

Ministerial reshuffle – clean sweep at the DfE

Boris Johnson's much anticipated and delayed Government reshuffle saw an almost complete clean-out at the Department for Education. The widely predicted defenestration of Gavin Williamson as Secretary of State for Education happened. He was the first Minister to be sacked as Johnson re-shaped his team from his Commons office just after Prime Minister's Questions last Wednesday.

His place is taken by former Vaccines Parliamentary Under Secretary Nadine Zahawi, who gets the biggest promotion of the reshuffle. It is a return to the Education Department for Zahawi, who was Parliamentary Under Secretary for Children there from 2018 to 2019.

He has one of the most interesting back stories of any MP. A Kurd, he was born in Baghdad in 1967. When he was nine, he and his family fled Iraq and Saddam Hussein and landed in London as refugees. His father was a businessman and his mother a dentist, so they quickly re-established themselves in England and the young Nadine went to a private school. Then, when he was 18, another disaster struck. His father invested everything he had, including the proceeds of remortgaging their house, in an American company whose Air Knife product was, it claimed, revolutionary. Instead, it turned out to be a complete duffer and the firm went bust, taking the Zahawi family with it. They lost everything except their car, which had been in his mother's name. The family went on housing benefit and family support, while his father had a breakdown.

Eventually he got to University College London to study chemical engineering, got involved in Conservative Party politics in London and was elected to Wandsworth Borough Council. In 2000 he co-founded the polling company YouGov, which he ran for the next decade. It made him a millionaire. He is married with three children, and was elected MP for Stratford-on-Avon in 2010.

While Gavin Williamson's departure was widely predicted, that of pretty well the rest of his ministerial team was not. Nick Gibb had been Schools Standards Minister of State for most of the time since 2010. He had held the job for longer than anyone else in living memory. A traditionalist with fairly right-wing views, he was still well-liked as a genuinely nice man who was always ready to meet and debate with those he did not agree with – which was most people in education. He had been a rare point of consistency in nearly a decade in the same office, with only the unplanned removal of David Laws from the Cabinet after a scandal and the need to subsequently accommodate him in a non-Cabinet post interrupting his unbroken decade in the same position. He fell victim to the Prime Minister's desire to bring on more younger MPs, especially women, a move rather cruelly and offensively described as a cull of the "pale and male". He said he was sad to leave a job he clearly loved.

His place was taken by Robin Walker, who moved across from the relative obscurity of Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office to take on the high-profile schools role. He was previously Parliamentary Under Secretary at both the Northern Ireland and Scotland Offices simultaneously, and before that Parliamentary Under Secretary for Exiting the European Union under Theresa May. He had campaigned against leaving the EU in 2016.

Politically he will be the opposite of Nick Gibb, being a self-declared One Nation Conservative, just like his Dad, Lord Peter Walker, who sat for the same seat of Worcester. Entering the Commons in 2010, eight years after his father vacated the seat. He took his first step up the ministerial ladder when he was made Parliamentary Private Secretary (PPS) to

the then Education Secretary, Nicky Morgan, five years later. He is married to Charlotte Keenan, former Chief Executive of the Tony Blair Faith Foundation and currently Managing Director of Goldman Sachs. They have one daughter, Hermione, who was born in 2018. Mr Walker is 43.

The other Minister of State is the Universities Minister Michelle Donelan, the only survivor from the Commons of the previous ministerial team. While her title remains the same, she does get a promotion as she is now entitled to attend meetings of the Cabinet. Baroness Berridge of The Vale of Catmose also survives as the Parliamentary Under Secretary in the Lords.

The two new Parliamentary Under Secretaries are Will Quince and Alex Burghart. Quince, the Minister for Children and Families, is a 39-year-old former lawyer who, at his second attempt, in 2015, took the seat of Colchester from the Liberal Democrats. He had been Leader of the Conservative Group on Colchester Council a year before the election. In 2018, he was appointed PPS to the Secretary of State for Defence, then Gavin Williamson. In April 2019, Quince was appointed Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Welfare Delivery.

Alex Burghart is the Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills, whose responsibilities include further education, T-levels, adult education, basic skills, Institutes of Technology, National Colleges, NEETs and careers education. Born in 1977, he entered Parliament for Brentwood and Ongar at the 2017 election.

Burghart is an academic. The son of two teachers, he read History at Christ Church, Oxford. After university he taught history at school and then King's College, London, where he completed his PhD in 2007 on "The Mercian Polity, 716–918". He was the lead researcher for the King's College, London project on interrogating Anglo-Saxon charters using digital technologies.

Burghart became a political and policy adviser to Tim Loughton MP, then Shadow Minister for Children and Young People, in 2008. After the Coalition took office in 2010, he followed Loughton to the Department for Education, where he worked on the Munro Review of Child Protection. In 2012 Burghart left the Civil Service to become Director of Policy at the Centre for Social Justice. In February 2016 Burghart was appointed Director of Strategy and Advocacy for the Children's Commissioner for England, Anne Longfield. Later that year he moved back into politics as part of Prime Minister Theresa May's policy team.

After entering Parliament, he was soon appointed PPS to three Cabinet Ministers in a row before becoming PPS to the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, in 2019. He now gets his first ministerial appointment, at the DfE.

Burghart is the author of *A Better Start in Life: Long-term approaches for the most vulnerable children*, published by Policy Exchange in 2013, and has written extensively about early medieval England. He is married to the daughter of a former Conservative MP and has two children.

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