House of Commons

Political and Constitutional Reform Committee

The impact and effectiveness of ministerial reshuffles

Written Evidence

Only those submissions written specifically for the Committee and accepted by the Committee as evidence for the inquiry are included.

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Written evidence submitted by Nic Dakin MP (MR 01)

1. I tend to agree with the analysis that the current PM is sensible in sticking to his guns and resisting reshuffles so far except when forced upon him. We will see how long that resolve lasts now the period of government wobble has been entered.

2. But the PM absolutely has to have the power to move people around. It's about getting people in the job that best suits them, in which they can deliver best for the Government and the nation.

3. Good luck with your inquiry

June 2012

Written evidence submitted by Joan Walley MP (MR 02)

1. Thank you for your email about your Committee's inquiry on the impact and effectiveness of ministerial reshuffles.

2. With no major reshuffle so far this Parliament, this has not yet featured as an issue for my Committee, so we have not discussed your Committee's inquiry.

3. Perhaps I could offer a personal perspective, informed nevertheless by long service on the Environmental Audit Committee.

4. As a general proposition, it must be right that administrative efficiency would be enhanced by ensuring that ministers serve a sufficient time in post to allow Parliament and its select committees to be able to hold them accountable for the policies they introduce. Having greater scrutiny of new ministerial appointments could perhaps encourage less frequent reshuffles, with prime ministers and ministers alike wishing to be able to point to achievements promised in the initial appointment scrutiny. The environmental protection and sustainable development agenda, covered by my Committee, works on perhaps longer timescales than in many other policy areas—last month's UN Rio+20 Earth Summit was the latest in roughly ten-yearly UN events looking to shape progress on these fronts—so it is particularly important that sustainability and environment ministers remain in place long enough to make a difference.

5. While committees can already seek to take evidence from a newly appointed minister on their priorities and strategy, the more formal scrutiny of the appointment itself (being examined in your inquiry) could put the focus on the Prime Minister rather than the just the minister involved. It would be this feature of such a system, I suspect, that would make a real difference in how well reshuffles are managed to deliver good sustainability and environment outcomes.

July 2012

Written evidence submitted by Peter Allen, doctoral researcher and sessional lecturer in Politics, Birkbeck, University of London[1] (MR 03)

1. The question I will address here is part of question eight in the Committee's call for evidence; '*How is the performance of MPs and their suitability for ministerial office, or promotion to a more senior ministerial post, assessed*?'

2. My research looked at those MPs elected for the very first time at the 1997 general election and tracks their frontbench careers (if they had one) across the three terms and thirteen years until the 2010 general election. In order to allow for a cross-party analysis, I constructed a scale which harmonised government and shadow frontbench positions and gave these a degree of comparability. This is detailed below in figure one and will be used in the discussion below.

5 – Cabinet Minister/Shadow Cabinet/Lib Dem Shadow Cabinet/Chief Whips/Party Leaders
4 – Ministers of State/Shadow Ministers/Lib Dem Shadow Ministers/Whips
3–Under-Secretaries of State/Opposition Spokespeople/Lib Dem Spokespeople/Junior Whips/Advocate General
2 – PPS
1 – Backbenchers

Figure One Harmonised scale detailing hierarchy of highest potential frontbench offices in UK Parliament. Copied from Allen, 2012, p10

3. Relevant to the inquiry by the Committee is the material relating to promotion. I found that there was a statistically significant relationship between the first office an MP was promoted into and the highest office they would then go on to reach. This is shown below in table one.

First position on scale	**Highest Office on scale**				**Total (%)**
	2 (*n*=33) (%)	**3 (*n*=39) (%)**	**4 (*n*=55) (%)**	**5 (*n*=28) (%)**	
2 (*n*=78)	97.0***	38.5***	45.5***	17.9***	49.7
3 (*n*=56)	3.0***	56.4***	36.4***	46.4***	36.1
4 (*n*=23)	0***	5.1***	18.2***	35.7***	14.2

[1] This evidence is based on findings published recently in the peer-reviewed academic journal *Parliamentary Affairs*. The full article is available online at http://pa.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2012/06/11/pa.gss030.abstract

Total	100	100	100	100	100

Table One Crosstabulation of highest office on scale and first office on scale, *n*=155; *** difference significant at .001 level (Pearson chi-square 53.714)

4. In my article I note that table one:

> …suggests that for many MPs, their first position is the highest they will reach. For example, 97% of MPs whose highest office is as a PPS had a PPS role as their first position and 56% of MPs who first stepped onto the ladder at undersecretary of state level never moving higher. The percentage of MPs making the leap from a first entry at the PPS level to the cabinet (or equivalent) stands at 17.9%, with the majority of MPs reaching those highest offices entering at either under-secretary of state or minister of state level. Over half of MPs whose highest office is at the under-secretary of state level began there, although it would also seem to be the case that this office is a good springboard to higher ones, with 36.4 and 46.4% beginning their frontbench lives at this level and then moving to minister of state or cabinet level, respectively. As such, the higher you enter, the better your prospects of moving even higher (Allen, 2012, p16).

5. To a certain extent, this suggests that reshuffles are rarely occasions of great joy for many MPs, with the majority often staying put in the same position that they began their frontbench careers in.

6. In terms of suitability, my article also looked at the political experience that MPs had prior to their election to the Commons and assessed whether there was a link between the two. There was, and the details of this are shown below in table two.

