



Junior Ministers to Watch

An insights and analysis briefing from the Whitehouse Consultancy



Junior Ministers to Watch

The term 'junior Ministers' is a slightly misleading, all-encompassing one covering Ministers of State (one step down from a Cabinet-level Secretary of State) and the most junior rank, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State. Their job is to support their Secretary of State by managing particular portfolios, answering questions in the media and Parliament, and in developing – and successfully piloting through Parliament – new laws.

“The first step onto the ladder of preferment, or the high-flying career aborted early on”

It's easy to overlook these appointments' importance: new Ministers or Parliamentary Under-Secretaries are never particularly high-profile, nor are their roles often in the public eye. But who is put in what job is still vitally important.

Why? For almost all would-be Cabinet Ministers (and so nearly every hopeful occupant of 10 Downing Street), a role as a junior Minister is a testing ground - the first step onto the ladder of preferment, or the high-flying career aborted early on. Make a success of their job, particularly in a difficult position, and promotions will likely follow. Prove incapable of managing the myriad of challenges thrown up by your boss or your civil servants, and you will likely have to seek success away from ministerial office.

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More important, perhaps, is the role that junior Ministers play in developing policy. Many are often given tight briefs, enabling them to either bring existing expertise to a job, or develop a deep knowledge and understanding on a specific subject – and so be well-placed to help policy-making. Many junior Ministers develop a genuine appreciation for the work that they do: they are given responsibility for a particular policy area, but not so much responsibility that they lose sight of what they're meant to be doing.

With these considerations, we have profiled a handful of junior Ministers appointed by Theresa May. They are interesting in different ways: some are rising stars; some will drive particular policy in their departments; some may clash with their immediate bosses. Some may succeed and some may fail - but none of them should be overlooked.

Whitehouse's Ministers to Watch

Robert Halfon	Penny Mordaunt	Robin Walker
David Mowat	Nick Hurd	



Samuel Blainey
Senior Political Consultant



Junior Ministers to Watch



Department for Education

NAME Robert Halfon

POST Minister of State, Department for Education

CONSTITUENCY Harlow

MP SINCE 2010



Who are they?

Long-tipped as one of the Conservative Party's rising stars, Halfon is a man of paradox: the libertarian who has called for the Tories to embrace trade unionism and rebrand as 'The Workers Party', the Highgate school alumni who endorses 'white van Conservatism'. Elected MP for Harlow in 2010, he was appointed PPS to Chancellor George Osborne in July 2014. After doubling his majority, he was appointed to the Cabinet as Minister without Portfolio and named Deputy Chair of the Party.

Halfon is a long-time campaigner for apprenticeship reform: he was the first MP to employ an apprentice in the House, subsequently establishing the Parliamentary Academy to encourage other MPs to do likewise. He has also called for greater cooperation between businesses and employees around access to training and reskilling opportunities.

What they will do

Perhaps unsurprisingly given his experience, Halfon's appointment drew plaudits from across the skills sector. The Learning and Work Institute chief executive David Hughes noted the "energy and dedication he has shown a true commitment to apprenticeships and equalities as an MP."

However, the new Minister faces a number of challenges ahead. The decision to leave the European Union has led to calls from the Institute of Directors, manufacturing organisation EEF and business lobby the CBI for the Apprenticeship Levy – a tax on all employers with a salary bill of £3 million or more – to be delayed. Questions persist as to the real value of apprenticeships, with many schemes synonymous with poor employment practices and minimal skills training. Ensuring that apprenticeships are a robust alternative to tertiary education will be a key priority.

Halfon must also weigh up whether or not he will follow his predecessor, Nick Boles, and seek to implement the 34 recommendations for improving post-16 technical education as set out by Lord Sainsbury.

Key policy priorities

- Ensuring that apprenticeships offer real value and aren't seen by employers as a means of reducing their wage bills
- Navigating Brexit and ensuring that the Apprenticeship Levy doesn't hinder already-fragile corporate confidence
- Embracing the digital revolution and guaranteeing that new working practices are employed when available to drive down costs.



