

# Ministers Reflect Tracey Crouch



10 July 2019

# Biographical details

## Parliamentary history

2010 – present: MP for Chatham and Aylesford

## Government career

2017–18: Parliamentary under secretary of state for sport, civil society and loneliness  
(Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport)

2015–17: Parliamentary under secretary of state for sport, heritage and tourism  
(Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport)

**Tracey Crouch was interviewed by Dr Catherine Haddon and Daniel Devine on 10 July 2019 for the Institute for Government’s Ministers Reflect project.**

Tracey Crouch talks about her relationship with officials, the influence of the Treasury and Number 10 on policymaking, and how to balance ministerial office with a personal life.

**Catherine Haddon (CH):** Let’s start with May 2015 when you joined the government as a parliamentary under secretary of state at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. Could you tell us a bit about the appointment process, how you heard about it, and what you were told about the role?

**Tracey Crouch (TC):** Well, I didn’t expect to be made a minister, so it came as a bit of a surprise. In fact, when I got the call from Downing Street, I thought it was a prank [*laughter*]. I wasn't in London, I was on my way back to Kent, and so couldn’t do the walk down Downing Street – which is probably a good thing because I think I was in jeans anyway – and then the next morning, I couldn’t be in London either as we were about to go off on holiday. So, I ended up having a phone call with the prime minister.

I didn’t take the job straight away, I asked to think about it, which apparently is a very common trait among female ministers, according to David Cameron. All the females that he tried to appoint were: “Can I think about it?”, whereas all the men were like: “Yes, no, I’ll be marvellous” [*laughter*]. He gave me half an hour to consider the position, which actually only took me about two minutes to decide, but I waited 29 minutes to call back.

**CH: What made you hesitate in the first instance?**

**TC:** I've spoken quite publicly about this, but during the election campaign immediately before that I’d had a miscarriage, and so it sort of changed my perspective on what I wanted out of life, and I wasn't sure whether or not being a minister would be conducive to starting a family. As it happens, it turned out that the day I was appointed was actually the day I conceived my son Freddie [*laughter*], a point I did make to David Cameron. But it was really from a personal perspective. I’d never sort of harboured great ambition to be a minister, and I certainly hadn’t spent the first five years of my parliamentary life trying to be one – in fact, quite the opposite. He offered me the only job that I would have taken. If he'd rung up and offered me, you know, junior fisheries minister or something, I wouldn’t have taken it.

**CH: Obviously, you had a background in some of the areas that you went on to deal with. How much did that help you with conceiving what you might want to do with the role? Did you have any concept of what you'd actually be doing as a minister?**

**TC:** I did. I'd been on the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee for around two years beforehand, so I was aware of some of the policy areas that we had been looking at as a committee, but also where there'd been gaps in government policy. So when I had the initial conversation with David Cameron, I asked if I could have school sport in my brief, to which he unfortunately said no, but to this day, I still think there is an issue with not having school sport in the brief, because that's where you really start to get people's interest in sport, or indeed you lose them from sport. We'd done some work on gambling, so I already kind of knew what I wanted to do around gambling, and although tourism and heritage were fairly new, we had looked at the tourism industry on the committee. So, I had some idea about what I wanted, but while I had a political and policy interest in sport, I also have a personal passion for sport, so I felt very comfortable, very relaxed going into the brief.

**CH: What about your first day and going into the department for the first time?**

**TC:** Well, that was a week later. The most bizarre thing was actually arriving at our hotel in Dorset, and about three hours later, a [ministerial] box arriving: that was the strangest thing, not least because I also had a glass of wine in my hand! You realised straight away that your timetable was not your own anymore.

**CH: Had you spoken to the department or the secretary of state?**

**TC:** Yes. It was the weirdest thing, because, I put the phone down to Ed Llewellyn [Downing Street chief of staff], and I then immediately rang my parliamentary office and literally – we're talking 30 seconds – they answered the phone and I could hear my secretary screaming in the background. It was because they were watching the Sky News ticker and my appointment came across on the screen. I had only just put down the phone, then picked it up again and it was already announced. Once I put down the phone to them, there was another call from Downing Street saying: "We're putting you through to your private secretary", and my wonderful private secretary was there saying: "Congratulations, minister", and I was like: "Oh my God, it's begun. You know, that's it, I'm now a minister". It just went crazy.