Highest office on scale	**Pre-parliamentary political experience**				
	Neither (*n*=35) (%)	**Local councillor (*n*=105) (%)**	**Instrumental occupation (*n*=50) (%)**	**Both (*n*=52) (%)**	**Total**
1 – Backbencher (*n*=86)	31.4***	44.8***	24.0***	30.8***	35.5
2 – PPS (*n*=33)	2.9***	18.1***	8.0***	17.3***	13.6
3 – Undersecretary of State\Opposition spokesperson\Lib Dem spokesperson\ Junior Whip (*n*=39)	28.6***	14.3***	4.0***	23.1***	16.1
4 – Minister of State\Shadow Minister\ Lib Dem Shadow Minister\Whip (*n*=55)	22.9***	20.0***	34.0***	17.3***	22.7
5 – Cabinet Minister\Shadow Cabinet\ Lib Dem Shadow Cabinet\Chief Whip (*n*=29)	14.3***	2.9***	30.0***	11.5***	12.0

Total	100	100	100	100	100

Table Two Crosstabulation of highest Office Achieved and pre-parliamentary political experience; *** difference significant at .001 level (Pearson chi-square 45.600)

7. In the article I discuss how table two:

> …shows a clear difference in the parliamentary careers of MPs based on their pre-parliamentary political experience. As mentioned previously, research from the 1970s showed that MPs who had been local councillors prior to their election to Westminster were more likely to end up long-term backbenchers than those who had no such experience (Mellors, 1978, pp. 98–9). These findings are replicated here; it is clear that the top roles (levels four and five on the harmonised scale) are dominated by those MPs without local council experience, whereas the inverse is apparent for the lower end roles (levels one and two on the scale). These differences were all highly statistically significant. Of additional interest is the fact that MPs with neither local nor instrumental experience were still more likely to reach the top two sets of roles than those MPs who had both, suggesting that local council experience not only does not enhance an MPs' prospects of reaching the top as much as instrumental experience does, but also that it actually reduces them. Conversely, the opposite would seem to be true for those MPs who had the backgrounds of stereotypical 'professional' or 'career' politicians. MPs in possession of such experience are more likely to reach higher office than those who are not. Also shown in (table two), 44.8% of those MPs with only local council experience remained backbenchers for the entire 13-year period between 1997 and 2010, or their entire parliamentary careers if they left the Commons before then. This is compared to only 24% of those MPs with only instrumental occupational experience. MPs with both lie somewhere between these two groups, with 30.8% of this group remaining backbenchers for the duration of their time in office, suggesting that local council experience cancels out the benefits of instrumental experience, to some extent, although it is hard to assess this with much precision. Looking at the higher echelons, a significant majority (64%) of MPs with only instrumental experience made it to the top two levels (the cabinet and ministerial level, or equivalent) in comparison to 22.9% of those MPs with only local council experience doing the same. Again, MPs with both types of experience lie between these two figures, with just under 29% of them reaching either levels four or five. Overall, these figures show that having local council experience makes you more likely to remain a backbencher whereas having taken the Westminster route to parliament as a political insider leaves you less likely to remain in that position. The opposite applies to the highest positions in the hierarchy, suggesting the possibility that there is a pattern here worth investigating. To put the figures in a wider context, of all 86 MPs who did not move beyond the backbenches, 54.7% had local council experience and

> only 14% had instrumental experience, whereas of the 29 MPs who reached cabinet-level offices, 51.7% had instrumental experience and 10.3% local experience. 20.7% of those MPs who reached cabinet level had both instrumental and local council experience and 17.2% had neither. To some extent, it is accurate to say that the very top positions are dominated by those MPs with instrumental experience of some sort (Allen, 2012, p14).

8. Evident here are the strong benefits offered to MPs with long-standing connections to Westminster and their parties on a national, as opposed to local, scale. It is hard to say with any exactitude what these might be other than the obvious—contacts, friendships, insider knowledge and the ability to call in favours from higher-ranking Members. The role of these contacts in the process of reshuffles should probably not be underestimated.

Bibliography

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July 2012

Written evidence submitted by Rt Hon The Lord Boateng of Akyem and Wembley
(MR 04)

1. I am grateful for this opportunity to share my views on the reshuffle process but I am afraid the Committee's timetable prevents me, given my own prior commitments in the coming weeks, from providing anything other than the most truncated response to the questions raised. I would make the following observations.

2. Reshuffles are the PM's primary instrument in dealing with "events", be they a crisis brought on by a ministerial indiscretion, death, illness, or catastrophic or lesser degrees of failure, or a means in troubled times of reasserting the PM's authority and maintaining the balance of political forces. They are seldom if ever simply about refreshing the ranks of the Government with new and upcoming talent, rewarding outstanding parliamentary performance, and so on. This exalted and high-minded explanation is often given but rarely in my view wholly truthfully. The decisions made are necessarily therefore highly subjective, not always entirely capable of being justified by reasoned explanation and in some instances are quite inexplicable. Luck, timing, visibility and senior ministerial patronage or the lack of it all play their part. Diligence alone is no guarantee of preferment or insurance against losing office. It might well improve Government's effectiveness to keep good ministers in their posts longer but seldom does a candidate for promotion turn it down because they want to complete a cherished project or to clear up messes inherited or created in post. One is often just grateful to be called to 'higher things', or to get out intact from a troubled or troubling department. The Prime Minister's phone call, eagerly awaited, is simply by the fact that it is made a persuasive influence and the offer when it comes difficult to decline regardless of the PM's powers of persuasion silken or otherwise. Matters of duty/responsibility to party, the cause and the country also have some bearing on one's responses, as well as understandable ambition and the workings of powerful egos. These former sentiments of duty are often discounted by those who observe from outside our rise or descent on the greasy political pole, but not always justifiably in my view. We mostly want as parliamentarians to do the right thing. Are we sometimes deluded in that respect? I expect so yes, but that is the human condition.

