



House of Commons
Public Administration Select Committee

Smaller Government: What do ministers do?

Written Evidence

This is a volume of submissions, relevant to the inquiry into Smaller Government: What do Ministers do?, which have been reported to the House but not yet approved for publication in final form. Any public use of, or reference to, the contents should make clear that it is not yet an approved final record of the written evidence received by the Committee.

List of written evidence

	<i>Page</i>	
1	Regulatory Policy Institute's Better Government Programme (MIN 01)	3
2	Regulatory Policy Institute's supplementary evidence (SUPP MIN 01)	11
3	Matthew Flinders and Anika Gauja (MIN 02)	12
4	Campaign Against Arms Trade (MIN 03)	15
5	Peter Riddell (MIN 04)	17
6	Professor Kevin Theakston (MIN 05)	20
7	Professor the Lord Norton of Louth (MIN 06)	22
8	Constitution Unit, University College London (MIN 07)	30

Written evidence submitted by the Regulatory Policy Institute's Better Government Programme (MIN 01)

The Better Government Programme, a free-standing entity within the Regulatory Policy Institute, focuses on the machinery of government and regulation and on improvements to policy and regulatory processes. In 2009, a commission established by the Programme produced a series of recommendations on improving trust in institutions and processes. As part of its work, it considered the role and functions of Ministers and this submission draws on that analysis.

The submission, which focuses on the Committee's questions 1-4, does not necessarily represent the corporate view of the RPI.

Summary

- There are few constitutional arguments against the appointment of Ministers from outside Parliament. Prime Ministers should be free to select Ministers from the widest possible pool of talent.
- There is no reason why unelected decision makers should not be as accountable as elected Ministers to Parliament and the public.
- A significant move to appointment of non-political Ministers might limit the less attractive aspects of politicised debate over policy and public administration and would introduce greater separation between Executive and Legislature.
- Public and media accessibility demands make it difficult to reduce the number of formal decision makers, but a better policy making and governance model may only require an elected Secretary of State and one other political chaperone for non-political appointees in each Department.
- Concern that unelected decision makers may be technocratic and out of touch with the public mood can be addressed through departmental policy governance boards combining elected and non-political members.

1. *What do Ministers do and is their work best done by Ministers who are drawn from Parliament?*

1.1 Ministers currently have four roles:

- To act as the political managers of their departments, progressing and taking responsibility for the Government's policies.
- To act as the ultimate decision makers on any issue within their Departments.
- To act as the link between their Departments and the legislature, accounting to Parliament for their decisions and providing the highest level of accountability for their Departments' work.
- To act as the ultimate departmental representatives of the Government in public fora.

1.2 Is that work best done by Ministers drawn from Parliament? Before answering, we should consider whether it is constitutionally a requirement, or at least desirable, that Ministers should be members of either House. Not necessarily, we would submit, for the following reasons:

- Citizens do not vote for Ministers. While electors can collectively dismiss a constituency MP because of poor performance as a Minister, they are formally asked to vote only for a representative for that constituency. They have no say in the appointment or removal of Ministers (whether drawn from the Commons or Lords) once a government is formed.
- Some maintain that decisions in the system of government can only be considered legitimate if they are taken by those electorally mandated to make them. But that implies that decisions taken by the unelected - bodies such as the Competition Commission, Monetary Policy Committee and sector regulators - under delegated powers lack legitimacy. Legally and constitutionally, that is clearly incorrect.
- Some also suggest that only those drawn from Parliament can be truly accountable to the public; but that concept should only prevail if accountability as we currently experience it is effective and if it would not be possible for those outside Parliament to be at least as accountable to it as Ministers are now. The current experience is that this is insupportable. Traditional accountability mechanisms, such as questions in the House or the ability to vote out a government every few years, have encouraged a culture of obfuscation, point scoring rather than calling to account, and Lines to Take rather than true explanation. And there is no reason why unelected decision makers, who regularly appear before Select Committees now, should not also answer Oral Questions or handle Standing Committee stages.¹ In short, there is no need to pair “unelected” with “unaccountable”.

1.3 Aside from points of principle, there is the question of credibility and competence. Elected Ministers are often seen as amateurs whose decisions are made without the benefit of personal expertise. They are less the best people for the job than the best people (or just the rewardees) that Prime Ministers have chosen from the small pool – one likely, under proposals to reduce the number of constituencies, to get even smaller - of their own party’s (largely) elected members. And election does not confer on an individual a special skill of competent decision making that is lacking in others. In the United States and France for example, there are no concerns over the ability of presidents to select the most capable individuals to Cabinet-level positions without confining themselves to the legislature. Why should a Prime Minister not be given the same freedom provided, we reiterate, that unelected Ministers are placed – and perceived to be – in a position of genuine accountability? There is certainly no constitutional barrier to it.

¹ And Ministers are arguably at their most accountable on the Today or Question Time programmes, which are not restricted to MPs or Peers.

1.4 Both Government and Opposition have recognised that the public trusts non-political “experts” (however defined) above politicians to make certain types of decisions² or to manage processes. We have mentioned the MPC and Competition Commission, but we have also seen the establishment of bodies such as the Office of Budgetary Responsibility and the UK Statistics Authority as a result of suspicion of political intervention. Where Ministers have relinquished powers (for example in setting interest rates or in most merger cases) confidence in the objectivity of processes has improved (even if they are no more transparent or certain) because their replacements are perceived as focused only on their job and not on demagoguery or playing Party games. On the other hand, “expert” in this context is often associated with a technocratic approach to government under which evidentially “correct” decisions do not take account of the public mood, to which Ministers drawn from constituency MPs are more exposed; but that does not mean that unelected decision makers are by definition out of touch or incapable of equity.

1.5 The record of Ministers appointed from outside Parliament has been mixed, but they have rarely been placed in major decision making positions and in recent years have been used mainly as *consiglieri* between the Government and their former sector. Many have found it hard to cope with the aggressive nature of party political culture (it is difficult to imagine Beveridge getting his welfare proposals through today), which suggests that even though a widespread move to non-political Ministers might introduce a civilising element into policy debate, even the most capable of such appointees may need to sit alongside “political” Ministers (or at least mentors such as Special Advisers) in order to deliver policy effectively. But that may be considered more as an indictment of party political gaming than of the ability of non-political appointees to make and deliver sound decisions. It is however important to avoid appointments on the basis of personal profile and political acceptability without consideration of their ability to understand and work effectively within the Whitehall machine.

1.6 There is a second element to the Committee’s question – what should Ministers do? Do we need to adhere to the convention (or fiction, given the scale of delegated power) that Ministers should be regarded as involved in and responsible for all policy decisions? There may be arguments in favour of reviewing this principle:

- It encourages them to involve themselves in management of a system the size of which is impossible for the great majority of transient Ministers to control. It also encourages an environment in which Ministers are criticised both for taking credit for policy and for evasiveness when blamed for problems that in most cases were not their fault.
- It encourages the personalisation of power, with Ministers claiming responsibility for popular decisions and running away from poor ones; and with Opposition parties opportunistically seeking to blame Ministers for every failure of government, regardless of involvement.

