



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Briefing Pack for the position of Director General Food, Biosecurity and Trade



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Opening Message



I am delighted to invite applications for the role of Director General Food, Biosecurity and Trade.

This is a critical time to join Defra as we continue to deliver our ambitious agenda, setting global standards in protecting and enhancing our natural environment for future generations and leading the world in food, farming and fisheries, and animal welfare. At a time when public and political interest in the environment has never been higher, the successful applicant will have an unprecedented opportunity to contribute to issues that profoundly impact people's lives.

The role offers the opportunity to lead a large part of the Defra Group, with end-to-end responsibility to set and shape strategy for food, biosecurity and trade, develop government policy across a varied portfolio, to lead major programmes of change, and to oversee operational performance and delivery of three customer-facing Arms-Length Bodies. The role requires the ability to influence on an increasingly international stage as the UK negotiates new trade deals, develops its exports markets and participates in critical global responses to risk, for example food insecurity. This will be underpinned by constructive relations with senior industry stakeholders, Ministers and colleagues across government. I am looking for someone who brings brilliant thinking and confident leadership, alongside strong values and a total commitment to diversity and inclusion. You will need the experience to take on a wide-ranging, high-profile agenda and be able to make an immediate impact across government, with Ministers and partners across a range of sectors. You will be working with talented and committed colleagues across Defra Group, across government and beyond.

We are not expecting candidates to have expertise across the full scope of this role. You will be supported by a team rich in expertise and will be adept at leading in ways that allow others to bring the full benefits of their expert and professional skills. If you think you can deliver in this role, we would love to hear from you, regardless of areas in which you would need to develop more specific capability and experience.

If you have the passion to deliver outcomes for the public and share our ambition for the future, I look forward to your application.

Tamara Finkelstein, Permanent Secretary, Defra

To hear more from Tamara directly, view her video [welcome message](#).

Context

Our work profoundly affects people's lives. In the UK and globally we face an ever more complex set of external challenges, from climate risks to global food security and supply chain fragility, to cost of living pressures for our citizens. What we do in Defra is vital for human health and happiness, for our economic growth, resilience and wellbeing, and for all the wondrous and diverse forms of nature we share the planet with. We have a vital role to play across government on the economy and Net Zero, on climate adaptation and on national security risks and resilience.

The challenges may be large, but we are optimistic. The UK has bound itself to ambitious targets: our legal commitment to Net Zero and our statutory environmental targets on biodiversity, air, water and waste. These outcomes will drive the way we work as an organisation for years to come.

We are making headway. Our pioneering reforms to the way we give financial support to farmers are garnering interest from around the world. Our success will mean we protect and sustain farmers' livelihoods, invest in the countryside as part of our shared heritage, enable the vital transition to Net Zero in the agriculture sector, and begin to restore the very ecological systems that underpin our ability to grow food sustainably, with better soil health, cleaner rivers and greater biodiversity.

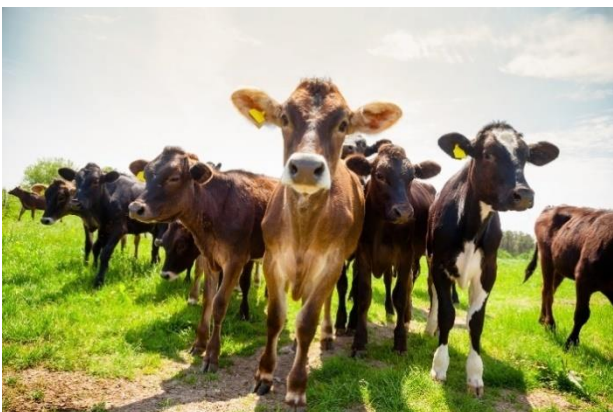
The UK has some of the highest animal welfare standards in the world. We have legislated multiple times over the past ten years to strengthen legal protections, most recently in the Animal Sentience Act, formally recognising animals as sentient beings in domestic law.

We have a critical role to play in our nation's biosecurity. Our vets and scientists perform vital surveillance and monitoring of animal and plant disease to prevent and contain outbreaks, and we work closely with the UK Health Security Agency on biosecurity implications for human health, as well as being key contributors to the UK's first Biological Security Strategy. We have an ambitious plan to renew the UK's biosecurity capabilities through new world-class laboratories in the years to come.