3. Some reshuffles go better than others. Some are undoubtedly missed opportunities, particularly when heels are dug in by the pieces on the chequer board. But, given the nature of Prime Ministerial and Cabinet Government and the impact of events, in my view it's not easy to see how if we continue to draw folk from the ranks of Parliament, it might be readily reformed. Cabinets and departments work by a form of alchemy, and forming them is, as I have observed, an art rather than a science. I don't see how an oversight committee would be capable of improving on the quality of the eventual outcomes much if at all. And it could in fact make things worse. The PM needs to be the ultimate arbiter because on him/her falls the ultimate responsibility in our system. I am however firmly of the view that ministers should as a rule be drawn from the ranks of Parliament and from a pool of people with a track record of service and proven skills in this place. I am dubious about the notion that Parliament is so lacking in talent that it is necessary to go repeatedly outside it in order to meet the needs of good Government. Where an exception to this rule is to be made by elevation to the peerage or appointment immediately after a by-election to ministerial rank, the case for some sort of

ratification by senior colleagues in committee in my view becomes much stronger. I look forward to learning of the outcome of the Committee's deliberations.

August 2012

Written evidence submitted by Rt Hon Ben Bradshaw MP (MR 05)

1. The main reason for reshuffles is to allow Prime Ministers to try to ensure they have the best possible team of ministers. Ideally, they should be about rewarding ability and performance. In reality other factors come into play such as the need to balance governments politically and give "big beasts" jobs. Reshuffles allow Prime Ministers to: test and bring on young talent by giving them experience in different departments; resolve problems when ministers get into difficulty and are forced to resign or are sacked; refresh governments or departments that appear tired or underperforming; reward loyalty.

2. This obviously depends on the effectiveness of reshuffles. They can have a positive effect on policy making and delivery or a negative effect depending on the quality of the reshuffle itself. If a department is performing well and delivering it can cause damage if a Secretary of State or crucial member of the ministerial team is reshuffled out. But equally, if a department is not performing and the issue is not addressed by moving the underperforming SoS or ministers out then that will negatively impact on policy making and delivery. If a minister is left in a job for too long he or she can become stale unless they have a particular passion and special interest in the policy area they cover. But equally if ministers are moved around too frequently, they are never going be able to perform to their maximum—because just as they are in a position where they master their brief and can work at their most effective—they are moved. Reshuffles ought to strengthen the authority of the PM and the effectiveness of government—at least in the early years of a government because people who perform well as shadow ministers in opposition may not necessarily do so in government so it may take several reshuffles once in government for a PM to have the most effective team and the team he or she really wants. Towards the end, particularly of long governments reshuffles can be more challenging as PMs have an every shrinking talent pool to choose between and the "authority" or power that is conferred by patronage has inevitably weakened.

3. Ideally there should be much more transparent reshuffle criteria than the PM's or whips' whim. Promotion appears too often related to political networks or whoever shouts or stamps their feet loudest rather than objective performance by a minister. Ministers are also often left completely in the dark as to what is expected of them. There is no formal induction or training. If you have a hands-off or semi-detached SoS you're left to work it out for yourself in a sink or swim culture. If ministers were set clearer objectives around their departments' performance and delivery that would improve both the effectiveness of government and the transparency and objectivity of the reshuffle process. Reshuffles themselves are often chaotic with little or no constructive feedback to a minister as to why they haven't been promoted or, worse still, sacked. The post reshuffle process also leaves much to be desired. Ministers who've been moved out into new jobs are often so busy getting to grips with those that they have little chance to brief their successors properly and important political and institutional knowledge can be lost. This is also the time when the civil service often sees an opportunity to try to delay or even thwart policies they don't like or try to persuade an incoming minister to reach a different conclusion from their predecessor.

4. Parliament should have no role in endorsing the appointment of ministers. Prime Ministers have to have the freedom to appoint and fire ministers for which they are ultimately responsible. Their freedom of movement is restrained enough by the need to balance their government politically and keep "big beasts" happy that I would not want to see their freedom of movement curtailed further. Parliament already has "soft power" to make or break ministers' careers through criticism of ministers' performances in select committee appearances for example and the relentless scrutiny by Parliament more generally. The Chamber is unforgiving of weak or underperforming ministers.

August 2012

Written evidence submitted by Keith Dowding (MR 06)

Preliminaries

1. Prior to consideration of the impact and effectiveness of ministerial shuffles the Committee needs to ensure it is clear about the right and proper role of ministers. Recent discussion suggests that the ministers' role is to run departments. Of course, not every minister heads a department, but those who do should not be thought of as running them. Departments ought to be run by professional civil servants.

2. The role of ministers is political and must continue so whilst the UK remains a parliamentary democracy. First, it entails reporting to Parliament on the running of departments. This responsibility should not be denigrated and is of the foremost importance in a democracy. That is why ministers need to be politicians inured to the rough and tumble of Parliament. Second, it requires representing the department within the cabinet (which means not only at a meeting of 22 or so ministers once a week, but also across cabinet committees, bilateral meetings, and so on). Third, it involves, together with other ministers, formulating policy to present to Parliament. An important requirement in all these roles is the ability to make decisions.

3. A prime minister when first forming a cabinet will do so keeping in mind the political aspect of the role. Parties are collections of factions held together by some common beliefs. To be kept on board, those factions must have their representatives in cabinet. Some colleagues are powerful; they have demonstrated in Parliament and outside that they are politically too important to be excluded. A prime minister will also want colleagues who are loyal; and colleagues who are competent.