² The Committee may wish to decide whether there is any conceptual reason why, for example, the Food Standards Agency is trusted to take most decisions on food safety but only Ministers are considered appropriate decision makers on GMOs.

- In the absence of stronger constraints, it permits Ministers to impose on what they have said should be an evidence-driven process decisions that may be driven by the desire to court short-term popularity or to reward supporters.
- Even when Ministers do not involve themselves, the strength of the constitutional fiction³ is such that unnecessary risk is often created through uncertainty over political intervention.
- Several witnesses to the Committee’s *Better Government* inquiry [HC 983] shared the view that the convention that Ministers are deemed to know of and be responsible for everything that goes on under their command should not be sacrosanct. Sir Steve Robson⁴ said that

“delegation... is a good route to go but it is only going to bring profound benefits if Ministers cease to be responsible for micro issues”, adding that Ministers “account for the broad policy, they account for the structure they put in place.... they account for the top hires, and they account for the incentives they give their top hires - and that is it”, observing that so long as ministerial responsibility exists, “delegation is not going to bring the benefits it can do because it is never going to be real delegation.”

Kenneth Clarke MP observed⁵ that:

“The relationship between the politicians and the Civil Servants has changed very badly. We have taken to absurd lengths the idea that politicians lay down policy and Civil Servants deliver.... They [Civil Servants] will administer things better if they play the key role they used to have in the formulation of policy.”

Sir Richard Mottram⁶ added that:

“big departments should be run on the principle that the Secretary of State is effectively the executive chairman for strategy and policy, and the nonexecutive chairman for the leadership and management and proper conduct of business of the department, and the Permanent Secretary should be held to account for all of these things.”

1.7 The members of our Trust Commission had mixed views on this:

³ The courts have acknowledged that the principle of ministerial decision-making in reality means a collaborative process: *“To treat the minister in his decision-making capacity as someone separate and distinct from the department of government of which he is the political head and for whose actions he alone in constitutional theory is accountable to Parliament is to ignore not only practical realities but also Parliament’s intention.”* – Diplock LJ in *Bushell and Another v Secretary of State for the Environment* [1981] AC 75 at p 94.

⁴ *Better Government*, Public Administration Select Committee, HC 983, Q83-84

⁵ Ibid, Q135

⁶ Ibid, Q27

“I do not believe responsibility for policy making should pass from elected politicians to unelected Civil Servants or to other, shadowy individuals who would have “no interest in anything but doing the job”. How would these paragons be identified or chosen? There has to be a real risk that they would be drawn from the massed ranks of political cronies. Be that as it may, I fear that far from enhancing public trust, this diluting of democracy could do the opposite. It would certainly give politicians/officials/advisers/others a heaven-sent opportunity to blame each other and evade responsibility for mistakes even more effectively than they do now.”

“I would not be comfortable with geneticists setting the policy for stem cell research, but once they have been given their policy parameters by politicians I don't think the political class can have anything more of value to say on the subject and the scientists should get on with it. Likewise, I don't think the Bank of England should fix the monetary framework or its targets, but it should have the independence to meet its set objectives in whatever way it sees fit. Nor should the FSA write banking legislation, but it should be free from political influence when it supervises a financial firm...

I would be happy with a position that says that the elected political level should clearly and transparently set policy, preferably at a high enough level that it doesn't need endless revision. The system should then encourage appointed experts or agencies to carry out these policies as independently as possible. Also, independence isn't a carte blanche to run away with an issue, as it must always be tempered by, for example, accountability to Parliament; or review (ombudsman, judicial etc.) if it strays beyond the parameters that were set by the high level policy objectives.”

This submission favours the second approach; and, as we explain in 2. below, it could lead to a reduction in the number of Ministers, at least as we know them now.

2. *Are there too many Ministers, not enough, or is the level about right?*

- a) *Are current statutory limits on the number of Ministers set at an appropriate level?*
- b) *Is there an optimal number of Ministers in the interests of good government?*

2.1 The complexity of each Department's portfolio (and this is unlikely to decline significantly even if direct responsibility for some sectors is devolved because decision making will, at least to some extent, be replaced by oversight) and the need to provide reasonable access to Ministers through visits and speeches makes it difficult to reduce the number of Ministers without imposing unsustainable strain on those who remain.

2.2 Some commentators point to the appreciable growth in the number of Ministers over the past 50 years (examined in the Committee's *Too Many Ministers?* report). In that report, the Committee concluded that:

The ever-upward trend in the size of government over the last hundred years or more is striking and hard to justify objectively in the context of the end of Empire, privatisation, and, most recently, devolution to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. (para 5)

2.3 But that overlooks the nature of modern government. “Good government” is about more than just the efficient delivery of fairly made policies and decisions. In a world of “stakeholders” and 24 hour news media, Ministers are expected to be seen, and to account and be a spokesman for the Government to a far greater extent than their predecessors. It would be difficult to envisage that a smaller cadre of those doing the work of Ministers could satisfy the demands of today’s concept of accountability. But that does not mean that such work should be reserved only for Ministers as we know them now.

2.4 We do not agree with the Committee (ibid, para 9) that it would be desirable to cap the number of unpaid ministerial posts. While we agree (ibid, para 15) that appointment to a ministerial post as a reward should not be condoned, it is for governments to determine whether the creation of Ministers is necessary provided that the salary burden is limited. However, there would not appear to be any good case for increasing the number.

2.5 A review of decision making and accountability conventions, as discussed in 1. above, might lead to a reduction in the number of Ministers. We examined a model under which decisions within the system should be regarded as having been taken by people with relevant expertise; be seen to be based on a fair balancing of evidence and to be taken in the national interest; and be subjected to true scrutiny, with the additional benefit of introducing greater separation between the Executive and the Legislature. It might have the following characteristics:

- The convention that Ministers make all decisions and are responsible for everything would be replaced with a radical change in role. While the Prime Minister’s ability to appoint the Cabinet would be unchanged, Departments would be restructured on the lines of a managed fund or the BBC Trust, under which the Secretary of State would appoint (from the best available talent, which could include Parliament, and perhaps by competition) and chair a board that would allocate budgets, decide on policy objectives and parameters and give directions to sector specialists, who would be responsible for detailed policy making and implementation.
- The board would therefore be akin to trustees, responsible (and accountable to Parliament) for governance; the executive staff for execution (although we would envisage them discussing implementation options with the Board). While the operation of the BBC Trust has been called into question, a parallel to its model, under which the roles of and relationship between the trustees and the executive would be defined by published protocols, similar to the relationship between Ministers and sector regulators and akin in concept to Service Level Agreements (or the BBC Trust’s Purpose Remits and Service Licences) could be considered. Failure of governance or execution, as defined in the protocols and in statute, would be judicially reviewable.
- The Board (not including the Secretary of State) and senior executive level appointments would be subject to confirmation (not just nomination) hearings by the relevant Select Committee or by a joint Commons/Lords committee, which could vote against appointment.

