

Ministers reflect

Mark Hoban

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Mark Hoban

Biographical details

Electoral History

2001-2015: Member of Parliament for Fareham

Parliamentary Career

2012-2013: Minister of State for Work and Pensions

2010-2012: Financial Secretary

2005-2010: Shadow Treasury Minister

2004-2005: Shadow Minister for Education

2002-2003: Opposition Whip

Mark Hoban name was interviewed by Nicola Hughes and Sophie Wilson on 14th July 2015 for the Institute for Government's Ministers Reflect Project

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

Mark Hoban (MH): Because it was the start of the Coalition Government, I remember being asked by my Private Secretary what were my priorities and not being entirely clear since the Coalition Agreement had not been drafted by that point. I was struck by how much care the Civil Service had taken to prepare for the incoming government, even the extent to which the two speech writers who were assigned to junior Treasury ministers had analysed my speeches and my speech patterns and the phrases I liked to use. So they had thought about this very clearly. They had thought through the implications of reforms set out to financial regulation which was my key piece of work as a new minister and there was a degree of responsiveness to the agenda which I don't think I had expected.

And so this impression, I am afraid it is a product of 'Yes, Minister', of an obstructive Civil Service was completely blown away by this preparedness for our agenda and then a sense that if you gave clear direction that officials would go away and implement, and actually do it really, really well in a very thoughtful way, come back with ideas, options. And I was just really impressed by the professionalism of civil servants and the thought they put into our arrival.

NH: And other than the things that they had prepared for you, was there any support available for you?

MH: No and being the Treasury, it was fairly hands-off! So, actually, really good private office, very good officials and I felt I did not actually need, at that point, anything else, because I knew my own mind and we were to get down to business pretty quickly.

NH: And what about previous roles that you had done, I you know you had been in Parliament and worked in business as well; how had they prepared you for the job?

MH: I think one of the things that really came in handy for me I had learnt from being a chartered accountant and working at PricewaterhouseCoopers where from virtually the second year of your training right throughout your career, you would spend your time reviewing things. So the idea of reading out on a submission was second nature.

NH: Yes.

MH: So that was quite good and you think about how you organise your thoughts; how you look at this. I was financially literate, which was important, I had run projects, some of those skills about managing people and managing teams I'd learnt at PwC were invaluable at the Treasury and even more so at DWP [Department for Work and Pensions] actually. So I felt those skills I had brought from business were important and helped me become a more efficient and effective minister.

NH: And in terms of the subject areas, you had done a bit of shadowing of the Treasury brief; did it feel very different when you went over to DWP and maybe had less familiarity with that brief?

MH: Yes, I think, as an MP you become slightly blasé about how much you know because you are required to respond to your constituents on a whole range of issues that you feel you know something about everything, which is obviously true but actually realise how little you actually know when you are confronted with a new area. So I certainly felt that the learning curve at DWP was much, much greater than at the Treasury. And incidentally, I would say that the difference between opposition and government is in opposition, as a shadow minister, there are areas that you will choose to look at and areas that you are forced to look at because they are live in the House [of Commons] and everybody has to come up to speed with them. As a minister, you just have to know everything. You are required to do

4 Ministers reflect

everything that is in your remit, so you cannot pick and choose in the same way, so there is that bit of learning curve there but certainly in DWP, the learning curve was much steeper.

NH: How did you go about that then?

MH: I just immersed myself. So there were position papers prepared for me; I would spend time doing a deep-dive and I knew the areas which were priorities for me, I had been told by the Prime Minister what my priorities were and I was very clear it was the Work Programme [flagship welfare to work scheme]. So I ended up doing a lot of deep dives; talking to officials about how a programme was meant to work; what we wanted to deliver; what our objectives were; what the metrics were around those programmes but also getting out into the field and seeing how those programmes work from both Job Centre Plus's perspective but also from the perspective of Work Programme providers. So really getting stuck into the detail so I could understand the mechanics of these programmes and understand where the strengths and weaknesses lie.

NH: Going back to the Treasury, when you entered office, you mentioned the Coalition Agreement. But what were your initial priorities? What were the big things that you wanted to achieve?

MH: So, it was the restructuring of financial regulation. So the move from the FSA [Financial Services Authority] to the PRA [Prudential Regulation Authority] and the FCA [Financial Conduct Authority] – that was a big chunk of work. I had to establish a relationship with the financial services sector at a [more] senior level than I had done in opposition. I was responsible for UKFI [UK Financial Investments], so I had to deal with RBS, Lloyds and Northern Rock in how we tried to move those back into the private sector, which didn't happen quite as quickly as we had thought.

