

## Fresh blood for UK science as popular minister quits

Greg Clark, the minister for cities and local growth, will take over from the highly regarded David Willetts as universities and science minister.

[Elizabeth Gibney](#)

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*Jayne Russell/Dematix/Corbis*

Greg Clark has been appointed UK minister for universities and science.

The UK government has a new science chief. Greg Clark, already minister for cities and local growth and Conservative Member of Parliament for Royal Tunbridge Wells, has been appointed universities and science minister, the top science job in the government.

He will replace David Willetts, who was popular with scientists but on Monday resigned as part of a wider cabinet reshuffle. Like Willetts, Clark will attend Cabinet, the decision-making body of senior ministers.

Clark's recent engagement with science has mostly been through his job as cities minister, where he has worked with universities and science parks in an attempt to boost local development. As a former shadow secretary of state for energy and climate change, he is also

known for his advocacy of a low-carbon economy and sustainable development.

His appointment by Prime Minister David Cameron could prove controversial: questions have already surfaced on Twitter regarding Clark's [public backing in 2007 for state-funded homeopathic hospitals](#). Clark will [take on the job in addition to his current position](#).

In a move that suggests the science portfolio could be split, at least to some extent, Cameron has also appointed George Freeman, MP for Mid Norfolk, to the newly created role of minister for life sciences. Freeman, currently a government adviser on life sciences in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), formerly worked in the agriculture and biotechnology industries. The junior-minister role is a joint appointment between BIS, where Clark sits as science minister, and the Department of Health.

### Swift rise

Clark was born in Middlesbrough in 1967, and was educated at a comprehensive school in Teesside before attending the University of Cambridge and later obtaining a PhD in economics at the London School of Economics.

Before entering politics, Clark worked at the US business-strategy firm Boston Consulting Group. In 1996, he went on to become a special adviser for then-secretary of state for trade and industry Ian Lang, and later was appointed the BBC's controller of commercial policy.

Clark became director of policy for the Conservative Party in March 2001, a post he held under three successive leaders, before being elected as MP for Tunbridge Wells in 2005. Clark then served as shadow minister for charities, and was appointed as shadow secretary of state for energy and climate change in 2008.

In May 2010, he became minister of state at the Department for Communities and Local Government, rising quickly to minister for cities in July 2011 and to financial secretary to the Treasury in September 2012. He became minister of state for cities and local growth in the Cabinet Office in 2013.

### Heartfelt farewell

Upon hearing of the outgoing science chief's resignation, several UK scientists [praised Willetts](#), who was regarded as an intellectual heavyweight and even earned the nickname 'two brains'.

"David Willetts is one of the UK's sharpest and most talented politicians," said Imran Khan, chief executive of the British Science Association in London and former director of the Campaign for Science and Engineering, in a statement.

In 2010, Willetts [ensured that research funding for science stayed the same despite an otherwise austere spending review](#). The deal came as such a relief to one science journalist that he presented Willetts with a bouquet of flowers. Willetts also supported a policy of [open access](#) to taxpayer-funded research papers.

The president of the Royal Society, [Paul Nurse](#), said in a statement that Willetts had been "an outstanding science minister, respected not only in the UK but throughout the world".

Clark [tweeted](#) that he was "thrilled to be appointed Minister for Universities, Science & Cities — building on the work of the brilliant David Willetts".

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