- Responsibility for errors should be attributable where they are caused, and not always to the top of departments.⁷ Officials, regulators and NDPB heads should be directly accountable to Parliament as well as to the Board.
- The board would have the support of a scrutiny cabinet to monitor executive performance.
- Board members would lead during Whole House stages of legislation but the Board and officials would jointly be answerable during the Standing Committee stage in order to improve the quality of responses to amendments and questions.
- This change must be coupled with a move away from rapid changes in ministerial posts. As one of our Commission members commented,

“Compare the longevity in post of the CEO's of the UK's top 25 firms with that of Cabinet Ministers. Frequently changing guard is very largely a measure of how inadequate too many SofS's are for the posts they are given. Having a half-life measurable in months is the antidote to continuity, accountability and effective governance. Mastery of a Department develops over time. I recall meeting and being impressed by how seriously XXXX had mastered the hugely complex XXXX brief when in opposition. Weeks after hearing how much effort he'd put into getting on top of the subject and how much he looked forward to making a contribution to an increasingly important/overdue national debate on the subject, he was given a completely different job to do. This isn't even Cabinet stuff, so how much worse is it when the brief goes wider?”

2.6 Would a smaller number of Ministers with reduced powers deter parliamentary candidates because their prospects of promotion would be more limited? Leaving aside the priority that should be given to an MP's traditional role as constituency representative, the evidence suggests that there was no shortage of candidates when the Government was half its present size.

2.7 And would ending the right of the unelected to hide behind Ministers inhibit the desire of those outside Parliament to put themselves forward for public service? It may be felt that if people are not prepared to be called to account they are the wrong ones for the job.

3. *If proposals to reduce the number of MPs are implemented, should the number of Ministers also be reduced?*

⁷ The Conservatives (*It's Your Money - A New Plan for Disciplined Spending in Government*, 2009) proposed including a fiduciary responsibility to taxpayers in the employment agreements of all senior officials, with disciplinary implications if it is breached. We agree, but believe that Parliament should have the power to discipline officials *and* Ministers for failure of duty.

- a) *If so, to what extent?*
- b) *How should it be done?*

3.1 There is a difference between Parliament and the Executive. The number of Ministers should be geared to the demands on them, and if we pass a point in delegation/devolution where decision making gives way to oversight and the focus of accountability for policy and service delivery shifts, the number can be cut. If the Government's declared aspirations come to fruition we are likely to end up with smaller departments with fewer functions and significantly smaller budgets. That would suggest fewer Ministers and fewer quangos. But while Ministers talk about decentralisation in the same breath as spending cuts, we do not yet have clarity about which functions are to be shed by Whitehall and who, if anyone, will pick them up. Some would consider it optimistic to assume that there is a latent army of eager volunteers with the right skills and in the right places to bring the Big Society to life.

4. *What implications does coalition government have for the role of Ministers and how they operate, both collectively and at the level of individual departments?*

4.1 None. Ministers' duty is to the Crown, not to any political faction. Trust in Ministers would be materially improved if they were regularly reminded of this.

August 2010

Supplementary Written evidence from Regulatory Policy Institute (SUPP MIN 01)

We noted and support the suggestion of Sir John Major that Ministers should be accountable to either House. This is an increasingly sensible idea at a time when reduction in the size of both Commons and Lords has been mooted and could justify a reduction in overall ministerial numbers. As far as we can see, it would only require amendment of Standing Orders in order to permit defined Strangers to participate in the business of each House.

November 2010

Written evidence submitted by Matthew Flinders, Professor of Parliamentary Government & Governance, University of Sheffield and Anika Gauja, Lecturer in Politics, University of Sydney (MIN 02)

1. Although the exact meaning of terms such as the ‘post-bureaucratic state’, ‘smaller government’ and the ‘smarter state’ remain opaque there is little doubt that the global financial crisis and a number of other socio-political challenges **will require some reformulation of the manner in which the British Government is composed.**
2. In this regard the global financial crisis presents an **opportunity** to reflect on the composition of the executive and its relationship with the legislature that should not be wasted. The growth in the number and distribution of ministerial positions (including the appointment of backbenchers as parliamentary private secretaries) reflects a surge in patronage that was concerned more with effective intra-party management than good government.
3. What do ministers do? Ministers oversee and direct the administration of the state. They are selected to make policy and oversee its successful implication. They are not appointed to play a detailed role in the administration of the state – they are required to **steer but not row.**
4. The benefit of having ministers that are **not drawn from the House of Commons** is that they are free from the obligations of constituency duties and may bring expertise and experience that is not available within the ranks of full-time party political politicians. They may therefore possess a degree of independence that in some circumstances allows them to remain focused on the broader ‘public interest’ and not become entangled in partisan or constituency plea bargaining.
5. The benefit of having ministers that are **drawn from the House of Commons** is that they offer a direct relationship and chain of accountability with the public. The constituency link may ensure that they are closely attuned to public opinion. Party political relationships, structures and loyalties also serve to ensure that ministers generally know each other and will meet in a number of formal and informal arenas.
6. Although it is probably in the interests of democratic legitimacy and clarity to have the greater number of ministers drawn from the House of Commons the burdens of constituency work plus the expertise, experience and independence offered by member of the House of Lords might weigh in favor of having **more ministers drawn from the second chamber.** This logic may increase if Stage Two reform of the Lords results in a composition that is interpreted as being more legitimate (but not necessarily elected).
7. **There are too many ministers.** Around one third of all MPs will hold a ministerial appointment (or will be a PPS) and will therefore follow the departmental line. The

scope of Prime Ministerial patronage is therefore very great and the arguments regarding how this undermines the independence of the House of Commons as a whole is voluminous. Chris Mullin's memoirs *A View from the Foothills* serves to underline why many ministerial posts are unnecessary.