One thing I was responsible for was European financial regulation and so actually getting to understand how Europe worked and what the levers were that you had there and trying to make sure we had an effective voice in what was quite a big and complicated programme for European regulatory reforms, were important for me. And then there were some more retail issues around pension reform that we had committed to doing in opposition, which I was keen to push through in government. So there was quite a wide range of areas I was trying to focus on.

NH: And how much did you set those yourself or was that your directive from the Chancellor, 'really focus on these sort of things'?

MH: Well the great thing about the Chancellor is he is a good delegator. So I knew financial regulation was important but the bit about pension reform was something we had talked about in opposition but it was not necessarily a very high priority when we were in government. But some of the changes in tax relief I sort of proposed and have driven through, so it was a combination. I think one of the challenges for junior ministers is there are priorities that are set out by your boss but there are things that you might want to do that perhaps aren't on his radar screen, perhaps slightly neglected, that you feel actually can be promoted and tackled.

NH: Okay. Based on that experience, how would you describe the main roles and duties of a minister?

MH: Gosh! Well first of all to implement your programme in government and I think that is the central task you have. I think the second one is to maintain good relationships with stakeholders. That includes your colleagues in Parliament but also businesses, consumer groups, the lobby, trying to get your message across because there is no point in doing great work in Whitehall and Westminster if no one knows about it. And also when you are pushing through radical reform, you need to keep people on board and that I think is an important part of having good relationships with stakeholders, to keep them informed and to find out what is going on but also that sounds very much like a 'transmit' type function. I think it's important for ministers to be there to listen as well and pick up concerns, to soak up new ideas, new and emerging issues. I think it is a two-way process.

Sophie Wilson (SW): Thinking about the day-to-day realities of being a minister, how was most of your time spent?

MH: In meetings. I would say in both roles, I had quite a full diary, partly because I was keen to get out and to see what was going on and to talk to people and make sure that the work we did had an appropriate profile. I think in both roles I had, there was a need as well that outreach work focus quite a lot on what is happening in the department, so in the Treasury it was the policy development behind financial reforms, around implementations and manifesto commitments that required quite a lot of engagement and meetings with officials to drive things forward.

At DWP it was a radically different role in a sense that the policy framework had been determined by my predecessor and I was there primarily to ensure its implementation. So the nature of my role was different in DWP to Treasury. And that links back to the comment I made earlier about the skills that I picked up in business were actually more applicable, I felt, in DWP, where you are trying to drive performance, trying to understand trends, or why wasn't a programme working: what were the financial incentives that meant it would not work? What incentives would make it work? How do you analyse results? How do you try to forecast what is going to happen next month or quarter on a programme? So the analytical and financial skills were very important to enable me to deliver a policy in DWP, compared to trying to develop a policy as it was in the Treasury.

SW: So there are a range of different roles that ministers play, including parliamentary, departmental business...

MH: Yeah.

SW: ...the media; how did you cope with those competing demands?

MH: I think it is a challenge around that flexibility and being conscious at various points, particularly, I felt, the Treasury is much more... I had more parliamentary engagement with the Treasury than I did at DWP. So when there was an Urgent Question around the first phase of the Eurozone crisis, it tended to be me who dealt with it and there were areas where I had to give oral statements around Equitable Life which was something I had picked up. So I was very conscious in the Treasury of doing more stuff on the floor of the House and I am slightly surprised, given the sensitivity of the areas I dealt with at DWP, which was around employment, sickness benefits, things like that, that there was less parliamentary engagement. So, I just think to have the flexibility to sort of move from one to the other is quite important.

The media, I think, actually interestingly at Treasury there was less media engagement; there were some points where there was lot, so during the Libor crisis, there was quite a lot of media engagement. DWP was much more continuing engagement, so part of that was around the monthly unemployment figures. Partly it was around when we knew there were releases of stats that we knew would be difficult or announcements were going to be difficult, so you could actually sort of plan your diary around those points, where you would have to have a meaty intervention.

But I think one of the things that I found really quite difficult as a minister, because it does not reflect my nature, was to change my diary because I have always been very clear, once it is in my diary, it should stay there. But actually I realise, as a minister, you end up having to be much more flexible in your diary to accommodate those things and the short term... you might come in the morning, even though your day is fairly well planned and suddenly something flares up that requires you to reschedule things or to cancel. You have got to lose any hang-ups you have about that without creating a reputation for being unpredictable or chaotic. It's quite interesting the number of times I heard people, who had organised events for ministers, say that the minister had been detained in the House on 'parliamentary business' and you think, hmmm, I am not entirely sure! [laughter] So I think people rumble that sort of thing. So, I think if people know, on the whole, you stick to your commitments, unless you have to break them, then you get away with it.