We maintain strong relationships with the food sector, built up over many years, through the process to exit from the EU and in response to the disruption to global supply chains brought by the Covid pandemic. We work closely with the sector to build resilience to shocks. We have an important role to play in a growing international dialogue on food security, sharpened by the conflict in Ukraine.

We have grown our trade capability to match our needs as an independent trading nation, playing an integral role in the negotiation and operation of trade agreements, and contributing to government policy on trade. We have an important role in promoting UK exports, including through our network of Agri-Food attachés based overseas.

We are a science-oriented organisation, building up our investment in Research and Development and supporting the UK's innovative agri-tech and life sciences sectors. In the next phase of our organisational development, we want to focus more on the growth and innovation potential of these hugely creative sectors, harnessing technology in our mission to secure sustainable growth and an economy that treats its natural ecosystems as a vital asset.

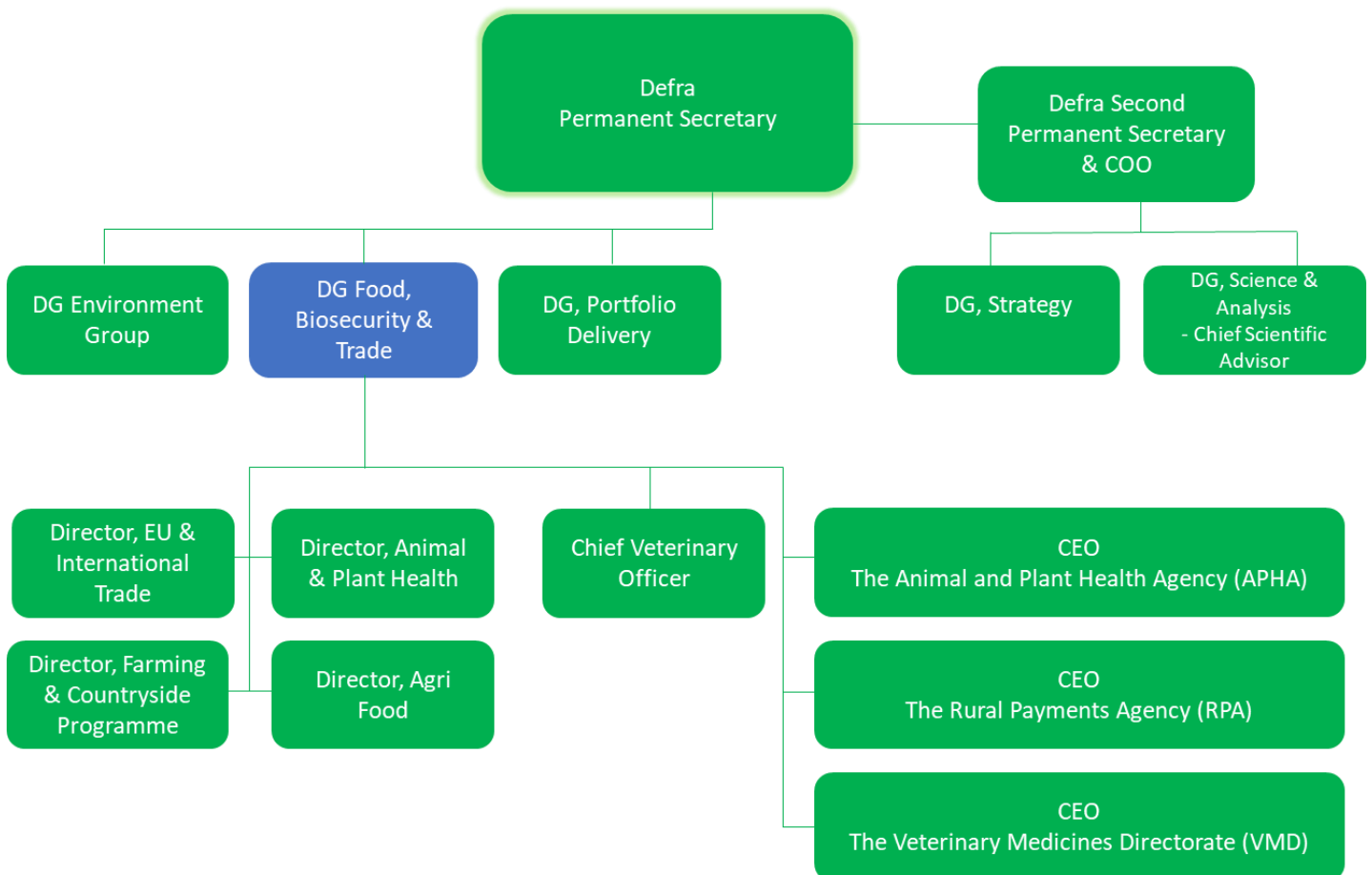


What does the role involve

The Director General for Food, Biosecurity and Trade is a key senior leadership role in the Department. Reporting directly to the Permanent Secretary, you will have lead responsibility for a significant portfolio, including the biggest reforms to farm policy and spending in 70 years, the delivery of the agriculture sector's share of the pathway to Net Zero, and the management of plant and animal disease risks included on the National Risk Register.

You do not need to be a deep policy professional to undertake this role but will need to have a keen interest and appetite to develop skills in working closely with Ministers, understanding how Parliament, law-making and the regulatory environment works, and ensuring value for money in the decisions we make.

You will be a member of Defra's Executive Committee and play your role in shaping the ambitions, delivery and culture of the Defra Group, as well as contributing as a senior leader across government. You will have five Director-level reports, including the government's Chief Veterinary Officer, and will line manage and oversee the work of the Chief Executive Officers of three agencies: the Animal and Plant Health Agency, Rural Payments Agency, and Veterinary Medicines Directorate. In total, line management responsibility extends to around 7,000 people, with budget responsibility for c.£3 billion annually.



Overview of the Directorates and Key Responsibilities

- **Farming and Countryside Programme:** Set up to deliver the most significant reforms to farming policy and spending in 70 years, taking England out of the Common Agricultural Policy and designing a system of farm payments based on the principle of public money for public goods. The programme is now in delivery phase for a new set of schemes, responsible for distributing an annual budget of £2.4bn to farmers and land managers to achieve a range of outcomes: to improve farm productivity, to meet environmental goals on water quality and biodiversity, and to support food sustainability. You will work closely with the Director General, Environment to ensure the new arrangements for regulating and supporting farming, particularly the Environmental Land Management schemes, to deliver our goals for the environment in line with the Environmental Improvement Plan.
