

INSTITUTE  
FOR  
GOVERNMENT

# Professional development for ministers





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The job of being a government minister is unlike any other. Ministers perform several roles. As departmental leaders, they represent government in Parliament and in the media. As MPs, they are accountable to their constituents. Alongside these roles, they have party responsibilities and personal lives.

While there is no single understanding of what an 'effective' minister is, former ministers from across the political spectrum agree on the indispensable elements. These include: clearly communicating what they want to achieve; prioritising ruthlessly; monitoring progress on priorities; and engaging openly with their team, Parliament and the public.



Ministers lack formal opportunities to develop their ability to do their job well. They receive only ad hoc support before entering office. New ministers are briefed by the civil service but this briefing is rarely tailored to the needs of the specific minister. Private offices, which provide direct support to ministers, work hard to help them adapt. But none of this constitutes ongoing professional development.

The Institute for Government fills this gap by providing ministers with support that is impartial, evidence-based and confidential. Drawing on our research into how ministers can be most effective, we provide insights and support to enable ministers to be successful in achieving their priorities.

# What professional development do we provide?

Since the Institute for Government was founded we have provided opportunities for professional development to more than 100 ministers, MPs and peers from across the political spectrum. We provide advice about preparing for the roles and fulfilling their wide-ranging responsibilities. We offer a private space for challenge and reflection, away from the constraints of department and party.

“...having somebody who is there for you and completely confidential, I think makes very good sense. For all ministers.... you [the Institute for Government] are it.”

**Harriet Harman**  
Leader of the House of  
Commons, 2007–2010



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We work with ministers, potential ministers and their teams to ensure our programmes match their needs and experience. Our sessions are adjusted to fit around the many other responsibilities of ministers and MPs. Our input ranges from short, one-off briefings, to team workshops held over a number of months.

New, established and shadow ministers are the three main groups for whom we have provided professional development in the past, but our support is available to anyone aiming to become a minister.

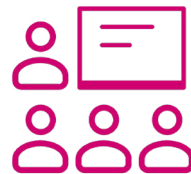
## Specialist briefings

We can provide specialist briefings. Drawing on the Institute's wider research, these have included topics as diverse as working with devolved governments, how to make good policy, how to handle a crisis and managing Brexit.



## Policy-making workshops

The Institute can run awaydays and workshops. These give ministers, shadow ministers and their teams the space to consider priorities and tackle new problems. For example, we have held workshops for teams wishing to focus on a policy in the early stages of development and to think through the practical challenges. We offer tools to stress-test policies and increase the chances of successful implementation.



# New ministers

New ministers have to pick up their duties almost immediately and have a limited time to make a mark. From 1997 to 2015, secretaries of state stayed in post for an average of two years and two months, with junior ministers only getting one year and eight months in the job.

**“There’s no training, no guidebook, no manual, no induction! You leave the Cabinet room with promotion ringing in your ears... and walk straight into the department and start doing the job.”**

**George Freeman**  
Parliamentary Under  
Secretary of State for Life  
Sciences, 2014–2016



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## One-to-one support

We offer one-to-one support for new ministers. This includes providing a confidential space to discuss their experience, or simply offering advice – drawing upon the experience of former ministers – on what makes ministers effective. We can help ministers create a development plan to revisit at regular intervals.



For secretaries of state, we offer specific advice on life as a more senior member of government, including how to manage a ministerial team.

## Induction seminars

At the start of a new parliament and after reshuffles we offer induction seminars for groups of ministers who are new to government, sometimes with their teams. These normally include presentations from former ministers, special advisers, civil servants and experts followed by facilitated discussion and opportunities for reflection.



Past sessions have focused on working with ministers' private offices and their departments, how to prioritise and understanding Parliament.

# Established ministers

Ministers already in office or who have previous experience of being in government often find the professional development opportunities we offer to new ministers helpful, especially if their role has recently changed. But we also provide support specifically tailored to established ministers.

**“We should all be doing 360-degree appraisals these days. I’ve just undergone one, undertaken by the IfG, which was an interesting experience and a good one”**

**Lord Maude**  
Minister for the Cabinet Office,  
2010–2015

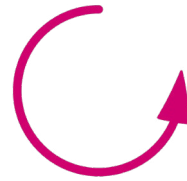




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## 360-degree appraisals

We offer a space for ministers to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of their leadership, and how they can make best use of these, drawing on feedback from colleagues.



Ministers' staff may feel that giving open feedback could be career limiting. By providing an anonymous avenue for constructive challenge, 360-degree reviews provide insights that ministers would otherwise be unlikely to receive. We have previously conducted these reviews for both junior ministers and secretaries of state.

## Expert seminars

Awaydays and seminars for established ministers can include topics such as how to prioritise, how to manage major reform and how to bring about lasting change. These draw upon the Institute's expertise and research, outside experts, and the experience of former ministers.



# Shadow ministers

Opposition parties are allowed contact with the civil service in the run-up to general elections. However, this contact is limited and it can be hard to make the best use of the opportunity. Our work with shadow ministers focuses on easing the transition to government, so ministers are better prepared for the challenges ahead.

Team awaydays are often an effective way of providing support to potential ministers. These give shadow teams time away from day-to-day pressures to work through 'live' issues and discuss challenges to their policy plans before they enter government. One-to-one sessions or seminars are also available.

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# Get in touch

To find out more about how we can help you and your team, please contact:

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## Citations

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**The Institute for Government is the leading think tank working to make government more effective.**

We provide rigorous research and analysis, topical commentary and public events to explore the key challenges facing government.

We offer a space for discussion and fresh thinking, to help senior politicians and civil servants think differently and bring about change.

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