

Submissions and briefs for Ministers

A. Submissions

1. General information

1.1 Submissions are used for seeking decisions or agreement from Ministers or senior officers to a course of action. Submissions relate to a particular issue.

1.2 A submission is a minute on a particular issue set out in a particular format. It will generally contain formal advice on a defined problem, and will seek a decision or agreement to a course of action. Sometimes, it will just bring an event or issue to the attention of the relevant person(s), or will simply be for information. When drafting the submission, it should be made clear whether:

- a decision or response is needed; or
- the submission is for information only

2. Format of submissions

2.1 The structure of a submission will normally have the following headings in the following order:

- Issue. The issue or problem should be clearly stated.
- Timing. Submissions are usually marked:
 - i. "immediate" (i.e. it needs to be seen that day); or
 - ii. "urgent" (i.e. it needs to be seen within 3 days); or
 - iii "normal" (i.e. it needs to be seen within a couple of weeks); or
 - iv. "routine" (i.e. there is no special timing factor)

A short sentence may also be added to explain the context of the timing (e.g. does it coincide with an announcement the Minister will be making?). It is also useful to give a date when a decision is required (and from whom). (See also paragraph 6.2 below)

- Summary. This should include all the points of the submission in a logical order
- Recommendation. Any recommendations should be listed
- Consideration. Order your argument carefully, grouping different factors together. Only give essential background, and set out the argument, including the evidence on which it is based. Important counter-arguments or dissenting views must be included so that the reader can consider the case fully. It should be made clear which groups have been consulted and what their views are. Any legal advice should be included. Consider using bullet points or side headings to organise the argument. The Consideration part is optional and should be omitted if it duplicates material already given elsewhere.
- Resource implications. The full financial implications of the recommendation should be spelt out. If there are no direct resource implications, it is better to

say so rather than leaving this heading out. Any task has indirect costs (e.g. staffing, travel costs, etc). Any new resource implications must be cleared by Accountancy and Finance Unit (AFU).

- **Equal treatment issues.** Submissions to ministers must state that implications for all aspects of equal treatment have been identified and taken into account in analysing options. Where appropriate, the advice should describe the provisions made for groups which might otherwise be disadvantaged; if it has not been done, the reasons for this must be stated. If there are no implications for equal treatment, this should also be declared.
- **Handling/Presentation.** This is where you set out how you think the media or the public might respond to the issue. You should consider asking Communication Directorate for a contribution. You should reflect the possible responses of different external stakeholders.

2.2 The submission should be kept as short and focused as possible (consistent with the decisions which need to be taken). Subheadings should be used to distinguish between different parts of the document.

2.3 If the submission is longer than two sides of A4, see if it can be shortened without leaving out key points. If it cannot, and it needs to be longer, the Consideration should be put in an annex.

3. Addresses and copy recipients

3.1 If the submission needs a decision from more than one minister, it should be addressed in reverse order, i.e.:

1. Junior minister (by name)
2. Home Secretary

3.2 If the submission needs a decision from the Permanent Secretary before submitting to Ministers, it can be addressed to:

1. Permanent Secretary (by name)
2. Minister/Home Secretary

3.3 Think carefully about the cc list for your submission and ensure that it is up to date. Do not include people on the copy list if no real purpose is served by doing so. It is generally known that copy lists are themselves copied for responses, so there is considerable waste of effort and paper when the copy lists are unnecessarily lengthened.

3.4 If you need Ministers other than the addressee to see it, but not to make a decision, put them at the head of the cc list. You should normally include Communication Directorate (even if there is no direct media involvement) and, for any major issues, the special advisers. You would generally include the relevant Home Office Board member and, for major issues, the Permanent Secretary. The cc list should include the full name of the person or their Unit so that Private Office can quickly identify where to send copies.

3.5 If you are drafting a submission for someone else, and you need a direct copy of the response, remember to include yourself on the cc list, because Private Office will use that cc list.

3.6 CC recipients are normally put in rank order with Ministers at the top and the most senior civil servants next. Political advisers are usually listed last (to distinguish them from the civil servants on the cc list).

