

[A hundred days of coalition](#) [1]

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The coalition government outperformed most expectations in its first 100 days. The document that set its agenda contained measures causing unease in both parties. It did not just highlight areas of overlap; there were few of those. Instead it represented horse-trading, with Liberal Democrats agreeing to some policies they opposed in return for Conservatives doing likewise.

It has been a surprisingly firm government. George Osborne has impressed the City and most analysts with his resolute approach to spending cuts. He reassured the financial community that Britain is serious about bringing the budget to balance and eliminating the huge deficit run up by Labour.

Education reform is radical. With the state allowance per child going to finance free places at new schools founded by parents, teachers and business groups, parents can escape from under-performing schools. It will restore much of the social mobility lost with the grammar school closures.

Some talk of lowering university admission standards for applicants from poorer schools, but the planned reform outflanks the issue. The new schools should raise standards sufficiently for their students to win university places on merit.

The welfare details have yet to be filled in, but Iain Duncan Smith stressed that welfare dependency as a career option will be closed off. This is as it should be, with welfare to help people without trapping them. Duncan Smith's principle, that work should always be worthwhile, is a good one. Coupled with the raising tax thresholds, the work/welfare balance looks set to shift dramatically.

Critics say that the reviews and commissions established simply kick difficult issues into touch, but what the government has been doing is laying down markers in key areas while it still enjoys some honeymoon popularity. There will be tax simplification. There will be much unwinding of Labour's surveillance state. There will be a power transfer to local levels. There will be reform of financial regulation. There will be a thorough shake-up to make our armed services better able to do their job.

People want from the government a clear sense of purpose and a determination to put right much of what is wrong with Britain. Business still awaits news on how over-regulation is to be curtailed. And we still wait to hear how our police forces are to be made more user-friendly and efficient.

But the early news and the omens are good so far, and better than many people expected. If the coalition carries on as it has started, and survives the faults and fissures of in-party manoeuvring, it could well go the full term.

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[3] http://disqus.com/?ref_noscript

[4] <http://disqus.com>