4. Ministerial competency refers to the role they play: performing well in Parliament (and in the media), representing the department, and formulating policy. Minimal levels of administrative competence are required, of course, but ministers should not become deeply involved in executive functions.

5. Traditionally, prime ministers have had a pretty free hand—within those political constraints—in the choice of ministers. If coalition cabinets become the norm, then PMs will lose that free hand. In many countries where coalition governments operate it is the party leaders who choose cabinet ministers, sometimes through written formal agreements (which party gets which portfolio), at other times through less formal negotiation.

The Impact of Reshuffles

6. Former ministers often complain that they get moved on too quickly. They learn the ropes in their department and then the prime minister shuffles the cabinet. Why do prime ministers shuffle so often? First, necessity. A minister is forced to resign because of some 'scandal', occasionally death in office, or for reasons of collective responsibility. When this happens a reshuffle involving several ministers moving might be more efficient than a simple

replacement, especially if the departing minister is senior. Second, prime ministers shuffle because they feel the need to reinvigorate the cabinet: to remove ineffective ministers (especially at the junior levels). This practice has led to the expectation of a 'mid-term' reshuffle.

7. Another reason for a prime minister to shuffle the cabinet is precisely to ensure ministers do not learn too much about their departments. Prime ministers like to be in control; shuffling ministers ensures that they do not gain too much command of their portfolio. This might be because a prime minister feels a minister is insufficiently policy-active, ineffectual, 'gone native', and the like.

8. Prime ministers sometimes use particular figures to shake up departments, and these they might like to move around. Once a department has been reformed or changed in some manner, the prime minister might want to use the troubleshooter elsewhere.

9. The Committee ought to compare turnover of senior executives in major companies. Whilst CEOs (equivalent to PMs) might last longer than ministers, other senior managers might be moved around as often ministers. I do not have reliable data to give to the Committee on this aspect; but it should not be simply assumed that ministers turn over faster than the closest private sector equivalents. (Though, I repeat, ministers should be performing a political rather than an administrative role.)

10. It is often suggested that high turnover makes parliamentary accountability more difficult since one minister will be implementing policies of a predecessor. I think this is a mistake. Turnover can be seen as an aspect of accountability. In recent work (Samuel Berlinski, Torun Dewan and Keith Dowding *Accounting for Ministers: Scandal and Survival in British Government 1945-2007* Cambridge University Press, 2012) my colleagues and I used 'calls for resignation' as a public indicator of ministerial competency. We show that whilst ministers often do not resign at the time of such calls (which is often thought to show lack of accountability) the 'hazard rate' (ie the probability that a minister will resign on any given day) increases with the number of such calls a minister receives. Whilst ministers might not go in direct response to resignation calls, their durability is affected by them.

11. We also show that the number of resignation calls made overall during the government affects the durability of every minister. This demonstrates an aspect of collective accountability in the sense that criticism of one minister, albeit not leading to a resignation, affects the durability of his or her colleagues. They each share some blame.

12. The average duration of ministers in coalition governments tends to be longer than in single-party governments. I am not convinced that this means they are more efficient. Indeed, I would argue that the simpler line of accountability in single-party governments makes individual responsibility clearer; hence ministerial turnover is higher.

13. With coalition government a prime minister cannot simply remove an inefficient minister, since her coalition partner might not be prepared to accept this. Strategically, a

prime minister might not be unhappy to have in office an incompetent minister from her coalition partner, as long as his incompetence damages the coalition party more than her own or the government as a whole. (This can also be true of ministers from within factions of a single party, though less obviously.)

14. There is no evidence that high turnover affects the delivery of policy. Ministers do not deliver policy; civil servants do. Oversight of departments through parliamentary committees need not hold ministers personally responsible; and whilst ministers do not, and should not, directly resign over department failings, failings pointed out through the public accounts committee or parliamentary questioning more generally are taken seriously through the system.

15. The ability of the prime minister to shuffle at will (subject to political and practical constraints) enhances her authority. To have constitutional constraints on that ability would hamper both prime ministerial authority and parliamentary accountability.

16. High ministerial turnover might have some deleterious effects on the capacity of the government and the civil service to produce and implement policy. However, the disadvantages of taking away parliamentary and prime ministerial discretion to remove or shuffle ministers due to political or administrative contingencies would be far worse. It should not be assumed that within the constraints with which they operate prime ministers are not trying to run an efficient government.

The Reshuffle Process

17. The prime minister decides as advised by senior civil servants, politicians and her private office. As revealed in memoirs, it is a complex process that resembles a jigsaw and involves various strategic and political considerations.

18. It is unfortunate that these days the process has to be completed so quickly. Churchill and Atlee would take as long as a couple of weeks to make all the moves in the government (though the full cabinet would be shuffled more quickly over a couple of days). Today it has to be virtually instantaneous or the media suggests that the prime minister is indecisive or that ministers are involved in strategic discussions. A prime minister might announce she will make all the changes over a longer time-period, but I suspect this would simply cause more media frenzy. It has been suggested that media speculation has caused the timing of if not a reshuffle itself. We might bemoan this aspect but there is no clear way of overcoming such pressures.

19. I see no need for the hiring and firing of ministers to be put on a statutory footing. There are no problems that emerge in the UK that do not exist in other countries. Parliament could be given a role in endorsing each ministerial appointment, but in a single-party government that would be largely ceremonial. In coalition governments it might pose more problems for coalition formation, especially if the parties were not disciplined. The failure of, say, Conservative backbenchers to vote for a Liberal minister might break a coalition agreement

laboriously put together and mean that government formation might take much longer. Coalitions can take many weeks to put together in Continental Europe (consider Belgium!). In essence governments are subject to parliamentary approval.

