

From Backbencher to Minister: Are you a new Minister, and feel out of your depth?

Objective & Aim:

The skills required to perform at a high standard as a Minister of State are unique and complex. Some will be taking on a government post for the first time. Others, with previous ministerial experience, will be taking on new briefs and responsibilities. The effectiveness of these individual Ministers is likely to have a significant impact on the standing of the government.

It is difficult to prepare for the realities of office – the sheer weight of responsibility, the round-the-clock media scrutiny, and the competing demands on a minister's time. Typically, new ministers receive little to no support in their new role. There is also a desire to prioritise 'getting stuck in' rather than focus on personal development. Induction and professional development are rare in the political system and the support structures around Ministers owe more to historic precedent than conscious planning.

The first few months in office are critical for any new Minister – setting the tone, forging relationships, and establishing their credibility. They can be supported in the challenges ahead.

A five-day programme developed jointly by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the Civil Service College aims to equip new ministers with a skill set and tools in managing a department comprising of hundreds of public servants and a budget of billions.

The programme will cover a combination of classroom engagements and experiential learning through study/field visits.



What you will learn:

- Ministerial Code setting out the standards of conduct expected of ministers and how they discharge their duties
- What is ministerial accountability?
- Speaking Truth - Ministers' & Officials' Duties
- Setting and managing Minister's private office
- The role of special advisers
- Minister's Briefing and Senior Officials
- Working across departments

Benefits of attending – You will be able to:

- Examine and debate the key issues facing Ministers in the wide range of roles that they perform, and apply the experience and knowledge gained to your own ministerial role
- Identify and develop necessary skills to help perform your roles as a Minister more effectively
- Experience the working of the UK Houses of Parliament and meet informally with MPs and peers to share experiences



PROGRAMME OUTLINE

Day 1

Overview of UK Government and role of Ministers

- Type of Ministers
- The work of Government
- Balancing constituency duties and ministerial responsibilities

Study visit – the role of Select Committees

- Watch a Select Committee hearing

Evening Dinner – Palace of Westminster

Communicate Minister's Priorities

There is common agreement among civil servants and politicians that effective ministers need clarity on their priorities and an ability to communicate these to their department.

Day 2

The Ministry/Department Brief

Any new Minister has to get to grips with how their department works. There will be lots of departmental support from the permanent secretary and private office, but there is no substitute for getting out and about. The first few months are a good time to get a different take on the department by meeting frontline staff, non-executive directors, and external stakeholders.

Study Visit – Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament

- Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

Building Strong Relationships

Internal discord quickly becomes common knowledge and can derail policy agendas. Junior Ministers should have clear areas of responsibility on which to report back.

Day 3

Minister's Private Office

Every Minister is supported by a private office that will have to adapt to their management style and preferred way of working.

Study visit – the role of the House of Lords

- House of Lords

Induction & Ministerial Codes

Many new Ministers have no experience of working in, let alone leading, a major government department. Ministers and advisers should make time early on to go through inductions that cover getting to grips with their departments, how government works, and practical considerations such as ethical codes.

Day 4

Constraints on Ministerial/Policy making power

Many Ministers seem unaware of the extent to which they are constrained in policy-making – lack of understanding of the following:

- Judicial Reviews – political motivation for many ministerial decisions
- Complexity – Ministers can grossly underestimate how complex, costly, and time-consuming changing a policy that has operational consequences

Study visit – Government Ministry/Department

- Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)

Day 5

What Ministers should be asking for from officials

Whilst some officials are clearly better at communicating with Ministers than others, the Minister could proactively improve the quality of the advice they receive:

- Submission
- Briefing
- Strategic thinking

Study visit – Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

- Closing Ceremony

Duration: 5 days

Fees: £2,150

Date: 4–8 April 2022

Location: London

For further details and programme booking, please email Ade Arimoro on ade@civilservicecollege.org.uk, or telephone her on +44 (0)20 8 069 9003

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