



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE PERMANENT SECRETARY CANDIDATE BRIEF AND JOB SPECIFICATION

August 2025



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Opening message from Sir Chris Wormald, Cabinet Secretary

I am delighted you are interested in finding out more about the position of Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Defence (MoD). This is a key post supporting the Defence Secretary, John Healey MP, and at a time when the threats we face as a nation are more serious and less predictable than at any time since the Cold War.

The Permanent Secretary will lead the department to deliver a challenging programme of Ministerial priorities across the Defence landscape and be expected to play a significant role more widely across the Civil Service. The Ministry is one of the biggest departments within Government, with a total workforce of over 195,000 people engaged principally in defending the security of the United Kingdom (circa 55,000 are part of the civilian workforce).

We are seeking to attract and appoint an outstanding leader with a record of delivering significant cultural and structural change successfully. The individual will be experienced in motivating a large and diverse workforce to reform and deliver the highest quality services within a complex business environment. A practical understanding and appreciation of the challenges of transforming services to scale will be essential.

The successful candidate will also need to have a credible track record of working collaboratively with partners and stakeholders, they will need to influence and collaborate with senior leaders in the Defence organisation, within Government and with external partners. In combination with the above, the successful candidate will have excellent strategy and communication skills and be strongly committed to the civil service values of impartiality, honesty, integrity and objectivity.

I welcome your interest and look forward to receiving your application.

Background

The Civil Service delivers public services and supports the government of the day to develop and implement its policies. Much of this work happens in our individual Departments (of which there are over 40), but we also have 12 cross- government functions - along with numerous arms' length bodies who work across the public sector.

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) is one of the biggest organisations in the Civil Service with a total workforce of 196,720, which includes civil servants and military personnel based in the UK and overseas, and military reservists. We are here to ensure that the UK is secure at home and strong abroad.

Since 1 April 2025, UK Defence is now led by a strengthened Department of State, a fully-fledged Military Strategic Headquarters, a new National Armaments Director Group, and the Defence Nuclear Enterprise. The new leadership "Quad" - the **Permanent Secretary**, Chief of the Defence Staff, National Armaments Director, and Chief of Defence Nuclear - will ensure that their teams work together across these structures to deliver our key defence departmental outcomes in collaboration. Defence Reform is designed to introduce new integrated ways of working together and making individuals more accountable – the driving principles of the government's Defence Reform agenda.

The Strategic Defence review (published in June 2025) is the Plan for Change for Defence. It sets out the following new ambitions:

- **'NATO First'** - stepping up on European security by leading in NATO, with strengthened nuclear, new tech, and updated conventional capabilities.
- **Move to warfighting readiness** - establishing a more lethal 'integrated force' equipped for the future, and strengthened homeland defence.
- **Engine for growth** - driving jobs and prosperity through a new partnership with industry, radical procurement reforms, and backing UK businesses.
- **UK innovation driven by lessons from Ukraine** - harnessing drones, data, and digital warfare to make our Armed Forces stronger and safer.
- **Whole-of-society approach** - widening participation in national resilience and renewing the Nation's contract with those who serve.

The complete review can be read here: [Strategic Defence Review](#).

The role

The Permanent Secretary is the lead adviser to the Secretary of State; they represent the Ministry of Defence at the highest level.

Specifically, the Permanent Secretary:

- As Accounting Officer, is accountable to Parliament for the Department's performance and expenditure, managing a budget of circa £62 billion. To do this successfully the Permanent Secretary will have the breadth and depth of experience to fulfil the significant Accounting Officer responsibilities, including the ability to interact effectively with HM Treasury counterparts;
- Provides strong engaging leadership to the Department by translating Ministers' ambitions into a clear vision to our people, setting a clear direction for that vision and ensuring it is organised, resourced and motivated to support Ministers effectively, and deliver their key priorities;
- Drives reform and transformation, providing strong change leadership to optimise opportunities, focused on organisational reform, higher standards and stronger delivery whilst embedding innovation and adopting greater flexibility in ways of working to deliver operational efficiencies;
- Acts as the primary policy adviser to the Secretary of State and his Ministerial team in setting the overall strategy and policy for the Department, ensuring it is cost effective, evidence-based and achievable;
- Motivates and engages staff to strengthen and develop their capability and is a role model for the values of the Civil Service, reinforcing and supporting a culture of continuous improvement, high performance and excellent delivery. Works with the Quad to improve the overall workplace culture within defence through the reaffirming our standards change programme;
- Works closely with the Quad to ensure the delivery of the Government's ambitions on defence;
- Represents the Department, and the Secretary of State, across Whitehall to ensure defence equities are understood and embedded into wider Government priorities, such as the growth agenda; and,
- Represents the Department with international counterparts to promote UK interests and strengthen UK alliances.

What experience will you need?

The Civil Service is open to talented people from anywhere in the United Kingdom, and from any career background; we will always seek to identify transferable skills from the individual's experience. To help you succeed in this role, you must have a strong commitment to the Civil Service values of impartiality, honesty, integrity and objectivity, and you will likely have the following essential criteria:

- Exceptional strategic capability and the resilience to work under sustained pressure and scrutiny and lead through ambiguity;
- Experience and confidence in managing large and complex budgets and for maintaining strong, effective governance arrangements to drive efficiency and value for money;
- Confident and engaging leadership skills, with a proven commitment to inclusive leadership, with exceptional capability to lead others through transformational organisational change;
- An exceptional collaborator, able to work across boundaries to achieve results for defence and the UK Government;
- The ability to secure the confidence of Ministers and senior leaders in developing and delivering complex policy and strategy alongside a successful track record of working collaboratively across organisations; and,
- Well-developed political judgement with experience of working closely with senior stakeholders, whilst providing constructive challenge and candid advice.

