direction, within the context that we had this coalition agreement that I had to stick to, but there were other things I could do that would signify an upping of the game, if you want to put it like that. And I knew the order I wanted to do all of this in. It hadn't taken me long to work that out from a few days beforehand. I needed to get discipline into the Cabinet, stop leaking out of the Cabinet and give ministers who were tired and had lost their way a break. So I asked – well, I didn't ask, a number of ministers were required to leave their positions, some of them because they couldn't be trusted and some because they were tired and needed a break and had lost their way.

AP: Are you talking about Liberal Democrats as well as Labour?

JM: It was pretty much just the Labour ones that I was dealing with at this point. There had been a slight Lib Dem shake up the previous summer, which meant I didn't really need to do that right away. The big priority was to sort out the Labour ministerial team. There were some people of great ability who had been excluded that I wanted to bring in. I wanted a few outriders, people who might bring some fresh thinking or some new approaches. So there was a lot of change in the ministerial team. It was done quickly and was meant to signal that the sort of indiscipline that had been happening in the past would not be tolerated, but also that we wanted to set out a more ambitious agenda and that some of the people coming in would hopefully achieve that. That was the first day.

The second day I appointed the first – at least the first in 400 years I think – solicitor to the appointment of Solicitor General for Scotland.

AP: This is the second legal officer?

JM: Yeah, we've got Lord Advocate and Solicitor General. The Lord Advocate I was happy with: he was a close colleague and someone whose instincts and advice I valued a lot. But I asked the existing Solicitor General to clear his desk, and I appointed a woman for the first time in history. And she was a solicitor rather than an advocate, the first time in 400 years. I gave her the job of sorting out the prosecution service in Scotland, which had been a shambles. There were quite serious criminal cases that were not being prosecuted because people were running over the time when prosecutions could be taken. There were a number of really distressing individual cases in Scotland where people who'd committed very serious, violent crimes were able to get off and not be prosecuted because of the amount of time the prosecuting authorities and police were taking to get them to court. I wanted all that sorted out. So

she came in with a remit to sort it. A very deliberate appointment, and that was a very strong symbol of change as well.

AP: And that wasn't a job for Jim Wallace as Justice Minister?

JM: No, I thought it had to be done independently of politicians. She was also the first person for a long time who was not linked to any political party. Normally, the two law officers were people who had some kind of political links. I wanted somebody who was non-political, who was a prosecutor. I wanted a symbol of change and I got one in a female solicitor, so it was quite deliberate.

On the third day...

AP: I hope you're going to rest in four days' time, Jack!

JM: Aye. On the third day, I made some significant changes to the advisory team, and asked most of the Labour special advisers to leave and started to appoint some new people. It took me a few months to do that. Because of the instability in the system, a lot of people didn't want to come and work in the Scottish Government because they weren't sure how long it was all going to last. So a lot of people said no on the basis that they just didn't think there was enough job security in it. Some people thought devolution wasn't going to last, it was that serious at the time, things were really rock bottom.

AP: And there was the Parliament building crisis as well...

JM: So many things going on, just the whole instability, the whole appearance of chaos and growing disenchantment from the population. So I had quite a tough time filling the advisory posts. But I did ask a number of people to leave, and that again was signifying that what we had been doing was not good enough, we had to be better. Then I also made some changes to the civil service team as well. So gradually, day by day, I sent out some pretty strong signals, I think, that things were going to change.

AP: And even though you hadn't prepared, you worked out those early changes quite quickly.

JM: Yes, because I wanted to send some very strong signals out.

I then spent maybe two months where we stabilised things, getting on top of the job, planning ahead in terms of policy, building the relationships that were required.... The sort of things that, if you're a leader of the Opposition, you will have done for two or three years before you become First Minister or Prime Minister. But when you take over mid-term, you're not prepared for it and you really do have to take some time to build those relationships and to get the tanker pointing in the right direction. So it was only really by January/February that I had the confidence to start announcing significant

policy developments. Although by then I was desperate to get on with it. It took me until then really to be confident enough, that if I was announcing things, then, firstly, they wouldn't be seen as undermining the coalition agreement, which was a four-year agreement. But secondly, that I had people in place, from advisers to civil servants to ministers, who could actually deliver the things that I was talking about.

I think the first major policy switch I made was on the environment, for example when we announced the devolution of the renewable obligations from the UK Government to Scotland. We negotiated that, and we set the initial targets for Scotland to significantly increase its renewable energy generation. But also on other issues like recycling and use of landfill sites. Things I had cared about for 20 years and now had an opportunity to do something about. So we made, again, a deliberate signal of change. Scottish politicians on the left were not used to saying things about the environment and sustainable development; it wasn't really a mainstream political thing in Scotland. But it was always something that I had treated very seriously, so I made my first major policy speech on that. And when I did it, I was certain I had this team in place who could then take it forward.