The permanent secretary rang me and later that afternoon [John Whittingdale](#), the Secretary of State [for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport], rang me too. It was at the point when I was on the phone to John that the box arrived and, yeah, it was bizarre. It's a really strange thing hearing your name being read out in appointments for the first time, I mean, Steve [Ladner, Tracey Crouch's husband] nearly crashed the car going around a roundabout when we heard it on *The World at One* [laughter]. It's just a very odd feeling.

I arrived in the department on the Monday and we had an all staff stand-up, which is quite daunting for the first time, and I met the permanent secretary, Sue Owen – who was just absolutely lovely, so welcoming – and I think all of us were beaming. I mean, it's the best department to be in. Ed Vaizey [minister of state for culture, communications and creative industries] was the kind of “minister of continuation”, which was a joke that the prime minister had forgotten he existed, and so he never got sacked. Then there was John [Whittingdale] who had been the [Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select] Committee chair for I think 10 years or something ridiculous, and then me. We were just all smiles, but alongside these fresh faced [were] however many civil servants standing in front of us with expectations: it is quite scary.

**CH: Did you have any sense of what your priorities were then?**

**TC:** I did, yes. Throughout the day, I met the core teams of each part of the portfolio – so the heads of the sports team, the tourism team, the heritage team and the gambling team. Each would come in. I'd already been given a massive brief about the policy areas and the priorities within those policy areas, according to the civil service, but I had some of my own bits. So, take gambling for example. On that very first day, I said I wanted to review stakes and prizes on gambling, and it took a while for that to actually start, because there was some push back from the civil service to begin with. But once it began, it did actually take three and a half years to finish, but we got there in the end.

**Daniel Devine (DD): When you came into your ministerial post, did you feel like your work before 2010 helped in any way to prepare you? What about your experience in Parliament in the preceding five years?**

**TC:** Yeah, I guess so. I mean, I've managed lots of teams throughout previous careers, but I'd also been at that level where you're both managing people that work to you, and also managing upwards as well. So, in my life before Parliament, I'd always had really good relationships with chief executives that I'd worked for; they'd admired and respected the advice that I was giving. I think that's the same sort of relationship you have with the secretary of state, you have to be absolutely on your portfolio, so that they know and respect and trust you in your policy decisions. John was really open about the fact that he doesn't know a great deal about sport. In fact, I bought him a book as a present for his appointment on the rules of every single sport that we have in this country and beyond, which he has confessed to me that he has never opened. Because he knew that I did know however, he wanted to test me – I don't mean test in terms of quizzing for answers – but he would challenge me on policy areas. He knew that ultimately, at the end of the day, I'd make a judgement based on the knowledge that I had.

**DD: Do you feel like your knowledge of the policy areas helped you get to grips with what you were doing, or do you feel like the transition would have been just as easy in a different portfolio?**

**TC:** I wouldn't have taken a different portfolio, so that's hard to answer really, because I just have no particular desire to go and do something else, and so I wouldn't have done it. But I'd worked with John and on the committee, so we had a good relationship. My understanding is that he asked specifically for me, so already I knew that I'd got that level of respect and trust, which I think helps.

**DD: Previously you'd worked as a chief of staff in opposition. How do you think working in opposition compared to eventually being in government?**

**TC:** I think it's different if you're an MP in opposition to if you're a staffer in opposition. My understanding of MPs in opposition, bearing in mind I've not yet been there, is that it's not a pleasant experience. But when you're a researcher in this place, it's hard and it's challenging, whether your member is in government or in opposition, but it's also enormous fun. And so, I think you have a lot more freedom to do and say things when you're in opposition; you can stand up and you can criticise and blame and it's actually easier to write a speech which is sort of attacking rather than defending. So, I think yeah, I learnt a lot as a staffer.

**CH: Can we talk a bit about the support you got from the civil service, because you've mentioned briefly your private office and speaking with them. How did you find that support and what was really helpful and what was difficult to adjust to?**

**TC:** I loved my civil service. I think DCMS [Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport] officials are really undervalued in the whole big scheme of things – the whole department is – and I was really shocked to hear that they have much lower pay levels than other departments, whereas what the department does and the impact that it has on the economy, GDP, productivity or whatever, is huge. But ultimately, they're all really nice and really supportive and my private office were brilliant.

I had about a year of the same private office before some were then due to rotate, and my private secretary stayed for a long time, and then his own personal circumstances changed so he left, but then I had another brilliant private secretary. But the support team were fantastic, and I'm sure they spent a lot of time buffering, sort of being the middle man taking out a lot of the crap, and they were brilliant at it.

