



## **CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK 2012-2016**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>THE CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION</b></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>We are established by statute to provide assurance that civil servants are selected on merit on the basis of fair and open competition; and to help safeguard an impartial Civil Service.</b></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>We are appointed through public open competition and are independent of the Government and the Civil Service. As senior managers from the private, public and voluntary sectors we seek to be firm on principles but pragmatic about process.</b></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>We want to see a highly efficient and effective Civil Service, now and for the future. We strongly believe that the country is best served by a Civil Service which recruits and develops the best and most diverse talent, free of personal and political patronage, and remains true to its core values of Impartiality, Objectivity, Integrity and Honesty in the Civil Service Code.</b></p>

*This is the Strategic Framework for the Civil Service Commission for the period November 2012 to April 2016. Within this Framework the Commission will fulfil the responsibilities that have been given to it by Parliament in the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 to provide assurance that selection to the Civil Service is on merit, and to uphold the core values of the Civil Service.*

*The Commission will prepare annual business plans, and in the preparation of these annual plans will review its progress against the vision outlined in this Framework. There will be a full review of the Framework at least once during 2012-16, and more frequently if this is required by changing circumstances.*



1. **Introduction: our vision for the next four years**
2. **The Commission's developing role**
3. **The context of our work**
4. **Four themes**
5. **Building our capability**

## **1. Introduction: our vision for the next four years**

The Civil Service is constantly changing, as society changes and resources are squeezed. The Civil Service Commission must reflect and support these changes while remaining true to its legal responsibility to help to safeguard the enduring values of the Civil Service. In this plan we describe some of the very significant changes the Commission has made in the recent past, and look forward to some of the ways that we will meet the challenges of the next four years.

In devising this strategy, the Civil Service Commissioners have looked forward to envisage the kind of organisation that we want the Commission to be in 2016. We outline that vision, and the actions we will take to help to bring it to fruition, against four themes.

**THEME ONE: to be firm on principles but pragmatic about process.**

**THEME TWO: to work with the Civil Service to improve recruitment practices and help achieve better outcomes.**

**THEME THREE: to improve understanding of the Commission's purpose and approach; among the public, their elected representatives, and the Civil Service.**

**THEME FOUR: to support an effective and diverse Civil Service that reflects and has the confidence of the people it serves.**



## **2. The Commission's developing role**

### **The importance of recruitment on merit**

The Civil Service Commission was originally established to help transform a Civil Service based on nepotism and patronage, and generally considered to be inefficient, into an effective service with recruitment based on merit.

The Commission has changed the way it operates, as society and the Civil Service have changed, but has continued to provide assurance that selection to the Civil Service at all levels is on merit on the basis of fair and open competition, not personal or political patronage.

The Commission also hears appeals raised by civil servants under the Civil Service Code. The Code describes the values of the Civil Service: Honesty, Integrity, Objectivity and Impartiality. It is an important part of the contractual relationship between civil servants and their employer.

### **The Commission's statutory powers**

The Commission operated for most of its life without statutory powers. Its role and responsibilities were finally established in primary legislation in the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010.

The Act established the Civil Service Commission as a corporate body, so reinforcing its independence from the government of the day and the Civil Service, and confirmed its two principal roles:

- i. Providing assurance that recruitment to the Civil Service is on merit on the basis of fair and open competition

This is primarily achieved through:

- Publication of Recruitment Principles, that specify the Commission's determination of what selection on merit on basis of fair and open



competition means and when exceptions may be allowed. The Recruitment Principles stipulate that Commissioners will personally chair competitions for the most senior jobs in the Civil Service.

- Hearing and determining complaints from anyone who believes that there has been a breach of the Recruitment Principles
  - Reviews of departments' recruitment policies and practices to ensure that the statutory requirement of section on merit on basis of fair and open competition is being applied and that compliance with the Recruitment Principles is not being undermined
- ii. Hearing and determining complaints from civil servants who believe that there has been a breach of the Civil Service Code

The Commission also works with departments to help them to promote and uphold the Civil Service Code.

### **3. The context of our work**

#### **Recent developments**

The underlying principle of recruitment to an impartial Civil Service by selection on merit on the basis of fair and open competition has remained constant. The approach of the Commission has constantly adapted as it has moved from being a recruiting organisation for the Civil Service towards a regulatory body, overseeing recruitment which the Civil Service manages for itself.