Similarly, with [Scotland's] population about a month later, when we made the announcement that we'd set up a group to look at what finally became the Fresh Talent Initiative a year later. That was in the early spring of 2002, we started to develop the ideas that then dominated the manifesto at the 2003 election, then the four-year period between '03 and '07, which was when we implemented them.

AP: In that time from early 2002 through to the election of 2003, what did you feel you were able to accomplish? Given the circumstances in which you'd come in unexpectedly as we said.

JM: Apart from the organisational challenge of getting the right team around me and dealing with day-to-day issues as they arose, as they always do, I suppose the key challenge of that period was moving from the first few months – which had to be about stability, about getting the ship back under control and getting a bit more professionalism around, raising people's morale and their confidence in the system – moving from that to making sure that there were both some achievements and some signals of direction that would help prepare for the 2003 election, which was going to be the first test in terms of public opinion.

There were two elements to that. One was to focus hard on delivery in certain areas. I had appointed Malcom Chisholm as the Health Minister, with a view to not just raising morale in the service but making sure we were delivering more on waiting times, waiting lists, and key priorities. And we had to see results on that before May 2003. We had just agreed, in my time as Education Minister, the big teacher settlement, and we had to see some progress on both school building but also on quality in the classroom and results. Similarly in other areas, transport projects and so on.

But we also had to send out some signals about the future, and the sort of direction I wanted to go in. Over that period, that included for example making a big statement about sectarianism in Scotland and taking a stand on that, which I'd always believed people in public life should do but very few people in Scotland had ever done. And looking towards getting a proper strategy for combatting that in a second term. Secondly, a number of significant transport projects, announcing intention and starting to get some significant signals of reform and change. And, thirdly, the indication that we were going to do something on migration and Scotland's population with Fresh Talent. Those three are good examples of how we were giving a strong indication that there had been change. And that did create a platform for the 2003 election, when the manifesto was so important.

AP: In that latter period of the first term, these things were not coalition policy, this was your personal initiative. So how did that work then? The two parties then governing together while fighting the election – did that create challenges?

JM: Yes. If someone is established at the head of a political party and they've been in that position for some time, whether it's as leader of the Opposition or as leader of the governing party, then not only do they have a degree of direction and to some extent authority inside their own party, but they also have the freedom to look to the future and, if they're in government, speak in ministerial terms about what the prospects might be if they have a chance to continue in that role. Instead, in the situation I was in, not only did I have a short period of time – and I think that issue of coming into office during a term of office is a very difficult and challenging one for anybody as successive people have shown at the UK level over the years – but also there was that additional element to manage. Firstly in my own party, ensuring I had the authority to drive the manifesto process in a way that would give us the kind of manifesto that would be right for its time. And secondly, to do that alongside holding the Coalition together, when the Liberal Democrats should be working out their own policies. From about January 2003, both Jim Wallace and I were announcing separate policies, at the same time as trying to govern together. We never found it challenging as individuals, but I think the parties found it difficult and in particular the Scottish media found it difficult. Some of the commentary on it was mischief making, just trying to wind up splits and disputes when they were choices for the future, doing different things. Some of it was just general ignorance on the part of reporters, who were not trying to learn what this new situation actually meant in practice.

In that process of establishing my position, the authority of the position and the future direction that we would take if successful in securing a four-year term, I sought and got some very good advice about being in that situation where the buck stops with you, in advance of and during an election campaign. There comes a point in the preparations for an election campaign where you've heard everybody's advice, you've picked up everybody's ideas, but somebody has to make the decisions on the clarity of the

direction and the priorities for the policies. Accepting that role, insisting on it and then being brave enough to drive it for the weeks and all the ups and downs of an election campaign, is a key role of party leadership, absolutely fundamental in party leadership. I spoke to others who'd been in that situation and got some good advice about the strength that I would need to come through that. And I think it served me very well. The manifesto itself was quite good, but when it came to writing the introduction for the manifesto, I sat down and wrote it myself. It was a very personal statement of what I wanted the Scottish Government to look like and, more importantly, what I wanted Scotland to look like. It then gave us a tone and a direction for the campaign, a message and, I think, a sense of purpose for the four-year term after the election that we would not have had otherwise, if I hadn't done that.

AP: After the election, was it certain that you wanted to go back into coalition? Or was there a process of thinking through your options, given the election result?

JM: My working assumption was, given everything that we could see in the opinion polls during the election campaign, that we were not going to have a significant enough victory to justify doing something significantly different from what we had done before.

AP: I.e. governing alone?

JM: Yes. Therefore, we had to prepare and think about the fact that there would be a second coalition.

There were two reasons for being minded towards a coalition. One was the fact that I didn't feel that we had achieved enough of a mandate to do something different, people were effectively voting to encourage us to go along a similar road. Secondly, we still had a bit of a crisis of stability. Although things had improved in the previous 18 months, in order for devolution, Scottish Parliament, Scottish government to really embed itself and then deliver stable government with a working majority, stability was absolutely critical.