NH: Can I just ask on Parliament - you talked about doing questions and so forth; did you spend much time engaging with the party and the back-benches, you know, in the tea room and stuff like that, or did that drop down the agenda?

MH: Yeah, I think that I probably spent less time doing that than I should have done. And interestingly as a back-bencher, I could see those colleagues who spent time in Parliament and I was quite surprised there are some ministerial colleagues who seem to spend more time in Parliament than in their departments which I think is slightly odd. But I think it is very easy to lose touch with what's going on and I did try to make sure that I would eat in the tea room in the evenings and stuff like that. But intentions of going across to the House for lunch did seem to disappear.

NH: And what about your constituency?

MH: I was very fortunate in that my private offices, I felt, were very well organised and so I felt that Fridays were very much a day for me to be in my constituency and unless I had to do a private members bill or was travelling, and that happened as it did before, I think the bit that gets squeezed is the time that is spent when you are in Westminster on constituency matters. So whilst I continued to deal with correspondence, I couldn't do as much constituency stuff when I was a minister. I used to take school parties around [but] I couldn't really do that, so that is where there the squeeze happens really.

SW: So you mentioned flexibility...

MH: Yes

SW: ...do you have any other top tips for managing time?

MH: I think you have got to be ruthless in prioritising what you are there to do. I think that helps enormously. I think it then frees up the time for things that are important. I think to ensure that your private office is good at filtering, so that they are very clear about what you want and the standard of submissions and things like that so that they filter out some of the rubbish so that the things that come to you are high quality, that they are finished, that they are very clear. That is really important and to get them to manage your diary and prioritisation well. I think a really good private office makes a huge difference.

SW: Could you talk through an occasion where an unexpected event or crisis hit the department and describe how you dealt with that?

MH: I am trying to think of one that will be okay on the public record!

NH: [laughter] A lot of people say that when we ask this question!

MH: So let me give an example. So in DWP, this was not unexpected, this was an expected crisis, okay. So there had been a programme that was introduced by my predecessor and we had not reported the results and we had scheduled a publication date. We knew the first of results for this flagship programme were going to be poor. We spent a lot of time thinking about the presentation of those results; thinking about how we prepared the media for those results. So a lot of conversations with journalists about the programme, its strengths and weaknesses and none of those meetings disclosed anything that should not have been disclosed. So it was all done properly, there were no stats announced in those meetings but we talked about the programme and broadly where it was at. We worked with third parties, so the providers of particular contracts had a good sense of where they were at. We put in place some measures that would help change performance, so there was a strong narrative for us for when the results were announced, so we could say well this is what we have decided to do to help improve performance and turn it around. We thought about the mood music around the programme.

We worked very closely with statisticians, with the Press Office, with the media spad [special adviser], policy officials, and in the run-up to the day of the announcement I spent a lot of time just getting to grips with the programme, so I could really understand what was driving it and why it wasn't as successful as it should have been. So by the time we got to the day of the announcement [laughter], coverage was relegated to page three of the papers, it was on the news and it did appear on most of the news bulletins but we had rolled the pitch to the point that it did not come as a surprise and actually, by being organised, had some very strong human interest stories of peoples' lives who had been turned around by the programme.

You know, I did a press conference and it was at one of the providers where, you know, it was really good, lots of nice young people who were very motivated now, they had been unemployed for over a year, etc, etc, so it worked out very well but a lot of effort went in to make sure it was not the lead story and it was not going to be a front cover story and I think in a way, one of the points to me was, whether the crisis was expected or unexpected, it is a matter of preparation, what you put into the message, how you fight back, how you respond. If you've got the time to do that, then you will emerge in much better shape than if you are chaotic.

SW: And so what was your role in that? Was it coordination?

MH: Well I was on the front line, so yes it was coordination; trying to set the tone; having weekly progress meetings with all the internal stakeholders from the Department, making sure that Number 10 were briefed; making sure that Oliver Letwin [then Minister for Government Policy] who had a strong interest in this programme understood what was happening, making sure that the comms across government were all joined up. So it was very much leading that response and making sure that IDS [Iain Duncan Smith, Work and Pensions Secretary] knew where we were at, so there were no surprises and people knew exactly how we were trying to land the story.