8. The *Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill 2010* amends the *Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986* to set the size of the House of Commons at 600 Members. If this occurs without a requisite reduction in the payroll vote the **relative power of the executive over the legislature will increase** rather than decrease. The statutory limits on the number of ministers should be reduced, possibly to **no more than 70-80 positions**, and only members of the Cabinet should be able to appoint a PPS. This could be achieved through an immediate reduction in some posts, notably those within the territorial departments, and a planned gradual reduction over future parliaments.
9. There are three broader and inter-related issues that the PASC might reflect upon during this inquiry: it is not about the money; political recruitment; and career structures.
10. Although the global financial crisis has focused attention on public sector spending and salaries, **saving money should a secondary but not primary priority** when it comes to reducing either the number of MPs or ministers. The savings accrued from reducing the number of MPs are negligible when viewed against the broad financial situation and if 'good scrutiny makes for good government' then cutting back the number of MPs may actually be economically inefficient in the long-term.
11. This inquiry must not allow a focus on the **number of ministers (i.e. quantity) to distract attention from the more important issue of the caliber of ministers (i.e. quality)**. This relates back to the issue of fiscal savings, provides a link with the issue of political recruitment and raises the basic issue of MPs pay. Although it is undoubtedly unfashionable to publicly admit this, the basic pay of an MP is arguably too low. If high-quality individuals from all sections of the community are to be given the opportunity and encouragement to enter political life, and therefore become a candidate for a ministerial position, then it is vital that the thorny issue of MPs pay is addressed sooner rather than later. Although statutory responsibility for this issue will soon transfer to the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority it is vital that the House of Commons is a little more brave on this issue than it has been in the past.
12. The issue of MPs pay is inevitably entangled with Prime Ministerial patronage and the fact that being a minister brings with it an additional salary. The lack of an **alternative career structure** within the House of Commons has for decades explained the executive's *de facto* control of the legislature (in all but the most extreme circumstances). One way of making the backbenches a more fertile training ground for potential ministers, of off-setting the impact of a reduction in ministerial posts, of encouraging former ministers to accept positions on scrutiny committees and

generally establishing a more mature and balanced constitutional relationship between the executive and legislature would be to **increase significantly the additional payments** that select committee chairmen receive.

August 2010

Written evidence submitted by the Campaign Against Arms Trade (MIN 03)

1. The Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) in the UK works to end the international arms trade. Around 80% of CAAT's funding comes from individual supporters. This submission focuses on CAAT's experience on the appointment of ministers from outside Parliament.
2. CAAT supporters often contact their MPs asking them to take up arms export issues with ministers. In the last few years, these ministers have usually not been elected members of the House of Commons, and many of them have been new to politics.
3. The major focus of CAAT's campaigning has been the Government's arms export promotion unit. The Defence Sales Organisation was set up by Denis Healey in 1966 and located within the Ministry of Defence (MoD). It remained there, with a name change to the Defence Export Services Organisation (DESO), until April 2008. Most of its promotion functions were then moved to UK Trade & Investment (UKTI), a body responsible to the trade department, now the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). UKTI has set up a Defence and Security Organisation (UKTI DSO).
4. Other campaigning work has taken place around the work of the Export Credits Guarantee Department (ECGD), which is responsible to the Secretary of State for what is now BIS, and "corporate mercenaries", euphemistically known as private military and security companies (PMSCs). A FCO minister covers this.
5. The responsible ministers for these areas of work for the past few years are shown below :
 - a) Defence equipment ministers with responsibility for DESO:
Baroness Symons from 1999 to 2001; Lord Bach from 2001 to 2005; Lord Drayson from 2005 to 2007; Baroness Taylor from 2007 to 2008.
 - b) Trade ministers with responsibility for UKTI DSO and the ECGD:
Lord Digby Jones from 2007 to October 2008; Lord Davies of Abersoch from January 2009 to May 2010. These junior ministers reported to the Secretary of State, Lord Mandelson.
 - c) Lord Malloch-Brown was the FCO minister with responsibility for PMSCs during the crucial period before the last Government's proposals for (non-)regulation announced in April 2010.
6. Currently, the responsible ministers are all MPs, but CAAT's hopes that this would remain the case have been dashed by the appointment of Stephen Green as Trade & Investment Minister designate. It seems that, by the end of 2010, responsibility for UKTI DSO and the ECGD will once again rest with someone who has not been elected to Parliament.
7. Leaving aside the policy content and the individual personalities involved, CAAT feels there is a major problem with accountability. The ministers who are not MPs, but are responsible for, and make decisions about, those areas of government with which CAAT is most concerned, are unable to respond to debates in the House of Commons, and cannot answer parliamentary questions there in their own right.

8. Possibly more importantly, unelected ministers are not exposed to constituents who might question the morality of arms export promotion, or to local political parties or human rights or development groups which might raise the issue in debate. CAAT supporters who are constituents of one Secretary of State have already been able to meet him and to make their views known. This is, at the very least, better for democracy. Without such constituency contacts, there is little to offset the direct lobbying by companies and trade associations.
9. It has been argued that having a trade minister appointed from the business world enables more time to be devoted to travel and making contacts than would be the case with an MP with additional parliamentary duties. However, this presupposes that trade is uncontroversial. There is no recognition of the negative impact of arms export promotion, or, moving away from CAAT's own concerns, that giving export credit support to, for example, a particular dam or pipeline is hugely problematic. Trade ministers must be as accountable as other ministers.
10. If the UK is promoting democracy, not only must the ministers be fully accountable, they also need to be seen to be accountable. With the UK's two chamber legislature, there is a need for one member of each department to be a member of the House of Lords. However, unless there is an exceptional reason, it should be no more than one member and not the Secretary of State. Also, the opportunity of reshuffles should be taken to ensure that one set of responsibilities within a department is not consecutively undertaken by a Peer.

September 2010

**Written evidence submitted by Peter Riddell, Senior Fellow Institute for Government,
and chair of the Hansard Society (MIN 04)**

1. The Institute for Government is currently undertaking a major research project into ministerial effectiveness. This focuses on the following questions: what are the characteristics of an effective minister? What are the main influences on effectiveness? Why aren't there more effective ones? And what can be done? We are nearing the end of our research phase, but have not yet reached firm conclusions.
2. Ministers have to set out policy goals on behalf of the Government; to drive through reform programmes; to explain and justify their decisions; and to be accountable for the performance of their departments, specifically to Parliament, but also, more generally, to the public and the media.
3. Possible conclusions we are considering include:-
 1. Improving the management of ministerial careers—greater stability in office; a more formal appraisal system.
 2. Improving ministerial development via systematic mentoring, coaching and advice at various stages of a ministerial career.
 3. Involving outsiders in government but being much clearer on their distinctive role, being a super-adviser and being accountable to, and handling, the Lords.
4. My response to the committee's specific questions are in my personal capacity (also reflecting my observations from nearly 30 years as a political journalist), and do not reflect the Institute's views:-

1. What do ministers do and is their work best done by ministers who are drawn from Parliament?-

Ministers have a variety of roles: in leading their departments: in articulating the Government's wider agenda within their departments: in fighting the departments' corner in the rest of the Whitehall, Westminster, Brussels and interested parties; and in handling the media. Most Secretaries of State and other ministers should still be drawn from the Commons, but there is scope, as above in paragraph 3, for more outsiders to be brought in to provide expertise in more technocratic roles, but, if they are ministers, rather than advisers, they have to have political skills.

2. Are there too ministers, not enough, or is the level about right?-

Recent Prime Ministers have abused the system by exceeding the statutory limit on the number of ministers by making appointments in both Houses who do not receive an additional salary, as well as of envoys and representatives, in addition to the

proliferation of parliamentary private secretaries. This has had the effect of boosting the “payroll” vote. In addition, devolution has not led to a reduction in the number of ministers, rather the reverse as a fewer ministers for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland has been more than offset by increases elsewhere.