We had prepared for the arrangements for coalition negotiations better than the last time. It was a different situation from 1999, which had essentially been a Labour programme of government in the old Scottish Office pre-devolution, slightly amended for the election campaign and with a few additional ideas for a manifesto from the Scottish Parliament. Then the Labour/Lib Dem negotiations were essentially about the Lib Dems adding a few things into that and taking the odd thing out.

In 2003, my feeling is that both Jim and I went into that election campaign with teams experienced in government and with manifestos that had been written solely in Scotland for the purpose of a Scottish Parliament. They were not manifestos that were hybrids of a UK manifesto, or offshoots of a UK manifesto. They hadn't been approved by anyone in London; they were our manifestos. And we went into the negotiations, not

as two equal partners because they had many fewer MSPs than us, but as two legitimate partners having a proper negotiation as opposed to adding in people and ideas to an existing programme. And I think that was very different.

The one thing I was very careful to do the first weekend was let it be known that I was prepared to talk to the Greens. I didn't want the Lib Dems to think they were our only option. So I did put it out there in the first weekend that we were prepared to look to other options if the first option failed. But our first option was to work with the Lib Dems again.

TKB: Having been in government with them for a few years already, did you feel you knew what their views were going to be on your manifesto and the programme it outlined?

JM: To some extent. I knew how they operated, I knew what would motivate them. I think both Jim and I knew roughly what the red lines were on both sides. I also had given a lot of thought to how to prepare my own party for this situation, because they had been quite disciplined but still pretty reluctant partners for the previous four years. I knew that it would be a tough ask to get them to commit, particularly if they were having to compromise on anything that was in the Lib Dem manifesto and not in ours. I could see well in advance that proportional representation for local government, for example, was going to be a bit of a sticking point. But we had the negotiation and I had written our manifesto in particularly direct terms, with some very specific commitments that I knew the Lib Dems would find difficult to accept. I had written them, not specifically to create that scenario, but in very specific terms so that there was clarity, that we weren't just fudging to get an agreement, that they would have to accept some of our policies in very clear terms if we were going to have to accept some of theirs. So, well in advance of the actual election campaign, I had given a lot of thought to what was in the manifesto that they would have to compromise on so that if we were compromising, it was seen to be a proper negotiation.

AP: Did you set up the Coalition to work in any different way, learning from the first term?

JM: Yes, we did two things. First of all, having concluded the negotiation and got the agreement we went to the [Labour] Party's Scottish Executive and got them to endorse the agreement, which they hadn't done four years previously. That gave us party authority over what we had negotiated and meant it was easier for MSPs to accept the compromises. The Lib Dems were doing the same thing, so I thought in principle it was the right thing for Labour to do. There was only one vote against it in the party executive, despite the commitment to proportional representation for local government. I felt that was a bit of a triumph for everybody involved, particularly Cathy Jamieson, who was the minister who led on it.

The second thing was that we set up procedures to handle better the conflicts that could arise and issues that could arise during the four-year period that couldn't be anticipated at that stage. In the first four years from day one, one of the things that had provoked crises on a fairly regular basis was the fact that issues would arise that were not covered by the coalition agreement and therefore it was quite hard for ministers to be decisive in public when they were a bit unsure whether they had the backing of the troops behind them. So we wanted to have systems that were able to respond quickly to those situations, but also that could just deal with ongoing areas of disagreement or disputes. So we had these committees behind the scenes who, I think, were particularly successful. It was a model that was copied in the 2010 [Conservative-Liberal Democrat] Coalition; [David] Cameron and [\[Nick\] Clegg](#) set up a similar set of mechanisms.

AP: They set up a coalition committee that then wasn't used because they used the 'quad' instead.

JM: Yes, but they knew that had to have something. As I said at your event in 2010, when I predicted that the Coalition would last five years when nobody else was predicting that. There were lots of commentators who said this would never last.

AP: So you'd put thought into the governance side of it. Did it work well as a coalition?

JM: I think it worked well. Working with a relatively small group of Liberal Democrats that included three or four strong personalities, in a parliament where we only had a majority of five, it was a constant challenge. It was relatively easy for individual members, both of their group and my group, to hold colleagues not to ransom, but with a bit of a threat to rebel if tough decisions were having to be made that affected their constituency. For example, one of the reasons that we ended up with a situation where bridge tolls became a national issue when they hadn't really been before, was that individual members had a lot of power in a coalition where there was a very small majority even between the Coalition and the rest of Parliament.