Junior Ministers to Watch



Department
for Work &
Pensions

NAME	Penny Mordant
POST	Minister of State for Disabled People, Health & Work, Department for Work & Pensions
CONSTITUENCY	Portsmouth North
MP SINCE	2010



Who they are

One of the more unusual characters at Westminster, Royal Navy reservist, former magician's assistant and participant in the television show Splash! Penny Mordant's political views were formed during her time working in Romania after the 1989 revolution. She has also worked as Communications Director for the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, and was Head of Foreign press for George W. Bush's 2000 presidential campaign. First elected in 2010, she managed to turn a marginal Labour-held seat into a comfortable Conservative one and subsequently increased her majority to over 10,000. A rising star in Tory ranks, she was PPS to then Defence Secretary Philip Hammond (2013-2014), before moving on to the Department for Communities and Local Government (2014-2015). She was then the first woman to be Minister of State for the Armed Forces at the Ministry of Defence (2015-2016).

What they will do

Following her appointment to the DWP, Mordant's portfolio has been boosted to include responsibility for the upcoming Work and Health Programme, which will be replacing the flagship Work Programme. This is a signal that the new Government is keen to continue focussing on halving the disability employment gap – making it a clear priority for Mordant.

Yet funding for disability support, and the design of the new Work and Health Programme, will be instrumental in achieving that goal – and given the disgruntled manner in which Iain Duncan Smith left the Department earlier this year, this will be under the spotlight in Westminster and beyond. The consensus among employment policy pundits is that measures on the disability employment gap have had limited success to date, making this a potential 'make or break' moment for the new Minister. If Mordant succeeds, she will have made a substantial contribution to the construction of the Conservatives as the 'worker's party', and could be destined for greater things.

Key policy priorities

- ✘ **Designing and procuring the delayed Work and Health Programme**
- ✘ **Supporting people with disabilities and health conditions towards work, to ultimately halve the disability employment gap**
- ✘ **Ensuring the perception of the Conservatives as the 'nasty party' is not renewed**



Junior Ministers to Watch



Department
for Exiting the
European Union

NAME Robin Walker

POST Parliamentary Under Secretary
of State, Department for Exiting
the European Union

CONSTITUENCY Worcester

MP SINCE 2010



Who they are

Robin Walker took the iconic seat of Worcester (home of the supposed swing-voter 'Worcester Woman') from Labour in 2010 and established a comfortable majority in 2015. His background is not exactly unusual for a Conservative MP, as his father, Lord Peter Walker of Worcester, sat in the Lords until his death in June 2010. Walker Jnr went to Oxford before working in financial PR in the City of London.

His rise has been steady rather than spectacular, initially focussing on business issues: he served on the Business, Innovation and Skills Select Committee and campaigned in favour of credit unions. Shortly before the 2015 election, Walker was appointed as PPS at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs before moving across to the Department for Education.

What they will do

Robin Walker is one of three junior Ministers at the newly-formed Department for Exiting the European Union (given the unwieldy acronym of DfEEU). Whilst his colleagues David Davis and David Jones were keen leavers, Walker was a vocal remain supporter. Indeed, the suspicion is that Walker – also an early supporter of Theresa May for Conservative leader - has been placed in the new Department to keep an eye on his Secretary of State.

If so, this presents an added burden to an already difficult job. The DfEEU is the first task-specific Department ever set up in peacetime; and Walker will be part of a Ministerial team trying to achieve the best possible deal for the UK out of negotiations with the other 27 EU member states, all with their own electorates to satisfy. He will work closely with the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Trade, along with satisfying a divided Conservative Party. If he manages this task well, Walker could be marked for greater offices of state.

Key policy priorities

- ✗ **Balancing different (and sometimes competing) priorities and concerns to ensure that Brexit negotiations satisfy as many different groups as possible**
- ✗ **Building relationships with related Government Departments to ensure a co-ordinated approach to Brexit negotiations**
- ✗ **Being the voice of the 48% of voted to remain within the Government Department set up to managing leaving the EU**



Junior Ministers to Watch



Department of Health

NAME	David Mowat
POST	Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Community Health & Care Department of Health
CONSTITUENCY	Warrington South
MP SINCE	2010



Who they are

A chartered accountant by trade, Mowat narrowly won Warrington South back from Labour after 18 years in 2010 overturning a 3,515 majority to secure his own of 1,553 in the process. Subsequently, in 2015 he narrowly increased this to 2,750.

