

Three main characteristics of the British Civil Service:

Permanence

Permanence refers to the career nature of the service. Civil servants may serve continually, perhaps moving departments or jobs but rarely leaving the service and returning. Ministers, in contrast, move frequently.

Neutrality

The civil service is impartial and ready to serve governments of any political colour. Policy decisions are for ministers, as advised, and responsibility to parliament rests only with ministers.

Constitutionally civil servants are servants of the Crown. The powers of the Crown are exercised by government and its ministers. Therefore the civil service has no constitutional responsibility apart from the government of the day.

Competition

Entry into the civil service is fair and via competition carried out by or supervised by the Civil Service Commissioners, on merit and suitability. Promotion and transfer to jobs within the service is again based on merit and assessment through the reporting system. Appointments are not based on nepotism or political influence.