But, given that we had a coalition and given that we only had a majority of four or five over the whole Parliament, I think we achieved a remarkable amount, an incredible amount of legislation, 50-odd bills. And much of it was radical reforming legislation, on criminal justice, health, education and so on. That period, by any calculation, is the most productive and radical of the Scottish Parliament in the four and a half terms it's had so far. It's all the more remarkable for that because of the fact that essentially a group of people that included some very strong-willed, independently-minded individuals managed to do it with a very small majority over two very disciplined political parties, the Tories and the SNP [Scottish National Party], who I don't think ever split at any point in those four years.

AP: But the opposition was then pretty fragmented, because you had the Greens and the Scottish Socialist Party as well.

JM: That was one of the advantages that we had, that there were the two smaller parties. Occasionally, it was possible to get independents or the Greens and the Scottish Socialists to come with us. And certainly, it was possible to try and play different opposition parties off against each other. And also to work with the independents. Thankfully, historically, I had had a good relationship with independents Margo MacDonald and Dennis Canavan, who were both very strong personalities, both of whom had rebelled against their parties [the SNP and Labour respectively] and had very high profiles. But I had been friends with both since the late '70s–early '80s, and even if they were not close to other people in the Labour Party or the Lib Dems, I spoke to both of them on a regular basis behind the scenes and maintained my relationship with them. I was always thankful for it. We could have had a much more difficult group of independents.

AP: So even if you had small, rebellions within one of the coalition parties, you could get a majority. And you only lost one vote.

JM: It only really fell apart on one vote. I think the difficulty was that all of the public pressure, in the Scottish media, in Scottish civil society, from backbench MSPs and from the Opposition, was constantly for more spending. So even though it would have been possible to work through different coalitions with different opposition forces on some policy and reform issues, the big dividing votes in Parliament came down to either UK Parliament issues – which weren't that significant in terms of Holyrood, just setting out markers on votes – but most significantly on spending issues, somebody having a proposal that something became free or for a big increase in budget. In those situations, if you're an independent Member of Parliament or you're a left-wing group like the Greens or the SSP [Scottish Socialist Party], then you're not going to start voting for less public spending. So, they were always on the side of the Opposition, on these really big votes, but we always managed to hold our side together. I will always praise the backbenchers of both parties for their incredible discipline and determination to make sure the Parliament was by and large doing the right thing all the time.

AP: In terms of the key relationship between you and the Deputy First Minister, did it change significantly when Jim Wallace was replaced by Nicol Stephen?

JM: It was different. Jim had a great deal of authority in his own party. He had been a national figure before devolution. He and I had worked together in the [Scottish] Constitutional Convention [the group of political parties, churches and civil society organisations who drew up a framework for the Scottish Parliament] and we knew each other very well. I think we had quite similar political instincts in many areas.

I had worked with Nicol before when I was Minister for Education and he was Deputy, and we'd got to know each other. So we did have a trusting relationship between us that was built on experience. But there was a difference in the relationship, I think simply because of different personalities and the different level of authority that Nicol had. A bit like me in the previous term, he had come in half way through the term and had managed to get himself elected, but you've still got to build up your authority and position over a period of time. It was always going to be more difficult in the second half of a parliamentary term to hold the Coalition together, but it became slightly more difficult in those new circumstances.

Nicol also found the combination of ministerial role and being Deputy First Minister maybe slightly more challenging than Jim had. I think Jim enjoyed having a ministerial role alongside being Deputy First Minister. He wanted to do both, and he advised Clegg to do both at the time of the 2010 Coalition. Nicol took on that job with both roles at the time, but certainly with hindsight, I think Nicol would have been better to change the role slightly so that it wasn't just him doing what Jim had always done. With maybe him as Deputy First Minister and in a different ministerial role, not a department but perhaps in a cross-government role of some kind. It would have been a good thing for him to signal change and it would have been a good for us to forge a different kind of relationship at that point.

It's a very difficult thing. I can see where Jim was coming from. From Nick Clegg's point of view, if he had been Home Secretary in the period between 2010 and 2015, I suspect he might look back on that period of government with a sense of achievement in terms of things that he did in the department rather than just being the guy who held it all together.

Jim liked having a position in a department, but I was never sure it was really healthy. That partly came from my experience as Finance Minister. When I was dealing with Jim as Justice Minister as he was then, across the table in the annual budget negotiation, I was conscious I was dealing with the Deputy First Minister, I wasn't just dealing with the Justice Minister. I think it skewed relationships inside the Cabinet a bit in a way that wasn't ideal.

But then, none of this is ideal. Politics is about working with what you've got and finding ways of making the right decisions and then implementing them. So you adapt to your circumstances. But in an ideal world, and I certainly said it to Nicol at the time, not having a portfolio was worth thinking about. But he wanted to have one, so...

TKB: Looking over your whole period in government, how did you manage the relationship with London? What was the balance of formal and informal communication?