20. Coalition governments are likely to mean that reshuffles are less likely to occur, will involve fewer ministers, and take longer. The more actors involved in any discussion about moving ministers around the more obstacles are raised.

21. One aspect of ministerial turnover is that, across parliamentary democracies, its rate is related to the number of ministers relative to the size of the pool of candidates. Where ministers can also be drawn from outside Parliament, turnover is higher. Where Parliament is large relative to the size of the government, turnover is higher. The probable reason is that when one removes a minister one must replace him with another. The larger the set of candidates the more likely there will be someone competent and trusted to be given the job.

22. The ability to perform before Parliament and the public is the key aspect of the minister's role. I would suggest that the Committee should be more concerned about the government machine restricting media access to ministers. Ministers, not the prime minister, or designated spokespeople, should present and defend government policy within their portfolio both before Parliament and to the press, radio, television and new forms of media. That is an important political role. In order to carry it out effectively, a minister needs not only presentational skills, but also to be on top of policy, committed to policy and not be dictated to by the prime minister. A minister will have difficulty defending a policy that has been imposed upon him.

23. It is true that being a backbench MP is no training for developing policy, making decisions, or 'running a department'. However, if we want training to run departments, we need to ensure that it is our civil servants, whose proper role it is, who are receiving it. MPs are politicians and that is the proper training required for ministers. That is not to say that newly appointed ministers might not benefit from short courses designed to teach them about aspects of being a minister. Indeed, such courses could be made available for all MPs who have ministerial ambitions.

August 2012

Written evidence submitted by Chris Mullin (MR 07)

What are the main reasons for reshuffles?

1. There are good and bad reasons. Sudden resignations, scandals make reshuffles inevitable. Until recently, however, under successive administrations, the idea has been allowed to take hold that reshuffles are an annual event. As far as junior ministers are concerned, one sometimes had the impression that Number 10 regarded these jobs as sweeties to be handed out to the boys and girls in return for good behaviour.

What is the impact?

2. Reshuffles can be massively destabilising. They trigger weeks, sometimes months of speculation, thereby affording endless opportunities for media mischief. They undermine the confidence of those whose fate is the subject of such speculation. They also undermine official confidence in those individuals, inducing paralysis in parts of the Government.

3. One of the Prime Minister's closest advisers remarked to me on the day I was appointed, indeed as I lingered in the lobby outside the Cabinet room waiting to be anointed, "There is massive in-built insecurity. Ministers who may not be there in a year are on top of a civil service which is permanent and who have nothing more to worry about than who gets what gong. The chances of moving anything more than 0.1 percent are slim."

4. If you visit a senior minister in his or her department you will find portraits of their many predecessors lining the walls. Often the portraits extend a great distance, down one side of the ministerial corridor, round a corner and back along the other side. They serve as a memorial to the impermanence of office. In many cases they are also evidence of impotence. No minister can hope to achieve very much in a tenure of less than two years. The effect is to leave power in the hands of the permanent civil service which sometimes has its own agenda. More usually, however, civil servants are also regularly reshuffled with the result that no one has an overall grip on policy and lessons have to be repeatedly re-learned.

5. In some departments, in recent years, ministerial longevity can be measured in a matter of a months, at most a year or two. I do not have the figures in front of me, but from memory I recall that under the last Government, there were, for example, eight Secretaries of State for Work and Pensions in ten years. All no doubt bright, capable people, but it is unlikely that any could have come to grips with the complex issues involved in the short time available.

6. There are exceptions. Some ministers have the good fortune to be left in place long enough to make an impact. Jack Straw's career—four years Home Secretary, five years Foreign Secretary—is a model in this regard. Likewise Clare Short—six years at International Development—and Michael Meacher—six years as Environment Minister—were left in place long enough to make a difference. Not forgetting, of course, the Chancellor Gordon Brown who was unreshuffable.

7. At the other extreme, the ministerial career of Dr John Reid—nine departments in ten years is worthy of study. Under the previous Government the Health and Education departments were turned inside out at regular intervals. There has also been a high turnover

of Prisons and Immigration Ministers, both complex policy areas which demand consistency. With the best will in the world, it is difficult to achieve any degree of political consistency, let alone stand a chance of taking on the mighty vested interests favouring the status quo, when those at the top of the department have so short a life expectancy.

8. With junior ministers, the situation is worse. Again from memory, I was the sixth Africa Minister (there were nine in the 13 years of the previous administration). There were 13 Europe Ministers (including Geoff Hoon who came round twice, on the second occasion for a mere three months). In briefs such as these, which involve diplomacy, establishing a good relationship with one's opposite numbers—who are often sophisticated people with long experience of their brief—is an important part of the job.

9. As Africa Minister, I often operated at Head of State level. Africa is a place where longevity counts. They do like to see the same face twice. After two years in the job I reached the point where, if I lingered in the lobby of the annual conference of the Africa Union, Heads of State would come up and initiate conversations with me, instead of my officials have to search them out and make appointments. I was useful. I could ring them up and they would know who they were talking to. At which point the man in Downing Street raised his little finger by half a centimetre and I was gone and my successor had to start all over again from scratch. It is not a sensible way to do business.

10. As regards Parliament holding a minister to account, this is obviously difficult if the minister is changing all the time. To be sure, a bright new minister—lawyers are particularly good at this—can learn the answers off pat and may be able to busk his or her way through the supplementaries, but it is too much to expect any depth let alone sufficient understanding to make any serious impact on the conduct of government.