On a) and b) there is no optimal number (see remarks below on the implications of creating the coalition), but the current statutory limits should be enforced rigorously. No one can be called a minister who does not fall within that limit.

3. If proposals to reduce the numbers of MPs are implemented, should the number of ministers also be reduced?-

a) Proportionately with the reduction in the number of MPs

b) By altering the statutory ceiling when the number of MPs is reduced.

4. What implications does coalition government have for the role of ministers and how they operate, both collectively and at the level of individual departments?

The existence of the coalition alters the context considerably, as discussed in the recent Institute for Government report, ‘United We Stand’. To ensure that both coalition parties have the chance to put forward their views in partnership, the two parties have to be represented as widely as possible. At present, five departments have no Lib Dem minister. This makes it harder for a Lib Dem voice to be heard and, in many other departments, the Lib Dem minister is often a junior one. This requires a change in attitude by both ministers and civil servants to take account of both parties’ views.

5. How is the role and function of ministers likely to change if plans to decentralise power from central government to local and community level are introduced?

In theory, there should be scope to reduce the number of ministers, but, as noted above, this did not happen after devolution.

6. What do developments such as coalition government and the decentralisation of power away from central government mean in particular for:-

a) The role and number of junior ministers?

b) Our understanding of ministerial accountability?

As noted above, there are contrasting pressures. Coalition government tends to require more junior ministers, and decentralisation fewer. But it is not just

the number of ministers. Equally important is the number of departments. There is a strong case for merging several departments, which would reduce the number of ministers.

On accountability, the key issue is not whether all ministers are elected but whether they can be questioned about their policies and performance. Lords ministers already appear before select committees, there should also be some mechanism for questioning by MPs generally in, say, Westminster Hall, as has been proposed by Speaker Bercow.

7. How significant are cost and affordability issues to decisions about the number of ministerial appointments, especially given the extent of spending cuts required from government departments in the foreseeable future?

There would obviously be savings if the number of ministers is reduced, and, as the ‘Too Many Ministers?’ report by the committee noted, this applies to unpaid as well as to paid ministers since the unpaid still have private offices and associated costs. A reduction in the number of ministers—rather like the 5 per cent cut in ministerial salaries—would be largely symbolic (an important factor politically at a time of widespread cuts) since the financial savings are pretty small.

8. Under what circumstances is it appropriate to appoint ministers from outside Parliament. Do those circumstances apply at present?

It is appropriate to bring in ministers from outside the Commons, mainly at middle ranking and junior levels, to broaden the range of experience available to a government and to fulfil specific tasks, provided they accept that being a Lords minister involves extensive political responsibilities in the Lords. There needs to be much clearer thought about the distinction between ministers and advisers.

9. Does the balance between the numbers of ministers in the Commons and in the Lords need redressing?

The question is less about numbers than ministerial roles. Probably about the current number of ministers is needed in the Lords to make statements, answer questions and take through legislation. The excess is in the Commons.

September 2010

**Memorandum from Professor Kevin Theakston, School of Politics and International
Studies, University of Leeds (MIN 05)**

JUNIOR MINISTERS

1. In constitutional terms the position of junior ministers in the British system of government today is the same as in the 19th century when the job was invented. They have no formal or legal powers of their own: any executive authority they have is by delegation from their ministerial chief. They share in the Government's collective responsibility to Parliament but in policy terms they are formally responsible to their Secretary of State rather than to Parliament (though in practice, if things go badly wrong, the junior minister may end up walking the plank). Historically, they had mainly a parliamentary role (and this is still an important aspect of the work) but the departmental and policy-making roles have grown more important in recent decades. Ministers are encouraged in the *Ministerial Code* to devolve on to their juniors responsibility for a defined range of departmental work and many—particularly at Minister of State level—carry special titles (a practice started by Harold Wilson in the 1960s). But what the job of a junior minister has amounted to in practice has usually varied between one department and another, and has depended greatly on the style of the Cabinet minister involved and his or her relations with the junior minister(s).

2. Junior ministers are sometimes written off as marginal or irrelevant dogsbodies, as political and departmental Cinderellas. Lord Digby Jones described being a junior minister as 'one of the most dehumanising and depersonalising experiences a human being can have.' Professor Peter Hennessy has said that 'in Whitehall terms, junior ministers are the wretched of the earth and are often treated as such.' Tony Blair's former Chief of Staff, Jonathan Powell, said 'there is an awful lot of make-work in junior ministerial jobs.' Former Cabinet Secretary Lord Turnbull argued 'a lot of what they do could be done by officials.' Chris Mullin complained in his diaries about his 'pointless existence' as a junior minister, the low-level drudgery, his 'utter lack of influence' and the absence of team working in government.

3. On the other hand, Baroness Joyce Quin's experience convinced her 'there can be real job satisfaction' because 'some jobs at the secondary level have substance and a proper measure of independence', with some junior ministers being able to take decisions and make a difference in their own defined sphere. Cabinet ministers are already overloaded; without the support of junior ministers their jobs would be impossible. In all this, civil servants take their cues from ministers. Formally (as spelt out in the *Ministerial Code*) junior ministers cannot give directions to permanent secretaries, meaning a civil service 'appeal' to the top minister is always possible. Junior ministers in the past have always found that their scope and clout depended crucially on whether they had the confidence and backing of the Secretary of State, and the same will go for junior ministers in the present Government.

4. The move to coalition government adds a new dimension in the sense that a Secretary of State in charge of a department (and civil servants) may not be able to treat, say, a Parliamentary Under Secretary as the lowest form of political life and of little account—to be told to 'get back in your little box and stay there', as one uppity junior minister was once instructed by his boss in the previous Labour Government—particularly when that junior

minister is the only representative of the Liberal Democrat Party in a ministry headed by a Conservative Cabinet minister. There are nine major Whitehall departments headed by Conservatives that include one Liberal Democrat in the junior ministerial team (six of these at Minister of State level, three at the more junior ‘Pussy’ level, as it is sometimes dubbed). These juniors all have their designated departmental responsibilities, and in formal terms their roles and responsibilities may seem as limited and circumscribed as with any other junior minister. But politically they have an important ‘watchdog’ role, trying to represent their party’s interests and provide a Liberal Democrat voice and input on a wider waterfront, across the full range of departmental business. This may involve more ministerial team meetings, these junior ministers being put more in the picture and having greater access to policy papers outside their own departmental responsibilities than would normally be the case, and a shift in the usual views of political seniority and hierarchies. Their wider role may mean these junior ministers will need more private office support and perhaps in some cases even their own special advisers (though current rules limit them to Cabinet ministers and ministers who attend Cabinet). But for most junior ministers from the larger party in the coalition—the Conservatives—working under chiefs from their own party, the underlying realities and determinants of their role, status and influence have not necessarily changed.