Over the past four years the Commission has clearly shifted away from a preoccupation with processes, towards a more principles-based approach which focuses on successful outcomes. The key concerns in this approach



are whether the principles of fairness, openness and merit are being upheld; and whether effective candidates are being appointed from strong and diverse fields.

The work of the Commission has also been brought closer to the work of the Commissioner for Public Appointments. David Normington was appointed in 2011 for a five year term to 2016 as both First Civil Service Commissioner and Commissioner for Public Appointments with a brief to review the approach to Ministerial appointments to public bodies with a view to moving it closer to the principles-based approach adopted by the Civil Service Commission. In these two roles he is supported by a joint secretariat that also supports the Civil Service Commission across the range of its activities. The joint secretariat provides more cost effective support across the two regulatory regimes and has delivered a cost saving back to the Cabinet Office as its sponsoring department.

Significant developments that reflect the move to an increasingly principles based approach include:

- The introduction of the Commission's Recruitment Principles to replace the previous, more process orientated, Recruitment Code.
- The publication of the guide 'Chairing Competitions' which clearly describes how Commissioners will approach their role in chairing senior competitions.
- The introduction of a more responsive compliance monitoring approach, to replace process-focused audit, to ensure that departments are following the Recruitment Principles and to highlight and share areas of good practice.



- The revision of all the Commission's published material on handling Civil Service Code complaint cases to provide fuller and clearer information for civil servants and departments.
- The identification and spreading of best practice in upholding and promoting the Civil Service Code based on analysis of departmental self-assessments.
- The development of stronger ties with individual government departments through 'Link Commissioner' arrangements and regular engagement with senior HR leaders in the Civil Service.

### **The current context**

The Commission works to ensure that its approach to its statutory responsibilities remains flexible and attuned to changes within the Civil Service. The current context includes:

- Continued shrinkage of the Civil Service; based on figures from current departmental change programmes it is estimated that by 2015 the Civil Service will be at least 23% smaller than it was in March 2010.
- A freeze in the recruitment of all but the most essential staff (recruitment to the Civil Service reduced by two-thirds from 39,005 in 2009/10 to 12,570 in 2011/12).
- Tight constraints on pay, coupled with major changes in Civil Service terms and conditions of employment and pensions, which will change the employment offer for those seeking employment in the Civil Service.
- A continuing trend to open up senior posts in the Civil Service to open public competition, and to recruit a wider range of financial, commercial and operational skills to improve value for money and major project delivery.



- Continuing debate about accountability which could lead to significant changes in the relationship between the Civil Service, the Government and Parliament.

Many of these issues were considered and brought together in the Civil Service Reform Plan, published by the Government in June 2012.

One of the themes in the Reform Plan relates to implementing policy and sharpening accountability. This has initiated some debate on how accountability works in the context of a politically impartial Civil Service. The Government, and others, are looking at relevant international comparisons to see if there are lessons to be learned from the way that other western democracies manage the relationship between government and the Civil Service.

There may also be wider constitutional developments that change the relationship between the various component parts of the country; and also the relationships between central and local government, and citizens.

This plan is based upon the assumption that these current trends will continue and that the statutory role of the Commission will remain unchanged for the lifetime of this Framework. If that changes, the Framework may need substantial revision.



## 4. Four themes

### **THEME ONE: to be firm on principles but pragmatic about process**

The Commission will continue to argue for, and uphold, the core values of the Civil Service and selection to that Civil Service on merit on the basis of fair and open competition. This is more important than ever in a period when the role and effectiveness of the Civil Service is being increasingly questioned and challenged.

The Commission strongly believes that the requirement to appoint on merit is an enabler, not an inhibitor, of improvement. The merit principle – getting the best person for the job - is one of the principal tools to allow the Civil Service to react efficiently and effectively to changing needs.

Getting the best available people with the right skills for the future Civil Service means professional, high quality and objective assessment of candidates from strong and diverse fields. This is what the core purpose of the Commission means in today's context and what we aim to achieve.

The Commission will continue to focus on regulation through a principles-based, not a process-based, approach.

We have already begun a number of initiatives designed to focus our activities even more clearly in achieving successful outcomes.

- Perhaps the most significant initiative is the introduction of a revised Compliance Monitoring approach to ensure that departments are following our Recruitment Principles. Compliance monitoring allows the Commission to investigate what is happening across the breadth of Civil Service recruitment. The new compliance monitoring contract commences in 2013



and should be fully operational by the end of that year. We will use the contract to move this important activity further away from process towards a real assessment of outcomes. This will enable the Commission to identify the best practice across the Civil Service, and allow us to spread this wider. Alongside staff and Commissioner costs, it is one of the Commission's two major areas of expenditure.

