Putting Goats amongst the Wolves: Appointing Ministers from Outside Parliament in the UK

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Abstract

In 2007 Gordon Brown appointed several ministers with no previous political or parliamentary experience. Advocates of such ministers point to the limited talent pool in the House of Commons, and argue that outsiders can significantly widen the skills and experience available to the government. Opponents point to the high failure rate of such ministers, measured by their short time in office. This paper, drawing on extensive research conducted by the UCL Constitution Unit, examines the experience of appointing ministers from outside the UK Parliament. The research found that the success of outsider ministers was varied, partly because the standards being used to evaluate them were varied. Most were given little or no induction. Their lack of political and parliamentary skills was said to be a serious handicap. The cluster of outside appointments under Brown did not signal a shift towards the UK adopting a greater number of pure hybrid or ‘image IV’ figures in government. Indeed one theme that emerged from the research was that politics is itself a profession, which requires a wide range of different skills, rather than narrow technocratic skills. It remains that prime ministers will have a variety of political, practical and presentational reasons for calling on outsiders. The more successful of these are likely to be those that can master a diverse skill set as currently expectations exceed capacity.

The paper contributes a more normative approach to the comparative study of ministers, concluding that in the UK it may be wise to look for hybrid candidates who have both technocratic and (transferable) political skills. Outsiders should be made fully aware of the responsibilities of being a minister, and particularly the parliamentary role.
**Introduction**

In the United Kingdom, there is a set ‘pathway to ministerial power’: members of the executive are drawn exclusively from the legislature. Ministers are appointed from the pool of democratically-elected MPs, and to a much lesser extent, from the House of Lords. This has been a strongly-held convention: it means that both Houses have government representation (or control), and ensures that those who govern are accountable to the people through being members of the legislature.

In June 2007, on becoming Prime Minister, Gordon Brown announced that he would bypass the ordinary pathway to power, and build a ‘government of all the talents’ (the ‘goats’). In practice this meant the appointment of a number of people from ‘outside’ Parliament to the House of Lords in order to make them ministers. Brown’s later appointments of Lords Adonis and Mandelson as Secretaries of State were also seen as part of Brown’s ‘big tent’ politics. By the end of Brown’s premiership, views about the success of these appointments were at best mixed. Some of the original ‘goats’ left government after a relatively short time. Commentators were scathing: some regarded Brown’s appointments as a publicity stunt; others saw this as testament to more deep-seated problems in the British political system.¹ These problems included the ‘shrinking talent pool’ of potential ministers; the phenomenon of the career politician and the issue of ‘expertise’; the high number of ministers and high rate of ministerial turnover; ministerial accountability; ministerial effectiveness with the growing complexity of modern day government; intercameral relations; and retirement from the House of Lords. All of these are big issues, and deserving of examination in themselves.

This paper, drawing on extensive research conducted by the UCL Constitution Unit, examines the experience of appointing ministers from outside the UK Parliament, analyses aspects of the appointments that relate to broader comparative and to some extent normative questions of ministerial effectiveness. The broader research project considered accountability and detailed the overseas experience of key comparator countries.² But this paper focuses more on the historical and recent experience of ‘outsider’ appointments in the UK. It briefly engages with the comparative experience of outsider appointees, gives an overview of UK outsiders and then, using a template for a functional assessment of ministerial activity in the UK, asks why they were appointed and what they themselves made of this experience. Semi-structured interviews including with former peer ministers, MPs and officials were conducted to understand the recent experience of those brought into the Lords with the purpose of appointing them to ministerial posts.

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² Yong, B and Hazell, R (2011) ‘Putting Goats amongst the Wolves: Appointing Ministers from outside Parliament’ Constitution Unit, UCL.
This research contributes to the literature on ministerial recruitment, focusing on a particular subset of ministerial appointees—those ministers appointed from outside the legislature; and asks what chief executives have looked for in the selection of such individuals. But it also takes a step further, and asks a question rarely asked in the literature: how did they themselves evaluate their experience? Their ‘outsider’ status may give them a different view of what it means to be a minister.

**Ministerial Recruitment: the Comparative Experience**

Brian Headey wrote back in 1974 that ‘it is hard to see how Ministers could be at the same time past masters of the politician’s art, specialists in the policy areas they are concerned with and experienced organisation men and decision-makers’. He posed the question: what are the gains and losses to British government from having intelligent laymen/parliamentary politicians in office rather specialists or experienced executives. Since Headey, scholars such as Blondel and Thiébault sought to introduce rigid taxonomies into the field dividing ministers into amateurs or experts and insiders or outsiders. However, Blondel and Thiébault’s work has had a rather ambiguous legacy. These classifications continue to trouble those in the field and may not be helpful. Neither has Blondel and Thiébault’s work been updated, with one very recent, but excellent, exception. Dowding and Dumont’s work is part of a new project of country studies which aims to re-examine the question of ministerial selection and deselection, taking into account some of the new theoretical approaches and themes (such as ‘presidentialisation’) which have emerged since Blondel and Thiébault’s time.

The argument concerning the skill set needed to be an effective minister remains, but discussion has moved from one of rigid taxonomies to ‘hybrid’ ministers reducing any distinction between bureaucrats and politicians. Aberbach et al had originally assumed that there would be a natural progression towards this fusion. Politicisation of the bureaucracy and the bureaucratisation of politics would create pure hybrid figures. The discussion is based on the premise that greater skills and expertise are required in government and such expertise can only be recruited from ‘outside’, from those able to bring both technocratic and political skills into government. The emphasis on a technical dimension in government as called for by Headey has not come to pass in the UK. The reasons may relate to constitutional constraints or may ultimately relate to the will of the prime minister with his or her patronage powers. The power of the prime minister to

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appoint and dismiss ministers is largely ‘unfettered’, apart from the ‘severe’ limitation of having to appoint members of the legislature and then largely from the Commons. The power of appointment is larger and more significant now as there are more posts to fill (and more to empty). The rise of the career politician has also increased ministerial aspiration.