JM: It was mixed. It was occasionally turbulent, it was sometimes very productive. We sometimes watched with astonishment at what was going on in London, the way the Government was being run there compared to our attempt at a more disciplined and delivery focused approach. There were ups and downs in the whole thing.

I thought 2003 was a significant opportunity, given that we were into the second term of the devolved Parliament, for Tony [Blair] to reform the way that the British Cabinet was structured. I had made no secret of my belief that the role of the territorial secretary of state had had its day and that the time was right to change that. He tried to change it in June 2003, made a mess of the reshuffle and ended up conceding the posts days later in reshuffling his reshuffle, if I remember rightly. So that kind of stuff was going on.

All the time, there was constant tension between Number 10, Number 11 and all the other acolytes. Then, of course, there were the significant controversies that opposition parties in particular kept trying to make the focal point in the Scottish Parliament, whether that was the Iraq War or any one of a number of other issues. So the whole environment was quite difficult to operate within. My relationship with Tony in particular remained pretty positive. I also had a very good relationship with Charlie Falconer, who did have a bit of an overseeing role in his position as Lord Chancellor, and I would talk to him on a fairly regular basis about how things were progressing here. Individual ministers built relationships. And individual ministers built relationships.

TKB: Did you talk to Scottish Secretaries directly?

JM: Yes, we used to have regular meetings, but they kind of died away really. There wasn't a lot of substance to them.

There were some significant policy positives. The Fresh Talent Initiative that was agreed initially by David Blunkett [then Home Secretary] was probably one of the most radical things that's been agreed in the UK in the last 20–30 years. He was extremely positive about that. I think Blunkett definitely understood that the UK state had changed, that it couldn't be business as usual any more. In fact, he used that phrase, "it cannot be one size fits all any more for the Home Office." But on the other hand, after Blunkett's time, we had the ongoing dispute over how the Home Office was treating the children of asylum seekers, in which we had a very real locus because of our child welfare responsibilities, and we were opposed to the way the UK Government was treating these children. But we were regularly let down on that I think, by ministers in the Home Office and elsewhere.

We also had the significant devolution of further responsibilities on rail when Alistair Darling was Transport Secretary, which is the biggest additional devolution that we'd had. We'd had one or two minor things up until then, but that was a big budget and a big change. We had a very good relationship with Number 10 around the Gleneagles UK Summit, and a very good relationship with Hilary Benn around the development of an international development policy. But there was real resentment against that elsewhere in the UK Government and on the backbenches and we faced a lot of both anonymous and public criticism on it. And, of course, we had the difference of opinion on smoking. They were all over the place on that. They were divided and the [UK] Cabinet just couldn't make a decision and ended up putting it all off. We just went ahead, united, and were successful in implementing it. So I think there were ups and downs in the course of the relationship.

After 2003, when it became clear that they were not going to create a Cabinet minister who was Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs or the Secretary of State for Nations and Regions or whatever formulations there could have been, at that point I was determined that we didn't get ourselves into a situation where there was only one route into the UK Government. We didn't want the Scotland Office to be our only route in. And with Alistair Darling's [by then Secretary of State for Scotland] broad support, we spent two or three years developing the relationships with individual secretaries of state. There were some very healthy relationships with secretaries of state here [in Westminster] who wanted them to happen. There are areas where the two systems operate almost completely separately: education is an example of that. But in health for example, there needed to be a good, strong relationship between the Secretary of State and the Health Minister in Scotland. There needed to be good relationships in transport and other areas. Sometimes personalities clash, but by and large I think that system worked fairly well.

TKB: Were there any efforts from those secretaries of state to come to Scotland and learn from what you were doing there, rather than just you going to them?

JM: There were those who promised to do that. There was almost no serious engagement to make it happen. And I thought that was a big mistake. It was partly turnover. Some of the people who were most positive about that didn't last long enough in their positions to really make it happen.

I remember talking to Charles Clarke, for example, at the Home Office about him coming up and engaging with leading figures in the criminal and civil justice system in Scotland. Although we had a separate criminal and civil justice system in Scotland, there is the Supreme Court, there is a UK framework in some areas, [and] there was European legislation that we were all engaged in. So I always felt that some engagement between him and Scottish leaders in the justice field would have been a good thing. He agreed with that. I think he would have done it if he'd lasted longer in post, but he didn't.

I had conversations with successive DWP [Department for Work and Pensions] secretaries of state, or whatever the department was called in any one year, about piloting some new ideas in Scotland on Welfare to Work; how we could perhaps find ways of combining the work that we were doing, or could be doing, with our local authorities and with housing and social welfare provision and so on, with their benefits system in a way that helped people transition into work and supported them in that. I remember successively discussing that with David Blunkett, John Hutton, other secretaries of state. But again those were one-off meetings, people were only lasting in the job about 12 months, therefore it wasn't getting seen through.

