

Ministers reflect

Stephen Hammond



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Stephen Hammond

Biographical details

Electoral history

2005-present: Member of Parliament for Wimbledon

Parliamentary career

2005-2010: Shadow Transport Minister

2012-2014: Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport

Stephen Hammond (SH) was interviewed by Jen Gold (JG) and Nicola Hughes (NH) on 16th July 2015 for the Institute for Government's Ministers Reflect project

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

Stephen Hammond (SH): Well I think it's interesting, most people don't always go to government departments or areas of their specialisation and yet the Conservative opposition through 2005, or 2006 when [David] Cameron became leader until 2009/10 had broadly kept a lot of people in policy areas all the way through. And so [he] had expected to be rather better prepared in terms of people who had done the policy work moving into the same departments. There had been a general expectation I think that had Cameron won the 2010 general election as a majority, obviously there would have been some changes, but I think very largely the opposition team would have moved into government in similar roles. I think that would have been quite different to what we'd ever seen before.

But in the end of course, that didn't happen and everything got broken up. When I went into government, two years in, two and half years in, after the first reshuffle, I went into a department where I had been expected to go two years earlier. I had always been specialising in infrastructure, transport and my secondary specialisations have been communities and local government and also the Treasury. So by going into [the Department for] Transport, I think I had a head start on a lot of people who go into ministries where they have no knowledge of the subject.

Inevitably things changed quite a lot, however much you try and keep up with it. And things are different from the inside than from the outside. So in those first few weeks there is a huge period of work that needs to be done in terms of briefing oneself, just getting oneself up to date. And also forming and considering whether the ideas one had formed prior to being in government, in opposition, worked in government.

I think for people it's quite a bewildering [experience] – you go and see the Prime Minister and as you're walking back down Whitehall [the department contacts you]. I mean I got a mobile phone call from someone called Charlotte who told me she was in my office. And I didn't know... I tried to work out, I've got a Sally and a Paul and then I realised it was my new departmental office! 'We've got a box of work for you and the Secretary of State wants a meeting in an hour and half's time.' I think people need to be prepared [to go] from the nothing to the total. There is no gradualism in this. You can't halfway jump into the swimming pool. I think that's a big shock for people. A lot of people think they might get a chance to ease their toe in. That's not true. The following day we had a debate to do on the floor of the House. Someone had to open it. Someone had to close it. And that's on day one, effectively day one, if you've been appointed as I was, late in the afternoon.

So I think firstly I was lucky in coming into government that I was very familiar with a lot of the policy terms, there was an awful lot of updating but it's quite different from a lot of people who have no experience of the policy turf that they're expected to go into. So that will be my first [reflection].

JG: You mention being very up to date with the policy brief, but in terms of ministerial duties, was that a learning curve for you? Or did you feel quite well prepared for that?

SH: I think no matter how much you want to pretend you're a minister in opposition shadowing, the reality of course is extremely different. A shadow minister really just does policy stuff and debates and things in the House and meetings or whatever. Nothing like the new burden of other things that come with it. Even if you have your own policy areas, then there'll be three or four other things, potentially some corporate stuff to do, covering for other ministers at various things.

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The volume, the potential volume of meetings and the potential volume of work, I think is really important. And I think the decisions you make in the first few days actually can set the tone for how your private office runs. You've got to take a view on how your private office runs. It's one of the things that's going to make you more effective. Some people take the office and some people, I think sometimes work on the theory of constructive tension that they're all out to get you. I think actually it's very important when you arrive as a minister, to have a private office in place. And I think it's not a very good idea to throw all the pieces up in the air straight away. But clearly if after a month there are things or people you cannot work with, because you work very intimately with these people, then I think that's acceptable to go to the perm[anent] sec[retary] and say we need to make some changes. I inherited a fairly efficient private office. But I did have a challenge in that it didn't have a principal private secretary and that had to change.

So within a week I got to choose my own new leader of the private office. And I think that was important. But I was quite lucky in that, although he was part of the Civil Service, you want your private office to be loyal to you. You also want them to be a good representation for you and the department. So how you react to them and then how they react with policy leads, can have quite a big impact on your effectiveness. As with all relationships in all bodies, good will and building up good will, building up respect is important.

JG: You mentioned your private office, were you generally satisfied with the level of support that was available to you? Is there anything else that could have been provided that would have helped?

SH: Well we may come on to one other particular thing later on. But in terms of how a private office works and what it does, the first two or three days are pretty intensive. You wander through the new responsibilities with them [and] you allocate who is going to lead on those responsibilities. The key thing is having a good, competent diary secretary.