SW: And in general, how did you make decisions?

MH: My approach was to listen and to try and weigh up what I thought the best outcome was. To listen, but then to talk through, and so you know, rehearse my arguments for a particular course of action, either with my private office or with officials. And where there were controversial issues, talk to either the Chancellor or the Secretary of State just to make sure that they were bought into it. But I think I would say my style on those things wasn't very much the only one taking the decision, it is a sort of collegiate process because actually you need to get buy in from others, particularly when making difficult decisions.

NH: I just want to move on to policy making and implementation. First of all, it would be helpful if you could tell us what you feel was your greatest achievement in office?

MH: I think the creation of the new regulatory architecture for financial services, of which I am now a victim! [laughter]

NH: Okay so what factors do you think contributed to the success of that?

MH: I think having socialised the change when we were in opposition, so people knew what to expect. Having a very clear process for sort of unwrapping a policy, so I think we went through two or three consultation exercises at varying levels of detail; there was a very good programme of engagement and consultation with industry and the stakeholders, so they felt they were bought in.

I think actually also by being very clear that this is what we were going to do. Before the election, [there was] a lot of scepticism about whether we would actually do what we were going to do. But when we came into office, it was just very clear this is what was going to happen and whilst people may not have agreed with it, they knew what was going to happen and therefore their lobbying and engagement was around the rough edges rather than saying, 'This is impossible, you can't do it'. Making sure that the leadership at the FSA were bought into this process. So, it was around that clarity of this is the direction of travel; these are the areas that are open for discussion and opening these areas of discussion which I

think made it a more straightforward and effective process than it would have been if we had been starting from a Green Paper and everything was up for grabs.

NH: And as the detail of these proposals got worked up, what were your reflections on the policy process and how policy development works in government?

MH: I thought what was good was it was top down. So when we got to more detailed decisions, you were trying to fit them within a framework so there was consistency. I think there were challenges around some of the fine detail, so as you got more into the stuff that would aid implementation, distributed between Treasury officials, the Bank of England and the FSA, to try to get those points right so there was an element of trying to get workable compromises between the three parties without losing the clarity of the reforms. I think that was quite an important part of the process and trying to work out generally, what the trade-offs were, you know, what was important to one organisation, what was less important and what was the trade – you know, ‘If we give you this will you do that?’ So a sort of softer element around that process and that was quite important.

What struck me was it was a relatively straightforward process, easier to do at the start of government than at a middle point and my predecessor who was the MP for Fareham said to me the best time to come in was when it was at the start of the government, because he came in partway through. If you come in partway through, as I found at DWP, you are constrained by your predecessor’s decisions. Therefore, your room for manoeuvre is limited, so it is much better to do it at the start and at the beginning or indeed, at the end.

NH: To dig into your relationships within the departments a little bit more and this might be different in the two, how did you interact with the Secretary of State and with special advisers?

MH: Different types of relationships but both, I think, were relatively hands-off. Both Secretaries of State trusted me to get on with the job. Both were interested in the areas that were more controversial and actually it was good to have that sort of sounding board and that source of support. I think I commanded their confidence and I think that then percolates through the rest of the department which was good.

I think with special advisers, I thought in both departments they were hugely helpful. Because of the time they spend with the Secretary of State, they know their minds very well and it is good to be able to bounce ideas off them, to talk about issues that are emerging that perhaps may not be on the Chancellor’s mind or the Secretary of State’s mind, but you can use a spad as a sounding board: ‘How do you think they’re going to respond to this?’ Or, ‘What is the best way to pitch this idea to them?’ I thought that in both cases, actually the media spad was very helpful because of that very clear distinction that having a sort of media side where civil servants would talk about policy but not the politics of it and actually, I think the media spad is very good in thinking through the politics and working through what the right messages would be and the language we might want to use. No, I think spads are hugely undervalued, actually. Good spads are fantastic.

NH: You didn’t have any of your own, so did you feel like you had enough direct support or you could get it from the Secretary of State’s spads?

MH: I thought in both cases, I had the support I needed from the Secretary of State’s spads actually and had good relations.

NH: What about your relationships across the ministerial teams; did you do much work with your fellow junior ministers?

MH: It’s a thing we didn’t really discuss at that session for ministers [reference to an earlier IfG event], actually, inter-ministerial relationships. So there are a few different dimensions. There is the relationship with the Lords minister in your department, particularly if you are taking legislation through, you know, how are they going to handle particular issues? What are their insights into the

Lords view of particular problems? So I think that is quite a helpful dialogue.