- **Agri-Food Directorate:** Responsible for delivering the government's vision to be one of the world's leading food and farming nations, renowned for a food system that is productive, resilient and sustainable. The Directorate owns policy from farm (including agri-tech and innovation), to fork (representing consumer interests, including through food labelling). The food and farming system plays a huge role in the government's agenda and wider economy – food is the UK's largest manufacturing sector and contributes to growth, trade, innovation, levelling-up, and Net Zero. You will be responsible for working across government to sponsor and champion the needs of the food and drink sector.
- **EU and International Trade:** Responsible for delivering the department's environmental, climate change, food, farming, fisheries and biosecurity objectives through trade. It does this by representing Defra's interests in bilateral and plurilateral trade negotiations, engaging multilaterally at the World Trade Organisation, leading the implementation of trade deals for the department and growing UK agri-food exports. Current priorities include Free Trade Agreement negotiations with India, Canada, Switzerland and a number of other trading partners and growing our global network of agri-food attachés.
- **Animal and Plant Health and Welfare:** Responsible for objectives on biosecurity and animal welfare. It monitors animal and plant health pest and disease risks and leads the response to outbreaks to safeguard animal, plant and human health, including management of risk at the border. The Directorate are working to reduce the burden of endemic disease in the national animal population to boost economic productivity, mitigate climate change and support trade, as well as to build consumer confidence in animal welfare standards to support domestic and international markets and deliver a wide range of Ministerial priorities and manifesto commitments on animal welfare. They also ensure the UK is playing a leading international role in biosecurity, anti-microbial resistance and other One Health issues.
- **Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA):** Employs over 3,000 colleagues including operational delivery professionals, scientists and vets to protect animal, bee and plant health to benefit people, the economy and the environment. In the last two years, APHA has been managing an unprecedented outbreak of Avian Flu.
- **Rural Payments Agency (RPA):** With around 2,700 colleagues providing a crucial service including payments to farmers and land managers, the RPA plays a critical role in delivering Defra's food and farming outcomes and its reforms to farm payments.
- **Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD):** Exists to protect public health, animal health and the environment by assuring the safety, quality and effectiveness of veterinary medicines. VMD is the policy lead body and regulator of all aspects of veterinary medicines in the UK.