**CH: Did you get any first day briefing documents?**

**TC:** Oh God, yeah [*laughter*] – that's what came down in the box, it was enormous and there was lots of different things in there: things about the department, things about where it sits within Whitehall, things about the key personnel within the department and then the areas that I was responsible for.

In your title, you know you're responsible for sport, gambling, tourism and heritage – well, gambling obviously became a part of it, but it's not in the title – but there are other things that I was also responsible for that are not in the title. So, it included all the First World War commemorations, but also ceremonial issues, and I suddenly become responsible for things like flags. But the one briefing that literally drained the blood from my face, to the extent that Steve actually asked if I was alright, was I suddenly became responsible for the ceremonial aspects of royal funerals and I was like: "Oh my God!"

You do appreciate where you stand in the big pecking order, but actually the bit that DCMS does is the public-facing bit. So, while you're not necessarily responsible for the actual event, because that's a decision for Buckingham Palace, things like making sure that, you know, the public are safe when they're paying their respects, that there are toilets and coffees and ponchos if it rains, that sort of thing. But if that bit goes wrong, then that's the bit that people remember, and so I was having palpitations.

**CH: What was your experience of interacting with Parliament as a minister for the first time?**

**TC:** I don't know. I mean, maybe my memory is slightly clouded because it got a lot easier over time, but I was always quite a nervous backbencher and I don't really like public speaking very much, which I know is an odd thing for a politician to say! When I did backbench speeches, I found things like taking my shoes off to speak a real kind of anchoring aspect which helped me control my nerves. You can't do that when you're on the frontbench, you can't be sat there with your toes out! So that was one of the things that sounds like a ridiculous change, but it's a real difference in speaking from the frontbench as compared to the backbench. However, holding on to the dispatch box at the frontbench is still really quite comforting.

So, I think I adapted quite well moving from backbench to frontbench, but you also realise that it's far more intense. It's not a case of making a quick speech, sitting down and then bugging off for a cup of tea; you're there for the whole thing and you have to pay attention, and it's far more challenging in that way. Everything you say becomes fact. That was the thing that I was most tough with my civil servants on: reminding them that it's me that goes into the chamber to speak to make policy announcements or to answer questions, and therefore, if they get it wrong, I get it wrong. I'm the one that gets punished, not them, I'm the one who gets sort of blazoned all over the papers or criticised or called back to Parliament or whatever, not them. So damn well get it right. That was the thing that I was always really tough on, I would get every single figure and statement of fact double checked, because I didn't want to be the one who got recalled to Parliament to explain an error.

**CH: Can we just turn to 2017? What then changed in the role? Was the change to your brief discussed with you beforehand?**

**TC:** So, I went on maternity leave, Theresa May came in, and she reappointed me to the same role. I was still sports, tourism and heritage, and then we had the snap election. Rob Wilson, who was the minister for OCS [Office of Civil Society] lost his seat, and the responsibility for OCS passed to me, but not the promotion of minister of state. Tourism and heritage were passed to Michael Ellis and I picked up OCS and then later loneliness to go with that.

**CH: Talk us through a policy area in terms of what goes on behind the scenes and what your role as a minister is to actually keep decision making going.**

**TC:** I guess I'll give you two examples, the first would be gambling and the second would be relating to safeguarding in sport, because one was seen through to its completion and the other was frustrated by other departments, so I think it's a good example.

On gambling, it took a while to kick off, there was some push back because the gambling team had only just completed another major piece of work on gambling, and there were other things that needed to be done within the gambling team, like society lotteries reviews, the fourth national lottery license and some horse racing issues as well. My view, though, was that you're a big team, you can definitely juggle all of these issues – it shouldn't just be one thing for one team at one particular time. So, it did take a bit of push, but we got there in the end.

Once we did, I think the gambling team were fully on board with the idea of conducting a wholesale review of stakes and prizes, of which fixed-odds betting terminals (FOBTs) was just one element. But I think there was also a realisation and a complete appreciation that the industry that we were dealing with were very... well, they're quite litigious. So, we absolutely had to go through proper process in order to ensure that whatever outcome came out, there was no way we could be JR'd [judicially reviewed] on the outcome. We couldn't be JR'd on the policy decision, just the process that reached that policy decision, and that's in many respects why it took so long. But I think we had a good dialogue with other stakeholders as well, so people understood why it was going to take a significant amount of time, and it was a really hard slog, and the team were, rightly I think, put up for an award when it was finally published. I think that they were recognised for the hard work that they did from beginning to end.

