

To: Heads of Department (via email)

22 July 2026

Dear Heads of Department,

We have a new Prime Minister, and this will inevitably involve some changes. I am writing to you in my capacity as First Civil Service Commissioner to remind you and your team of the requirements for managing the entry and exit of civil servants. The Civil Service Commission (the Commission) is a statutory body which exists to safeguard the application of the [Recruitment Principles](#) and provide advice on applications submitted by senior civil servants and special advisers under the Business Appointment Rules.

1. Appointments by exception

The Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 requires the selection of people for appointment to the Civil Service to be made on merit on the basis of fair and open competition. However, the Commission is able to “except” appointments from this requirement where it believes this is justified by the needs of the Civil Service or is necessary to enable the Civil Service to participate in a government employment initiative. These initiatives must be robustly compliant with the Recruitment Principles.

While individual departments hold delegated authority for making the majority of appointments by exception for up to two years, any appointment by exception at Senior Civil Service Pay Band 2 (SCS PB2 / Director level) or above, or any role matching or exceeding the SCS PB2 minimum salary pro-rata, requires the approval of the Commission. The Commission typically processes most exception requests for SCS PB2 roles within a five-day period, while those at SCS PB3 and PB4 levels are generally considered in under three days.

Secondments, including from local government or regional authorities, are completed through the use of Exception 3 (Secondments). All secondments into the Civil Service are classified as exceptions to fair and open competition, even if they have been subject to competition. These moves must follow Commission approval routes if they meet the senior grade/salary threshold, irrespective of which organisation funds the post. Furthermore, departments can use Exception 1 (Temporary appointments) to bring in experts to facilitate the delivery of critical or time-sensitive work.

When making appointments by exception below SCS PB2 that fall within your department's delegated authority, please be mindful of the findings from the Commission's [‘Review into appointments by exception delegated to departments’](#) from 2024.

2. Ministerial and Special Adviser involvement in recruitment

The Commission's Recruitment Principles explain how Civil Service appointments should be made in order to meet the legal requirement. Permanent Secretary competitions must be chaired by the First Civil Service Commissioner. Civil Service Commissioners chair all competitions for external SCS Pay Band 2 posts and all SCS Pay Band 3 level roles.

The Principles set out how ministers can be involved in appointments in which they have an interest. This is summarised below:

- The panel chair must ensure the minister is consulted on, and agrees to, the final role and person specification. The Minister's views on the necessary expertise, experience and skills of the candidates must be conveyed to the selection panel.
- Ministers can agree the composition of the selection panel, with particular focus on ensuring it features sufficient challenge from outside the Civil Service.
- Ministers may meet shortlisted candidates to discuss their priorities and the applicants' proposed approach to the position. This must be done for all shortlisted applicants and should be used to highlight areas for the panel to probe further at interview.

Section 8(5)(b) of CReG clearly states that Special Advisers are legally prohibited from being involved at any stage of the recruitment process for civil servants.

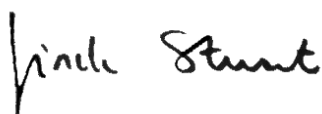
3. Business Appointment Rules

The Commission provides independent [advice](#) on applications under the government's Business Appointment Rules (BARs) for Civil Servants at SCS Pay Band 3 and SCS Pay Band 4 and special advisers at Pay Band 4.

Anyone who joins the Civil Service via an exception to fair and open competition is also subject to the BARs upon their departure, exactly the same as any other civil servant. It is vital that departments have early, proactive conversations with anyone joining the Civil Service including under an exception. If they wish to discuss how the BARs might apply to their specific circumstances, they should be signposted to your department's internal HR team or the Commission for early advice.

The Commission team is always ready to answer any questions you may have and can be contacted via info@csc.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely,



Rt Hon Baroness Gisela Stuart of Edgbaston
First Civil Service Commissioner