

Early Days in Parliament

Election outcome – minority government

Theresa May is facing a rather different new parliament than she envisaged when she called the snap election less than a year after she became Prime Minister. The voting resulted in a hung parliament, where no single party has sufficient seats to form a majority and establish government. Traditionally the Conservative leader steps down when they lose an election, however, the Tories did win a greater number of the votes than any other party, placing Theresa in a grey area. In a calculated move, amid calls from her party to stand down, Theresa has aligned the Conservatives with the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). They will not form a coalition; instead the negotiations centre on DUP supporting the Conservative minority government on a case-by-case basis where legislation is of mutual interest, termed a 'confidence and supply' agreement. The alignment within the DUP has been met with controversy in the media because of the party's contentious strong anti-abortion and anti-gay marriage stance, and the blurring of the PM's supposedly non-partisan approach to Northern Ireland. Although in recognising that the official title of the Tories is actually the Conservative and *Unionist* Party perhaps the political affiliation isn't that surprising nor the minority as tenuous as is currently being portrayed. Conceivably more precarious is the longevity of Theresa's stint at Number 10. Will she regain 'strong and stable' control over the Conservative party or 'altruistically' simply bed the new parliament in before resigning her premiership? More likely it's the middle ground, the Conservatives need her right now to retain their government and to progress Brexit. A [BBC article](#) talks of '*her jailer*' and that '*no-one else wants the job quite yet*'. No doubt if the political landscape remains boggy the handcuffs will come off and Theresa will be permitted to sink into obscurity.

See Ben Worthy's [Birkbeck blog](#) which highlights three 'rules' Theresa May broke landing her in the leadership hot water. Also [HEPI](#) consider what it means for universities if the DUP confirm their alliance with the Conservatives.

Queen's Speech

The new parliament will first meet on Tuesday 13 June; although the first hurdle for the government will be the Queen's Speech (originally scheduled for Monday 19 June but now expected to be delayed). This state opening of Parliament will see the Queen declare the government's planned policies and legislation for the forthcoming year. The speech is followed by six days of debate (in the Commons and Lords) before a Commons-only vote would have been taken on 27 June (now delayed). This will be scrutinized as a vote of confidence for Theresa's leadership and the government will be reliant on the DUP's support. Any (unlikely) dissent shown by the DUP at this stage will be a harbinger of parliamentary ineffectiveness, more muddled even than a coalition government. The Queen's Speech is written by the government and drawn from their party manifesto. Usually it would contain an ambitious (numerous) programme of planned legislation for the first year of the parliament. However, the political scene is clouded not only by the minority government and Conservative squabbles but also by a number of unpopular manifesto policies and the volume of work associated with the Brexit elephant in the room. The Great Repeal Bill, which ends the EU precedence over British laws and requires government to adopt, tweak or replace the EU laws, is a colossal task. The House of Commons library states its likely to be "*one of the largest*

legislative projects ever undertaken in the UK” replacing “*major swathes of the statute book.*” The BBC has an effective [summary](#) of the bill.

Lobbyist Opportunity

The difficulty associated with minority government is each policy is considered and negotiated on a case-by-case basis and achieving the vote cannot solely rely on the whips to ensure all party members vote in line and don't rebel or prioritise constituency need above the government policy. With the volume of Brexit negotiation and the time-burden of the Great Repeal Bill it could be expected that the most contentious policies will be shelved until a later year. However, the PM's passion for certain policies and her need to regain a strong show of face may still see some stingers within the speech. Theresa May needs to pick her battles carefully but we shouldn't expect a Conservative government to rollover.

Either way lobbyists see great potential in the lack of a government majority as an opportunity to water down some of the less palatable aspects within the Conservative manifesto. For HE the aspects that were left hanging during the snap election were myriad and speculation abounds.

Higher Education

Brexit: There has been much talk about a softer Brexit. However, the EU are determined to drive a hard stance, hence any softening will have to come from Britain rather than the EU. This could be good news for residency rights for EU academics, academic mobility, and membership of collaborative research and funding frameworks. Possibly also more positive for future EU students wishing to study in the UK, and the inclusion on international students within the net migration figures may be reopened for debate. Priorities for the sector are for international student numbers to continue to be uncapped nationally and for all universities to be free to recruit without number restrictions. What is clear is that the Conservatives campaign called for the people to provide the government with a clear mandate to negotiate a good Brexit deal, yet it appears the voters have done the opposite. The start of the Brexit negotiation talks have been delayed and Michel Barnier (EU's negotiator) has indicated flexibility over the start date, showing willingness to wait until Britain's ready.

Schools: The Conservative manifesto differed greatly from Labour and the Lib Dems over school education policies. The HE sector is speculating that it will be too challenging at this stage for a minority government to implement its ambitious schools reform programme – especially the increase in the number of grammar schools and compulsory university sponsorship of schools.