**CH: What about your relationship with the Treasury? Obviously, that became an issue later on, but was it there from the beginning?**

**TC:** Yeah, totally. The thing is that, ultimately, I think most departments are quite frightened of the Treasury, which I'm not sure is necessarily very healthy. The Treasury were quite dominant in their opinion on this early on, but with the change in prime



minister, Theresa May was very committed to making sure that this did happen. It helped to have Number 10's support in the review and once the review started it was clear the direction that the review was going in.

I think we also gathered up lots of support from around other departments. DWP [Department for Work and Pensions], at the time of Iain Duncan Smith, was incredibly helpful, because Iain saw it from the perspective of people who were his stakeholders becoming vulnerable to the actions and behaviours of the [gambling] industry. So once DWP had kind of started in that process, that was an enormous help as well. But we had to gather lots of different views and people are changing all the time within those departments, so it was continuous stakeholder management from a departmental perspective.

Downing Street were absolutely pivotal in that, once they had agreed that the review was happening, and the general direction of that review became clear, it was very difficult for others to oppose it. We did have to compromise in some areas – on the wider policy around gambling – in order to satisfy the Treasury to support us in the initial stake reduction, which they did. The gambling review was then published to much acclaim in May 2018. It was published and that was fine, but the delay in the introduction of it was I think really over to the Treasury.

The other policy, which I still feel frustrated by to this day even though I'm not the minister anymore, was around safeguarding in sport. Again, that was something that was out of DCMS's control; it came out of the historic abuse allegations in football and the relevant legislation doesn't sit within DCMS, it sits within the Ministry of Justice.

Sport had conducted, on my request, a massive review of its safeguarding procedures, and it had come back with recommendations for itself to enhance safeguarding procedures. But one of the loopholes that they came back with was that, at the moment, if you are a teacher, you cannot have a sexual relationship with a 16 or 17 year old, but you can if you're a sports coach, and they thought that that loophole should be closed. I absolutely agreed with them, but we didn't own the legislation, and the people that do own the legislation were at the Ministry of Justice, where the civil servants were less keen on change.

The minister at the time, Phillip Lee [parliamentary under secretary of state for youth justice, victims, female offenders and offender health] absolutely agreed, thought it was a complete no brainer and that we should do it, and so agreed with me that I could announce on the anniversary of the abuse allegations that we were going to go ahead and do it. Unfortunately, that wasn't necessarily the universal view at the Ministry of Justice, so when I said it was going to happen on the floor of the House it came as a bit of a surprise to many people [*laughter*]. And after that Phillip left, so he could no longer champion that cause and the next minister was more taken by the arguments of her officials.

**CH: Do you know what their arguments were that led to the reversal of that decision?**

**TC:** It was actually that it opens a can of worms, so their view is if we do it for sports coaches, we have to do it for driving instructors, music tutors and everything else. To which my response is, so, what's the problem frankly? Yes, we should do it for driving instructors and music tutors and everybody else. But it's not my department and it wasn't my legislation.

**DD: Can you talk us through the civil society strategy, which was the first such strategy in over 15 years? What was the process of creating that strategy and how did you ensure it was implemented properly?**

**TC:** I swear I became known as the minister for strategies, because I published the sports strategy, the loneliness strategy and the civil society strategy [*laughter*].

The civil society strategy was enormous fun actually, we built a really good team within OCS to look at various parts of civil society, which in itself is quite broad, and it's important as well that all the stakeholders within the wider civil society were being listened to and given the opportunity to talk about what was going to happen for the next 10 years. I think that what we tried to do is to build a strategy for the decade in front of us, rather than looking and reflecting on what was happening behind us. And the stakeholders in civil society absolutely loved that and were fully engaged, and actually really helped shape it themselves.

Certainly as a minister I didn't really have any pre-conceptions as to what should be in the strategy, so I was really open-minded, and when the officials were coming to me with ideas that they had built on from going around the country having stakeholder meetings, I was like: "Wow, that's amazing", you know? But again, Downing Street were absolutely kind of key in that. James Marshall [director of the Number 10 Policy Unit] really drove the idea of a civil society strategy, pulling different bits into it and bringing some real sort of big blue sky thinking on citizen aspects, how we encourage volunteers, and looking at different countries and what they do. So, it was something again that was quite well received within the sector.