Riddell et al suggest that the UK is unusual in among western democracies in limiting ministers mainly to those elected to the legislative chamber. There are comparative studies of ministerial recruitment, although the study of ministerial careers remains very much in its infancy. Blondel and Thiébault unsurprisingly found that a parliamentary background is the main career path to becoming a minister in Western European democracies: between 1945 and 1985, roughly 75% of all government ministers were members of parliament before becoming part of the government. However they found great variation across Western European democracies, with the UK, Ireland and Italy taking most of their ministers from the legislature; countries such as Sweden and the Netherlands having significant minorities of their Cabinets coming from a non-parliamentary background; and countries sitting somewhere between the two extremes.

There is considerable cross-national variation in the selectorate for a chief executive when forming or appointing a government. In many countries, ministers will retain their position as members of the legislature, but in some they will resign representative posts when they serve as ministers. In some countries ministers take a ‘sleeping mandate’ and temporarily resign their elective position and in others ministerial duties are incompatible with holding elected office. France, Sweden and the Netherlands require all their ministers to remain outside parliament, and select some from beyond the parliamentary pool. The United States is the most obvious example of an ‘outsider’ executive, although cabinet secretaries in the US chosen for expertise tend rather to be subordinate to the President, and often have a strong political dimension. There may also be particular structural and cultural reasons for the appointment of ‘outsiders’ to government. The Netherlands has traditionally had a high number of ‘outsiders’ or ‘technocratic’ ministers, but this is because the highly segmented and religious nature of Dutch society encouraged the selection of ministers who were ‘above’ politics. In France, the constitutional requirement that all ministers are ‘non-parliamentary’ stems in part from the strengthening of the executive under the Fifth Republic. In practice, however, the great majority of French ministers have parliamentary experience. In Sweden, having separated ministers from the legislature in 1971 a strong emphasis on expertise in the subject portfolio has characterised appointments, although in practice most appointments remain broadly political. Constitutional constraints therefore exist to limit (and empower) the scope of ministerial appointments. In addition the chief executive in some countries may be required to balance competing coalition partners, limiting the ability to bring in ‘outsiders’.

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10 Gordon Brown appointed 75 House of Commons ministers in 2007, compared to Harold Macmillan’s 54 in 1957 and Ramsey Macdonald’s 38 in 1929, ibid
More generally, much of the literature remains concerned with empirical issues: the various routes of ministerial recruitment; social, educational, economic and political background of ministers (which may include questions of ‘expertise’); the length of ministerial tenure. Within these agendas, methodological issues remain unsettled. In particular, definitions of experience and expertise remain problematic. Traditionally, political scientists have looked to a number of basic measures: education and professional experience. One problem with such measures is that they are narrow: these may not be the only measures of expertise. Riddell saw no useful measure of ministerial effectiveness, as so much depends on the individuals themselves. Such studies may therefore underestimate the presence of those able to meet the demands of a particular portfolio within government. More generally, there is often a buried assumption that ‘politician’ and ‘expert’ are mutually exclusive, when they are not. Indeed expertise and competence are not the same. Simply because a minister has subject expertise does not necessarily make him or her competent: competence stems from a much wider range of different skills.

But this is where the literature stops. We know that candidates from outside parliament are appointed, but not what their experience is like. Moreover, very little of the literature comes close to normative issues, such as evaluating what are the characteristics of a successful minister, or what skills may be useful for a minister. In order to organise our analysis we use Heady’s original template for a functional assessment of ministerial activity, as updated by Marsh et al. Broadly, this covers political, policy, executive-managerial and public functions (see table 1). These headings are useful in which to group the functional aspects of ministerial work and include sub headings, of which some may apply to outsiders more than others. As Marsh et al conclude ministers do matter; they have multiple roles which have become more demanding and complex since Heady’s time. Outsiders, often having had a distinguished careers in others fields, are generally freed from Marsh’s ‘most crucial goal’ - to advance his/her career.

Outsiders in the British Context

The term ‘goats’ is not helpful: we prefer ‘outsiders’ to describe the type of ministers under discussion. ‘Goats’ was a broad term to cover ministerial appointments from the House of Lords made by Gordon Brown over a short period of time. But Tony Blair made similar

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13 Professional experience’ is often measured by the last occupation before entering Parliament, which is itself problematic: a minister may have had a variety of experiences which may be of importance in his or her field, which may not be taken into account by those monitoring government.

14 Riddell (et al (2011) op cit p54.


18 Ibid p324.
appointments during his much longer premiership, which the press referred to as ‘Tony’s cronies’. The appointments we examine tend to share two key characteristics: first, that they were brought into the Lords in order to be made ministers; and second, that they brought with them expertise and experience that government was thought to be lacking.

The key difference between ‘ordinary’ peer ministers and outsider ministers is the prime minister’s expressed intention. This intention is often illustrated by the immediacy of appointment: there was no waiting period between being brought into the Lords and being appointed as minister. Other outsiders have been appointed to the House of Lords before being made a minister first, and given time to learn about the chamber. As for the expertise brought by outsiders, they differ in the kind of skills and experience they brought into government: some brought ‘technocratic’ skills; some political skills; and yet others were somewhere in-between. Focusing on this characteristic is important: it highlights the (purported) key reason for appointment: skills and experience. Thus, we will refer to these individuals as ‘outsiders’—in the sense of initially coming from outside Parliament, and to point to their skills and experience, which are often gained in a non-parliamentary setting.