I did three things fairly quickly. We initiated a process: my first two or three red boxes arrived with a mass of papers in them, top to bottom, with no indication particularly of priority or whatever. So the first thing I instituted was a basic discipline of a top sheet that listed everything that was in the box [and] when I was expected to make a decision on it, etc. So a fairly basic commercial discipline, but the previous minister hadn't been seen to be doing that. So pretty clear timelines, so I knew what I had to prioritise myself.

Second thing we prioritised was a weekly diary and media meeting. So every week the whole team would sit down for 20 minutes and run through the diary of the week, just to check whether there were things that needed to go in or come out or extra time that had to be made for the preparation of things. And also talking to the departmental press team about what was likely to come up and/or things you wanted to flag up and get them to work on. I think that meeting I found valuable.

The third thing, which funnily enough you might think was less valuable, was the monthly policy catch-up where we would tick boxes and check what we've done and what needed to be done. That was less useful because you almost did that on a rolling basis.

JG: And in those first few weeks was there anything that particularly took you by surprise that you weren't expecting at all?

SH: I don't think so particularly. I think that the Civil Service occasionally do test their ministers in various ways. I think you have to try and spot what those tests are. I think that inevitably it's quite difficult sometimes to change people's view of your priorities and what you want to get done unless you establish some of the rules fairly quickly. I think it is just the sheer extra hours you need to work.

I'm sure people have said to you what makes a good minister and what makes a bad minister. Well clearly talent is one thing, but the harsh reality like so much of life is it's how hard you work. You get a submission. It has your private office's box note, which is a quick and dirty summary of the note and the executive summary. There is then a submission, which sets out in the top three pages normally what the problem is, what various courses of action are, and a recommendation. And then there is the note that supports it sitting behind it and it rather depends. But if you want to be able to get the very best out of your Civil Service and actually be able to make criticism or want to really challenge recommendations, you have to have done the reading of the full note, not just the box note. Otherwise you challenge that recommendation and they'll say, 'Actually had you looked Minister, it is on para 88 in the notes.' And that's not trying to be clever, that's just the fact they've set the whole thing out. If you're not as up to speed as they are, then doing that work is really important.

NH: I think you'd been a PPS [Parliamentary Private Secretary] to Eric Pickles previously. Did that help prepare you in any way for the role?

SH: Yes I think it did. I was not destined to become a minister in 2010, [but] working with Eric was very helpful. Although as a PPS you have to be clear what your role is, you're not an extra minister you're a PPS. But as part of that, I was able to observe the workings of a department, the role of a minister and quite often how he deals with colleagues. And with Eric, he is a great man, he also allowed me to sit in on quite a lot of policy briefings and policy stuff. So one got to get the flow of what civil servants were likely to present.

JG: You've touched on priorities in one of your previous answers. I wonder if you had a sense of your initial priorities on coming into office and what you wanted to achieve in those early weeks and months?

SH: Yes. There were two or three big projects that I think we were able to put in place. Actually when I became minister I became roads minister initially, and that was an area where I was probably less skilled than rail and other things. But nonetheless I had a very clear view that the Highways Agency needed reform and we needed to find ways of progressing that forward. Also roads were on an annual spending round with the Treasury, unlike rail, which had a four-year continuous spending agreement. I think the difference therefore in terms of what you can drive in terms [of] efficiency gains is considerable. So I had a very clear priority to look at that.

The two or three other things I had responsibility for, I mean shipping was a real...and actually, funnily enough, I say I knew the policy area, it was probably my weakest area of initial knowledge. But I had a very clear view that British shipping policy was disparately carried out between various departments. So where environmental concerns touched, where some of the logistics and imports business side, BIS [Department for Business Innovation & Skills] touched and there were obviously other things. So I very quickly decided we needed to have some regular high-level 'ministerial plus' meetings to develop the unified shipping policy which would be established. I then decided we needed to be a lot more high profile because this is one of our own professional industries.

JG: And based on your overall experiences how then would you describe the main roles and duties of a minister?

SH: Junior ministers tend to be the workhorses of the department. So there is obviously policy formulated and there is obviously contributing to the overall trade but some of that in the end, the Secretary of State bags. But there is the volume of the parliamentary side, which is adjournment debates, question times, all sorts of debates. So you have to be on top of your game when parliament is scrutinising for all those things plus the performances in front of the select committee.