Unfortunately, the day it was launched there was a controversial comment from Boris Johnson about women in burqas, so I ended up spending most of my media round talking about that, not the Civil Society Strategy [*laughter*] – the perils of being a minister on a media round! But the sector thought it was really good. Implementation is definitely part of that, but that's for the next generation of ministers to do.

**DD: You spoke a bit about the struggles of working with other departments: how did you find working with other departments in developing the civil society strategy?**

**TC:** A lot of them were actually on board and enjoyed being part of something that didn't really involve money. To be honest with you, most departments only care if they

have to hand over some money, but when you're engaging other departments on big conceptual ideas, it's different. The sports strategy, for example, is exactly the same. There are eight or nine different departments that have mini forewords in each departments' sports strategy, because sport is actually key in terms of helping the Home Office, you know, trying to tackle some of the issues like knife crime, gang crime. Likewise, it's obviously key in education and health. And that was the same with the civil society strategy; if you get other departments on board, it will actually help deliver it in the long term.

**CH: One of the things you mentioned is getting out into the sector and talking to real people. How much was visiting and meeting different groups a big part of your job? Did you occasionally challenge the civil service to try and go and see different people?**

**TC:** Yeah, of course [*laughter*]. It's a case of sometimes you do feel like you're fishing from a small pool of opportunity, but I also understood that there were always limitations and we've just had such a mad kind of four or five years in Westminster, that it's been difficult to go further afield, but at the same time, I've met some incredible people on that journey.

I think as well, to be fair to my officials, I was always really precious with my time, you know, having had a baby in office, and they were brilliant at making sure that my week was front-loaded so when I got home, I could concentrate on being mum. So that meant, to be fair to them, that they were quite limited in terms of what I could do. I couldn't suddenly go off to Liverpool on a Wednesday afternoon, because I didn't want to; I wanted to go home, and I wanted to see the baby. I wouldn't really criticise them for always going over to Lambeth to see so and so, because that's really the premise I gave them to work with.

**CH: Do think there is more that Whitehall could do to actually support people who have got young families or caring responsibilities generally? Is there more that you can do as a minister or is it just part of the job?**

**TC:** I have an excuse because DCMS was so good at looking after me in that sense and the permanent secretary herself had a different challenge with caring responsibilities, so you know that it's a balance. But I also got everything done, so I think that they were never concerned that I wasn't doing the job, it was just how I managed it; it's surprising how much work you can get done at 6 o'clock on Saturday morning with the CBeebies on in the background [*laughter*]. Could they do more? I don't know. Could we have job shares? Could work, but it could also be a complete disaster. Could we have more ministers but with smaller portfolios? I could potentially support that, but then that's an extra cost to the taxpayer. I just don't think there's any easy answer.

**CH: You served under four different secretaries of state at DCMS. Were there any differences in how they managed their team?**

**TC:** Yes, enormous differences. I mean I don't want to go into too much detail but, enormous differences. John [Whittingdale] I've known very well, and he and I were friends as well as colleagues: we had sat on the select committee for years, we'd travelled to various parts of the world, and he knew my weaknesses as much as my strengths. So, he was brilliant in that sense. I would sit there at DCMS questions and the one question that I really hated being asked to answer was around secondary ticketing, because it's actually a Department for Business [Energy, and Industrial Strategy] issue. It involved the consumer stuff, but it's always sports fans, so I was like: "John, you have to take the secondary ticketing", and he loved it, he would always take it, so that's the kind of relationship that we had.

Then Karen [Bradley] came in and Karen was very different in the way that she worked. Matt [Hancock] came in and Matt was a very different secretary of state to minister: he was a complete pain in the arse as a minister – and I say this to his face – he was a complete pain, but as secretary of state, he was fabulous. He was a really good leader of a team, he was full of energy, he was 100% supportive of ideas and policies, he had a really good gut feeling about what would work, what wouldn't work. If he made a decision that was counter to what you were recommending, he would always explain his position and why he came to that view and be enormously apologetic, and you couldn't help but say okay fine, you're the secretary of state. I worked really well with Matt and I was sorry for me that he got promoted, although I wasn't sorry for him [laughter]. My relationship with Jeremy [Wright] was obviously very short.

