

Civil Service Commission

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PRESS NOTICE

15 October 2014

PRIME MINISTER TO BE GIVEN CHOICE OF APPOINTABLE CANDIDATES IN HEAD OF DEPARTMENT COMPETITIONS

The Civil Service Commission has today announced that, in future, for Head of Department appointments the Prime Minister will be given a choice of candidates assessed as appointable by an independent panel chaired by the First Civil Service Commissioner.

Currently the Commission's rules allow for a panel to recommend only one candidate to the Prime Minister which he must either accept or reject. The Commission has now agreed a change - for Head of Department posts - under which the Prime Minister will receive an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of those candidates judged appointable by the panel, from which he will make the final selection. The Prime Minister must make his decision only from those candidates and, as the law requires, on merit.

First Civil Service Commissioner, Sir David Normington said:

"The level of Ministerial involvement in top appointments to the Civil Service has been the subject of long running debate. The Civil Service Commission has long accepted the need for Ministers to be fully involved in the competitions for the most senior posts in their Department. But we have been reluctant to go further until we were convinced that the principle of a Civil Service appointed on merit could be fully protected.

"The Commission has listened to a wide range of voices over the last two years and now accepts that our current approach should be revised for Head

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of Department posts – currently around 25 posts. We have been cautious about this change - and remain so - but now believe that with important safeguards this change is possible.”

The safeguards are:

- That the selection panel will be chaired by the First Civil Service Commissioner, who must approve the panel membership and all aspects of the recruitment process (the essential criteria, job description, advertising strategy etc).
- That the competition can be paused by the First Commissioner if s/he believes the Commission’s Recruitment Principles are not being followed.
- That the panel alone will determine which candidates are put to the Prime Minister with a clear assessment of their suitability for the post against the advertised criteria.
- That there is no opportunity for a candidate to be added to the list if the panel has not assessed them as appointable. Where only one candidate is judged to be appointable by the panel only that name will go forward to the Prime Minister.

David Normington continued:

“We recognise that there is now wide consensus for this change – including from the three largest political parties in Parliament and other non-political bodies such as the Institute for Government and current and former senior civil servants including the Cabinet Secretary. Our foremost concern has been

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to protect the principle of an impartial Civil Service, appointed on merit and able to serve the government of the day and any future government, whatever their political colour.

“An important element in our decision has been the assurance from the Prime Minister and the Official Opposition that they have no wish to politicise the Civil Service. These are important assurances. We will monitor closely how this works in practice through our charring the competitions for these posts and reserve the right to return to our previous position should we feel that the fundamental principles – selection on merit after a fair and open competition - are under threat.”

Ends

Notes to Editors

1. **Media enquiries about the work of the Commission should go to Maggie O’Boyle on 07880 740 627.**
2. The Civil Service Commission was established as a statutory body in November 2010 under the provisions of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010. The Commission is independent of Ministers and the Civil Service. It is responsible for maintaining the legal requirement that recruitment to the Civil Service is on merit on the basis of fair and open competition.
3. The Commission’s Recruitment Principles set down the steps that must be followed when selecting people for appointment to the Civil Service, and specify the circumstances in which appointments may be made by exception to the legal requirement.
4. Heads of Department are defined in the Commission’s Recruitment Principles as either (a) the most senior civil servant in a Department of State for which there is a Cabinet Minister or (b) the most senior civil servant in the Scottish or Welsh Governments. These individuals are the principal accounting officers for their Department and therefore have a direct line of accountability to Parliament as well as within Government.
5. Within the Scottish and Welsh governments the final decision will be taken by the First Minister.

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6. The changes announced today will take effect from 1st December 2014.
7. The Commission comprises senior figures from the private, public and voluntary sectors. Civil Service Commissioners are appointed by the Crown for five-year non-renewable terms of office. David Normington is the chair of the Commission's Board, and is known as the First Civil Service Commissioner. The other Commissioners are Jonathan Baume, Kathryn Bishop, Adele Biss, Peter Blausten, Andrew Flanagan, Moira Gibb, Wanda Goldwag, Eliza Hermann and Angela Sarkis.
8. Further information on the work of the Civil Service Commission is available at <http://civilservicecommission.independent.gov.uk> . You can also now follow the Commission on twitter @CivServComm.