Gordon Brown was not the first Prime Minister to bring in outside talent: British Prime Ministers have been doing so for many years. The most prominent ‘outside’ appointments have been in wartime. For instance, Lloyd George appointed a number of ‘outsiders’ to his war cabinet. Joseph Maclay, chairman of a ship owning company, was appointed Minister of Shipping (1916-21). Sir Eric Geddes, Deputy General Manager of a railway company, North-Eastern Railway, served as Deputy Director-General of Munitions Supply (1915-1916), and in 1917 as First Lord of the Admiralty. Jan Smuts, a prominent South African politician and former general, became a member of the British War Cabinet in 1917, as Minister without Portfolio. Many of these appointments were regarded as successful, even though at least one (Maclay) held both Houses of Parliament in contempt. Churchill similarly appointed a number of outsiders during wartime. Jan Smuts was again invited to join the Imperial War Cabinet in 1939 as the most senior South African in favour of war. Lord Beaverbrook, the prominent media mogul, was also ‘recalled’ into government, by Churchill. Richard Casey, an Australian politician, was made Minister Resident in the Middle East in 1942 to meet the demand of having an Australian representative in the War Cabinet. However, in peacetime, and particularly the post war period, the recruitment of those ‘from the outside’ into British government has been less common.

Recruitment of outsiders into the House of Commons has been rare. The two examples most commonly referred to are Frank Cousins and John Davies. Cousins had been General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers’ Union and member of the Trades Union Congress, and President of the International Transport Workers’ Federation. He was parachuted into a safe seat in 1965 in Harold Wilson’s Labour government, and was made Minister of Technology (1964-66). John Davies had been Director-General of the Confederation of British Industry before being recruited by Edward Heath, who wanted to inject experience from the business world into government. Although Davies initially failed to be selected as a Conservative candidate in 1969, he was later found a safe seat in 1970.

Shortly after being elected, Davies was made Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, but remained in office for only two years before being reshuffled and moved to the office of Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. Historical judgement of Cousins and Davies has been harsh: neither was seen to be particularly good in terms of handling Parliament. 21

Recruitment of outsiders to the House of Lords has been more common, and is currently the favoured means of bringing into government those from ‘the outside’. Thatcher appointed a small number of ‘outsiders’, the most prominent being Lords Cockfield and Young. Lord Cockfield had been in the civil service for many years before later becoming director and chairman of Boots. He had then acted as an economic advisor to senior Conservative politicians. After being made a life peer in 1978, Cockfield became Minister of State at the Treasury (1979-82); the Secretary of State for Trade (1982-83); Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1983-84). In government Cockfield was seen as a man of wide experience and intellect, but was regarded as more of a technocrat than a grassroots politician. 22 Lord Young’s background was in business; but he had also advised Keith Joseph on privatisation; and was later Chairman of the Manpower Services Commission, which dealt with unemployment and training matters. Granted a life peerage in 1984, he was quickly placed in Cabinet by Thatcher as Minister without Portfolio to advise the government on unemployment issues. He then went on to become Secretary of State for Employment (1985-87) and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1987-89). Lords Cockfield and Young were both regarded as more effective than Frank Cousins and John Davies.

But it was under the premierships of Tony Blair and more particularly Gordon Brown that the appointment of outsiders into ministerial office increased (see Tables 2-4). The outsiders appointed under the Blair and Brown governments differed in the kind of skills and experience they brought to their respective portfolios. Some, for instance, corresponded to the stereotypical idea of the ‘technocrat’: individuals appointed solely for their expertise in a particular area, and lacking any obvious political affiliation—people such as Lord Simon of Highbury, appointed for his business skills and European connections; Lord Darzi, appointed for his medical experience and academic background; or Lord Myners for his business background. There were those who are clearly ‘politicians’, such as Baroness Kinnock, appointed as Minister for Europe after having been an MEP for 15 years; or Lord Mandelson, who had many years as a Commons minister. But some ministers appointed from outside Parliament do not fall so easily within these simple delineations. Lord Adonis, for instance, spent many years as a special adviser in the area of education, and was later appointed as junior minister for education in the Lords—he then worked his way up to Transport Secretary; Lord Gus Macdonald had had experience in broadcasting and business, and held a number of ministerial portfolios in the Lords. Adonis and Macdonald were ‘hybrids’: they had both technical expertise and political experience to deploy.

The coalition government has also appointed outsiders to examine various areas of government. Partially as a result of coalition constraints on ministerial appointment, most of these individuals have been given adviser positions rather than ministerial office—such as

Sir Philip Green (billionaire owner of various high street chains) as ‘efficiency tsar’. But there have also been a small number of ‘outside’ ministerial appointments to the Lords by the Conservatives: Jonathan Hill, former special adviser and head of John Major’s political office, as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for schools; Lord (James) Sassoon, former Treasury civil servant and adviser to the then Shadow Chancellor as the Commercial Secretary to the Treasury; and Lord (Stephen) Green, former Chairman of HSBC, as Trade Minister.

