

The rumour mill has been churning at maximum revolutions since the Cabinet and Ministerial reshuffle. Speculation wasn't abated by the unwillingness/ inability of both No. 10 and the MoD Press office to confirm the titles and responsibilities. The (anonymous to protect the guilty) No. 10 non-spokesman, who on being asked about Lord Drayson said "oh equipment and support" without further enlightenment, threw a good dollop of fuel on the fires of speculation.

Eventually it emerged that Lord Drayson would take charge of defence R&D as Minister of State for Strategic Defence Acquisition Reform; Quentin Davies MP, Minister for DE&S and Kevan Jones MP (Minister for Veterans stay in post but are still unpaid; and that in effect has increased the MoD Ministerial team from 4 to 6 under Prime Minister Brown (albeit two of them being "shared" with other departments). It is understood that Ann, Baroness Taylor of Bolton, will take the lead in answering defence questions in the House of Lords.

However, this is likely to be an unfolding story. The key is the Gray Review, publication of which is expected in a few weeks (Bernard Gray was the surprise pick as Special Advisor to Defence Secretary George Robinson in 1997, having been the Financial Times defence correspondent. His reappearance to carry out this review was as surprising as his original appointment).

It seems unlikely that Lord Drayson was not privy to its preliminary findings before taking on the job. After all, his departure to go motor racing had always been seen by the cogniscenti as a pretext to mask severe fallings out over policing on procurement, and given the way it promptly disappeared into the long grass, his Defence Industrial Strategy Volume 2.

Those who claim to be in the know hint that the Gray Report is likely to be a "missing link" between the here and now, and a Defence Review (even if not so called). It will lay the ground work for significant programme changes (If you have a vested interest in any, get ready to double your lobbying efforts).

It is believed that Quentin Davies will fall under the "guidance" of Lord Drayson, and the R&D brief may be under-spinning. Alaina MacDonald, a Special Adviser under both Des Browne and John Hutton, is believed to be staying for a "third term" under Bob Ainsworth. John Williams may think that his market value outside Main Building is potentially a wasting asset, and so his future is less certain.

On the subject of the future, John Hutton, as well as leaving the job now and Parliament at the next General Election, could be considering his future in the private sector. Any company thinking they might have hire him will recall that as well as his law degree and lectureship (in Newcastle, home town of Defence Viewpoints) he has had ministerial experience at the DTI (now D-BIS, formerly BERR) as well as Health, having been a Minister since Blair's first reshuffle in 1998.