

# Ministers without Agency

Sometimes ministerial positions are created without dedicated departmental resources. Ministerial portfolios signal that a government is concerned about a particular issue or constituency. But, without legislation to enable action, and dedicated resources to take action, specialist Ministers can struggle to be effective champions for their portfolios. Public accountability and high expectations can make rough seas for Ministers without agency.

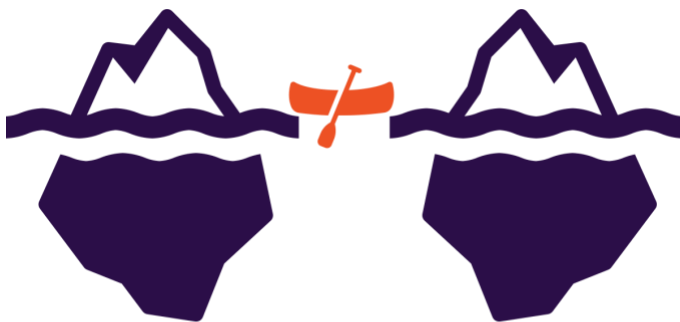
Ministerial positions with a whole-of-Government remit can be a powerful signal of a government's values, even without dedicated departmental resources. A special minister can be announced and set up quickly and cheaply, without major changes to machinery of government, legislation, or standing up a new agency.

Special ministerial positions can be a focus for advocacy and dedicate a government spokesperson to an issue. They can be champions for that issue within government, and sometimes even in Cabinet.

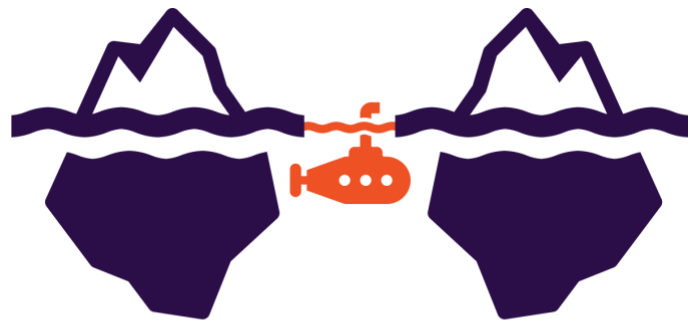
Special ministerial positions can also take a leadership role on issues that span multiple departments and portfolios, such as a Minister for Women, a Minister for Domestic Violence, or a Minister for a region.

The role of a minister, especially a Cabinet Minister, involves gathering information, contributing to government decisions, and implementing government priorities. But, without the support of a department, special ministers can struggle to compete with better resourced and established portfolios.

Without a department engaged in inter-agency policy work, special ministers may be consulted too late to drive much policy design. Without help with research and expert advice, special ministers have less evidence to form a position independently of vested interests. Without a department to implement their priorities, special ministers simply cannot direct much action. As such, special ministers without an agency may be—and be seen to be—largely ornamental.



ministers without agency cannot even see most of the policy work they are charged with influencing



even a small agency can help a special minister to understand and navigate deep policy work

A small, dedicated agency of public servants with whole-of-Government responsibilities that mirror those of the special minister can provide critical support for policy and practical work. It can collaborate with other agencies to develop and influence policy and give the minister independent expert analysis and advice.

A small agency can also support many Westminster roles of a minister, such as managing correspondence and engagement with relevant stakeholders and constituencies. Even without specific legislation to administer, an agency provides an administrative focus to complement the political focus of the minister.

A small agency can be established with minimal disruption to the machinery of government, or the time and cost of establishing a substantial new department.

Most policy work happens outside the Cabinet room. A dedicated agency can participate throughout the policy development lifecycle, magnifying the influence of its minister and their priorities. An agency can also provide independent research and advice on any relevant proposal to government, and prepare proposals to be advanced by its minister. With more time to negotiate, and better-informed positions, a special minister can be a more persuasive and effective champion within the government.

A special minister with the support of a small agency also has more capacity to drive real action, without having to rely solely on support from other portfolios.

Not every minister needs a department, but it's hard to achieve political goals without at least some agency.