**Why Appoint ‘Outsiders’?**

The recent history of appointments has therefore been patchy in the UK, with greater impetus for such appointments occurring under Blair and more particularly Brown. Why then should government need or desire outsiders in government, and why at this conjuncture? Historically, outsiders have usually been appointed in wartime for experience and expertise gained from outside politics but occasionally for ‘political’ reasons such as representation and balance. But in peacetime prime ministers have not been known for seeking to fit subject expertise and competence to posts, as Tony Blair’s description of the process illustrates:

> I decided to reshuffle the Cabinet. There’s a kind of convention that it should be done every year. It’s clear that governments need refreshing and there is a need to let new blood through. Also, a prime minister or president is always engaged in a kind of negotiation over the state of their party that requires people’s ambitions to be assuaged. ... If you don’t promote someone, after a time, they resent you. If you promote them, you put someone else out, and then that person resents you. You look for an elaborate index of methods to keep the offloaded onside, but let me tell you from experience: it never works. [...] Unless you give them something that really is spectacular as an alternative to being a minister, then they aren’t fooled [...] so, you have to reshuffle. But here’s some advice: you should always promote or demote for a purpose, not for effect. With this one, I determined that we should make a splash, show we still had vigour, show I was still governing for the future.

Therefore, the primary considerations to be taken into account in selecting ministers are: party balance, maintaining loyalty, and image management. Matching individuals to

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particular portfolios, or selection on the basis of subject expertise or competence, is not mentioned at all. The Public Administration Select Committee (‘PASC’) made a similar comment in its report on good government:

[The underlying problem seems to be that the system of political reward—the allocation of ministerial roles—is not directly related to an assessment of the actual requirements of government. Appointment to ministerial office is instead used for other purposes, including recognition of political loyalty.]

There are, of course, certain portfolios which may be better suited to outside experts. Previously, for instance, the Lord Chancellor’s office was always held by a high ranking lawyer-politician, but this changed as a result of the Constitutional Reform Act 2005, which removed much of the Lord Chancellor’s duties and powers in relation to the judiciary. The other is the office of trade minister. The trade minister portfolio, or the functional equivalent, has been held by outsider appointees in the past: Lord (Digby) Jones; Lord (Mervyn) Davies; and Lord (David) Simon. Following the 2010 election, the need to appoint someone from the world of business was illustrated by the Coalition’s anxiety over finding a suitable candidate to be trade minister—a number of business figures turned down the unpaid post before Lord (Stephen) Green was appointed to take up post in January 2011. But such portfolios are uncommon

The Brown appointments in 2007 were presented as an attempt to recruit talented experts with established reputations. If such a genuine desire to bring outsiders into government did exist we can identify two drivers. The first was that the pool of ministerial candidates was too limited: in the UK candidates for ministerial appointment were generally confined to those within the legislature. This pool might shrink over time, particularly as a government came into a third term of office—often with a smaller majority, and with a number of MPs having ‘done their time’ and perhaps been found wanting. The second reason was the apparent professionalisation of politics. People brought into Parliament, and those who remained in Parliament, were perceived to have a narrow range of skills. It followed (though not inevitably) that those appointed from the legislature to become ministers would also have a narrow range of skills. Put differently, it was not clear that the skills needed to be a successful politician were the same skills needed to be an effective minister.

This perceived gap in skills and experience apparently led recent prime ministers to look outside the traditional pool of ministerial candidates, and appoint as a means of injecting expertise into government a number of outsiders who had been successful in other fields. A key presumption of the PASC Goats and Tsars report was an increasing professionalisation of government. This is not a new argument: Anthony King and Peter Riddell, amongst others, have pointed to this phenomenon, and its deleterious effects on government and...
The more professionalised politicians are, the more distant they become from the public they are meant to serve. A second concern relates to competence: the greater the focus in living ‘for’ and ‘off’ politics, the narrower the range of skills that politicians will have to address the complexity of modern day government. Preparation for success in politics is not necessarily preparation for good government. However, against these concerns Beckman suggests that the professionalisation of politics may have benefits for democracy and governance.\(^{30}\) It may prevent plutocracy—the rule of the wealthy. It may also help to prevent the capture of politics by interest groups. And far from producing a class of people with narrow skills, professionalisation may confer political skills: the ability to politicise issues and create support for particular solutions; legislative skills, etc. Professionalisation may have two faces. Beckman also questions the assumption that political experience cannot breed subject expertise.\(^{31}\) Politics may provide opportunities for learning about the technical aspects in particular policy fields, which in time may lead to subject expertise. Such opportunities include serving as a member of a select committee; as a shadow opposition minister; and as an actual minister in a relevant policy field.

It appears plausible that the increased number of outsider appointments was made to plug the skills gap (chiming with disquiet over ministerial quality) and it was known that Gordon Brown was known to value outside expertise. However his appointments were largely tactical and strongly presentational in the sense that he was keen to shift away from the preconception of him as a ‘tribal leader’.\(^{32}\) The appointments were more about short-term public relations gain than long term improvement in governance. In evidence to the PASC, Lords West and Darzi both expressed surprise at their appointment when called in to meet the prime minister. With such a level of patronage, King and Allen present four criteria which prime ministers use in making ministerial appointments: governmental competence; political utility; presentational capacity; and policy compatibility. Yet as we shall see outsiders do not neatly fit into these headings.

The Experience of Ministers Recruited from Outside Parliament

Not being socialised in parliamentary culture, outsider ministers offer a fresh perspective on the experience of being a minister. Stories of what ministers (particularly junior ministers) do abound. These range from inhabiting an empty portfolio to being overworked and overburdened; from being frustrated by civil servants to being ‘captured’ by them, and so on.\(^{33}\) Some have suggested that outsider ministers, and particularly Brown’s ‘goats’ did not find the ministerial experience comfortable, pointing to their generally brief periods of...

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\(^{31}\) Ibid.