11. As for impact of constant reshuffling on the authority of the Prime Minister, in the short run it is no doubt enhanced. It may be fine in a climate where all main policy decisions are taken in Number 10, but it is not much use if you are expecting ministers to effectively manage their own departments.

How could the process be improved?

12. By less reshuffling. In fairness, the present administration seems to have taken that lesson on board. When I ran into the Prime Minister about six months after leaving Parliament I said, "With all due respect, I have only one piece of advice to offer: end annual reshuffles". I think he had already grasped that point and, I am glad to say, he seems to have stuck with it. Bar exceptional cases, ministers should expect to be left in office long enough to make a difference.

Should parliament have a role in endorsing senior ministers?

13. No. I believe the Prime Minister should be given the latitude to decide who he wants in his government. All good select committees will want to interrogate the relevant Secretaries of State at regular intervals and that should be sufficient.

September 2012

Written evidence submitted by Rt Hon Alan Johnson MP (MR 08)

1. Thank you for your letter of 17th July about the Select Committee's inquiry into the impact and effectiveness of ministerial reshuffles.

2. Dealing with your questions, in the order printed in your letter:

i) I suppose there are three reasons for reshuffles, (a) because a minister or ministers leave office for whatever reason and the subsequent movements to fill the vacancies become a reshuffle (b) because the Prime Minister is dissatisfied with the performance of particular ministers (c) to provide a progression route for talented backbenchers.

ii) Whether reshuffles have an effect on policy making and delivery depends on the reasons for the reshuffle and the personnel involved. If, as predicted in the newspapers, Justine Greening is moved from Transport for instance, it would obviously have a profound impact on policy making and delivery as it would seem to presage a change of mind in relation to the third Heathrow runway. Reshuffles can be disruptive to good policy making and delivery. An example from my own experience is the Department for Work and Pensions where the Secretary of State seemed to change on an annual basis. I served for seven months and was involved in two complex long-term issues involving reducing the numbers on Incapacity Benefit and Pensions Reform. I am absolutely sure that more stability would have benefitted those two policy areas.

I don't think there's an impact on the ability of Parliament to hold government to account as in my experience Parliament makes no concession to the inexperience of whoever has picked up ministerial responsibility. I do however believe it can affect the authority of the Prime Minister because constant change suggests either indecisiveness or poor judgement in the first place. As for the effectiveness of government I'd cite once more my experiences at DWP.

iii) In terms of how the reshuffle process could be improved, I suppose the glib answer is that there should be fewer of them. This Government has had a tough time but I do not believe the absence of reshuffles has been one of its problems, indeed I think it's helped at all levels. If I can move away from Cabinet positions, ministers such as Greg Clark at DCLG/BIS and Steve Webb, the Pensions Minister, have been given an opportunity to gain some real expertise which has helped them to have an impact on very important policy areas where a Secretary of State relies on having knowledgeable and effective ministers. As for the actual process itself, a long period of conjecture leading up to a reshuffle is corrosive. Having praised the Government for not having reshuffles, the one that they're about to have was flagged up far too early and has led to a sense of drift. If Prime Ministers are going to have a reshuffle, they shouldn't signal this in advance, they should simply get on and do it in order to avoid weeks, and in this case even months, of speculation.

iv. I don't believe that Parliament should have any role in endorsing the appointment of senior ministers. The Prime Minister has a difficult enough job as it is. I think he or she has to be given the leeway to make these appointments. I can't think of any way in which some kind of parliamentary endorsement would benefit either government or Parliament itself.

3. I hope this is helpful.

September 2012

Written evidence submitted by Rt Hon Nick Raynsford MP (MR 09)

1. Ministerial reshuffles are a necessary part of the process of government in the UK, but their scope and frequency have increased to a point where they have serious adverse impacts on the effectiveness and efficiency of government.

2. The three most significant impacts are:

   i) Creating perverse incentives in favour of short-termism in policy development
   ii) Conversely making implementation of longer-term projects in policy initiatives more difficult
   iii) Undermining the development of effective and coherent ministerial teams in individual departments

3. When ministers (and prospective ministers) believe that their tenure of office is likely to be relatively short and their prospects for promotion will depend on making a mark quickly, they will inevitably focus disproportionately on short-term initiatives that are likely to generate favourable publicity and opportunities to shine rapidly in Parliament or in the media. This is likely to influence both ministerial and civil service behaviour, as the latter will know the political importance attached to shiny new initiatives ready to be wheeled out by newly-appointed ministers.

4. Conversely, in an environment where ministers expect to be judged on immediate impact rather than longer-term delivery, it is inevitably harder to sustain necessary policies which have potentially difficult or adverse media consequences in the short term. One example, with which I am very familiar, is the failure to carry out a revaluation of the base for the council tax since 1991. As a result, notional 1991 values are still, bizarrely, created to determine council tax liabilities in 2012, and look likely to continue to be used for many years to come. The recently-announced government decision to defer implementation of the Business Rates revaluation due to take effect in 2015 is another case in point.

5. In the absence of any serious attempt to develop skills among prospective ministers to meet specific needs or to fill perceived gaps in ministerial capabilities, the coherence and effectiveness of departmental ministerial teams will inevitably continue to be compounded by the demands of short-term political expediency. It is difficult to reconcile the recent replacement of the entire ministerial team at CLG (other than the Secretary of State) with the objective of developing a strong team of ministers with complementary skills and a shared understanding of how best to deliver the department's complex responsibilities. It is difficult to imagine any private sector company operating in a similar way.