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I mean there's clearly policy formation. There's also clearly the element of working with colleagues, lots of colleagues; it's not just necessarily about policy, but lots of colleagues will want to write to you about how something in their area touches your department. There's a huge amount of that.

The other thing is you are the ambassador. At whatever level it is, you are the ambassador for that policy area or that particular area of government; when you go outside, people shouldn't underestimate how powerful a performance, an appearance by a minister at things both internally in the UK and externally is. So there's the policy, parliamentary, and there's what I would describe as the ambassadorial role.

NH: So thinking about the day-to-day reality of being a minister, how did you actually spend most of your time?

SH: Well the way I personally worked, again it will be different person to person, but we broadly took the view that the ministry owned me from Monday lunchtime through to Thursday evening. So constituency-wise, I tried, it doesn't always work like this, but I tried to keep Monday mornings relatively free and I tried to keep Fridays relatively free from ministerial business so I could still be a constituency MP. Partly because my wife is my office manager, it works slightly differently for me. A lot of other colleagues actually carve out half an hour every day for their constituency. The fact of the matter is I could do that at home. But a normal day would probably start with me getting up – I'm better in the mornings than the evenings – so I would tend to do at least half my box in the morning. I wouldn't tend to do everything at night because I'm more alive and more functioning in the mornings. So there's a whole load of the red box to do.

Despite the fact that everybody complains about government cars, it's probably going to be one of the great false economies because it is an extension of your office. You can do work in a car. If you sit on the Tube, you're not supposed to have a red box, you're not supposed to open papers. People have found ways around that, but it's not really convenient.

Then in the ministry it would probably be a full working day, literally. But as I said earlier we would have had a diary review. And one of the things you clearly want to have sight of is if you're going to have external meetings, with people from outside of the department, I want to see briefings for them well in advance. Briefings for internal meetings, at least a day in advance so you can comment on those, and if there's anything, then you want your private office to get back to you beforehand. So there is a whole chunk of stuff actually in preparation for meetings.

There's obviously then the daily round of letters and statutes for me to sign. During any one week you probably do at least one visit to somewhere, which would take up a period of time. So it is the job of running... I mean, you are part of running the Government of this country. Even at a junior minister level, it's hard work. Even at a junior level, you are making decisions that potentially will affect people's lives in quite a big way. So if you think about some of the motoring decisions we made, they have affected how people do things, you know. So I think you need to always be working...it's like in all things at life, I think you've got to try your hardest and work your hardest at it. Generally although the days are longer because there will also be demands on your time to speak at things in the evenings. So it's not each day every day, but it's generally a longer day. There's generally preparation outside and I think it's the volume of that...

NH: Did you get a lot of thinking time?

SH: You have to carve some out, I think is the answer to that. Particularly if you're going to have a big policy submission, which then you're going to work on with officials and then take to the Secretary of State or take to speak to the Chancellor or the Prime Minister about, or take to Oliver Letwin about because Oliver was policy [minister]. You would obviously want to build into that process at some stage

some thinking time – ‘is that right or not?’ You probably don’t get enough. I think that’s where the diary meetings and that discipline of building some time in each week rather than allowing... because otherwise, through no fault of their own, but just through the sheer volume of requests, the Civil Service will probably fill your diary up. Having a discipline to ensure you have some control over your diary is key.

NH: You mentioned the diary meetings. Do you have any tips on that for how to manage time and how you run those, how you prioritised this volume stuff that was coming in?

SH: Well I think you shouldn’t be afraid, you will always get the recommendation that, ‘I think you should meet these people, Minister’. I mean, obviously there were some things that had to go into the diary and there were some things that were regular fixtures in the diary, like there was a weekly meeting with the Secretary of State, for the whole ministerial team. But there are a whole load of things, ‘well this would be a good thing to do’, or ‘I think you should sit in’, you know. I think you’ve just got to think about your capacity, what it’s going to do, is it worthwhile, is it worthwhile either to you, either in term of the Government’s reputation or in terms of how it might [help you]. So I think it’s the classic, don’t be afraid to say no.

NH: Could you talk us through a time when an unexpected event or a crisis hit the department and how you dealt with that?

SH: Well I can think of unexpected crises in two particular areas, one affected me heavily and one affected me less heavily. Within three weeks of being in the new ministerial team, it was quite clear that a franchise decision that had been taken by the previous Secretary of State in good faith acting on information that the Civil Service were giving, was not the right decision.