\(^{33}\) Former ministers have recently related some of their stories before the Public Administration Select Committee: see: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmpubadm/c994-ii/c99402.htm; see also: Laurin, D. “No way to run a life let alone a country” *The Guardian Public* (17 September) http://www.guardianpublic.co.uk/ministerial-life-culture-whitehall-comment.
ministerial tenure.\textsuperscript{34} Former trade minister Lord Jones of Birmingham complained before the Public Administration Committee that his experience as a junior minister was:

one of the most dehumanising and depersonalising experiences a human being can have. The whole system is designed to take the personality, the drive and the initiative out of a junior minister.\textsuperscript{35}

Most outsiders have been appointed as junior ministers: more specifically, junior ministers in the House of Lords. The role of peer ministers differs slightly from Commons ministers, who answer only for their sphere of responsibility within the department. By contrast, the role of peer ministers has usually been that of departmental spokesperson, answering questions on all matters which fall within their department, and taking bills through the House. Thus, in practice, a peer minister may end up doing the equivalent parliamentary work of three to four Commons ministers. Moreover, within a ministerial team, a peer minister is often at a disadvantage, because of her unelected status, and almost always being a junior minister. The relatively low status and role of peer ministers are a function of the low respect with which the House of Lords has been held by successive governments.

The election of Labour in 1997 and reform of the House of Lords had a significant impact on government representation in the Lords. First, the lack of Labour peers in the Lords required the appointment of a number of new life peers in order to meet the needs of the new government. Second, the removal of all but 92 hereditary peers in 1999 transformed the Lords as a chamber. The House of Lords became a chamber composed mostly of appointees, and more importantly, no longer had an inbuilt Conservative majority. In effect, the chamber was ‘hung’—no political party had an overall majority. The result has been a far more active and political body, more willing to challenge the work of the government.\textsuperscript{36} This in return led to pressure on the Labour Government to appoint more competent ministers in the Lords. In addition, some peer ministers began to be assigned more significant responsibilities. These peer ministers included former politicians or individuals with relevant outside experience, such as Baronesses Hayman, Symons and Hollis, amongst others. Several of our interviewees talked of how much more demanding the Lords had become since 1997. Future reform of the House of Lords will again impact on outsider appointments, potentially limiting the prime ministers power to make such appointments to the Lords in future.

Outsider ministers interviewed pointed to a more immediate problem. There was very little in the way of induction or introduction: “I was dropped right in it. A few weeks after appointment I was taking a bill through the Lords.” “It was sink or swim.”\textsuperscript{37} This was partly a result of the lack of understanding on the part of prime ministers about the role of the House of Lords: “[The Prime Minister] told me not to worry much about the Lords: he said I


\textsuperscript{35} Digby Jones’ much-reported comments can be found in Public Administration Committee Good Government (HC 92-II, 2009) at: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmpubadm/97/97ii.pdf.


\textsuperscript{37} Interview with former peer minister.
wouldn’t be spending much time there”, said one former outsider. This situation has apparently improved: the Government’s Chief Whip may explain the nature of a minister’s duties at appointment, and there are induction courses for new ministers available at the National School for Government. Two former outsider ministers suggested that one possible remedy is to provide a ‘mentoring’ process, whereby a more experienced minister acts as a guide for a newly-appointed minister. Informally, some of the outsider ministers have been offering advice to outsider ministers on their own initiative. Another possibility is something written: some jurisdictions also provide guides on ministerial office. Such an induction guide might cover more practical issues, like the nature of the relationship between the minister and the private office and the role of the civil service generally; pay, travel and correspondence; and key aspects of parliamentary procedure.

The Political Role

Outsider ministers noted the unusual nature of a junior minister’s parliamentary duties in the Lords. Outsiders owed their position to the prime minister more than parliamentary ministers and so had a more autonomous place in the departmental team. However they struggled with the range of political aspects, particularly as junior ministers in the Lords carry a much heavier load of parliamentary work than those in the Commons. Outsider ministers expressed some bewilderment at the responsibilities of being a minister, particularly as they generally inhabited positions at the foot of the ministerial food chain. These ranged from mastering the arcana of parliamentary procedure, answering all manner of questions related to their portfolio and their department (“did anyone bother to tell Lord West that he would be answering questions on dangerous dogs in the House?”); remaining in the House late at night to take part in debate and voting on divisions; remaining in the House generally to get a sense of the occupants’ mood; taking through legislation and dealing with hostile amendments. One outsider minister found his initial experiences in the chamber “intimidating” and even “humiliating”.

Observers of outsider ministers thought that with a small number of exceptions, it was in Parliament where such ministers tended to fail. This is unsurprising: ministers in both the Commons and Lords are often judged by their ability to perform ‘at the dispatch box’ (that is, answer questions and carry debate) and to a lesser extent carry legislative proposals through the House. These same observers were critical of some of the outsider appointees for failing to meet their parliamentary or House obligations more generally, especially after leaving office. This was a particularly sore point: a number of outsider ministers were seen to have taken the title but not the responsibilities that flowed from being a peer—

38 See http://www.nationalschool.gov.uk/policy/MinisterialProgramme/Induction.asp. However, as Lord Norton has pointed out, availability does not necessarily mean appointees will partake of them: on one count, only a relatively small proportion of the Coalition government (35) have taken such courses. See: http://www.nationalschool.gov.uk/policy/MinisterialProgramme/Table.asp; and http://lordsoftheblog.net/2010/11/02/ministerial-training/.
39 In New Zealand, for instance, there is the Cabinet Manual, which deals with legal and political issues which ministers often confront; and the Ministerial Handbook, which covers ministerial office matters. Scotland has a ‘rough guide’ to being a minister, known as Key Information for Ministers.
contributing to the business of the House, taking part in debates and scrutinising the government: “They take the peerage, but not the work.”\textsuperscript{43}