If you go back to that period in UK government, there were not a lot of significant reviews of policy and organisation, apart from [John] Reid's reforms in the Home Office after 2006. One of the areas where that did happen was Darling's reform of the railways. He had enough time as Secretary of State to see that review to a conclusion, to implement it and as part of that, we reached a quite significant change in the agreement, in relation to devolution to Scotland. I think if there had been more continuity in the holders of the posts of secretary of state in the UK Government, then the relationships might have been easier to develop. Partly because personalities are so important. Structures are important but in politics, personalities drive things. People either work together or they don't, and it was very hard to get working relationships in a situation where things were changing so much.

AP: Did you have much interaction with the Chancellor? Obviously he was key to how the UK Government worked.

JM: There are two aspects to that, I think. One is that we found the occasionally dysfunctional relationship between Number 10 and Number 11 hard to work with, because things would be agreed with one and then took ages to be implemented by the other. As much as anybody else down here [in London] found that difficult, as a devolved government we found that difficult.

The second thing was, I think there was a difference in the relationship between us and most of the England-based Cabinet ministers and more junior ministers in the Blair Government, and most of the Scotland-based Cabinet and junior ministers in the Blair Government. I think that most of the English-based ministers – I would particularly refer to Clarke and Blunkett in this but there were others as well – understood that devolution had happened and wanted to use that in innovative ways, to try out new ways of working across the UK. Most of the Scottish ministers were part of a generation of Scottish MPs that found the transition to devolution difficult. They couldn't quite accept that they weren't still responsible for some of the things that went on in the Scottish Parliament. There was significantly more tension with ministers who represented Scottish constituencies than there was with English ones. There were occasional exceptions to that. We did have the odd humdinger of an argument with Margaret Beckett or John Prescott, but again they were part of that older generation

that found the devolution of power and autonomy harder to accept. The exception among Scottish ministers was Alistair Darling who did, I think, understand devolution had taken place and wanted to make it work. But I think others found the psychology of the autonomy of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government quite a challenge.

TKB: Especially having been Minister for Europe earlier, how were you working to build the relationship with the EU as First Minister?

JM: I wanted us to be proactive outside of Scotland. I wanted the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government to be engaged. Partly because it was important for Scotland not to become insular just because we had got a Scottish Parliament. While there were big problems to deal with at home, I felt the best of Scotland over the centuries had been outward looking and engaged internationally, and I thought we should do that.

I thought we should do it in three ways: I thought we should engage with other devolved administrations in the UK and build alliances. So I tried very hard to maintain regular contact, bilaterally and collectively, between me, Ken Livingstone, Rhodri Morgan and leaders in Northern Ireland.

Secondly, I wanted an international development policy, which became primarily about the Malawi Partnership but was also about a wider engagement and recognising that everybody's got a role to play tackling global poverty.

Thirdly, there was the engagement in Europe. I wanted our engagement in Europe to be more than just the occasional seat at the Council of Ministers, or some kind of information point for Scottish people in Brussels, or as a recipient of EU rules and regulations. I wanted us to be engaged in the debate. So, we did engage and we had a number of ways of doing that. One was, we were a leading player in what was called the group of 'Legislative Regions' [the Conference of European Regions with Legislative Power] but was essentially some of the historic nations of Europe that were now part of larger member states – Catalonia, Bavaria, Flanders, a whole range of others. We met on an annual basis and we maintained contact on a regular basis, particularly as part of the debate on the EU Constitution that was raging at the time. We submitted ideas, we debated ideas, [and] we tried to influence our own governments and the European-level debate. Secondly, we were engaged with European policy think tanks in Brussels. So we weren't just in Brussels acting as an office space for Scottish organisations, but we were making speeches, engaging, responding to initiatives. And thirdly, we were building relationships with individual commissioners. I met Michel Barnier, for example, in his first role in the [European] Commission as Regional Commissioner. All of the ministerial team, where it was relevant, would go over to Brussels on a regular basis and build those relationships. I also had a very good relationship with [Romano] Prodi when he was President of the Commission when I was First Minister. We were determined to

try to engage in the fullest possible way to influence what was happening as well as to be aware of what was happening.

TKB: Back to Scotland, could talk us through a particular crisis you remember? How you managed it, how you worked through it?

JM: A crisis that went wrong or a crisis that we sorted? *[laughs]* For me personally, I think an interesting one in terms of lesson learned, would have been the one vote that we lost, which was on the Licensing Bill. We were basically changing and amending the licensing laws. The bill was essentially a coalition fudge, it wasn't as coherent as it might have otherwise been as a piece of legislation.

I liked to have robust legislation, I liked us to be clear what we were doing. I recognise, though, that you have to build momentum, so you have to sometimes start with less detail and work it up. With proportional representation it was a step by step, difficult challenge getting people to agree where we had to get to, but we got there in the end. On smoking, we spent a long time on consultation and public work before we got anywhere close to a bill. Sometimes you do have to take time and you couldn't be clear at the beginning, but I did always prefer having a bill that was coherent and not a mess.