I had been in a meeting in the morning where we were beginning to realise there had been some issues. Not quite as difficult as stopping the whole process, which is a very dramatic thing to do when you’ve already awarded a franchise, a rail franchise. I was at a ports conference actually. We’d caught the train up to Windermere and all of [a] sudden I’ve done my speech, we were on a boat in the middle of Lake Windermere at the time and I suddenly got [told], ‘The Secretary of State needs to speak to you’. I’m stood on a deck when it was pouring with rain and I spoke to him saying, ‘Look, tomorrow morning I’m going to make this announcement that’s going to have these consequences.’

The department was under considerable pressure and fire. There was an emergency question, which obviously the Secretary of State held. There was a Westminster Hall debate which I had to handle where the Civil Service had given me my brief, given me my speech. I read it through. I called them in and said, ‘Are you absolutely sure I can say all of this because I am concerned about blah, blah, blah’. ‘No, it’s fine.’ An hour before I go in to do the debate, they come back to me and say, ‘Actually Minister, we think on second thoughts we don’t think you can say some of this.’ So immediately you’ve got to be careful. You’re then wondering of course what else you can and cannot say. Really it was a very fluctuating thing. The department was under pressure. I did a Transport Select Committee on something else, and again one members of the Transport Committee said, ‘How can we have faith in anything your department is doing even in this area because of the contagion from the other area?’ So as a departmental team, we were under a huge amount of pressure.

Actually righting the department, putting a process in place to not only investigate what had gone wrong with that franchise, but more why has it gone wrong, suspending some fairly major civil servants, putting a review of whether the whole system was actually good enough, defending the department and then moving on, was a period of a couple of months of really quite intense pressure. Particularly when it was a very new ministerial team.

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One of the ones more directly to me, was when there was a particular major project that was going on in the department which was under my direct control and the civil servants came to me and said, 'We think there's going to be a problem with this project.' And I said, 'Well, what is wrong with this project?' The people involved were indicating quite clearly that they'd lost a grip on cost. And I said, 'Right, you have a week to go away [and] write me a proper brief about what this is.' [They] came back a week later; the costs had completely spiralled out of control. So I called the whole... chief executive of the company, the strategy director of the company, the whole of the project team in for a star chamber. Broadly, the opening premise was 'If you think I'm going to go to the Chancellor and tell him the cost of this project has doubled or if you think I'm going to tell the Secretary of State the whole project... we now have to work out why you've made these errors, what the problem was, have we got it right for this project and how we put it right for future projects'. And as minister, you have the power to do that sort of role.

NH: You mentioned getting more information, getting people in, in general how did you take decisions - what did you use to inform decision making?

SH: Well to be fair, you do have a huge amount of information as a minister because you have the whole panoply of the Civil Service and it's resource with you. So if you're not happy with anything that's been said, if you want more information, you're perfectly at liberty to go away and say, 'I think you may be right, but I'm concerned about this and this and this, go and resolve these points for me.' And inevitably in decision making, you do that a lot of times. Equally, you may sit down with a team of fairly senior officials and have a discussion about their recommendation as opposed to counterpoints to convince yourself their recommendation is right. Equally, you may say well we need to modify these things. But in the end, it is for you to take the decision. But do you have access to a lot of advice. You have the perfect right to turn something back and say I want more information.

Where I think there's always the issue, and that is more tricky, is where, as a minister, you can take advice outside the Civil Service. I think one of the great mistakes, given we've come out of a period of economic crisis, which 2010 was and there was a real concern about the cost of government and everything else, government should be good value for money for the taxpayer and there are lot of easy things, like I've just talked about is the Government car service. But as a minister, if you don't have a government car you do less meetings because you don't have time to go there and back. There are a lot of times where we did go by public transport because it was actually simply quicker to get on the Tube service. But it's not always. And it's very easy for The Daily Mail and The Sun to say 'profligate minister in the car'. They forget they actually want you to be there. And they're also saying, 'Why on earth did they have a red box delivered by a car?' Well at first sight it's extraordinarily profligate, but if you think about it, if you're not in the office on a Friday and most ministers aren't in for the whole day on a Friday or at all. If you want the minister to do a lot of weekend work, there are only two ways of doing it, either putting it in a secure bag via the Royal Mail or if two or three ministers live in the same part of London, why not send a car to drop a box round on a Saturday morning.

The other thing we stopped was, I think all ministers ought to have their own special adviser. I understand secretaries of state have two, junior ministers generally don't have one. But personally, I would give every minister a special adviser so that special adviser can sometimes play devil's advocate in a way that it is very difficult for the Civil Service to do. Even if you're playing devil's advocate in your own mind, so someone can inform you.