Our recruitment process

Civil Service recruitment processes at Permanent Secretary level are regulated by the [Civil Service Commission](#), and we follow clear guidelines to ensure that our recruitment is fair and open. We expect the process for this role to be as follows:

- **The closing date for applications will be 30 September 2025.**
- A shortlist of the applications will take place in the week commencing **6 October 2025**.
- Between **the week commencing 6 October and 13 October 2025**, shortlisted candidates will be invited to undertake assessments (to be confirmed)

Inputs from all of those steps will then form the basis of a panel interview, chaired by the First Civil Service Commissioner, Gisela Stuart, in the week commencing 20 October. Other panel members at the interview will include the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Chris Wormald, and the Government Lead NED, Baroness Casey. Further panellists will be confirmed.

Full details will be provided to shortlisted candidates and recognising that there are a number of steps in the process, we will do our best to arrange the sessions in a way that works for you. We hope that this process will be conducted in face-to-face sessions, but if you need any adjustments do let us know.

How to apply

To apply please submit the following documents to responses@russellreynolds.com by **no later than 23:55 on 30 September**:

- The role title and reference code **P2507-176L** in the subject heading 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 (1000 words) explaining why this appointment interests you and how you can evidence your suitability for the role, with particular reference to the criteria in the 'relevant experience' section on page six.
- A **Diversity Questionnaire**: The Civil Service is committed to achieving a workforce that reflects the society it serves, at all levels including the most senior. Collecting this information enables us to identify whether we are recruiting from the widest possible pool of talent and check that all groups are

being treated fairly throughout the process. This form will not be disclosed to anyone involved in assessing your application. Please note that applications will not be accepted unless the form is returned. If you do not wish to provide a response to a particular question, you should complete the 'prefer not to say' option. This is available to complete via the electronic form available: [here](#).

- A completed Declaration of Interests form: This is available to complete via the electronic form available: [here](#).

Please note that applications will not be accepted unless the form is returned.

We operate a Disability Confident Scheme (DCS). We are committed to making reasonable adjustments in order to support disabled job applicants and ensure that you are not disadvantaged in the recruitment and assessment process. All monitoring data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not affect your application in any way. If you wish to make an application under the DCS, please indicate that when asked on the Diversity Questionnaire available above.

This vacancy is also 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 hyperlink above.

Please note that references and open-source due diligence checks (including into social media accounts) will be undertaken for all short-listed candidates.

Detailed terms and conditions

- The successful candidate will hold this post for up to five years from the date of appointment. There is no presumption in favour of renewal, but renewals for a shorter period than five years may be possible where performance has been strong, following consultation with the Cabinet Secretary and at the discretion of the Prime Minister.
- If you are successful you can expect your salary on appointment to be between £185,000 - £200,000 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 flexible working arrangements are welcomed and will be considered (including existing job share arrangements). The role will be based in London.

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 of almost 30% of salary as explained at [Civil Service Pension Scheme](#).

- The role includes 30 days annual leave - this is in addition to 8 public holidays and one privilege day.
- If successful you must hold, or be willing to obtain, security clearance up to DV level. More information about the vetting process can be found [here](#).
- You will need to hold the right immigration status and nationality requirements for this role. This is a reserved post - please ask joanne.whitehead1@cabinetoffice.gov.uk if you have any questions.
- Unfortunately we will not be able to reimburse you for any expenses incurred as part of this recruitment process.

Restrictions

During the period of appointment there will be certain restrictions on political activities.

Business Appointments

Candidates should also note that on completion of the appointment, the post holder will be subject to the government's Business Appointments Rules, with the possibility of restrictions on future employment imposed by the Prime Minister, on the recommendation of the independent Advisory Committee on Business Appointments. If you would like to discuss what this means, please get in touch with joanne.whitehead1@cabinetoffice.gov.uk

Further information about the Rules and restrictions likely to be imposed on former Permanent Secretaries can be found [here](#).

Equality and Diversity

We are committed to supporting the principle that everybody should have the same opportunities for employment, development and progression. This should be based on their ability, competence and suitability for the role.

This means that no applicant should receive less favourable treatment on grounds of their ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status, disability, religion, transgender status, family or domestic responsibilities, or working patterns. Also nobody should be disadvantaged by any specific conditions or requirements, unless it can be justified that these could affect their ability to undertake the role.

Complaints

The law requires that selection for appointment to the Civil Service is on merit on the basis of fair and open competition as outlined in the Civil Service Commission's Recruitment Principles, which can be found at [here](#). If you feel your application has not been treated in accordance with the Recruitment Principles, and you wish to make a complaint, you should contact Jo Whitehead in the first instance. joanne.whitehead1@cabinetoffice.gov.uk If you are not satisfied with the response you receive from the department, you can contact the Civil Service Commission at the address below: info@csc.gov.uk