



## New UK Energy Minister

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Following the unexpected resignation of [Lord Sainsbury](#), the supermarket billionaire, on Friday (10Nov06) from his post as the Minister for Science our Energy Minister [Malcolm Wicks](#) has left his post at the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to take up the vacant position of Science Minister.

A new Energy Minister then? Well, kind of. Wicks' ministerial position sat within the DTI, reporting to the Trade and Industry Secretary [Alistair Darling](#). It is Darling who is to take on personal responsibility for the energy brief going forward. This does promote the energy brief to a cabinet level position - long called for by those in the energy industry - but also dilutes attention as Darling maintains his existing responsibilities. The sceptical could perhaps point out the UK no longer has an energy minister though I don't think that's fair.



*Goodbye Malcolm Wicks*

*Hello Alistair Darling*

Around these parts Wicks will be most remembered for his ludicrous comment to parliament on [23rd Nov 2005](#), as all the evidence suggested (later to be proved correct) the country faced an extremely challenging and tight gas supply over the coming winter Wicks suggested the country was "awash with gas".

The [Guardian](#) newspaper made this curious comment on the news:

Mr Wicks was considered to have done well with the energy brief and is generally seen as a safe pair of hands.

Done well? If the output from last year's Energy Review or the comments from the DTI's Clare Durkin last week are anything to go by I would not say Wicks as done well. There is little evidence

that he is recognising let alone addressing either the national challenges the UK faces as North Sea oil and gas play out, nuclear and coal power stations are decommissioned and renewable energy sources continue to struggle to gain traction over the coming decade or the global energy challenge that peak oil represents. In fact [we heard](#) from Durkin that the DTI hasn't even investigated the issue.

Can we expect better from Alistair Darling? Maybe. It would seem that the energy brief has moved up the agenda residing with a cabinet level minister though no doubt many would claim it deserves its own dedicated representation. Interestingly the Department of Trade and Industry was **almost** renamed the Department for Productivity, Energy and Industry [last Summer](#), a move seen by many as recognising the increasing importance of energy. We may not have the name change but the internal reorganisation is to be welcomed.

Who is Alistair Darling?

A Labour member of parliament for 19 years and due to celebrate his 53rd birthday in a couple of weeks, Darling represents the constituency of Edinburgh South West. Previous to his political career he was awarded a law degree from the University of Aberdeen and became a solicitor then advocate. He was only appointed Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in May 2006. Previously he was at the Department for Transport, it is his performance in this position that gives me concern. During his time at DfT road congestion has increased markedly and shortly after he left congestions targets were increased such that:

Ministers will judge traffic control to be a success if journey times increase by no more than 4.4% over the next four years - but some parts of England could increase by much more than this. In Bristol, for example, the Government believes journey times will increase by 14%, and by 11% in Yorkshire by 2010.

[Link](#).

In addition to this failing we also have the [much criticised](#) Aviation White Paper forecasting the doubling of 2002 passenger numbers by 2020 and a doubling of air freight by 2010.

A safe pair of hands? By the Guardian's use of the phrase, maybe.



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