

The talents of all the Cabinet

In the 1820s and 1830s the *Monthly Magazine & British Register* printed an occasional analysis of leading members of the Houses of Commons and Lords. These “Tabular Estimates” were sharp, pithy and pulled no punches in pronouncing on the intellectual capacity and external appearance of the political class. Wellington’s judgment was described as “doubtful”, Peel’s style “flippant”, and Liverpool’s manner “specious”. Now, in a format unchanged except for occasionally re-described categories, **Matthew Parris** and **Ben Schott** revive this 19th-century tradition to assess the calibre of the members of Gordon Brown’s first Cabinet.

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Tabular Estimate of the Members of Gordon Brown’s First Cabinet

CABINET MEMBER	INTELLECTUAL CAPACITY			EXTERNAL APPEARANCE				EFFECT		Temperament	Character
	Resources	Judgment	Logic	Voice	Language	Pulchritude	Demeanour	Power & Impression			
GORDON BROWN <i>Prime Minister</i>	Complex, detailed grip	Disputed	Malleable	Manly and deep, gulping	Limited and repetitive	Solid, jowly, saturnine	Intimidating	Considerable, emphatic, leaden	Morose	Obstinate, cautious	
ALISTAIR DARLING <i>Chancellor</i>	Moderate	Prudent	Adequate	Gentle, Scottish	Unshowy, considered	Handsome badger	Quiet, unthreatening	Senior courtier’s authority	Calm, civil, circumspect	Dependable	
DAVID MILIBAND <i>Foreign Secretary</i>	Very considerable	Confident	Rigorous	Light baritone, accentless	Clear, modern, punchy	Simian	Prim	Persuasive	Genial, ironic	Ambitious	
JACK STRAW <i>Justice & Lord Chancellor</i>	Moderate	Considered	Flexible	Halting	Careful, direct	Cowed, donnish	Unaggressive	Thoughtful authority	Open	Application, cunning	
JACQUI SMITH <i>Home Secretary</i>	Moderate	Good	Adequate	Schoolteacher	Fluent, unoriginal	Efficiently groomed	Brisk, low-key	Moderate	Controlled	Quietly motivated	
DES BROWNE <i>Defence & Scotland</i>	Limited	Slow	Woolly	Unmodulated, Scottish	Very limited, jargon	Well-fed	Low-key	Boring, safe	Unadventurous	Self-satisfied, loyal	
ALAN JOHNSON <i>Health</i>	Broad, moderate	Good	Adequate	London, Ken Livingstone	Plain, unshowy	Spivvy, rubbery, weather-beaten	Confident, relaxed	Underwhelming, agreeable	Good-natured, grounded	Shrewd	
HILARY BENN <i>Environment, Food, Rural</i>	Moderate	Cautious	Adequate	Tenor, slipping into his father	Fluent	Thin-faced, owlsh	Upright	Borrowed, inspires respect	Civil	Measured, virtue	
DOUGLAS ALEXANDER <i>International Dev.</i>	Considerable	Obedient	Good	Clever schoolboy, Scottish	Programmed	Sweet	Earnest, uncommanding	Moderate	Eager to please	Reasonableness, loyalty	
JOHN HUTTON <i>Business, Enterprise</i>	Considerable	Considered, informed	Scholastic	Unremarkable	Plain, unexciting	Stern features	Controlled, solemn	Effective, uninspiring	Civil	Capable, reserved	
HARRIET HARMAN <i>Leader of Commons</i>	Limited	Unsteady	Dispensable	Mechanical, inoffensive	Repetitive	Mannequin	Earnest	Superior	Indignant	Perseverance, persistence	
PETER HAIN <i>Work & Pensions, Wales</i>	Moderate	Variable	Shifting	South African, haughty	Clear, careless	Tanned, groomed	Insolent	Intrusive	Genial, smug	Ambitious, indefatigable	
RUTH KELLY <i>Transport</i>	Limited	Clumsy	Deficient	Contralto, growling	Unshowy	Boyish	Graceless	Unimpressive, insistent	Flat	Moral	
HAZEL BLEARS <i>Communities & Local Govt</i>	Limited, deftly used	Good	Loose	Chirpy	Northern, serviceable	Pert	Buoyant	Cheering	Relentless, sunny	Perseverance, optimism	
GEOFF HOON <i>Chief Whip</i>	Moderate	Unoriginal, careful	Flexible	Dull	Precise, unshowy	Standard, dated	Placid, pleasant	Disheartening	Sedate	Dogged, bland	
ED BALLS <i>Children, Schools, Families</i>	Very considerable	Unknown	Acute	Unremarkable	Technical	Pale and square	Uncomfortable	Unsettling	Edgy	Loyal	
ED MILIBAND <i>Cabinet Office</i>	Very considerable	Quietly confident	Rigorous	Baritone, slight lisp, accentless	Clear, modern, reflective	Preppy	Gentle	Likeable	Diffident	Ambitious	
JAMES PURNELL <i>Culture, Media, Sport</i>	Good	Untested	Adequate	Classless	Fluent	Vain	Confident	Impact	Pushy	Ambitious	
SHAUN WOODWARD <i>Northern Ireland</i>	Moderate	Erratic	Flexible	Educated, southern	Fluent, unexciting	Puffy, indulged	Ingratiating	Limited, unlikely	Agreeable	Restless	
BARONESS ASHTON <i>Leader of the Lords</i>	Good	Good	Adequate	Low-key, not too posh	Functional	Pleasant, mousy	Courteous and engaged	Moderate	Level	Motivated	
ANDY BURNHAM <i>Chief Sec. to Treasury</i>	Moderate	Careful	Adequate	Regional	Unadventurous, clear	Pleasant	Confident	Performer, gimmicky	Bouncy, yappy	Dependable	
JOHN DENHAM <i>Innovation, Universities</i>	Considerable	Good	Adequate	Gentle and firm	Precise, clear, unshowy	Unremarkable, open-faced	Informal	Inspires respect	Measured, genial	Principled, ambitious	