**CH: What are the factors then that make for an effective secretary of state? Do enough people think about how to work in a team with others? Is it actively encouraged, or do you think it depends on the individual initiating that for themselves?**

**TC:** I think it just depends on the individual. The thing is, you're either a good team leader or you're not, and I think being in that position really shows whether or not you're a good team leader or not, because you have to have confidence in yourself to be able to make a decision, particularly in areas that you might not know everything. You have to recognise that you are working with people who may know a little bit more than you on specific issues. At the same time, it's important to encourage your team to continue to have that specific knowledge and not stamp them out and make them irrelevant. You also have to have that constant energy as well as enthusiasm.

Matt and I had a phenomenal turnaround in [ministerial] box work. We would both be given a box in the evening and have then back on the desks of our private offices in the morning completed. And it didn't matter how much work you put in there, we would get it done. We would make decisions quickly; we'd have a conversation in the morning, Private Office would give us a recommendation in the afternoon, and it could be made by the evening – you know, it was that quick. But we just worked really effectively with each other, and to be honest with you, I think he's just very naturally like that. When he stood for the [Conservative Party] leadership, almost everybody who had worked for

him in a department supported him, and I think that probably shows that he was a good secretary of state and had those qualities that make that.

**DD: You've been in Parliament during the [2010–15 Conservative–Liberal Democrat] coalition and during the transition from having a majority to a minority. Do you think these changes affected your work or the dynamics of Parliament generally?**

**TC:** Yeah, I mean, dynamics, absolutely. There are times I really miss the coalition [*laughter*] – we got stuff done. But the thing is, I don't think you can compare each time in an equal way, that's apples and pears. I mean, the way we worked before Brexit is also very different to the way we've worked post-Brexit. I feel enormous sympathy for officials and civil servants who have been working on issues for years and it's just ground to a halt because of Brexit. Nothing is happening and the one thing I know from my time in Whitehall is that officials want to get stuff done. You know, their *modus operandi* is not: "Let's not have any change" [*laughter*]. They're there to deliver policy change and legislation and I genuinely feel for them at the moment.

**CH: Apart from the impact on Parliament, in what other ways did Brexit impact your job? How did your role change?**

**TC:** Well, actually, rather wonderfully, my portfolio was quite Brexit-light. In fact, people used to get fined if they mentioned the 'B' word in a meeting [*laughter*], because I had very limited Brexit-related policy, and we could really motor on through quite a lot of issues as a consequence. The department itself saw quite a big change in the number of people that were going off to the Brexit delivery units, so the teams became fewer in number, which made it more challenging for them. As a result, I had to temper some of my own thoughts and ideas, because they couldn't be delivered as we just didn't have the resources to deliver them. So, certainly we had to start to prioritise the areas that we wanted teams to look at, which is a shame because there was a lot of good stuff that in normal circumstances could have been done.

**CH: You've mentioned having to work with Number 10. What is it like for you as a minister? How does Number 10 influence you, and how much do they interact with you as a junior minister as opposed to a secretary of state? Do they have a media focus, or do they intervene in your policy brief?**

**TC:** I had a mixed relationship with Number 10: when they were good, they were very good, [*laughter*]; when they were bad, they were awful. But at the same time, I also had a portfolio, particularly the sports portfolio, which wasn't very political. So, one of the early frustrations we had was, because our relationship was initially not so good, we developed our own way of working.

Quite often, media teams in departments have to go and get permission from Downing Street to talk to journalists on particular issues. Now, I understand that when the issues

are quite political, but I don't get that when it's relating to whether or not the IAAF [International Association of Athletics Federations] should remove its ban on cheating athletes, as it's got nothing to do with the government. They want the minister to comment, but it's got nothing to do with Parliament, politics or anything like that. Or it might be some sports story, like was Johanna Konta [a British professional tennis player] right to call out a patronising journalist – I'm not going to go to Downing Street and ask if it's alright to do a comment on that.

We ended up creating our own way of working, because, as I quite often pointed out, their concern was the front half of the newspaper, while my concern was the back half of the newspaper, so we're not going to get into an issue. On other more controversial issues, where you just had to develop the working relationship, I had quite a light touch relationship with them. I wasn't their, I guess, main focus.