I think then you have got the relationship with ministers in other departments. The one that I had a lot of dealings with in DWP was Matt Hancock [then Skills Minister], where actually having a good relationship with a colleague makes a huge amount of difference and there were times when Matt and I were able to compare notes on what our officials were telling us which enabled us to clear log-jams. And there were times where relationships were not as easy with ministers in other departments and I think that is quite a difficult situation to manage. It is not always based on coalition politics either frankly. I had good relationships with Lib Dem ministers across departments and bad relationships with Lib Dem ministers across departments. So you know, sometimes it's about your personal relationships, about the alignment of interests, and how you mediate those. But it is, I think, a challenge where the philosophy of departments... so I think the philosophy of Treasury and BIS conflicts from time to time, so how do you manage that and of course it is easier when one department is in a stronger position than the other.

NH: Did you notice a big cultural difference between the two departments you worked in?

MH: Yes I did and I think there is a... I do not think you appreciate the power and influence of the Treasury until you are outside. Particularly on the spending side, it has a very clear sense of its own priorities and interests and views about the effectiveness of policy and spending priorities and things like which actually the detail of their engagement surprised me. I think it was very detailed! [laughter]

But actually, it is a an interesting reflection, if I think about the transition now into business where there is a very strong sense of challenge and accountability, I think if the Treasury wasn't there to exercise that challenge to departments about their spending, I do not know who else would provide that challenge. It is certainly not the role of the PAC [Public Accounts Committee] or National Audit Office. You need some counter-balance within government to ensure that money is spent well and carefully and properly thought through, that there are obvious spending priorities and the way money is spent, so you need that. It can feel a bit intrusive at times on the Treasury but I suspect any organisation where you have got one part of it holding another to account, I think tensions can be there.

SW: And what did you find most frustrating about being a minister?

MH: Gosh, most frustrating? I seemed to spend an inordinate amount of time answering letters.

SW: And so how do you think government could be made more effective?

MH: More effective?

NH: Fewer letters!?

[laughter]

MH: I think that there are times when you feel that it is difficult to delegate. So it is fine if you are Secretary of State, you can delegate to your junior ministers, but who does a junior minister delegate to? Clearly there is, in terms of policy development and thinking, there are people there who will do that and provide the options and things like that. I think I seemed to review a lot of subs [submissions] that I wish I could have delegated to somebody else to review and I think a filter... a better filter more close to ministers. Now, maybe the answer is, I don't know, these extended ministerial teams are working, but a bit more support to a junior minister or someone actually who knew what they were... who has just good political sense reading subs and saying well actually this one needs to go to him and this one doesn't would be quite a good way of trying to prioritise and free up some ministerial time. There is always a risk that you are having to process a lot of stuff that actually is not really necessary, but because of process a minister has to do it.

NH: Did you feel that you could push back on any of that with your officials?

MH: I certainly asked questions around how necessary was this. What do I actually need to do with this sub? You know, do I actually need to read this? That is not quite the right word but how important is this really and is it just procedural? Well actually you don't need to give much input to just try and separate some of those things but I do think there is a lot of departmental activity that is focused on something that pops up on a minister's desk which is not necessarily appropriate.

NH: Let me put the question slightly differently; is there anything that surprised you most about the role; was there anything that was unexpected or surprising?

MH: I think the thing that struck me was just how much you can achieve and I suppose I shouldn't be so surprised on one level but I think you can do quite a lot as a minister and quite a lot as a junior minister and it goes back partly to the clarity of your objectives; I think it's something about your work rate and your ability to process all of these things and to move what was relatively low priority quite quickly and focus on the bigger items.

I think that your influence... I think it is easy to under-estimate when you are inside the Whitehall environment about the impact that you have and I have always been struck at how people pore over what you say and action it. It might have been a throw-away comment or a line of a speech. It has a resonance with people and is almost magnified by third parties into something bigger than what it was at the time. You just feel that there's ripple effect of what you say which I don't think you necessarily realise before you become a minister and I think it is only when you start to pick up when these things are replayed back to you.

NH: So did that make you quite cautious?

MH: Not necessarily but I think more aware of your impact. There was an episode when there was, what I thought, quite an arcane point of policy, a European policy where I went probably slightly further forward than I intended to and I got a bit of press coverage and it got to the desk of one of the Commissioners. He then spoke to the Chancellor about it. And you go, oh, it had an impact didn't it? And it worked in the right direction. But I think I sort of under-estimated the impact something like that would have and where it would end up, but that was a good thing. No, I think sometimes you feel as a politician that you are talking and no-one is listening but I certainly think one of the things you have as a minister is that power to project and others will magnify what you say.