6. To counter these negative tendencies, I would argue that the following principles should, wherever possible, govern reshuffles and ministerial appointments:

i) At the start of each Parliament, newly-appointed ministerial teams should be given objectives for the full five-year term, with the expectation that their appointment will normally last the full term (unless they fail) and their performance will, in large measures, be assessed on how far they have met their objectives.

ii) This will demand a clear definition of expectations and performance measures with regular appraisals involving 360° feedback.

iii) There should be a much more rigorous process of training and development for prospective and serving ministers to equip them better to meet their responsibilities and develop their skills. Exit interviews with departing ministers should be a normal part of the process of evaluating how government is performing and how it could improve.

iv) Wherever possible, casual vacancies caused by resignation, dismissal or death, should be filled without a widespread reshuffle. New appointments should generally be expected from a pool of potential ministers who have been receiving training in preparation for becoming a minister. Larger-scale reshuffles should as far as possible be limited to one per Parliament, in addition to the initial ministerial appointments made at the start of each Parliament.

November 2012

Written evidence submitted by Baroness Hilary Armstrong, Chief Whip 2001-2006 (MR 10)

1. As Chief Whip, I was centrally involved in reshuffles during 2001-2006. I am not going to go through the details of every change in government in that period, but consider the context and process of reshuffles in the Westminster system.

2. To understand the process, it is important to take into consideration the special circumstances of government in the Parliamentary system we have in Westminster. We do not have a written constitution, and the executive is part of the legislature. To be a minister, you need to be a member of Parliament, either in the Commons or the Lords. If senior members of the Government however are in the Lords, that does not go down well in the Commons, which is of course, the House with primacy. It is therefore quite unusual for a senior minister to be in the Lords.

3. This basic fact of the executive being part of the legislature has several major repercussions when considering the make-up of the Government. The Prime Minister does not have the ability to simply appoint the best person for the job. There is a limited pool from which ministers can be drawn, and the vast majority of government members will have a constituency to serve, and elections to face. They are also likely to be ambitious for their own career, and their constituency party will also have expectations for and of them. The Prime Minister will also have to take account of different groupings within the parliamentary party, and the demands/wishes of other key ministers. When there is a large number of members from the governing party, then there are always people who are disappointed, that they are not in government, that they are in what they consider to be the wrong job in government, or that they have been dropped from government. Those factors inevitably can affect their view of the Government, and their loyalty—always a challenge for the chief whip!

4. The Prime Minister during my time always was concerned to ensure that he had people in what he saw as key roles who were committed to reform, able to grasp the brief and able to get on with delivery. He got information on the departments and on the individual's from a range of sources, including the civil service and the chief whip.

5. There are always external forces which either demanded a mini-reshuffle, or even changed the date of a reshuffle. Government is not like a company. The role of a minister is much more about leadership qualities, being able to take decisions, having a clear strategic view of direction and being able to motivate others. It should not be about the detail of operational activity. That is the role of civil servants. However, the relationship between the minister and civil servants will determine whether the whole thing works. It is also why there are special advisors. If they have a good understanding of their minister, and a good relationship with the civil service, then

delivery of policy is much more likely to work. Ministers are far more subject to public scrutiny and media challenge than most company executives. They have that day in and day out—not just when there is a catastrophe, and some people are worn down by that.

6. Reshuffles are always difficult. Determinedly not having reshuffles annually, and refusing to lose ministers under attack in a way that would probably not have been true in the past, also has its difficulties, as the current Prime Minister has experienced. The process is a product of our particular form of parliamentary democracy, but in my view is not sufficient to move to a system more like the USA. There are things that can be done, around more training, and around changes in Parliament. However democracy is not tidy and streamlined; government appointments and changes are a product of that untidy system.

November 2012

The Rt Hon Francis Maude MP, Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (MR 11)

Following on from your call for evidence for your inquiry into the impact and effectiveness of Ministerial reshuffles, I am writing to set out the statutory and non-statutory background on this issue. As you know, responsibility for Ministerial appointments is a matter for the Prime Minister.

You also wrote to the Prime Minister inviting him to give oral evidence to your Committee. Please accept this as a reply to your letter to the Prime Minister and also as the Government's response to our call for evidence. The Prime Minister has suggested that any continuing questions you have on reshuffles can be picked up when he is next in front of the Liaison Committee.

It is a prerogative power of the Prime Minister to recommend to the Sovereign the appointment, dismissal and acceptance of resignation of Ministers and to determine the membership of Cabinet and Cabinet committees. The *Ministerial Code* states: the Prime Minister is responsible for the overall organisation of the Executive and the allocation of functions between Ministers in charge of departments.'

The Prime Minister can be held to account by Parliament for his decisions on who he appoints to the Government, like any other decision. At the Liaison Committee on 3 July when questioned about decisions he takes on Ministerial conduct he said The House of Commons should call the Prime Minister to account for his or her decisions, as I have been thoroughly called to account recently. Also, if you do not agree with a recommendation about a particular Minister, the House of Commons has perfect abilities to put down motions, cut their pay and all the rest, to hold them to account.'

This gives the right balance between the respective roles of Government and Parliament — the Prime Minister is the Leader of the Government and therefore responsible and accountable to Parliament for the appointments he makes. It would therefore not be appropriate for Ministerial appointments to be subject to any kind of Parliamentary process and blur the lines of accountability between Parliament and the Executive.

All reshuffles are carried out within the statutory limits on Ministerial appointments. The Ministerial and other Salaries Act 1975 limits the number of paid ministers (whether sitting in the House of Commons or the House of Lords) to 109. Under the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975, there is a maximum of 95 ministers, paid or unpaid, who may sit in the House of Commons.

