

## **Q and A**

### **Prime Minister to be given choice of appointable candidates in Head of Department competitions**

#### **Why is the Commission making this change now?**

The Commission has long accepted the need for Ministers to be fully involved in competitions for the most senior posts in their Departments, and for the Prime Minister to make the decision whether to appoint or not. But the Commission was reluctant to go further until we were sure that the long standing principle of an impartial Civil Service appointed on merit could be fully protected. The Commission has discussed this issue at length and listened to a wide range of voices. We now believe it is possible to make this change for Head of Department appointments with some important safeguards in place.

#### **Which posts will this affect?**

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. There are currently around 25 Heads of Departments in the Civil Service. 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.

The change will not apply to any other posts in the Civil Service.

#### **Does this change politicise these appointments?**

No. The Commission's foremost concern is 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. The independent panel, which will be chaired by the First Civil Service Commissioner, will send the Prime Minister an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of those candidates judged to be appointable. The Prime Minister cannot add any other candidates and must make his decision based on merit, as the law requires. It may be that in some competitions there is only one candidate assessed as appointable by the panel, in others there may be two or more appointable candidates.

The Commission intends to monitor closely how this new process works in practice and reserves the right to return to the previous position should they feel that the principle of selection on merit after a fair and open competition is under threat.

**When will these new procedures start?**

The Commission is consulting the Prime Minister on this change as required by the law. We expect this change to take effect from 1<sup>st</sup> December 2014. The Commission's [Recruitment Principles](#) will be revised and republished shortly.