There's obviously the Civil Service, but sometimes there's some really good outside experts. Of course, you can call them in and I did quite often [and] say, 'I want to see so-and-so about this'. But it would be a lot more helpful if there was someone else. I do think we're going to have to think quite carefully, given the complexity of modern government and the need to make sure you're giving the very best advice. I would personally, although it would be a cost and everybody would shout at it, I would personally give everybody a special adviser.

NH: Did you make use of the Secretary of State's spads [special advisers]?

SH: Yeah.

NH: What sort of thing did you go to them for, is it that devil's advocate role?

SH: Well it's a bit of that. On very big policy formulation, I would tend to ask them if they would like to come to the meetings. We would also then discuss things not only for... as a minister, let's be clear you're not only here to run the Government. And not all of government is political. So making sure you're doing things in a political way in certain areas is important to get some political sense or feel because you sometimes may or may not necessarily as a minister.

Most secretaries of state had two advisers – one is more concentrated on policy, one's more on media and getting out. So there was a balance also in making sure that working with the guy who runs the media, talking about where you're going on visits and what else you can do when you're there, not just what the Civil Service is suggesting. Also working with them to place, again, the sort of articles you might be writing not from a government point of view, but sometimes from a political point of view as well. Certainly the way our department worked was that I would probably pop into the spads' office to chat about something at least once a day.

JG: What about your relationship with other junior ministers and the Secretary of State? How did that ministerial team work within Transport during your time there?

SH: Pretty well, and don't forget it was a time of coalition. But we never separately caucused at all. We always had one ministerial team meeting. We used to run a double meeting actually very effectively, which was that the first meeting would be a meeting for all ministers and all civil servants. And then there'd be a meeting with ministers by themselves without the Civil Service there. Some weeks we did it one way, some weeks we did it another way. That would be quite an important focal point for getting together.

As a minister, obviously there are overlaps in policy areas where you'll sometimes do joint meetings. But you know, if you think about most departments, you had quite... and you'd go and look at the ministerial book, people have quite clear areas of responsibility within a department. It's quite clear who the lead is and the lead minister is. You would obviously see colleagues around and you chat to them and socialise with them a little bit. It was always collegiate and friendly without being in each other's pocket all the time. Inevitably you have a job to do, they have a job to do. You may sometimes chat to them during the day. Certainly share lifts around. I always thought the Secretary of State ran a pretty happy ship of ministers actually. He would have you in on meetings about your area that you wanted to be informed in, particularly if there were particular challenges. It worked. I mean I found that a very collegiate relationship actually. So we all worked together. We all knew each other, but it wasn't like we needed to see each other every day of the week.

JG: And just thinking about getting things done during your time in office, looking back what do you feel is your greatest achievement?

SH: I guess in policy, I can find things, in the four major policy areas I was involved in, you can find four things that are now working a lot better because of the changes we made than they were before I started in the department. And that's what you can be pleased with.

JG: So can you give us an example of one or two that you're particularly proud of?

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SH: Well, I guess in terms of the whole area of shipping, I'm particularly proud it's no longer the backwater of the Department for Transport. We've given it a lot more profile within government. London International Shipping, which we started, is running this year for the second time. I'm very proud of the fact that we've got a new deal for the roads in this country in terms of the Highways Agency becoming a separate company and four-year funding for that cycle. And actually in the last budget, the hypothecation of the new road tax; all ideas that we were talking about in 2012. On the rail side, I'm particularly proud of the new franchising system and the new way we operate franchises which allow for not only the Government to set the usual necessary terms of service, but of encouraging operating companies to come forward with innovative solutions. And that we have now got a metric of analysis that enables us to make comparatives between various qualities as well as the quantitative bits. That's made some huge differences particularly for the recent East Coast franchise award which I think was a model of the new way that franchises should be awarded.

JG: That sort of links back to the unexpected event question, what were the key factors in turning round that franchising system?

SH: Well out of that disaster came a review of the whole franchising system and was the franchising system the right way to go. At the time, I was minister for roads not rail, but I also contributed to it and particularly some [of] the conclusions. I didn't necessarily agree with all the conclusions of that review, actually. It was written by an outsider. What it did establish is that we needed some key strengths in the department; we needed to think about how we were going to assess the qualitative aspects of a bid if we wanted that. So we built, over a period of time, built that capability. There were some issues about whether it should have been done in-house or as a separate office for rail franchising and I think there are still some issues around that.

