

The incredible Mr Gauke

Published: January 13, 2026, 5:09 am

It seems it's not just the [Tax Journal that h](#)as Exchequer Secretary David Gauke under review. [Accountancy Age has reported](#):

But perhaps the most controversial goal Gauke has imposed upon himself is that of tax transparency among big international companies.

In a recent speech to the Hundred Group of [Finance](#) Directors he said the contributions made by businesses in tax would be better understood if they were more transparent and explained “the story behind the figures”.

There was much criticism of the speech. But the overwhelming point can be summed up in a single comment. If Gauke is keen on more transparency, why not do something about it rather than simply calling on [business](#) to voluntarily do something?

One critic, Richard Murphy of the Tax Justice [Network](#), insists the answer is country-by-country reporting.

What happens next?

Gauke will need to go on fronting difficult issues but he might take some time to refine his approach. Threatening tax evaders is easy.

No one likes them but insisting HMRC will hit them hard while substantially cutting the department's budget opens him up to accusations of na?~vety.

The GAAR policy reveals a politician being a politician — floating a policy in a bid to

keep certain interests satisfied. But for many the speech on tax transparency reveals flaws that the minister will need to address or risk losing the initial credibility he had from tax advisers.

The implication is clear. The tax profession doubts David Gauke knows what he's doing. And I doubt it too. So do the staff of HMRC (I know).

Put simply his policies make no sense.

He's sacking staff when he needs tax revenue.

He demands transparency and then opposes measures to deliver it.

He says he'll tackle the tax gap and then refuses to recognise its scale.

He doesn't want a GAAR but sets up a review to consider one.

He says big business is innocent of tax avoidance but says transparency may embarrass them.

He's a Tory in government - clueless as to strategy; clueless as policy; clueless as to delivery.

It's not a pretty combination.

But it's what we've got.