Key responsibilities will include:

- Delivering transformational farming reforms, shifting £2.4 billion of funding a year from EU-style subsidies into new schemes which support farmers to be more productive and improve environmental performance. This will require close working with the farming community as well as colleagues across Defra, our Arms-Length Bodies, and external partners.
- Supporting the food and drink sector to deliver for consumers, and be a driver of innovation and economic growth, while improving the UK's food security and resilience.
- Protect and enhance the UK's biosecurity, managing the risk of animal and plant diseases and managing outbreaks including avian influenza.
- Implementing flagship measures to improve animal welfare and protect public safety, including implementing legislation on live animal exports and dangerous dogs.
- Optimising the UK's trading arrangements for agri-food to secure the best deal for UK producers and consumers, through negotiating and implementing trade agreements, and working with trading partners around the world to tackle barriers to trade.

This role is a Director General role. If you have never worked in the Civil Service, as a general guide, each Department is headed by a Permanent Secretary and their direct reports (usually the Departmental Board or functional leadership) are our Directors General. Although comparisons are not always straightforward, that means this role is equivalent to an Executive Committee role in the private sector. The size and shape of Director General portfolios varies by Department, but each role will have its own delivery priorities, plus a contribution to Departmental leadership – and a broader commitment to collective leadership across the Civil Service as part of our Civil Service Leadership Group (the most senior 250 civil servants).

What experience will you need?

To be successful in this role you will need to be an outstanding, inspirational leader. We will assess your capability against the following criteria:

- Strong strategic capability and judgement, with a track record of using evidence and analysis to develop a clear view of the context and priorities, and the ability to support effective decision-making at the highest levels.
- The ability to translate strategy into effective policy and successful delivery on the ground.
- Strong capability to improve the performance of large systems from an outcomes, customer and efficiency perspective, understanding how to use data and metrics to drive performance.
- Confidence, authority, and resilience in leading complex operational response activity (ideally with experience of overseeing crisis response, although not essential).
- Experience of leading in contentious and/or sensitive environments and the ability to respond quickly to changing situations and approach challenges with flexibility, responsiveness and creativity.
- Experience of leading change, including culture change, among a very large group of people, and a track record of building high-performing, diverse and inclusive teams.
- Experience of large, complex programmes with a customer focus.
- First class communication skills, with experience of very senior stakeholder management, internally and externally (prior experience of working within government is helpful, not essential).

Diversity is vital to the success of this role, and to the Civil Service as a whole. We actively welcome applications from candidates from all backgrounds, with different experiences and perspectives – and we are committed to ensuring that we work in an inclusive way that means everyone in the Civil Service can perform at their best.

At Defra we passionately believe in equality, diversity & inclusion and we match that belief with action. We are committed to being an organisation in which fairness and inclusion are central to all our working relationships and we want you to have a respectful, welcoming, and engaging working environment free from discrimination regardless of age, disability, gender identity, marriage and civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, social background, trade union activity, caring responsibilities or working pattern.

We have many active staff networks including Age; Mental health; Cancer; Carers; Disability; EU nationals; Ethnic Minority; Faith; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Asexual and Transgender (LGBAT+); Social Mobility; Women and Work life Balance. They are supported by senior champions and encouraged to take an active part in the development of our organisation. You can read more on our Diversity & Inclusion strategy [here](#).

Detailed Terms

- This role is being offered on a **permanent** basis.
- If you are successful and are from outside of the Civil Service, you can expect your salary on appointment to be up to **£135,000 per annum**. If you're an existing Civil Servant, your salary will be agreed in line with the Civil Service pay rules in place on the date of your appointment.
- This is a **full-time** role, but all flexible working arrangements are welcomed and will be considered (including existing job share arrangements). We operate an expectation of working at least 60% of time in the office.
- You can be based in **Newcastle, Bristol, York, or London** – the role will require some attendance in the London office but much of the role can be done from any of these hubs.

Please note that:

- **Civil Service pension** arrangements will apply, and you will have the option of joining the Civil Service Alpha Pension Scheme, a defined benefit (DB) pension scheme. The current employer contribution rate for this salary level is in excess of 30% of salary as explained at [Civil Service Pension Scheme](#).
- The role includes **25 days annual leave**, increasing on a sliding scale to 30 days after five years' service. (This is in addition to eight public holidays and one privilege day).
- If successful you must hold, or be willing to obtain, security clearance up to **SC level**. More information about the vetting process and what SC means can be found [here](#).
- Unfortunately, we will not be able to reimburse you for any expenses incurred as part of this recruitment process.