- The new compliance monitoring contract will be part of an integrated approach with the Commissioner for Public Appointments that introduces a transparent risk-based assessment of departmental capability. It will include Civil Service-wide thematic reviews and more real-time monitoring and public reporting of departmental performance.
- We will provide ongoing critical evaluation of both our approach to our role and also how we explain our approach to stakeholders and the public. For example, we will keep under review our guidance on Ministerial involvement in senior competitions. At the end of 2012 we published new guidance on how, within the provisions of our Recruitment Principles, Ministers can and should be involved in Permanent Secretary appointments. We will keep under review how this guidance is working in practice. Our aim is to be pragmatic, while safeguarding appointments against the risks of personal favouritism and political patronage.
- We will also keep under review the exceptions to the requirement for recruitment on merit on the basis of fair and open competition that are allowed in the Recruitment Principles. We will consider if they remain valid and whether the delegations to departments for their use are still at the appropriate level.
- We expect during the period of this Framework to conduct a public review of the Commission's Recruitment Principles to ensure that they remain appropriate, proportionate and effective.



**THEME TWO: to work with the Civil Service to improve recruitment practices and help achieve better outcomes.**

The Commission will work with departments to encourage better recruitment practices in Government and will put the focus relentlessly on how departments make successful appointments from strong and diverse fields. As indicated above, in checking compliance with our Recruitment Principles we will be focusing on driving improvement to produce better outcomes and spread best practice.

We will take forward a number of initiatives over the period.

- Working with departments in professionalising senior recruitment and the assessment of candidates. This will build upon the recent work with the Civil Service's Senior Leadership Committee to promote and facilitate improved methods of objective assessment from strong and diverse fields of candidates for the most senior posts in the Civil Service. This will be a priority to 2014.
- Reviewing how the Commission can provide efficient and cost-effective support to departments and civil servants through the provision of more and better on-line resources. This will be part of a thorough review of our website to be taken forward in 2013.
- Following on from this, from 2014 onwards, we shall review where the activities and communications of the Commission and Commissioner for Public Appointments can be aligned.
- Reviewing the evidence base available to the Commission to see how it can be improved and used to further support the Commission's discharge



of its statutory functions. This will be an ongoing activity through the period.

- As part of this we will look at the possibility of assessing which of the senior appointment decisions resulted in successful outcomes one and two years after appointment.

**THEME THREE: to improve understanding of the Commission's purpose and approach; among the public, their elected representatives, and the Civil Service.**

The Commission believes that the work it does to maintain an effective Civil Service recruited on merit is not sufficiently well known. This will be a major priority across the period of this Framework and is expected to form a significant work-stream in the first two years.

It is clear from the current context, described in section 3 above, that there will continue to be important debates on the role of the Civil Service and its relationship with Government and Parliament. The Commission will explain its responsibilities and its approach to its statutory duties with greater clarity to inform these debates.

The Commission will also make a more explicit link between the merit principle and the core values of the Civil Service: impartiality, honesty, integrity and objectivity.

If the Civil Service is to do less centrally and commission more from the outside, the Commission will also need to work with the Civil Service to consider how to promote and embed these values more widely with partner organisations.

During the period we will progress a number of initiatives.



- A critical review in the course of 2013 of our communications, and in particular our website, to ensure that it conveys clear and comprehensive messages on the role of the Commission.
- As part of this review there will be a renewed emphasis on explaining not only what we do, but why we do it in the way we do. The Commission will provide more context and explanation of its approach to its statutory responsibilities.
- The review will also consider whether there are other methods of communication that the Commission should employ, including greater use of video and social media.
- The Commission will also consider whether it needs to take a more proactive advocacy role around its core regulatory responsibilities.
- Following on from this in 2014 the Commission will review the extent to which communications of its role and those of the Commissioner for Public Appointments can be brought closer together and crucially, how the important differences between the two appointments regimes can be more clearly communicated.
- We will also keep under review of the Commission's approach to transparency with a view to ensuring that the maximum amount of information on the Commission's work is put into the public domain.