But you've got the right person to lead it who then goes out and gets the right people sometimes on secondment, sometimes not. Bizarrely, the quality of corporate finance in DfT [was good], [there were] two or three really competent corporate financiers, which made a really big difference. You generally wouldn't have expected to have found people of that quality inside government. I would have expected to find them still in the City, but for all sorts of reasons it enabled us to take a much more, make the franchising in places much more responsive to what customers are saying they wanted to see. And in the end, the thing you need to remember is it's the customer that counts. So over a period of two years starting from the crash of one franchise, what went wrong with that franchise, to a review of the total system [and] some of the outputs of that to rebuilding and then awarding the franchise at the other side of the country two years later. I think it completely rebuilt the whole process. Upgraded it significantly with a number of initiatives.

NH: What was most frustrating about being a minister?

SH: I think there are always things the Civil Service want to try and stop you doing. Quite a lot of that was around EU regulation. I think quite rightly sometimes, well not necessarily quite rightly, but there were a number of things I might have wanted to have been chucked back quite quickly. So there are always a number of things that they will say, 'Well, I'm not sure you could really do that, Minister. I am not sure you should think about them or I think you should think about that, Minister.' Some of that is frustrating; some of that is good advice. Some of it is the natural caution of the Civil Service. I do think we need to overcome that. I think that sometimes in some areas, not in all things, the process and the speed of government is still very slow still even comparative to the corporate world.

NH: Do you mean getting from policy to implementation or do you mean in the day-to-day?

SH: A bit of both, but mainly policy to implementation.

NH: And do you have any thoughts on how that or government generally could be made more effective?

SH: I think in that particular area one of the problems is there are probably some processes that could be shortened quite dramatically. There are certain processes that are probably necessary, but could go on concurrently with other processes. So the whole write-round process is quite slow and that slows things up. Sometimes switching resources, Civil Service resourcing, in the department to push one project ahead faster, sometimes takes longer. Sometimes just getting sheer agreement on certain things takes longer than it might otherwise. I guess you could argue that you obviously want to have the right checks and balances on anyone's policy to ensure it complies with the overall things.

But I think the process could be better. It's really interesting, one of the things we did do I suppose again, I'm talking about the roads, going back to the roads, when I first arrived I tried to work out why it took so long when we had an idea for upgrading a road to getting the first shovel in the ground. And what you found was every process went consecutively. You're thinking, 'why didn't some of these...?' 'We've never done that before, Minister, we don't do it that way.' 'There's no reason you can't do it.' 'I suppose we could try it.' You know one of the road schemes we took five years out of the process and it's still taken you seven years to build the bloody road. But we took five years out of the process because of this.

NH: And based on all your experiences how would you define an effective minister?

SH: I think it's got to be someone who has strength of character and intellect that knows what they want to do. I think that is important. Personally, I think it needs to be someone who has to build a strong sense of respect, it's better if people like you as well, in my opinion, it's not necessary [but] respect is important.

NH: Do you mean within the department or...?

SH: Within the department. Well it always, you know, you're perceived to be effective, i.e. delivering your policies, you're perceived to be knowledgeable, you're perceived to be competent, turning up on time and these sort of things, turning up to Cabinet committees being fully prepared. So not only in the department but across government I think that's important as well. And the final thing is just be prepared to try and find that extra three hours, two hours every day. It is a question of working harder I think in the end.

JG: With hindsight, is there anything you'd have done differently?

SH: I guess two things I would have done differently, I need to think about others, but I would certainly encourage all ministers to think about having their own press officer as well. It doesn't matter if they're Civil Service or outside. I think there's huge numbers of chances for exploitation of bringing out government policy and creating that impression of effectiveness and competence which we miss. So whether it's press or whether it's media, call it what you want, the wider social media and whatever. I think inside private offices having your own, just like you have a diary secretary, having a person who is responsible for media, even if it's only part of their job, I think I would try and insist on that next time. I would probably be more slightly more ruthless about the diary than I was. I would definitely try and persuade the Secretary of State to give me a bit more dedicated resource of a special adviser. I guess having done it once, if I went through it again, I would probably have an even sharper focus on the things I wanted to achieve. Notwithstanding all the other things you would achieve because the Civil Service are doing them, [but] things you personally want to do. Hopefully there will be rehabilitation but if there's not, but if there were, I'd have an even sharper focus. I'd spend the first day making clear what I really what I wanted to do.

NH: Is there anything that we haven't asked about? It's the end of our questions. Anything you'd like to add?

SH: No, I don't think so particularly. I think we've covered an awful lot of ground.

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