NH: Final couple of questions.

MH: Yeah.

NH: So based on all of those experiences, how would you define an effective minister?

MH: Someone who gets difficult things done with the minimum fuss, whether it is from your department or from your stakeholders. That sounded like I had thought about that for a long time..!

NH: Very pithy! Was there anyone that saw as a role model or you thought was particularly good at doing that?

MH: Well I was quite good at doing it! [laughter] But role model? I don't think there's anyone I'd say was a role model but I think I was just struck by the people you see who just get on with the job and just do it very well. Yes, I think it is just those people who just know, who will plough through it and when you see them in the House [of Commons] they are on top of that brief; they understand it. I think one of the interesting tests of ministers is how well regarded they are by the opposition. Now that is not to say that means you are a pushover or soft, but I think if you can command the respect of your opponents then I think that is a good sign actually because it means even if you are dealing with a very sensitive brief, it shows that if you handle it well and sensitively and carefully and are solid and robust in your defence, then actually you get a lot of brownie points for that.

NH: And what advice would you give to a minister entering government for the first time now?

MH: Enjoy it. I think it is the thing I enjoyed most in politics because I think you can get things done and you can make a difference and you can contribute to how the country is run or, you know, delivering really good outcomes to people. I think it is a great job to have and I enjoyed every moment and I think it is...there will be times when people say, 'It is making an impact on me or on my family, on my constituency'. The reality is whatever job you do, you are not going to have that long to do it in comparison to the rest of your life, so enjoy it to the full.

NH: And with the benefit of hindsight, anything you would have done differently in the role, any ways you would have approached it differently?

MH: I think the thing touched on earlier, the thing I think I should have done more of is actually keep in touch with the parliamentary party. I think it is very easy to be sucked into your department and if you do a role that does not necessarily bring you into contact with lots of your colleagues, you need to find a way to get out there and talk a bit more about what you are doing and that communication with colleagues is really important. You do lots of 'Dear colleague' letters and things like that but actually, spending that time, trying to find out not just how people see what you are doing and understand what you are doing and what their issues are but trying to get the sense of the mood of the party is quite important and it is very easy to miss that if you are stuck in a department.

NH: Okay. Is there anything that we haven't asked about that you would like to raise?

MH: No I suppose you have not asked very much about the relationships with the officials. The nature of your relationship with officials I think, determines how well you do in your role and to the extent to which they feel that you have understood their briefing, their options. And I think one of the things I sought to do as a minister was try to involve civil servants in what I was doing, you know, trying to make sure - particularly where you had big, complex areas - trying to get a lot of people into the room to talk about them because you end up... and one of the things is the process as advice comes up, that quite often you get a relatively short submission, a lot of synthesis has happened to get to that and you lose a lot of the nuance of the detail. And where you have got difficult issues to resolve that are complex, trying to get not just the most senior officials in the room but also the most junior ones as well to talk through their bit of a submission.

I think that is quite an important part of engagement but also what you are aiming to do is, I think, to identify those people who really add value to what you are doing; those who have got some insight into what's happening that perhaps you would not necessarily get when you are talking to the most senior person on the project. So trying to dig down and find out the people who really know what they are up to and what is going on. I think that's invaluable as a minister, not just rely upon the most senior officials to tell you what is happening.

NH: What was your impression of the quality of the Civil Service?

MH: I thought on the whole, very good actually. It reminded me of, particularly at the Treasury, of when I was at PwC in terms of lots of young, very bright, very motivated people who were very keen and ambitious and it was really quite a dynamic environment. And the same was true in DWP. A slightly different mix in DWP - the Treasury, I think, on the whole, was younger than DWP - because you had the delivery side as well as the policy making side. You had a broader range of people involved which brought a different set of strengths actually. Where DWP was very good was telling you how you could implement and deliver something and what the levers were and how you can make something happen and how you needed to calibrate your policy to make it happen. Whereas the Treasury, because it was not a delivery department, was much more theoretical and intellectual which was right for the purposes but actually there was a real strength I saw in DWP was that variety of experience, that intellectual capacity to think about how a policy should be designed but then also that experience to say well this is how it can be delivered in practice, which is helpful.

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

For example: Transcript, George Young, 21 July 2015, Ministers Reflect Archive, Institute for Government, Online: <http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/person/george-young> . Accessed: 15 December 2015

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