On licensing, there was a general mood that the availability of licensed alcohol was a contributing factor to anti-social behaviour and crime, particularly in the most deprived or traditionally working-class communities. I was aware that in a bill that was potentially liberalising the system, there would be a reaction from some of our backbenchers, which I sympathised with – seeing this as a step too far that was just going to cause more crime and trouble on the streets. So, we came up with a couple of provisions that were designed to be a bit of a counter-balance to the liberalisation. But the unity on the bill completely fell apart on the day that we had our biggest debates on it. We ended up losing a vote, and I think it was the one vote on a ministerial position that we lost in that time.

AP: Due to rebellion in which party?

JM: The rebellion was actually from the Labour side. They saw it as the over-liberalisation of the laws.

What that taught me was that I should never have moved away from my determination, when I took over as First Minister in 2001, to have coherent pieces of legislation. If that meant being honest with people and agreeing difficult compromises before we went to the Parliament, then we needed to do that. I think in that instance we made a mistake in that we tried to manage the situation, rather than be clear where we stood. There was a big difference between that and, for example, the Smoking [Health and Social Care (Scotland)] Bill, where we were crystal clear where we stood. And we stood against all sorts of manoeuvring by opposition parties, people held together, despite the

different views on it. The clarity of the legislation and the clarity of the ministerial position made a big difference. I don't think the licensing row was the fault of the minister. It was partly my fault for trying to find a way through that kept everybody happy. I should have known by then that you can't always keep everybody happy! So that was a crisis that reminded me of one of the basic lessons, I think.

The kind of crisis that might jump into people's minds was the security around the G8 Summit in Gleneagles [in 2005], in particular the problems in Edinburgh in the days beforehand when we had about 1,000 Italian anarchists and others arriving with weapons and trying to rip the heart out of central Edinburgh. I think the way that was handled was brilliant. That was about the UK and Scottish governments working completely hand in hand, getting our communications strategy in sync with our operational strategy, having good intelligence, having really good people in charge, and ministers getting their sleeves rolled up, forgetting about the glamorous stuff and making it happen. For example, Cathy Jamieson, who was the Justice Minister, and one of my key political advisers never made it to Gleneagles. They weren't at any Gleneagles events because they were in the bunker. They were on the spot should any decisions be required and overseeing the operations. That was a sacrifice for the responsibility of their position, but it worked. And despite the damage to the city centre, we did protect people by and large from injury and we drove those characters back out of the city. So I think that was a good example of the UK Government and the Scottish Government working together, of ministers and operational leaders in the police and other services working closely together, and people taking preparation seriously matched with good decision making, judgement and delivery on the day.

TKB: How did you manage media and communicating with the public on something like that? Did you do that personally?

JM: I did most of that personally. But justice was always one of those key positions where things that were very sensitive could suddenly become very public, very quickly. One of the reasons that Cathy Jamieson had got that job ahead of everybody else was that I felt she was the minister who could be relied upon to handle a difficult situation like that very well in public. She did a lot of interviews around then and she didn't put a foot wrong. So we're back to people again!

AP: As you approached the 2007 election, were you reflecting on how the institutions worked, eight years into devolution, and what you might want to change had you been returned to office? Or were you more concentrated on getting done what you'd already committed to?

JM: We were trying to balance all three elements that you have to balance in leadership. So we were trying to finish the programme and ensure that we had delivered enough in certain key areas to feel confident we could justify being re-elected again. That was important. Particularly with the coalition situation and particularly in a

parliament that's so transparent and slightly less party political perhaps, it was important to be working on delivery right to the very end of the parliamentary session in March. Whereas the experience here in Westminster would probably be that from about January it would be all party politics and all about the forthcoming election, whenever it might be. So we were conscious of that.

The second element was preparing for the election campaign and the trench warfare that we were in at that point with the SNP. We were behind in the opinion polls. We had significant problems with the reputation of the then UK Labour Government that we were having to counterbalance, and that had affected my profile and the profile of the party in Scotland. So we were constantly fighting for space as well as trying to get on the front foot.

Then the third element was planning for the next term. In 2003 we had thought very carefully in advance of the election and during the election campaign about various coalition issues, about the manifesto, about the way in which we run the Government, about the personnel I'd have around me. And I didn't want the other two elements, although they were really time-consuming, to stop me doing that again. We had in 2007, in my view, a more substantive manifesto with more radical ideas than we had in 2003. I don't think it was as well presented, but the actual ideas in it were better thought through, they would have been easier to implement and were more radical. That was deliberate, because we wanted to indicate a level of ambition to go for a third term, which is always a challenge. But I was also thinking about the machinery of government. I felt that at that point, possibly the Coalition had run its course – that we'd had the stable government that the Coalition had helped provide, that we'd had the delivery and that maybe it was time to take a few risks and push the boat out with some more radical ideas. You might lose some along the way, but at least to have the argument to do the things that I believe in rather than just compromise behind the scenes all the time in order to then have a united public position. So the manifesto was designed as a radical programme that we could put to the Parliament as a single-party government and have a go.