**CH: When loneliness was added to your brief, did Theresa May take a greater interest in what you were doing?**

**TC:** Yes, absolutely. I mean, Downing Street led that and James Marshall was our point of contact in there, but again it was fairly non-controversial. We used Downing Street to help us get other departments to buck up their ideas; you know Downing Street sent out a memo basically telling departments that they had to give us one person and money, and of course, when they didn't do that, we'd go back to Downing Street. It was like going back to your mum to tell on your little sister, but it was quite helpful.

**DD: Moving on to November 2018, can you describe the experience resigning from your role?**

**TC:** It's quite traumatic. But it was actually relatively simple [*laughter*]. I had said to the chief whip that the situation as it was was problematic and that I wouldn't support the decision to delay the implementation [of the maximum stakes to fixed-odds betting terminals]. However, I was actually going to be in the air when Phillip Hammond stood up and made his Budget speech – if that hadn't been the case, I probably would have resigned on Budget day itself rather than later on. Anyway, I was abroad, and by the time I got back nothing had changed and there was an opportunity. The uproar had already begun, and I'd had conversations with Downing Street while at Washington Airport and still nothing had changed by the time I had landed, and so we waited until the end of the day, when we'd been told that there could be a concession in the winding up speech from the chief secretary of the Treasury.

When that concession didn't come, I pressed send on my letter of resignation. I didn't know up until that point, but once you press send there is no unsending it. Earlier that day, I'd spoken to the prime minister's chief of staff and said: "Right, I'll send you the draft now", and he said: "No, you can't do that, the minute you've sent the letter you

have resigned”. So, the minute that the chief secretary sat down and there was no concession, that’s when I pressed send. In terms of process, it was all relatively simple.

The aftermath was quite interesting. My private office had been with me for quite a while and they were really upset about it, but one thing I said to them was you know this is what you do, this is your job and your job is ‘the king is dead, long live the king’; I do not take it personally that you will be working tomorrow for somebody else. They were fantastic though, they cleared my desk, brought everything over, and it was very smooth in terms of exit. The permanent secretary was kind enough – and this is the gift of a permanent secretary, and not a normal thing apparently – to let me go and do a goodbye to the staff, which was really touching. I think everyone was in tears including myself, but it was quite an unusual part of the process.

**DD: You have focused on many of the same issues on the backbench. Do you feel like your experience as a minister has made you a more effective backbencher?**

**TC:** Yeah, I mean I’ve been quite cautious about continuing the portfolio entirely. My predecessor was brilliant at giving me space, and I kind of feel that needs to be the same for Mims [Davies, the subsequent parliamentary under secretary of state for sport and civil society]. I haven’t spoken in the chamber at all on any of my previous portfolio, I’ve made a couple of media comments on particular issues that have come up, but I’ve not spoken in the chamber on it. I feel uncomfortable doing it. And actually, one of the things I feel most uncomfortable about is standing up and then everyone else going, you were an amazing sports minister, when the new sports minister is sat there and it’s just embarrassing for everyone. So, I haven’t really done that.

**CH: What achievement in office are you most proud of?**

**TC:** It’s difficult because I was there for so long, as longest-serving Conservative sports minister [*laughter*], so it’s challenging. There are lots of things that I’m really proud of. I’m proud of the strategies that we delivered, a lot of hard work went into that, and obviously I’m pleased with the outcome of the gambling review and the fact that, even today, eight months on, I still get emails from people saying I saved their life – so that’s the one that’s potentially had the most human impact. But I am really proud of some of the work we did in sport and, in particular, changes that we made to governance in order to ensure that you have more women on boards, and women are more pro-active in sport at leadership levels as well as participation. You see the outcome of what’s happened at the World Cup and know that I was there right at the beginning, four years ago in Montreal, talking about how we can progress women’s football. So, there’s so much. I guess FOBTs is the one thing I’ll always be known for, but there’s lots of other things that I did that I’m very proud of too.

**CH: Is there anything else?**

**TC:** I don't know. I wish that officials were recognised more for the hard work that they do. I have an enormous amount of respect for my officials, they worked through some really tough times and some really odd times as well, and continue to face enormous challenges as we try to deliver Brexit. They are often maligned, and I don't think that's fair. I also don't think it is fair that DCMS officials are paid less than other officials in Whitehall, just because they do some of the fun stuff as well.

**CH: What advice would you give to a new minister on how to be effective in office?**

**TC:** I think the first thing is to really know your own mind, and appreciate that you're the one that is standing up in Parliament and defending any policy areas that you are responsible for. I would say, always be kind to your private office, because they will then be kind to you.



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