To ensure the integrity of the judgements and decisions they make every day, all civil servants must make sure that no conflict arises – or could be perceived to arise – between their public duties and their private interests when joining, or leaving, the civil service. This is a requirement of our [Civil Service Code](#) and is designed to protect both individual civil servants and their employing departments.

If you believe you have any interests that might be relevant (or be perceived as relevant) to your ability to undertake this role, please let Russell Reynolds Associates (RRA) know early in the process. Such interests may be financial or may be related to the relationships you have with specific individuals, organisations, or employers. RRA will be able to discuss those interests with you and help work through potential next steps.

Selection Process

Civil Service recruitment processes at Director General level are regulated by the Civil Service Commission, and we follow clear guidelines to ensure that our recruitment is fair and open. More detailed information about the Civil Service Commission and their role can be found [here](#). The Selection Committee for this role will be Chaired by **Paul Gray**, a Civil Service Commissioner and will include **Tamara Finkelstein** the Permanent Secretary of Defra, together with **Heather Hancock** Lead Non-Executive Director at Defra and, **Gareth Davies** the Permanent Secretary of the Department for Business and Trade.

We expect the process for this role to be as follows:

- **The closing date for applications will be 23:55 on Monday 12 February 2024.**
- A longlist of the applications will take place during the w/c 19 February.
- Longlisted candidates will be invited to meet with the Russell Reynolds team for a preliminary interview.
- A shortlist of the applications will then take place during the w/c 18 March.
- Shortlisted candidates will then be invited to the following sessions (from 19 March):
 - A **meeting with an existing Director General and a staff member of Defra**. This is an opportunity for candidates to build their understanding of what it's like to work in the Civil Service and at the same time an opportunity for the DG and staff member to ask you about your leadership experience.
 - A **meeting with a key external stakeholder** who you will be expected to build a successful relationship with if successful. This will be an opportunity for you to gain a better understanding of the importance of different stakeholders in making this role a success and at the same time an opportunity for the key stakeholder to ask you about leadership experience.
 - An **Individual Leadership Assessment**.
 - A **meeting with a senior Minister of Defra**.
- Inputs from all these elements of the selection process will be incorporated into **a two-part interview process** (w/c 8 April) where you will be invited to two conversations – the first to meet Heather Hancock and Gareth Davies, and the second to meet with Tamara Finkelstein and Paul Gray.

Full details about the assessment phase will be provided to shortlisted candidates. The steps outlined above have been designed to bring together a stronger picture of strengths and experiences and may be slightly different to what you may have experienced in previous Civil Service DG recruitment campaigns. We would welcome feedback on this process – please let Russell Reynolds know if you have any comments.

How to apply

Russell Reynolds Associates have been retained by Defra to support this recruitment process. To apply for this role, please submit the below materials via email to responses@russellreynolds.com.

The closing date for applications will be 23:55 on Monday 12 February 2024. Your application should include:

- The reference number **2310-123L** and role title in the subject line of your email.
- Your **CV**, with educational and professional qualifications and full employment history, including an explanation of any gaps in your employment history, and details where possible of budgets and numbers of people.
- A **short covering statement of no more than two A4 sized pages** explaining why this appointment interests you and how you can evidence your suitability for the role, with particular reference to the criteria referenced in the 'what experience will you need' section.
- A **Diversity Monitoring Form**. All applicants are invited to complete this information to assist the Civil Service with monitoring its recruitment process. All data is reported in an anonymous and aggregate format and will not be seen by anyone assessing your application. [The form is available here.](#)

This vacancy is part of the [A Great Place to Work for Veterans](#) initiative. For further information on whether you are eligible to apply under this scheme please follow the link above. In addition to this, Defra is an accredited 'Disability Confident Employer' under the government's **Disability Confident Scheme**, which denotes organisations that have a positive commitment towards disabled people. We guarantee to interview anyone with a disability whose application meets the minimum criteria for the role, as outlined on page 6 of this pack. If you wish to claim a guaranteed interview, you should declare so at the point you submit your application.

Further useful information:

[Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

[25 Year Environment Plan - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