5. The long-term increase in the number of junior ministers has been widely commented on. In 1914 Asquith’s Government had only 15 junior ministers; in 1945 Attlee appointed 32 junior ministers; counting on the same basis (Parliamentary Secretaries and Ministers of State), Brown’s Government in 2010 had 77 junior ministers while Cameron’s has 65. British governments are, overall, bigger and have many more junior ministers than their international counterparts. Up until the 1950s most government departments had only one junior minister but now ministerial teams are much larger: currently ten departments have four or more junior ministers (one has six); in the previous Government one department (Business, Innovation and Skills under Lord Mandelson) actually had nine junior ministers. Whitehall mandarins sometimes complain about departments being ‘over-ministered’; Lord Turnbull claimed most departments could be run with just three ministers. At the same time there is concern about the size of the ‘payroll’ vote in the House of Commons, with proposals regularly made to cut the number of ministers or to set a percentage quota of MPs who could be in government.

6. In 2009 the Irish Taoiseach reduced the number of junior ministers in his government at a stroke by 25 per cent. In Britain, as a first step, there is probably scope to shave off one junior ministerial post per department (and save other ministerial posts by the overdue merger of the territorial offices for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland), cutting up to 20 junior ministerial posts. A reduction in the size of governments and in the number of junior ministers need not involve a loss of administrative quality, parliamentary accountability or governing capacity, provided that those junior ministers who are appointed are of high quality and have a real job to do. Fewer junior ministers could—and should—mean that those who serve in the ‘foothills’ of government may be more likely to have a significant and satisfactory role.

October 2010

**Memorandum from Professor the Lord Norton of Louth, Professor of Government,
University of Hull (MIN 06)**

This submission addresses what ministers do, the problems associated with their number and activities, and what may be done to create a more efficient government and concomitantly rebalance the relationship between the House of Commons and that part of which forms the Government.

MINISTERIAL FUNCTIONS

1. Ministers fulfil a range of functions. The senior ministers heading departments have to:
 - (1) manage their departments (the doctrine of individual ministerial responsibility is of most importance in this context, establishing a minister's line control of the department);
 - (2) determine the policies of the department;
 - (3) answer to Parliament for their actions;
 - (4) persuade Parliament to give assent to legislation;
 - (5) be the public face of their departments; and
 - (6) join together in Cabinet to agree the principal policies of the Government and the programme to be laid before Parliament.
2. The question of whether there are too many ministers cannot be detached wholly from the question of what they do. There are two distinct issues relating to size, one constitutional and one functional.

Constitutional

3. Ministers by convention are drawn from and remain within Parliament. By convention, most are drawn from the House of Commons. There was an attempt through the Act of Settlement to remove placemen (ministers) from Parliament, but this was never implemented: the legislation was to take effect upon the demise of Queen Anne but was repealed before the end of her reign.⁸

⁸ Instead, ministers upon appointment had to fight by-elections. This provision was finally repealed in 1926.

4. By remaining within Parliament, ministers are able to answer for the actions of their departments and for the legislation they introduce. By being parliamentarians, they are already socialised in the parliamentary process and may therefore be seen to be sensitive to the needs of other members. This dimension may be seen to be to the benefit of Parliament.
5. Ministers are bound by the convention of collective ministerial responsibility. This convention became established in the nineteenth century. Initially it did not wholly encompass junior ministers but they were soon brought within its scope.⁹ More recently, Parliamentary Private Secretaries have been deemed to form part of the 'payroll vote', even though they remain private Members. Their inclusion has been part of a creeping process, their inclusion now implicit as a result of the wording of the Ministerial Code.
6. The 'payroll vote' gives the Government a guaranteed vote in any division. As the Committee has already noted in its report *Too Many Ministers?* the size of the payroll vote has increased over time, principally as a result of an increase in the number of junior ministers and of PPSs.¹⁰ In 1950, the payroll vote (ministers + PPSs) in the House of Commons constituted 15 % of the House. It now constitutes 21 %. (That proportion will increase slightly as a result of the proposed reduction in the number of seats to 600 under the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill.) Expressed as a proportion of the number of MPs in the coalition, it is 38 %.
7. From a constitutional perspective, it can be argued that the ministry is entitled to have ministers in Parliament in order to manage the Government's business and to explain and persuade in getting its business. However, ministers are members of a body that is expected to subject the ministry to critical scrutiny and which has the responsibility of determining whether to give assent to the legislation placed before it. The growth of the 'payroll vote' has extended the number of votes at the disposal of the whips. The greater the numbers on the payroll vote, the fewer MPs there are to challenge government and if necessary to vote against it and defeat it in the event of unacceptable legislation, or other provisions, being laid before the House.
8. There therefore has to be some balance between the needs of government in terms of the number of ministers required to fulfil the essential tasks of government and the freedom of the House of Commons to challenge and ultimately, if necessary, to say no to government. There has never been, as far as I am aware, any convention as to where the balance lies, either in absolute terms (the number of ministers) or in relative terms (ministers as a proportion of the number of members), and relatively little discussion of the topic, other than through the occasional report, such as that of the

⁹ Philip Norton, 'Collective Ministerial Responsibility', *Social Studies Review*, Vol. 5(1), 1989, pp. 33-36.

¹⁰ Public Administration Select Committee, *Too Many Ministers?* Ninth Report of Session 2009-10, HC 457.

Herbert Committee,¹¹ and the occasional Private Member's Bill designed to reduce the number of ministers.¹²

9. The foregoing discussion relates to the House of Commons in that the Government rests on the confidence of the House. The number of ministers drawn from the House of Lords is smaller than the number in the Commons (and has been since the nineteenth century) and expressed as a proportion of the membership, ministers constitute less than 3 per cent.

Functional

10. Ministers fulfil a range of functions.¹³ Senior ministers fulfil those adumbrated in paragraph 1 and junior ministers carry out those allocated by the minister heading the department.¹⁴ However, in fulfilling the functions, there are two problems.
11. First, there is a premium on parliamentary skills. Members who are good at the Dispatch Box and in committee are more likely to be promoted than those who may have strong managerial skills but who are poor parliamentary performers. Some ministers survive because of their performances in the House even though they may not be good at taking decisions and managing their departments.
12. Second, in the running of government departments, ministers are generally amateurs. They may have or develop parliamentary and managerial skills, but historically they have lacked any training in the running of a department. Senior ministers have usually been appointed to office with little guidance from the Prime Minister as to what is expected of them and have been left to determine for themselves how they should manage their departments, including their junior ministers.¹⁵ By the time they feel they have a good grasp of the issues and how to run the department, they get appointed to another post or are removed from government. New ministers come in and, in essence, are left to re-invent the wheel, relying on their experience and observations as junior ministers, their outside experience, their intuition, or guidance from officials.
13. Some training is now made available to ministers, but the utilisation of such training has been limited. In October, I asked how many ministers had received training

¹¹ Select Committee on Offices or Places of Profit under the Crown, *Report from the Select Committee on Offices or Places of Profit under the Crown*, Session 1940-41, HC 120.

