



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Position Specification

Department for Work & Pensions
Permanent Secretary

Opening message from Dame Antonia Romeo, Cabinet Secretary

Thank you for your interest in the role of Permanent Secretary at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

The DWP is at the heart of delivering the Government's highest priority of economic growth, and this is a crucial opportunity to make a difference to the lives of millions of citizens across the UK. Working closely with the Secretary of State you will be responsible for running an effective, fair and affordable welfare system that harnesses AI and emerging technologies to transform services to the citizen.

DWP is one of the largest Government departments, and as the most senior official you will be responsible for leading more than 85,000 colleagues, based at over 800 sites, and overseeing expenditure of over £300 billion. You will lead the team on a wide range of operational, policy, and major programme delivery issues, focusing intensely on delivering the PM's and the Government's priorities and achieving outcomes for the public, and the taxpayer.

The successful candidate will have a track record of delivering major reform in large and complex organisations, working collaboratively to deliver. You will have exceptional strategic capability and judgement, and will be a confident, engaging leader, with a proven commitment to leading through change, and the resilience and focus to lead the department by building an inspiring, dynamic environment that great people want to work in. You will be a leader in the civil service at a time of huge technological change, and you will work with colleagues to ensure that it is understood and harnessed to improve services to the citizen and value to the taxpayer.

This is a national moment. Every single person in the country depends on the Civil Service, and we are operating at a time of unprecedented global uncertainty and change. As a member of the Permanent Secretary team, you will play a vital role working with me to shape the Civil Service of the future – focusing on our three priorities: a relentless focus on delivery, a commitment to innovation and productivity, and serving the government with purpose and with the pride that comes from high performance.



Dame Antonia Romeo DCB
Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Civil Service

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 Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) touches the lives of every citizen in the country at some point in their life. It is responsible for welfare, pensions and child maintenance policy. As the UK's biggest public service department, it administers the State Pension and a range of working age, disability and ill health benefits to around 20 million claimants and customers.

DWP works in partnership with other government departments, and with the private and voluntary sectors, providing services under the brands of Jobcentre Plus, the Pension Service, and the Child Maintenance Service.

The Department aims to:

1. Enable people to get into work and to get on at work, ensuring employment opportunity for all.
2. Tackle child poverty and hardship, ensuring financial security for all.
3. Shape the pensions system to serve the interests of savers and pensioners, ensuring decent, secure retirement incomes for all.
4. Pursue a just, equal and inclusive society, ensuring independence and control for all disabled people.
5. Deliver high quality efficient services, ensuring that people are treated with dignity and respect.

DWP is one of the largest departments in the Civil Service, employing nearly 85,000 colleagues and operating out of over 800 sites across the UK. The Department is currently reforming how the welfare system works, with major reforms to the Pensions System, Universal Credit, counter fraud measures, and Statutory Sick Pay in this parliamentary session alone. DWP has also taken on responsibility for apprenticeships, adult further education, skills, training and careers, and Skills England.

The Department is at the centre of major reform, including changes to the welfare system, pensions and employment support, alongside a strong focus on improving productivity and service delivery.

The Role

The Permanent Secretary is the lead adviser to the Secretary of State; they represent the Department for Work and Pensions at the highest level and are responsible for overseeing operational delivery of essential services at a large scale. The role combines leadership of a large-scale operational delivery organisation with responsibility for shaping policy and driving reform in a highly visible and scrutinised environment.

Specifically, the Permanent Secretary:

- As Principal Accounting Officer, is accountable to Parliament for the Department's performance and expenditure. Department spend on pensions and benefits (AME) in 2026/27 is expected to be around £330bn and DEL is expected to be around £16.5bn, with the inclusion of the skills portfolio. AO responsibilities include the Synergy Cluster to create shared corporate services across DWP, Ministry of Justice, Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, and the Home Office. 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 confidently and expertly with HM Treasury counterparts.
- Drives reform and transformation, including by progressing AI adoption and wider digital transformation in the department, providing strong change leadership, overseeing major welfare reform and embedding innovation, and agility in ways of working to deliver better for Ministers.
- Acts as the primary policy adviser to the Secretary of State and ministerial team, providing sound and objective advice on issues across the Department's remit to support effective policy delivery.
- Provides strong leadership to the Department by translating Ministers' ambitions into a clear vision to staff, setting the strategic direction for the organisation and ensuring the Department is organised, resourced and motivated to deliver its priorities.
- Manages, motivates and engages staff to 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.
- Builds a strong senior leadership team to strengthen capability, and to shape how the Department delivers and transforms services.
- Provides oversight of DWP's Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) ensuring they use their resources effectively in the delivery of the government's aims.
- As a member of the wider collective leadership of the Civil Service, works with permanent secretary colleagues across government to lead the UK Civil Service for the future.
- Works with the Cabinet Secretary and Permanent Secretaries to reform and rewire radically the Civil Service overall to become recognised for excellence in delivery, adoption of tech and AI, and with the purpose and pride that comes from high performance.
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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. For this role, we welcome applications from candidates within and outside government, including those from large, complex organisations where leaders have operated at comparable scale and complexity. 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**:

- A successful track record leading organisational excellence by transforming large-scale operations and culture to deliver superior customer service and productivity.
- Practical and effective experience of leading the delivery of frontline services to significant scale and impact, with the ability to build a talented, productive, engaged and motivated workforce.

- 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.
- Proven ability and experience to successfully discharge the responsibility for managing multi-billion-pound revenue and capital budgets to deliver significant public value and to the satisfaction of key stakeholders.
- Proven ability to manage complex relationships and interests and to build strong collaborative partnerships to support effective delivery of cross-cutting agendas.

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.

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 23:55 GMT on Monday 27th April 2026.
- A shortlist of the applications will take place in the week commencing 27th April.
- In between week commencing 4th – 11th May, 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, Baroness Stuart, in the week commencing 18th May. Other panel members at the interview will include the Cabinet Secretary, Dame Antonia Romeo, and the interim DWP Lead NED, Arabel Bailey. Other panel members may include the Government Lead NED, Baroness Casey, and HMRC Permanent Secretary, JP Marks.

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

The recruitment process is being undertaken by Russell Reynolds Associates on behalf of DWP. The closing date for applications is **23:55 GMT on Monday 27th April 2026**. Please submit your full application by email to responses@russellreynolds.com quoting reference number **P2603-118L** in the subject heading of the email. All applications will be acknowledged.

Your submission should include:

- 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 **supporting statement** of no more than two A4 sized pages (1,000 words) explaining why this appointment interests you and how you can evidence your suitability for the role, with particular reference to the essential criteria in the 'what experience will you need' section.
- 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. We ask all candidates to complete the Diversity Questionnaire as part of the application process. This information is used solely for monitoring purposes, is treated in the strictest confidence, and is not shared with those involved in assessing your application. If you would prefer not to provide this information, 'prefer not to say' options are available.
- A completed **Declaration of Interests** form. Please note that applications will not be accepted unless the form is returned.
- **Details of two referees** – these will only be contacted for shortlisted candidates, and not without prior notice.

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.

Appendix I: 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 £200,000 to £220,000 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 is almost 30% of salary as explained [here](#).
- 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.