It was the political-parliamentary function of the ministerial office which caused outsider ministers the most difficulty, although interviewees acknowledged that many outsider ministers did not start well, but over time learnt to manage their parliamentary role. There may be too much emphasis placed on ministers’ parliamentary role at the expense of other aspects of ministerial office.\textsuperscript{44} Marsh et al drew attention to the extent to which outstanding performances in the legislature strengthened the minister in the eyes of the civil servants and bolstered departmental capacity.\textsuperscript{45} Those more sympathetic to outsiders noted that little attempt was made to compare the parliamentary performance of outsiders with other peer ministers, or indeed Commons ministers: it was not clear that outsiders were any worse. Some interviewees suggested that in terms of handling the House of Lords the current outsiders—Lords Hill and Sassoon—were in fact better than the Conservative working peers. ‘Ordinary’ working peers interviewed tended to take the view that it was better to appoint those with parliamentary or political experience to ministerial posts generally. Recruitment through Parliament was a prerequisite because it provided skills and expertise that would be useful for the parliamentary aspect of ministerial office. Outsiders tended to be judged by their parliamentary performance, an area in which outsider ministers performed poorly. Some interviewees argued that for this reason such appointments should be kept to a minimum.

There’s a parliamentary ethos that many of the [outsider ministers] seem to lack. [...] To get the best out of the system, you have to understand the system and play by the rules. It doesn’t require a genius, but there needs to be some experience.\textsuperscript{46}

**The Policy Role**

Most outsider ministers revelled in the policy function. Policy, and policy implementation, was the reason they had been brought into government. Coming from outside government such ministers could give a different view of the policy making process. Although as junior ministers (apart from Lords Mandelson and Adonis) there was a limited ability to be agenda setters. More likely there were policy initiators. In Lord Darzi’s case he came in to do a project, the Next Stage Review. As he told the Public Administration Select Committee: ‘It was highly focused. I had the support of all of my ministerial colleagues, so it was not just deciding on policy but I had the opportunity to implement.’\textsuperscript{47} Many others felt constrained by the bureaucracy, and expressed concern about the ‘silo’ nature of government, and about the lack of joined-up government. For some, the civil service was a large machine, no different in terms of institutional logic from other businesses. But at least one outsider minister thought that government was only deceptively similar to commercial organisations, especially in relation to the detailed decisions ministers had to take: “I made more decisions in the first week than I did in two years as [head of a large organisation].”\textsuperscript{48}

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43 Interview with former working peer. \\
46 Interview with former peer minister. \\
47 Oral evidence to Public Administration Committee op cit footnote 33. \\
48 Interview with former peer minister.
\end{flushright}
Most outsider ministers admitted that ‘horses for courses’ (a phrase often employed by interviewees) appointments worked best; where their skills and experience matched their portfolios. One observer (a working peer) of one of Brown’s ‘goats’ commented that having someone with technocratic expertise in the departmental field on the ministerial team was highly beneficial, particularly at departmental meetings. However, much of this was ‘hidden’ work and very few observers commented on outsider ministers’ accomplishments in terms of policy and executive managerial functions. For some outsider ministers, the emphasis on parliament and the political ignored the executive-managerial or policy work they did—despite the fact that many outsiders had been brought in precisely for their extra-parliamentary expertise and experience. There was little sense that they had been evaluated for their work as people with skills relevant to their portfolio. Moreover, the fact that these outsider ministers had not come from a political party or through the traditional recruitment path sometimes put them at a disadvantage. One outsider minister complained that jealousy caused by thwarted ambition sometimes spilled over into team relations. He could never be sure if he would be backed up by the party.49 A small minority of outsider ministers professed some irritation with the insistence on traditional paths of recruitment. Political parties were ‘trade unions’, and ministerial recruitment their ‘monopoly’. But the benefits of bringing expertise and experience gained from outside parliament into government outweighed these (possibly temporary) problems. As one outsider argued:

too much weight has been given to [keeping factions happy] and not enough to where the expertise lies. If you want the government to perform well and you realise that means that your ministers actually have to do things in their departments, then I think you might want to give more weight to expertise and enthusiasm.50

The answer, in riposte, is to join the party of government. Many working peers thought membership of the party was a prerequisite: it ensured loyalty.51

The Executive-Managerial Role
Almost all outsider ministers interviewed thought that traditional understandings and expectations of ministerial office had become out-dated. For a start, it involved outmoded ideas about what any one individual could realistically handle. Interviewees registered concern about the amount of work a junior minister was expected to do. “It was the most exhausting job I’d ever done. It was relentless”, said one former businessman and outsider.52 This was a result of the lack of clear lines of delegation, and the lack of any job description. They were asked to be responsible for all manner of decisions, without a sense of what was and what was not appropriate to the role. All outsider ministers interviewed thought that the role of a minister should be limited to strategic direction, rather than being a jack of all trades. One outsider minister said:

49 Interview with former peer minister.
50 Interview with former peer minister.
51 A number of interviewees noted that Lord Digby Jones refusal to take the Labour whip was resented by his colleagues and other party members.
[Ministers] shouldn’t get involved in running the department. I think there should be a much clearer cut of responsibilities: permanent secretaries should run departments and ministers should deal with policy. Otherwise it’s hopeless. Very few ministers have ever run anything. There is no way you’re going to convert them into good managers.\textsuperscript{53}

Another stated that what was needed was a rethink of what it meant to be a minister: “Governments need to be more honest about the capacities of the executive”.\textsuperscript{54} Expectations outran capacity. The outsiders who were most successful were usually those with mixed skills. For instance, Lord Myners may have been best in the policy and executive-managerial functions: having been director of various large companies, he was instrumental in dealing with the £500 billion bank rescue package (as was Baroness Vadera). Lord Darzi was probably best in terms of the policy and public relations functions because of his experience as a surgeon and his knowledge of the health sector in general. Lord Adonis, on the other hand, may have been best in terms of the policy and political functions, having previously been a special adviser and head of the No 10 Policy Unit, and having focused on education.

