

# INSTITUTE FOR GOVERNMENT

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**Georgia Gould MP**  
**Sir Chris Wormald KCB**  
**Cabinet Office**  
**70 Whitehall**  
**London**  
**SW1A 2AS**

28<sup>th</sup> July 2025

Dear Minister Gould and Sir Chris,

I am writing further to the public debate and private discussions about the new No.10 guidance to civil servants about how to engage with stakeholder groups and the media.

As you know we at the Institute for Government, together with many others, have been concerned about the chilling effect the guidance is having on external engagement by civil servants, and the damage it risks doing to the effectiveness of government.

I strongly endorse Minister Gould's view that we should want "a civil service that is connected to the British people", Sir Chris's parliamentary evidence that "the policymaker... needs to be good at reaching out and drawing on expertise from throughout the public sector, from academia and from the private sector" and the prime minister's statement that government is "a partnership [between] businesses, charities, campaigners, unions, investors, England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland".

Our concern is that the guidance will close down that partnership just at the time when the government is seeking to expand and enhance it.

We have already started to see civil servants who appear to have turned inwards, withdrawing from discussions – in private as well as in public. Many have interpreted the guidance, whatever its original intention, as a reason to increase their precaution, stepping back from opportunities to build the connections that we know improve the quality of decision making and implementation in government.

We were therefore pleased to see in correspondence from Sir Chris that the Cabinet Office has "clarified certain elements of the guidance to make clear that government officials can continue to speak to, and take questions from, sector-facing audiences". We also welcome his confirmation that operationally independent officials and scientific and medical experts can continue public and media engagements.

Of course we agree that ministers should be the primary voice of the government in the media and in Parliament, and that it is reasonable for ministers to authorise and co-ordinate elective public appearances by civil servants. But we also strongly believe in the value of senior civil servants speaking in public about matters for which they have responsibility. The effectiveness and capability of the civil service itself would be a primary example of such a matter. Permanent secretaries, cabinet secretaries and other civil servants have often participated constructively in such discussions at the Institute for Government and elsewhere.

To that end, we would be grateful for confirmation on the following points.

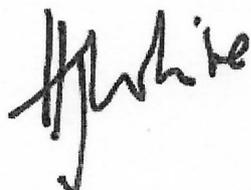
- Whether civil servants and public officials can participate in private or 'Chatham House' meetings which include (non-media) stakeholders from academia, think tanks, charities and the private sector, without such engagements requiring gridding?
- Whether civil servants and public officials are actively encouraged to engage with third party groups who have contributions to make to policy development and its implementation, which would include sector facing engagement with Q&A, without such engagements requiring gridding?
- Whether civil servants and other public officials are still able to participate in public discussions on matters relevant to their personal responsibilities, without seeking clearance to do so where media are not present?
- Whether, where media may be present, the expectation is that permission will normally be given, without unreasonably restrictive conditions, particularly at public events where no minister has the desire or time to participate?

We would be grateful to understand how the revised guidance is being distributed to civil servants, and whether a complete version of the new guidance will be published. The recent letter to The Times demonstrated the strength of feeling on this issue across civil society. The sector is eagerly awaiting clarification on this guidance, and we are keen to share any updates with them.

I know that you both, with your colleagues, want a government and a civil service that can draw on the best evidence, from all sectors and the front line, to develop and implement its policies. I also hope you see the value in a confident civil service that is able to explain and present those policies, amplifying the reach of ministers and improving how government works.

I look forward to your reply and response to the points above.

Yours sincerely,



**Dr Hannah White OBE**

**Director & CEO, Institute for Government**



Rt Hon Nick Thomas-Symonds MP  
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Our reference: MC2025/12660

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14<sup>th</sup> October 2025

*Dear Hannah,*

Thank you for your letter of 28 July relating to communications guidance for Civil Servants. I am replying as my portfolio in the Cabinet Office has recently been expanded to include this area of work, please accept my apologies for the delay in responding to you.

I would like to begin by agreeing wholeheartedly with the importance of civil servants engaging with stakeholders. As you know, it is my view - and the view of the Government - that it is essential for civil servants to be actively engaging widely across civil society.

Organisations from business, the wider public sector, the third sector and think tanks all have unique perspectives that they can bring to the policy and delivery work of Government. And it is vital that civil servants are actively seeking out these views and perspectives in their day-to-day work.

Similarly, we also agree that it is important for civil servants to speak in public about matters for which they have responsibility. However, as you note in your letter, Ministers should be the primary voice for the government.

In addition, in undertaking public events, civil servants must align with the requirements of the Civil Service Management Code, which has been in place since 2016, and states that:

"Civil servants must not take part in any activities or make any public statement which might involve the disclosure of official information or draw upon experience gained in their official capacity without the prior approval of their department or agency. They must clear in advance material for publication, broadcasts or other public discussion which draws on official information or experience. All contacts with the media should be authorised in advance by the relevant Minister unless a specific delegation or dispensation has been agreed which may be for blocks of posts or areas of activities."

As your letter notes, the Cabinet Office has recently clarified guidance to Departments on how to interpret the Civil Service Management Code.

The guidance makes clear that civil servants are able to take part in stakeholder engagement and sector engagement activity. Where media outlets are likely to be present at public events, further approvals may be needed, subject to the judgement of departments on the nature of the activity.

Thank you for taking the time to write.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nick Thomas-Symonds', written in a cursive style.

**RT HON NICK THOMAS-SYMONDS MP  
MINISTER FOR THE CABINET OFFICE  
HIS MAJESTY'S PAYMASTER GENERAL**