**THEME FOUR: to support an effective and diverse Civil Service that reflects and has the confidence of the people it serves**

As the country, and the Civil Service, continues to respond to new challenges, the Commission believes it has an important continuing duty to explain the



importance of merit. Merit is essentially about getting the best people into Civil Service roles. This is done by giving everyone with the right skills a fair chance to be considered.

Who is the best person for any job will depend upon a range of factors that include:

- The skills that are required to do the job
- The current context of the role
- The contribution that an individual can make to the Civil Service
- The ability to uphold the values of an impartial Civil Service

There will always be a balance to be struck between the immediate demands of a job that needs to be done now, and the on-going contribution an individual can make to public service.

The Commission believes that diversity is intrinsic to the statutory requirement that recruitment to the Civil Service is on merit on the basis of fair and open competition. There can only be complete assurance that recruitment has been on merit if there is clear evidence that active steps were taken to try to ensure that recruitment was from a strong and diverse field of candidates. If for particular roles it is not possible to attract a strong and diverse field there should be a critical assessment of why this is so, and whether other approaches could achieve this.

The Commission also strongly supports the view that the Civil Service needs to reflect the diversity of the people it serves. In addition it must maintain the public's trust. We believe that trust is dependent upon maintaining the reality of a service dedicated to serving the public, and true to its core values of honesty, integrity, objectivity and impartiality.



There will be a significant number of initiatives taken forward during the period of this framework.

- We will include diversity as a key part of the Commission's review of its communications activities, undertaken during 2013.
- Also in 2013, we will publish a diversity statement that clearly articulates the importance of diversity to recruitment on merit on the basis of fair and open competition; and an action plan to support departments to attract diverse fields of strong candidates for appointments to the Civil Service.
- From 2013 through 2014, we will review the work the Commission does to help departments to uphold and promote the values in the Civil Service Code. Over the last few years the Commission has audited departments to assess their capability; and also to identify good practice that can be shared with other departments. This has been supplemented by a range of softer promotional initiatives. The Commission will consider if this is still the correct approach and mix of activities.
- Also through to 2014, we will review the data available to the Commission to provide better insight on successful approaches to attracting strong and diverse fields, and also to provide a stronger basis on which to challenge recruiting departments. We will consider the most effective ways to provide challenge to departments where there is a failure to attract a strong and diverse field for a competition.

## **5. Building our capability**

The Commission is a small organisation, and we are determined to ensure we get the best value and maximum impact from the resources available. The Commission's budget during the period of this Framework is just over £1.13



million per year. This is a reduction from the budget of £1.37 million in 2010-11. We have achieved this reduction partly through more efficient working, and also through the sharing of secretariat functions between the Civil Service Commission and the Commissioner for Public Appointments. Through the period of this plan we will continue to seek for greater efficiencies and better ways of working, but with a small budget there is relatively limited scope for further reductions without impacting upon our statutory responsibilities.

The Commission will outline in its annual business plans how it will align its capability, and specific activities, against the longer-term view described in this framework. We will report progress each year in our Annual Report and Accounts.

One key thread that will run through our activities is the determination to make better use of the information available to the Commission through our work. We will be looking at how we can use this information to improve our own activities, and also to add value to the Civil Service.

Over the period we expect to develop in a number of important areas.

- When reviewing our communications activities during 2013, we will specifically focus on how we can use our website to provide better support both to the Commissioners, and also to departments and other stakeholder groups.
- We have already taken steps to improve the data presented to the Commission to enable us to fulfil our assurance role. We will continue to refine and improve this during 2013/14.
- We will review our internal organisation to achieve improved value for money and better outcomes for our stakeholders. During 2013/14 we will



look to move from a function-based secretariat organisation, to one that is focused on departments to provide better support and challenge.

- Also during 2013/14 we will look to refocus our organisation to maximise the synergies between the Commission's regulatory regime and that of the Commissioner for Public Appointments. We will seek to adopt common approaches and procedures where we can, only maintaining difference when the needs of the two different remits require it.
- Again through 2013/14 we will develop our peer self-assessment programme to ensure that the Commission gains maximum corporate benefit from the experiences of individual Commissioners.
- Throughout the period, we will maintain a continuous professional development programme for Commissioners to strengthen our skills base and spread learning between Commissioners.

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Our work to build our capability will be to ensure that that Commission can continue effectively to meet its important statutory responsibilities to provide assurance that civil servants are selected on merit on the basis of fair and open competition; and to help safeguard an impartial Civil Service.