The Public Role
If the ‘public’ role meant dealing with their portfolio’s interest groups, outsider ministers thought this was straightforward: given their experience gained outside Parliament, they had little trouble dealing with their department’s ‘policy networks’—they had once been part of those same networks. Few dealt with ‘the public’, meaning the media and the general public: this was seen as something more appropriate for the Secretary of State. Those who did deal with the media and the public sometimes found it very hard indeed. One outsider discovered that while ostensibly there were ministerial ‘teams’, this was more in theory rather than in practice:

I remember there was a [terrible incident] and I was appearing in all the newspapers. It was quite a problem. I handled it with my private secretary. I don’t think we ever discussed [it] with the Secretary of State. I remember [a Commons minister] saying [...] “You have to remember, in government, every minister is a sole trader.” And it often felt like that.\textsuperscript{55}

To some extent ministerial posts which directly touched upon voter interests and money were considered to be ‘Commons’ portfolios and more publicly focused. Arguably, for instance, the office of the Lord Chancellor had to be taken by someone from the Commons once the Ministry of Justice took over much of the work of the Home Office. This was one reason why the appointments of Lords Mandelson and Adonis caused many to talk about accountability: both their portfolios involved major areas with direct impact on voter interests. The corollary of this was that outsider ministers tended to be given portfolios which did not require contact with the general public, and with rare exceptions were seldom seen—contributing to the sense that they had done little. One such exception being

\textsuperscript{53} Interview with former peer minister.
\textsuperscript{54} Interview with former peer minister.
\textsuperscript{55} Interview with former peer minister.
the post of trade minister, often held by an outsider, with its strong external and ambassadorial focus (albeit business rather than public orientated).

Some working peers made the argument that outsiders were best placed as advisers, not ministers – so avoiding any public role. Outsiders could still utilise their experience and expertise as advisers; but the essence of being a minister was being accountable to Parliament. In spite of the often negative experiences and evaluation of outsiders, there was a recognition that further outsider appointments were likely in the future. Merely being an adviser, or even a ‘tsar’, did not compare: as an adviser one remained separate or distanced from government. It might allow for greater flexibility in terms of being able to deal with ‘horizontal’ (that is, crosscutting) issues, but “If you want to make things happen, you have to be a minister and get involved.” Most accepted the oddities of ministerial life: this was what they had signed up to.

Conclusion

There is a history of appointing outsiders into British government, but in recent times this has come to be seen as signifying growing problems within the British executive: in particular, the declining ministerial talent pool and the need for expertise gained from outside Parliament. Yet, ministerial appointments are an important function of prime ministerial patronage and the appointment of outsiders cannot only be assessed in terms of skill shortages in government. The Brown appointments were unusual as they came in a cluster (five at once with more to follow) and signalled intent to bring in talent from outside parliament. However the appointments exposed constitutional constraints in relation to accountability (particularly at Cabinet Minister level), taking the government whip, and the anomaly of creating ordinary peers who then remained peers once they resigned from their ministerial post. Such anomalies have not subsequently been resolved.

The overseas experience of ‘non-parliamentary ministers’ is not as different from the UK’s as it might seem. While constitutionally the range of choice is left open, in practice in other countries many ministers are members of the legislature, or have had some form of political experience. Ministers appointed via a non-parliamentary route are often not ‘technocrats’ (defined narrowly as those solely with skills acquired in a non-parliamentary context), but rather individuals with hybrid skills, having experience of both the ‘political’ world and the ‘non-political’ world. Hybrid figures, in the UK, such as Lord Myners and Lord Darzi, able to master the political and policy demands in particular proved the more successful of the ‘goats’. Although British Prime Ministers are constrained in some ways (in particular, by the convention that ministers should be appointed from the legislature), they are not in other respects. The British Prime Minister’s power to appoint and dismiss ministers is surprisingly broad—or it usually is, under the conditions of single party government. However it is hard to see the appointment of the Brown ‘goats’ reflecting well on his patronage: only one of the original five ‘goats’, Lord West, served for the whole two years and 11 months of the Brown government. In spite of the stated desire to bring in talent from outside, many of the appointments in the UK had a clear political dimension such as Lords Mandelson and Adonis, Baronesses Kinnock and Vadera. Many interviewees found themselves at a distinct disadvantage in comparison with ‘party’ ministers, in terms of political expertise and

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56 Interview with former peer minister.
parliamentary skills. The political party continues to be the main source of recruitment for the prime minister, providing political and parliamentary expertise and skills over a longer period of time. There is of course still a strong expectation within parties that taking the parliamentary (and political) route – finding favour with the prime minister - is the way to achieve a ministerial position. The outsider route generally provides a ‘fast track’ to get a prime minister’s preferred political appointee into government.

In the UK, there will continue to be occasional ‘outsiders’—those who are not from Parliament, but have relevant technocratic experience or skills. Such appointees may usefully add to a ministerial team appointed from parliament, but evaluations will naturally be subjective, the data set is small and prime ministerial whim must be accounted for. The criteria set out earlier by King and Allen do not necessarily apply to outsider appointments lacking as many did competence in government, political acumen and presentation capacity. But the more successful outsiders did appear to be appointed in the expectation that they would demonstrate some policy compatibility with the prime minister, whilst providing the authority that came from a technical background. We can however suggest ways in which future appointments in the UK may be more ‘effective’, based on our research. First, it may be wise to look for hybrid candidates who have both technocratic and (transferable) political skills rather than making purely technocratic appointments, given the insistence on performance in Parliament. Second, outsiders should be made fully aware of the responsibilities of being a minister, and particularly the parliamentary role. There needs to be greater recognition of the difficulties which outsiders face. In part this is simply a sub-set of the difficulties faced by all new ministers.

