

Civil Servants

*Civil Servants are those who are employed by **the Crown**, excluding those employed by the Monarch herself. The Civil Service therefore excludes those who are employed by **Parliament** and those employed by **other public bodies**. I have prepared a separate note which examines those three types of public sector employee and ends with a summary of key statistics – see www.civilservant.org.uk/definitions.shtml .*

If you are a new recruit, arriving on your first day, you will first meet support staff (or ‘administrative staff’) in reception areas, delivering papers, and so on. They also carry out routine casework and provide direct support for senior staff. They are very important, not only because nothing would function without them, but also because they see more clearly than anyone else what is going on. If you want to know whether a unit is well run, and provides a good service to its customers, you will generally get a better informed, and more honest, answer from support staff.

Next up the chain are middle management (or ‘executive grades’). They help formulate and amend policy; deal with more difficult casework and help Ministers respond to letters from the public. A small number of them are in the ‘fast stream’ – serving a three to five year apprenticeship before being promoted to (what used to be called) Grade 7 and then into the Senior Civil Service.

Titles such as ‘Grade 7’, or the even older ‘Principal’, are old-fashioned, and have been superseded by a wide range of other titles. Grade 7 has become Range 10, Band A, Deputy Director, Assistant Director, and Range E, to name but five. But there is no common title used across Whitehall, so the old titles live on, including in this website. The main ones, at Grade 7 and above, are shown in the following table:

	Very Old Title	Old Title	Nowadays often known as ..
	Cabinet Secretary & Head of the Civil Service		
Senior Civil Service	Permanent Secretary (Civil Service Head of each department)		
	Deputy Secretary	Grade 2	Director General
	Under Secretary	Grade 3	Director
	Assistant Secretary	Grade 5	Director or Assistant Director
	Senior Principal & Principal	Grade 6 & Grade 7	Deputy Director, Assistant Director, Team Leader, Policy Manager etc.

Internally, and especially when talking about senior staff across Whitehall, some now find it convenient to refer to the “pay bands” (PBs) established by the Cabinet Office, where PB1 = the old Grade 5, PB2 = Grade 3 and PB3 = Grade 2. Comparisons between civil service grade and their equivalents in the armed services may be found in

a table at the end of this note.

What do these senior people do? They help Ministers and other officials deliver Ministers' objectives, both by giving advice to Ministers and by implementing Ministers' decisions. They need to be able to work closely and effectively with Ministers, with other Whitehall civil servants, with the wider civil service, with the private and voluntary sectors and with pressure groups. They operate more like a club than a hierarchical organisation – and that is simultaneously their great strength and their great weakness – a subject to which I return later.

The key grade is Grade 7. Grade 7s are expected to know all there is to know about their policy area, and to know all the key players, pressure groups and so on. In a well-run department, you will find that senior officials listen very carefully to their Grade 7s, and tend to operate in a way which supports their Grade 7s, rather than vice versa.

There are around 3700 people in the Senior Civil Service (SCS), including many outside Whitehall, many specialists and many who first worked in other sectors. Indeed, the long term aim is to have around one-third of the SCS recruited from outside the civil service. SCS jobs vary hugely, but usually include one or more of the following:

- agreeing strategic aims with Ministers, and communicating those aims to Grade 7s and others;
- agreeing and providing the financial and human resources needed to achieve those aims;
- deploying their greater knowledge and experience in support of Grade 7s;
- trouble-shooting;
- undertaking complex casework and project management, and
- acting as a personal adviser to Ministers, of whom more below.

The breadth of responsibilities increases with increasing grade, but it is seldom necessary for there to be a Grade 5 and a Grade 3 and a Grade 2 between the key Grade 7 and the Permanent Secretary/Head of Department. Most departments structure themselves so as to cut out one of these tiers (but not always the same one) in each management hierarchy.

It is worth noting that the more senior officials are not necessarily more powerful. They have to rely on others both for information and for delivery, and they are often heavily constrained by (small p) political factors, including the independence of each Secretary of State, and hence the independence of each departmental senior management team. Other constraints on senior officials include the need to avoid annoying Ministers, and the club-like nature of senior officialdom. The latter can be a good thing, in that it encourages senior officials to work collaboratively rather than just for their own Ministers. It also allows pay levels to be set relatively low, in return for lots of genuine job satisfaction. (*You may like to read a more detailed note about civil service pay at www.civilservant.org.uk/pay.shtml.*) But the 'clubiness' of the Senior Civil Service can also lead to senior officials being over-tactful in their dealings with one another, which can delay change, leads to poor annual appraisals, and creates confused expectations.

Note

The following table compares old and new civil service grades with their equivalents in the armed services.

Civil Service

Armed Services

Principal, Grade 7, Deputy Director, Team Leader etc.

Colonel, Captain, Group Capt

Assistant Secretary, Grade 5, SCS Pay Band 1, Director or Deputy Director

1 star, Brigadier, Senior Captain, Commodore, Air Commodore

Under Secretary, Grade 3, SCS Pay Band 2, Director

2 star, Major General, Rear Admiral, Air Vice Marshall

Deputy Secretary, Grade 2, SCS Pay Band 3, Director General

3 star, Lieutenant General, Vice Admiral, Air Marshal

Permanent Secretary

4/5 star, General, Field Marshal, Admiral, Admiral of the Fleet, Air Chief Marshal, Marshal of the RAF