AP: And you weren't expecting a majority, given the electoral system.

JM: Not at all. We were expecting to lose. We were far behind at the start of the campaign. Nobody predicted we would get so close.

AP: There was one seat in it in the end wasn't there?

JM: In the end.

AP: If you'd been one seat ahead rather than behind, would you have gone for a minority government, as Alex Salmond did?

JM: We would certainly have given it a go, yeah, I think so. I don't think there would have been any prospect of the kind of coalition that I would have believed in at that point. By that point, I wanted to push things further and faster or there was no point in being there. I'd done six years. If I was going to do another two, three, four years, I wanted those years to be years when I really challenged Scotland and the Parliament to think about the future and do radical things. So we were ready for that, and that was how we had prepared for the aftermath of the election, if we had been lucky enough to pull it off.

AP: What do you remember of that period as the results came in and your last days in office, if it's not too painful a memory?

JM: *[Laughs]* Very, very painful. The key thing was to make the right decisions in the days after the election. We had lost, there had been a shift in public opinion. It was possible, if the ballot paper had been designed in a different way or all the things that were said in those days afterwards, that the result might have been different. But I believe in accepting the result. I've always taken that view, I take it on Brexit at the moment. There was all sorts of pressure and manoeuvrings that weekend to not accept the result. I took the view that that we would be in real trouble as a party, and devolution and the constitutional arrangement would be in real trouble, if we didn't accept that the public had spoken. So I went out and said that. And I lived with it for the fortnight afterwards. It was tough, but it was the right thing to do. That was me, I suppose, going full circle back to November 2001, when I took the view that one, I had to step up to the plate and be First Minister, but secondly, that I had to sort out what at that point was the declining confidence in devolution and go for stability before we went onto progress. I suppose I was finishing up with a decision that it was the right thing to do for that great purpose that I'd been involved in since I was 18, which was to create a functioning, stable, devolved Scottish government that gave us autonomous decision making in key areas.

TKB: What do you see as your greatest achievement while you were in government?

JM: That depends on the context of the question! The best piece of legislation was the smoking ban legislation, probably the best single decision. It was influential, it was well prepared, it was well delivered, it's been a huge success, [and] it helped transform modern Scotland in many ways. So that is definitely the most significant piece of legislation, partly because of the difficulty of the circumstances around it and partly because of the way it was implemented and accepted by people. It was a real turning point for devolution. The fact that people were willing to accept that the Scottish Parliament had that level of authority over their lives was the day when devolution really mattered in Scotland. It was a much more significant day, I think, than the

opening day of the Parliament, in historical terms. It was the day when devolution could tell you to do things you didn't want to do, and you said okay. I thought that was really significant.

The thing that I am most proud of is quite a difficult choice, but I think it probably comes down to the stance that I took on re-population and in-migration. It was way out of step with the prevailing mood at the time, amongst politicians and the media. All sorts of people tried to persuade me not to do it, not just before I did it but in the years afterwards. It was constantly undermined by people, but it was absolutely the right thing to do, and we won the public argument for it. What we said and did on immigration: Fresh Talent, being an open and enterprising society not just tolerant but celebratory of different cultures and all the things we did around that, the 'One Scotland, Many Cultures' campaign and the promotion of Scotland internationally and all the things that came with it. It wasn't just one initiative, it was a whole package. I think that is one of the main reasons why Scotland voted decisively against Brexit and it's one of the main reasons why there's a slightly different attitude in Scotland to immigration today than there is here [England]. I think we won the public argument, and we did it well. I personally took a major risk, and I've never regretted it. So that's my proudest thing, but the smoking legislation might be the biggest single achievement.

TKB: What would be your advice to a future First Minister?

JM: My number one piece of advice for anybody, whether they're going to be First Minister or just a Member of Parliament, is not to do it unless you know what you stand for. If you don't know what you believe in don't do it because you'll be useless and will probably regret it.

AP: Do you think lots of people do it in that way?

JM: Far too many, maybe the majority, seem to do it without a sense of purpose. I think the number one reason for the problems we have in our political system today at all levels, is too many people have become involved for the wrong reasons.

AP: Because they think they'd be rather good at it?

JM: They think they might be good at it, for the status, for the money, for whatever. I think the thing that kept me going, through all the ups and downs, and allows me to look back on that period despite all the ups and downs with a sense of achievement, is that I knew what I wanted, what I cared about and why I was doing it. If people don't know that then I would rather they stayed away! Even if I disagree with them, I would like them to know what they stand for. And the public want them to as well.

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