Mowat's primary interests to date have been poverty and social mobility, and finance. He previously served on the Joint Committee on the Draft Financial Services Bill (2011 to 2012) and was subsequently appointed PPS to Financial Secretary to the Treasury Greg Clark before following him to the Cabinet Office.

What they will do

In his new role, Mowat will be responsible for social care, primary care and older people; however, there is little to indicate that these are areas that have greatly concerned him in the past with just a handful of Parliamentary Questions on health matters submitted over the last parliamentary term. He has raised the issue of health allocation formulas on several occasions and on the allocation of resources across the health service more generally – but the evidence is that health and social care isn't exactly a priority for him.

Perhaps it's hoped that his links to new Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Greg Clark, and his previous work at the Treasury, may help squeeze some money for health out of other Government Departments. Extra funding of some sort for Mowat's particular area of responsibility is certainly expected, not least because of the demands of an ageing population and the promises of more money for the NHS from the victorious 'Leave' campaign. Yet 'Brexit', and the new immigration rules that may come with it, also threaten social care, long reliant on non-UK labour. Pots of new cash may not be all that helpful if the social care sector faces a severe labour shortage. All the signs point to Mowat taking on a very demanding job indeed.

Key policy priorities

- ✗ Improving his understanding of the labyrinthine Department of Health
- ✗ Grappling with the multiple challenges of providing care to an ageing society
- ✗ Securing funding for care services and working with private and community providers to ensure their stability



Junior Ministers to Watch



Department for
Business, Energy
& Industrial Strategy

NAME	Nick Hurd
POST	Minister of State for Climate Change & Industry Department of Business, Energy and Industry Strategy
CONSTITUENCY	Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner
MP SINCE	2005



Who are they?

The son of former foreign secretary Douglas Hurd, and the fourth member of his generation to sit in the Commons, Eton-educated Nick Hurd carries many of the hallmarks of a traditional Conservative politician.

However this former Bullingdon boy has a clear social conscience – and in many ways Hurd is reminiscent of former party leader David Cameron. It was this flair for compassionate conservatism that made Hurd a natural choice for the voluntary sector brief during coalition – and he was integral to the launch of the Big Society Initiative and National Citizenship Service. During his four-year tenure in the Cabinet Office (2010-2014), Hurd built a reputation among civil servants as a clever and capable minister – qualities that will no doubt be put to good use in the politicised world of climate and industry policy

What they will do

Green organisations cautiously welcomed this appointment as a signal Theresa May wants a ministerial team that is familiar with climate change issues. In his first few years in the Commons, Hurd showed real interest in the sector; sitting on the Environmental Audit Committee and scrutinising the then Labour Government's 2008 Climate Change Act. During this period, Hurd was among a minority of Conservative MPs calling for long-term policy signals from government to act on climate – now the accepted wisdom among his party colleagues. It was perhaps this prescience - coupled with a determination to continue championing green Conservatism over the past decade - that led to him being awarded the 'Parliamentarian of the Year' award by the Green Ribbon group earlier this year.

Now prompted to a major role within the beefed-up business department, Hurd will work alongside Greg Clark, Baroness Neville-Rolfe and Jesse Norman to take on the challenges of balancing the competing priorities of security of supply, affordability and decarbonisation. As Minister of State for both climate change and industry, Hurd's personal priority will be to reconcile tensions between heavy manufacturing, which has lobbied for the removal of the Carbon Price Floor, and environmentalists who would like to see these energy intensive industries cut emissions at a faster rate. The referendum result will provide additional complications – with Hurd now responsible for guiding the UK through the UN climate process as it prepares for withdrawal from the European Union.

Key policy priorities

- Successfully deliver the privatisation of the Green Investment Bank
- Underpin the new industrial strategy in low carbon fundamentals
- Ratify the COP21 Paris accord, as the UK prepares for life outside of the EU

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