HE tuition fees: While the Conservatives will not U turn on HE tuition fees they are likely to be particularly mindful of Labour's success within the polls following their education focus, especially the record turnout of [young voters](#). Labour's policies of abolishing HE tuition fees and ending student loan repayments for alumni are considered to have contributed to their success. The Conservatives will likely want to steer clear of these emotive topics while the government is volatile although they might make other UK concessions such as student loan repayment thresholds or rates.

TEF: The notification of the TEF outcomes (scheduled for Wed 14 June) has been delayed due to an extended period of purdah while the government was formed. A new release date will be announced shortly.

Apprenticeships: in the election aftermath all is quiet on the apprenticeship front, however, all the major parties manifestos supported a planned expansion of apprenticeships and promoting alternative paths of technical education of equal status to a university degree. The Conservatives also promised a review of tertiary education. This perhaps could make its way through the Commons even with a minority government.

Industrial Strategy: The government is due to respond to the green paper consultation later this year. We will see in the next few weeks if policy evolves in this area.

Widening Participation: We wait with baited breath to see if social mobility features within the Queen's Speech. It was a key feature of both Cameron and May's governments and widening participation is mutual policy area for all the major parties. Of note is that there is current underperformance against the last government's 2020 social mobility goals, the decline of part time learners remains a hot topic, and the flexibility of study and credit was within the Conservative manifesto.

The rise of the opposition

Lobbyists will also engage with non-government parliamentarians more as the minority heralds an increase in their political influence and power. The non-Conservative Commons MPs could form interest alliances to effectively block and overturn government policy and legislation. These parliamentarians will be sought out by the sector to a greater degree than usual, based on their stated interests, because of this significant power to challenge. Academics looking to improve their REF standing through policy engagement should follow [select committee inquiries, consultations](#) and the [All-Party-Parliamentary Groups \(APPGs\)](#) for their research area closely. The BU policy team is here to support staff with policy engagement – email us at: policy@bournemouth.ac.uk

Ministerial wrangling – who's in and who's out

The two principle architects of the manifesto are out: Ben Gummer lost his seat on Thursday night and Nick Timothy, the controversial co-chief of staff, was ousted over the weekend. Theresa may be mourning her close advisors but the backbench 1922 Committee are pressing the attack. They want Theresa's methods reformed and are calling for more consultation and policy influence compared to her previous closed shop approach.

A notable absence is, at the time of writing, **Jo Johnson** has not been reconfirmed as Universities Minister.

The former chair of the Science and Technology Select Committee Nicola Blackwood (Conservative) and former Education Select Committee chair, Neil Carmichael (Conservative) have both lost their seats in the election.

The SNP will be very influential in Westminster regarding policy decisions and votes. Further, the Scottish Conservatives may disagree with the English Conservatives on particular issues if their Scottish constituencies demand it, such as a softer Brexit, or positions on immigration policy. Nicola Sturgeon has said SNP MPs would “look to be part of a progressive alliance” at Westminster and while she’s not a Corbyn fan she stated her party would work with others to implement “progressive policies”. The Scottish government under Sturgeon has already introduced several policies contained in Labour’s manifesto, including axing tuition fees for students and abolishing parking fees in hospitals.

Cabinet Reshuffle

The reshuffle contains few major changes.

The changes:

- Michael Gove - Environment Secretary
- David Lidington - Lord Chancellor and Justice Secretary
- David Gauke - Work and Pensions Secretary
- Damian Green - First Secretary of State and Minister for the Cabinet Office - (promoted from work and pensions secretary) * now effectively Theresa’s second in command *

The following Cabinet members remain in place:

- Philip Hammond - Chancellor
- Boris Johnson - Foreign Secretary
- Amber Rudd - Home Secretary
- David Davis - Exiting the European Union Secretary
- Michael Fallon - Defence Secretary
- Liam Fox - International Trade Secretary
- Jeremy Hunt - Health Secretary
- Priti Patel - International Development Secretary
- Justine Greening - Education Secretary
- Chris Grayling - Transport Secretary
- Greg Clark - Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Secretary
- James Brokenshire - Northern Ireland Secretary
- Sajid Javid - Local Government Secretary
- Karen Bradley - Culture, Media and Sport Secretary
- Patrick McLoughlin - Conservative party chair
- Baroness Evans of Bowes Park - Leader of the Lords
- Alun Cairns - Wales Secretary

The following also attend Cabinet:

- Liz Truss - Chief Secretary to the Treasury

- Andrea Leadsom - Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons
- Gavin Williamson - Chief Whip
- Jeremy Wright - Attorney General
- Brandon Lewis - Home Office Minister (attending Cabinet)

Further ministerial announcements and changes are expected in due course.

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