

The *Code of Practice* covers all Ministerial appointments to the boards of executive and advisory non-departmental public bodies, health bodies, public corporations and nationalised industries. It also covers the heads of the utility regulators.

The Principles

Merit and Diversity. Government Departments are looking for able, enthusiastic and committed citizens with the skills required to help make decisions about our public services. Public bodies should broadly reflect the communities which they serve and Government Departments promote and deliver the principles of **Equal Opportunities**. Your energy, experience, skills and commitment are welcomed and valued.

Openness and Transparency. The appointments process is open to **Independent Scrutiny** at every stage. However, all the information about you as a candidate is held in confidence.

Probity. Anyone seeking to carry out public service should do so for the right reasons. How you conduct yourself is important. You will be expected to behave responsibly and discretely while at the same time accepting that your own conduct must be completely open and transparent.

Ministerial Responsibility. The ultimate responsibility for appointments lies with Government Ministers, although this is sometimes delegated. The procedures for appointments should be subject to the principle of **Proportionality** and handled in a way that is appropriate to the nature and responsibility of the post.

Public bodies and public appointments

Public bodies play a real part in shaping and influencing national policy and decision-making, from advice-giving organisations like the Advisory Board on Family Law, to those delivering public services, such as NHS Trusts and the BBC. Appointments to the boards of public bodies are more commonly known as public appointments. Government Departments work hard to ensure that there is a fair and open process.

Although appointments are generally made by Ministers, the administration of your application will be handled by either civil servants in **Government Departments**, or, on occasions, by a recruitment consultant.

The Commissioner for Public Appointments

The Commissioner for Public Appointments regulates, monitors and reports on public appointments.

Government Departments are required to follow the Commissioner's *Code of Practice* to ensure that appointments are made on merit, after fair and open competition.

The Independent Assessor

The Independent Assessor is involved in a variety of ways throughout the process to seek to ensure that the Commissioner for Public Appointments' *Code of Practice* is followed.

Ref 262764/0504/D16

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Your Application for a Public Appointment

Public appointments affect everyone's lives. Because they are so important, it has been decided that an independent person, called an Independent Assessor, will monitor each part of the process you go through.

This leaflet has been written by a group of experienced OCPA Independent Assessors to help you understand the process involved in making public appointments and what will happen to your application.



Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments

Thank you for your interest in this appointment.

We hope that you will want to apply and that you will find the application process simple and straightforward. To help you in your application we have put together a list of frequently asked questions. We hope that you will find these useful and informative.

Is a public appointment just like a job? No. Most are part-time and over half of all public appointments are unpaid. Selection for public appointments is often extremely competitive and the standard of candidates is very high. However, do not be put off. The Government is always looking for effective contributions from *all* sections of society. If you can show you meet the criteria – and have a commitment to public service – we would encourage you to apply. Do not be downhearted if your first application is unsuccessful. Details of other public appointments are available at www.publicappts-vacs.gov.uk

Where can I find out more? The information pack should provide details about the board vacancy and about the appointment process. In addition, the pack should contain details of any remuneration; how to claim travelling expenses, if available; and the name of someone who can tell you more about the position or process (the named contact). You might also wish to try your public library or the Internet. All Government websites can be accessed through just one address – www.direct.gov.uk.

How long will my application take? Your pack should contain full details of the process including a timetable. Because competitions for public appointments can generate a lot of applications, it will take months rather than weeks to process all the applications and make a selection.

I have specific needs. What support is available in making my application? The named contact will be able to give you details of help available with completing the application form and access. You might also wish to ask whether the department operates a Guaranteed Interview Scheme (GIS) for disabled people.

What happens after I return my application form? There will be an initial selection (sift) against the stated criteria to identify those applicants who best meet the role or person specification. A short-list of candidates is drawn up and those selected are called for interview. These stages are overseen by an Independent Assessor to ensure that they are carried out in a fair, open and transparent manner. After the interview, details of the appointable candidates are presented to the Minister who will assess their merits and choose the best person for the appointment.

Can I get feedback on my application? Feedback is available from the named contact to candidates who have been invited to interview but have been unsuccessful.

Who ensures that my application will be treated fairly? Firstly, the Commissioner for Public Appointments. The Commissioner oversees all Ministerial appointments to public bodies and publishes a *Code of Practice* (www.ocpa.gov.uk) which sets out a framework for the public appointments process. It provides departments with a clear and concise guide to the steps they must follow to ensure a fair, open and transparent appointment process which produces public appointments that command public confidence. Secondly, Independent Assessors. These people act as guardians of the principles of the Commissioner's Code of Practice and provide an assurance that your application will be treated fairly.

How can I comment on the appointments process? If you have any comments or complaints you should address them to the Department. If, after you have received a substantive reply, you are still concerned, you can write to the Commissioner for Public Appointments at the address overleaf.

Independent Assessors and your application

You	The Independent Assessor
<i>I am considering applying for a public appointment and have sent off for an application form. It mentions someone called an Independent Assessor. When will they be involved?</i>	The Independent Assessor is already involved. They should have been consulted in the production of your application pack to ensure that the role specification and application form are suitable for a diverse range of applicants.
<i>When I read the application pack, is there anything in particular I should be looking for apart from the normal things like an application form and information about the appointment?</i>	The Independent Assessor recommends that you check to ensure that your pack contains a timetable, including the closing date and possible interview dates; contact details for the department; and the department's and body's websites.
<i>How will my application be judged to see if I should be interviewed?</i>	The department will carry out a sift at which applications are judged against the role and person specifications to ensure that the best suited people are put forward for interview. The Independent Assessor takes part in this process to ensure each application is treated fairly.
<i>I have been invited to an interview. Will an Independent Assessor be involved to ensure that the interview is fair?</i>	Yes. If you are selected for interview the panel will either include an Independent Assessor, or be scrutinised by an Independent Assessor.
<i>Who makes the final decision on who gets appointed?</i>	The Government Minister with responsibility for the body concerned. The Minister will select the best person for the position from a list of people agreed by the selection panel. In making a decision, the Minister will consider both the role and person specification and the make-up of the Board.