



Independent Adviser on Ministerial Standards  
Sir Laurie Magnus CBE

27 February 2026

Dear Prime Minister,

You asked officials on 15 February to carry out an exercise to establish the facts in response to allegations made about the conduct of Josh Simons, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State jointly in the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and the Cabinet Office. Earlier this week, that process having concluded, you referred the matter to me and asked for my advice.

The Ministerial Code sets out that I have a role in advising the Prime Minister about adherence to the Code. As such, my remit is concerned with the conduct of Ministers during their time in office.

Certain allegations have been made about Mr Simons' actions before his appointment to office (and indeed before his election to Parliament), when he was Director of the think tank, Labour Together. Allegations have also been made about Mr Simons' conduct, whilst a Minister, concerning the veracity or otherwise of statements he has made in response to these questions. In order to reach a view about Mr Simons' conduct under the Code, it has therefore been necessary to consider his relevant actions which are the subject of these allegations prior to his appointment as a Minister.

The Ministerial Code is clear, at paragraph 2.4, that *"Ministers are personally responsible for deciding how to act and conduct themselves in the light of the Code and for justifying their actions and conduct to Parliament and the public. However, ministers only remain in office for so long as they retain the confidence of the Prime Minister."* Mr Simons has provided an account of his actions and his response to the allegations that have been made. I have met Mr Simons and also had access to the results of the fact-finding exercise. I am grateful to him for his full and proactive co-operation.

The Ministerial Code includes the Nolan principle of *Honesty: that holders of public office should be truthful*. It records, at 1.5d, that *Ministerial office requires candour and openness*. The Code also explains, at 1.1- 1.2, that *Ministers are expected to maintain high standards of behaviour and to behave in a way that upholds the highest standards of propriety, and that Ministers should recognise that as office-holders, they are held to the highest possible standards of proper conduct, and ensure that they are living up to those standards in their words and actions*.

I have considered the various public statements that Mr Simons has made whilst a Minister in response to allegations about his actions as Director of Labour Together. These public statements have, in essence, made three points: that he commissioned a firm, which he understood to specialise in reputation management and public relations, specifically to investigate what he believed may have been an illegal hack which had resulted in the disclosure of private information; that he did not intend for this work to involve scrutiny of UK newspaper journalists that had reported on that information; and that he was surprised and shocked when the firm's initially submitted report included references to a particular UK newspaper journalist and acted to ensure that these were removed in the final version.

Mr Simons has made clear to me that on reflection the terms of reference agreed with this firm were wider than he had understood and that he acted too hastily in confirming their appointment without the benefit of legal advice. He recognises that this has given rise to a perception that his purpose extended more widely than investigating the source of a suspected illegal hack, when that was not in fact his intention. He acknowledges that this perceived gap between his public statements and what he now accepts appears to be a more extensive scope has been damaging. I am satisfied that his statements are being made in good faith but, for the avoidance of doubt, I am drawing no conclusions concerning the firm commissioned by Mr Simons.

The disclosure of Mr Simons' decision, during his time as Director of Labour Together, to employ this company has provoked extensive public speculation concerning his motivation for doing so. Decisions made by ministers prior to their appointment generally fall outside the ambit of the Ministerial Code, but clearly can have relevance if a minister is diverted from their ministerial duties in order to respond to the controversy associated with such decisions. It is also relevant where you and other ministerial colleagues become obliged to defend the minister's qualification for public office, drawing public attention away from the presentation of government policies and potentially damaging the overall reputation of your Government.

I see no basis for advising you of any breach of the Ministerial Code by Mr Simons, but you will wish to consider, in the light of this distraction and potential reputational damage, whether he continues to hold your confidence as a member of your Government.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Laurie Magnus', written in a cursive style.

**Sir Laurie Magnus CBE**  
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