The cluster of outside appointments under Brown did not signal a shift towards the UK adopting a greater number of pure hybrid or ‘image IV’ figures in government. Indeed one theme that emerged from the research was that politics is itself a profession, which requires a wide range of different skills, rather than narrow technocratic skills. These can include running a big department; dealing with Parliament; and handling relations with the media and the wider public. It remains that Prime Ministers will have a variety of political, practical and presentational reasons for calling on outsiders. The more successful of these are likely to be those that can master a diverse skill set as currently expectations exceed capacity.
Table 1 Ministerial Roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Executive/Managerial</th>
<th>Political</th>
<th>Public Relations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agenda-setting</td>
<td>Departmental management</td>
<td>Advocacy of department’s position in:</td>
<td>Overseeing dept’s relations with:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy initiation</td>
<td>Decision taker</td>
<td>Cabinet</td>
<td>Interest groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy selection</td>
<td>Parliament</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy legitimation</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Media</td>
<td>party</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 2 Tony Blair’s ‘Outsider’ Ministers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name, background</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Date appointed to the House of Lords</th>
<th>Date minister appointed and date resigned</th>
<th>Total time as minister</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lord Simon of Highbury, former businessman</td>
<td>Minister for Europe</td>
<td>16/05/1997</td>
<td>16/05/1997-29/07/1999</td>
<td>2 years 2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lord Sainsbury of Turville, former businessman</td>
<td>Under Secretary of State, Dept of Trade and Industry</td>
<td>03/10/1997</td>
<td>28/07/1998-10/11/2006</td>
<td>8 years 3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lord Macdonald of Tradeston, former broadcaster and businessman</td>
<td>Minister for Business and Industry, Scottish Office</td>
<td>02/10/1998</td>
<td>03/08/1998-29/07/1999</td>
<td>4 years 10 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minister for Transport, Dept for Transport</td>
<td>29/07/1999-09/06/2001</td>
<td>09/06/2001-13/06/2003</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duchy of Lancaster, Cabinet Office</td>
<td>29/07/1999-09/06/2001</td>
<td>09/06/2001-13/06/2003</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lord Falconer of Thoroton, former barrister</td>
<td>Solicitor General</td>
<td>14/05/1997</td>
<td>06/05/1997-28/07/1998</td>
<td>10 years 1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name, background</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Date appointed to the House of Lords</td>
<td>Date appointed and date resigned</td>
<td>Total time as minister</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lord Malloch-Brown, former diplomat</td>
<td>Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office</td>
<td>09/07/2007</td>
<td>28/06/2007-24/07/2009</td>
<td>2 years 1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lord Darzi of Denham, surgeon</td>
<td>Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department of Health</td>
<td>12/07/2007</td>
<td>29/06/2007-21/07/2009</td>
<td>2 years 1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lord Jones of Birmingham, former Director of CBI</td>
<td>Minister of State, Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform</td>
<td>10/07/2007</td>
<td>29/06/2007-05/10/2008</td>
<td>1 year 4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lord West of Spithead, former First Sea Lord</td>
<td>Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Home Office</td>
<td>09/07/2007</td>
<td>29/06/2007-11/05/2010</td>
<td>2 years 11 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baroness Vadera, banker and government adviser</td>
<td>Under Secretary of State, Department for International Development Under Secretary of</td>
<td>11/07/2007</td>
<td>28/06/2007-25/01/2008</td>
<td>2 years 3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Start Date</td>
<td>End Date</td>
<td>Duration</td>
</tr>
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<td>-----------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lord Carter of Barnes</td>
<td>Under Secretary of State, Dept for Culture, Media and Sport</td>
<td>15/10/2008</td>
<td>22/07/2009</td>
<td>9 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>businessman and govt adviser</td>
<td>Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Dept for Business, Innovation and Skills</td>
<td></td>
<td>05/10/08-21/07/09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lord Myners</td>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury</td>
<td>16/10/2008</td>
<td>11/05/10</td>
<td>1 year 10 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>businessman</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lord Davies of Abersoch</td>
<td>Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office</td>
<td>02/02/2009</td>
<td>11/05/2010</td>
<td>1 year 3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>businessman</td>
<td>Minister of State, Dept for Business, Innovation and Skills</td>
<td></td>
<td>02/02/2009-11/05/10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lord Mandelson, former MP</td>
<td>Secretary of State, Dept for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform</td>
<td>13/10/2008</td>
<td>11/05/10</td>
<td>1 year 7 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cabinet minister</td>
<td>President of the Council, Privy Council Office</td>
<td></td>
<td>10/06/2009-11/10/2010</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead</td>
<td>Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office</td>
<td>30/06/2009</td>
<td>11/05/10</td>
<td>11 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name, background</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Date appointed to the House of Lords</td>
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<td>Total time as a minister</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lord Hill of Oareford, former political consultant</td>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Education</td>
<td>27/05/2010</td>
<td>27/05/2010-present</td>
<td>7 months (as of Dec 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lord Sassoon, former banker, civil servant</td>
<td>Commercial Secretary to the Treasury</td>
<td>29/05/2010</td>
<td>03/06/2010-present</td>
<td>7 months (as of Dec 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lord Green of Hurstpierpoint, former banker</td>
<td>Minister of State for Trade and Investment</td>
<td>22/10/2010</td>
<td>01/01/2011-present</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>