Ministerial appointments are made in consultation with the Deputy Prime Minister. This arrangement is set out in further detail in section 1 of the *Coalition Agreement for Stability and Reform*.

Ministers do not have performance agreements or appraisals, but they are held to account for delivering the Government's policies by Parliament in the first instance.

When Ministers are appointed they are given guidance on sources of training to help them to fulfil their new role effectively, and they are encouraged to seek training where it is needed. I lead an induction event for new Ministers. The induction event assists new Ministers adapt swiftly to their new role by providing practical guidance and the opportunity to discuss the realities of the departmental role, working with the Civil Service and with Parliament, and highlighting the importance of the Ministerial and Civil Service Codes. In addition the Institute for Government provides tailored support to Ministers in the form of 360 degree feedback and follow up support, where requested. It offered some preparation and induction to new Ministers immediately after the 2010 General Election.

The Government looks forward to hearing the Committee's views on this issue, particularly in the light of last September's reshuffle. I would like to highlight that September's reshuffle was the first significant reshuffle undertaken since the Coalition Government came into power. The Prime Minister has made significant efforts to minimise the number of reshuffles as he values Ministerial continuity and he believes this has been welcomed both inside and outside Government. As he said at Liaison Committee on 3 July 'this Government have kept Ministers in place for a decent period of time, so you can hold them to account.' Allowing Ministers to become more familiar with the detail of the issues in their portfolio gives improved stability for those delivering the Government's agenda and for Parliament in scrutinising Departments' work. The Prime Minister intends to continue to follow this principle.

14 February 2013

Written evidence submitted by Sir Jeremy Heywood, Secretary of the Cabinet (MR 12)

Thank you for your letter of 15 February regarding the management of Cabinet reshuffles. I apologise for the delay in my response.

As I set out in my evidence to the Committee, reshuffles of Cabinet are primarily political events, driven by the Prime Minister's own views. Section 1 of the Coalition Agreement for Stability and Reform sets out how Ministerial appointments are made in consultation with the Deputy Prime Minister.

During a reshuffle, the Cabinet Secretary may need to advise the Prime Minister on three broad areas. First, the number of Ministers and the balance of Commons and Lords Ministers, to ensure that these are in line with the statutory limits. Second, any particular pressures on departments, whether those are legislative, the implementation and communication of new policy, or significant risks or major milestones in major government programmes and projects, including whether anything is known about how ministerial teams are working and whether there are any gaps in expertise and/or experience. Third, the Cabinet Secretary will provide advice on any known conflicts with potential appointments.

I hope this is helpful.

09 April 2013

Written evidence submitted by the Rt Hon Sir John Major KG CH (MR 13)

Response to questions from the Committee

1. When you were Prime Minister, what did you use reshuffles to achieve?

There were a number of objectives in any reshuffle. The first was to promote able Members to replace Ministers who were under performing. I was also keen to bring a regional and political balance to the Government, in order to fairly reflect opinion within Parliament. A third objective was to bring on young Members, and give them a breadth of experience, if I judged that they were likely to make it to the Cabinet.

As you will appreciate, there were occasions when these objectives were in conflict – in which case, I gave priority to the promotion of the most able. The harsh – but difficult – reality for Prime Ministers is that politics is an ever-rolling stream and changes – even painful ones – are unavoidable.

2. How far is it possible to make decisions about who to move where based on people's performance as Ministers and on matching talents and experience to posts?

A great deal of input in any worthwhile reshuffle comes from the Government Whips Office, who are far more familiar with the abilities of Ministers in Departments, and their performance in the House of Commons.

It is, therefore, always possible to make decisions on Ministers' performance and on matching talents and experience but, in practice, competing priorities can mean this does not happen. As much as possible, I tried to match talent and experience to individual posts; but, upon reflection, I can see this was often subordinated to the wider issue of giving the best young talent the greatest possible experience at Parliamentary Secretary and Minister of State level, in order to prepare them for the Cabinet.

As I look back, this may not always have been the right decision in the interests of good management of a portfolio and the best service by Ministers to the public. Few Members reach Cabinet, and I should, perhaps, have given greater priority to matching abilities and portfolios.

This does, of course, raise the wider question of the shrinking skill base in the

Commons – a trend which has continued for several decades. I am, myself, not sure quite how we bring extra wisdom and skills into Parliament, but I am sure that is an objective worth examining – perhaps by this Committee.

3. Based on your own experience, are there any ways in which you think that the reshuffle process could be improved?

In some ways the reshuffle process has been improved since I left Office. In the 1980s and early 1990s, a reshuffle was an annual event, and pressure for it began to build up in the Parliamentary Party and the media at regular intervals. When he came to Office, Tony Blair had far fewer reshuffles, and I believe he was right to do so.

In my own view, there are several key points about reshuffles:

(i) Able Ministers should be left in place for a sufficient length of time to know the brief in every detail, and be in a position to offer policy suggestions for the future based on experience;

(ii) It is desirable to match life experience and skills to portfolios to a much greater extent than has happened thus far;

(iii) Reshuffles should be driven by necessity, not by public or political pressure.

(iv) Often expediency rules and elderly, experienced Ministers are replaced, even when performing well. This helps the career projections of ambitious young talent but may not best serve the electorate. We should utilise age – not despatch it.

One allied point: in view of the lack of life experience in many areas of Government, I would favour a constitutional innovation in which Ministers in the Lords who hold a particular portfolio were able to appear in the Commons to promote and defend their stewardship – although, of course, without the right to vote. This opens up the possibility of bringing greater experience to Government by appointment to the Lords. It is not an entirely satisfactory solution to the skill shortage, but I think it could make a contribution.

21 May 2013