¹² See House of Commons Library, *Limitations on the number of Ministers and the size of the Payroll vote*, Standard Note SN/PC/03378, pp. 6-7.

¹³ See Rodney Brazier, *Ministers of the Crown* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); also Richard Rose, *Ministers and Ministries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), and Diana Woodhouse, *Ministers and Parliament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

¹⁴ On junior ministers, see Kevin Theakston, *Junior Ministers in British Government* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987).

¹⁵ Philip Norton, 'Barons in a Shrinking Kingdom: Senior Ministers in British Government', in R. A. W. Rhodes (ed), *Transforming British Government*, Vol. 2 (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 106.

offered by the National School of Government. The answer was that, since the general election:

“...the number of Ministers who have attended induction events organised by the national school, or who have commissioned expert briefings or other forms of leadership development, are as follows: induction workshops: 31 Ministers; induction briefings to individual Ministers or to specific teams of Ministers: 32 Ministers; expert parliamentary briefings: nine Ministers; expert finance and governance briefings: three Ministers; and individual work on leadership development: nine Ministers.”¹⁶

14. The provision of some training is welcome but it remains somewhat sporadic rather than a comprehensive and sustained feature of government. There remains an emphasis on parliamentary skills and on the amateur minister. Historically, this has created an amateur government, in that ministers are not trained in running a department and they deal with senior officials who are generalists rather than specialists.
15. The relationship of this point to numbers is that government has tended to be inefficient, relying on quantity rather than quality in the provision of ministers. Senior ministers are not trained in managing a department and do not necessarily know how to get the best out of their junior ministers. They may well be able to do more with less.

POLITICAL IMPERATIVES

16. Over time, the size of the ministry has grown. Though it can be argued that the increase can be attributable to the increase in the range of government responsibilities, there has been no study that bears out this claim, and it is notable that when some responsibilities of government have been reduced or transferred elsewhere (as with devolution) the decrease (if any) in the number of ministers has not been commensurate with the scale of the transfer.
17. The rise in the number of ministers may to a larger degree be the response to the Prime Minister's desire to extend the scope of patronage. As Jonathan Powell, the former Chief of Staff to Tony Blair, has written in *The New Machiavelli*:

“If prime ministers had their way, they would appoint all the MPs on their benches to ministerial office. The payroll vote is an essential parliamentary tool, and the bigger it is the better.”¹⁷

¹⁶ *HL Deb.* 27 October 2010, col. 291W.

¹⁷ Jonathan Powell, *The New Machiavelli* (London: The Bodley Head, 2010), p. 142.g

18. The patronage explanation as opposed to the responsibilities of government explanation has found support in the evidence of former ministers and officials. I chaired the Conservative Party's Commission to Strengthen Parliament, which reported in 2000.¹⁸ Various witnesses made clear that in their view there were too many ministers. This has been reinforced by the evidence given to this Committee in its earlier report.¹⁹ Those believing there are too many ministers include former Prime Minister Sir John Major and former Foreign Secretary Lord Hurd of Westwell. As former Cabinet Secretary Lord Turnbull said in evidence to the Committee, some functions could be carried out by officials.²⁰ There is also the argument that some tasks do not need to be carried out, including—as Chris Mullin has observed—of speaking at conferences and other gatherings where ministerial attendance fulfils no significant benefit for government.

19. The impression may be given that the needs of government require the current number of ministers, with ministers appearing fully occupied. However, as a former minister, Frank Field, observed in evidence to the Commission to Strengthen Parliament, the amount of work increases to occupy the time made available by ministers.²¹ Lord Hurd contended that the number of ministers could be reduced without undermining the essential tasks of government. He argued that:

“a decision by an incoming prime minister to abolish twenty ministerial posts at different levels would not only be popular but would be followed immediately by an adjustment of workload. The whips and those who enjoy exercising or receiving patronage would be dismayed, but the benefits would be great.”²²

20. We agreed with Lord Hurd and the other witnesses. We concluded:

“The case for reducing the number of ministers is compelling on its merits. It also has a number of beneficial consequences. Limiting the number of ministers increases the number of MPs who are not committed to government by the doctrine of collective ministerial responsibility. Narrowing the route to ministerial office may serve to make attractive the alternative careers in the House of Commons. We believe that these benefits should not be negated by extending patronage through other routes.”²³

¹⁸ The Commission to Strengthen Parliament, *Strengthening Parliament* (London: The Conservative Party, 2000).

¹⁹ Public Administration Select Committee, *Too Many Ministers?* Ninth Report of Session 2009-10, HC 457.

²⁰ *Too Many Ministers?* Paragraph 13.

²¹ *Strengthening Parliament*, p. 48. See also the evidence of Jonathan Baume, *Too Many Ministers?* Paragraph 17.

²² *Strengthening Parliament*, p. 48.

²³ *Strengthening Parliament*, pp. 48-9.

21. We recommended that the number of ministers in Cabinet should be capped at 20 and the number of other ministers capped at 50. We also took the view that there should only be one PPS per department and answerable to the Cabinet minister.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 22. There is a case for fewer but better trained ministers. The present system is inefficient and gives the Government an unnecessary advantage within the House of Commons in the form of the payroll vote.**

23. The number of paid ministers should be reduced. This can be achieved through amending the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975. A cap on the overall number of ministers can also be achieved through amending the Ministerial and Other Salaries Act 1975. If the size of the House of Commons is reduced to 600, this further reinforces the need for a reduction.

24. The Herbert Committee recommended that the number of ministers in the House of Commons should be no more than 60. This Committee recommended that the total payroll vote (ministers + PPSs + MPs holding posts such as special envoys) should be limited to 15 % of the House—in effect, reverting to the percentage as existed in 1950.

25. I would separate consideration of the formal payroll vote—those in receipt of a ministerial salary—from those who are informal members. There is an important constitutional distinction. Ministers are members of Her Majesty's Government and Parliamentary Private Secretaries are not.²⁴ However, the Government have attempted to have it both ways in the treatment of PPSs, classing them as in effect falling within the ranks of government when it suits their purposes and not as falling within its ranks when it equally suits their purpose. This inconsistency—what some may see as a cynical misuse of the position of PPSs—is enshrined in the Ministerial Code.

26. On the one hand, the Code now draws PPSs within the ranks of government when it comes to voting in the House: 'Parliamentary Private Secretaries are expected to support the Government in important divisions in the House. No Parliamentary Private Secretary who votes against the Government can retain his or her position'.²⁵ (This moves the PPS from a position where voting against the Government did not necessarily result in being dismissed.)²⁶ On the other hand, PPSs are deemed to be private Members for the purpose of serving on Select Committees.²⁷

²⁴ See Philip Norton, 'The Constitutional Position of Parliamentary Private Secretaries', *Public Law*, Summer 1989, pp. 232-6. More generally, see House of Commons Library, *Parliamentary Private Secretaries*, Standard Note SN/PC/04942, 18 January 2008.

²⁵ Cabinet Office, *Ministerial Code*, May 2010, paragraph 3.9.

²⁶ Norton, 'The Constitutional Position of Parliamentary Private Secretaries', pp. 234-5. There may still be scope for some latitude, though, in that the wording of the current Code is ambiguous in relation to abstentions.

²⁷ *Ministerial Code*, paragraph 3.10.

27. This treatment is wholly inappropriate. The Ministerial Code should be precisely that—a *Ministerial* Code. PPSs are private Members and insofar as they have a vicarious responsibility in relation to government it relates solely to the departments in which they assist their ministers. They should be expected not to speak or vote against the Government in respect of the department in which they serve as PPSs, but otherwise should have discretion to vote against the Government.
28. I would therefore recommend reducing the number of paid ministerial posts, capping it at 70;²⁸ reducing the number of PPSs, with only one being appointed per department; and amending the ministerial code so that PPSs are not treated on a par with ministers. The first of these requires an amendment to section 2(1) of the House of Commons Disqualification Act. The remaining two are dependent on persuading the Prime Minister to take the action recommended, though it is within the gift of the House to resolve that no PPS may be appointed to serve on a select committee.
29. Reducing the number of ministers would not undermine the efficiency of government—rather the reverse—if accompanied by comprehensive provision of training for ministers and with whips taking on some of the responsibilities for answering for departments in the House. Whips in the House of Lords combine the normal tasks of whipping with acting as spokespersons for departments. It is not unknown for a Whip to be responsible for taking a major Bill through the House. At the moment, for example, the Public Bodies Bill—a highly contentious measure—is being taken through the Lords by a whip, Lord Taylor of Holbeach.
30. Given that the increase in the number of ministers in the Commons has extended to the whips, there is scope for such a change in roles. It would also have the benefit for government of extending the capacity to test whether whips are suitable for promotion within government. The Whips’ Office has tended to be used, especially by Conservative governments, as a training ground for up-and-coming MPs who are seen as ministerial material. It is a somewhat limited training ground in that the occupants of the office remain silent in the House. The virtues of a Trappist monk are not necessarily those required to be an effective departmental minister.
31. If necessary, some of the tasks —those not amenable to deletion—could be taken on by additional ministers in the House of Lords. The number of ministers in the Lords is not excessive, either in absolute terms or relative to the size of the House. As already noted, the number of ministers constitutes less than 3 per cent of the membership. There is no tradition and little scope for appointing PPSs in the Lords. The position in the House of Lords is presently the reverse of that of the House of Commons: the membership of the House is increasing while the number of ministers has decreased slightly.

²⁸ This figure derives from the existing material, as indicated, and could be adapted following a thorough review of each ministerial post and the needs of Departments.

32. A redistribution of essential tasks, and a jettisoning of non-essential tasks, in the manner recommended obviates the need for ministers to be appointed outside the House. Appointing ministers who do not serve in either House is unnecessary and undesirable. By being drawn from and remaining within Parliament ensures that ministers are aware of the role of Parliament, and of members, and proximity is important also not only for being answerable in formal terms but also in being accessible to members less formally (for example, being button-holed during divisions). The existence of ministers in the Lords maintains the appreciation of Parliament without the need to fulfil constituency responsibilities.

33. In short, there needs to be a more efficient ministry, delivered through fewer ministers and PPSs, but with ministers trained in the tasks expected of them (especially in relation to management and policy making) and making greater use of whips and, if necessary, ministers in the Lords. A leaner, more accountable Government is good for the health of the political system. The most difficult task may be persuading government of that fact.

November 2010

Written evidence from Constitution Unit, University College London (MIN 07)

Comparative table showing size of the Ministry compared with size of the Legislature

Countries with parliaments of less than 100 members

<i>Country</i>	<i>Size of Cabinet (current)</i>	<i>Size of Junior Ministry</i>	<i>Total size of Ministry</i>	<i>Size of legislature</i>	<i>Ratio of Ministry to legislature</i>	<i>Population</i>
Wales	10	4	14	60	1:4	2,980,000

Countries with parliaments of between 100 and 200 members

<i>Country</i>	<i>Size of Cabinet (current)</i>	<i>Size of Junior Ministry</i>	<i>Total size of Ministry</i>	<i>Size of legislature</i>	<i>Ratio of Ministry to legislature</i>	<i>Population</i>
NI	13	2	15	108	1:7	1,789,000
New Zealand	19	8 (Ministers outside Cabinet)	27	122	1:5	4,252,277
Scotland	8	10	18	129	1:7	5,194,000
Finland	22	0 (Secretaries of State in Finland are civil servants)	22	200	1:9	5,255,068

Countries with parliaments of between 200 and 300 members

<i>Country</i>	<i>Size of Cabinet (current)</i>	<i>Size of Junior Ministry</i>	<i>Total size of Ministry</i>	<i>Size of legislature</i>	<i>Ratio of Ministry to legislature</i>	<i>Population</i>
The Netherlands	12	8	20	225 75 (Senate) 150 (House of Representatives)	1:11	16,783,092

Ireland	15	15	30	226 166 (Dáil Éireann) 60 (Seanad Éireann)	1:8	4,622,917
Australia	20	10 (Outer ministers) 12 (Parliamentary Secretaries)	42	226 150 (House of Representatives) 76 (Senate)	1:5	21,515,754

Countries with parliaments of between 200 and 500 members

<i>Country</i>	<i>Size of Cabinet (current)</i>	<i>Size of Junior Ministry</i>	<i>Total size of Ministry</i>	<i>Size of legislature</i>	<i>Ratio of Ministry to legislature</i>	<i>Population</i>
Sweden	24	32	56	349	1:6	9,074,055
Canada	36	27 (Parliamentary Secretaries)	63	413 308 - House of Commons 105 - Senate	1:7	33,759,742

Countries with parliaments of over 500 members

<i>Country</i>	<i>Size of Cabinet (current)</i>	<i>Size of Junior Ministry</i>	<i>Total size of Ministry</i>	<i>Size of legislature</i>	<i>Ratio of Ministry to legislature</i>	<i>Population</i>
Spain	16	26	42	609 350 (Congress of Deputies) 259 (Senate)	1:14	46,505,963
Germany	16	30	46	622	1:14	82,282,988
France	23	8 (Secretaries of State)	31	920 577 (Assemblée nationale) 343 (Senate)	1:29	64,768,389

Italy	22	38	59	945 630 (Chamber of Deputies) 315 (Senate of the Republic)	1:16	58,090,681
UK (Ministers from House of Commons only)	20	32 (Ministers) 28 (Parliamentary Under- Secretaries of State)	80	650	1:8	62,348,447
UK (Ministers from House of Commons and House of Lords)	23	37 (Ministers) 35 (Parliamentary Under- Secretaries of State) ²⁹	95	1388 650 (House of Commons) 738 (House of Lords)	1:14	62,348,447

November 2010

²⁹ Does not include 27 Whips.