4. Classification

4.1 Classify the submission if necessary, but do not over-classify. It may be necessary to classify an annex but not the main document. If it proves necessary to classify the documents, the correct procedures should be followed in distributing the copies

5. Draft letters

5.1 If the submission is recommending the dispatch of a document, letter or message, a suitable draft should be included. The tone of the draft will depend on who will be signing it (i.e. the terms of a Minister's reply will be different from those of senior officials).

5.2 A key point to bear in mind is that a Minister is a member of the Government and can therefore refer to Government policy as "our policy", and to the Government as "we" or "us". A Private Secretary's reply, or a reply from a civil servant or senior officer, will refer to "the Government" and "the Government's policy".

5.3 The draft (which should be double-spaced) should be attached as an annex to a covering minute and the disk. It may sometimes be possible to use e-mail (but this should first be checked with the relevant private secretary).

5.4 Other points to bear in mind are:

- Wherever you can, help the Private Office by giving correctly the full title of the intended recipient, with any "post-nominal decorations" (e.g. MP or OBE) and the address, as they should appear on the letter. Mistakes can create a bad impression
- Unless you have already agreed the details with the Private Office, make sure your submission includes details on copying and posting the document
- Is it to go by post, or are there any special arrangements that the Private Office need to know about?
- Do you need a copy of the final version? If so, remember to include yourself on the internal distribution list
- Are there any external copy addressees? If so, does this information need to be included in the draft itself?

6. Finally

6.1 Ministers and senior officials must be given enough time to consider the submission before any action is required. If the issues are difficult, they may want to discuss them further. If timing for a decision is likely to be critical or tight, the Private Office should be contacted as early as possible to check the Minister's availability and discuss timescales. Ministers may not always be available, even to receive

material at home by box. For individual Ministers' box arrangements, see the guidance for the relevant Minister's Private Office.

6.2 Submissions should always be sent to the appropriate Minister's office unless the Minister concerned is unable to receive papers for any reason (e.g. on leave or on a visit) and the submission really cannot wait. In these circumstances, the handling of the submission will need to be discussed with the Private Office.

B. Briefs

7. General guidance

7.1 Briefs are used to provide Ministers or senior officers with a short background to an issue, key facts and a line to take, often before visits or meetings. A brief can cover a single topic or a range of subjects, but is normally needed for a specific purpose or occasion.

7.2 Briefs can be written in prose or in bullet points, as appropriate or preferred by the recipient(s). They may be accompanied by a short covering submission (for Ministers/Permanent Secretaries), or minute (for senior officials), summarising the reason for the visit/meeting and the key message to convey.

7.3 The aim of a brief is to provide the information needed to conduct business effectively, so it should be as short and as focused as possible. If you are asked to provide a brief, ensure that you understand exactly what is wanted and why, since the format and content of a brief will vary according to its purpose and the subject matter.

7.4 Questions to consider before you start are:

- How long is the meeting likely to last? It is useful to point out the expected length of the meeting in the brief and ensure that the agenda is matched to this
- How familiar is the recipient with the subject? If they are familiar with it, keep the background brief short. If the brief is for a meeting, bear in mind that it is only necessary to cover agenda items or points which might be raised in Any Other Business
- What preparation will be needed? For major meetings and events, particularly those where the agenda is set in advance, aim to discuss the briefing requirement with the Private Office well in advance. Ask them whether their Minister would find it helpful to have an early scene-setting note or discussion to explain and highlight the main message of the meeting. Presenting the issues early, and giving the principals an opportunity to discuss them, should help reduce the focus and content of the brief.
- Will support staff be present to answer any detailed questions? If so, the brief only needs to cover the major points.

8. Format of briefs

8.1 Ease of reference

8.1.1 Readers must be able to find their way easily around the brief. Therefore:

- If there are a number of supporting annexes, put an index at the beginning that lists the subjects. Include this in the introductory notes or, if there are a large number, on a separate contents page
- Use flags and side flags to identify documents, or specific passages within documents
- Highlight important or contentious issues

8.1.2 It may be helpful to split the brief into two parts:

A steering brief. This should not exceed two sides of A4 paper. It should:

- outline the aim of the meeting or visit; and
- outline the strategy to be adopted by the Minister/senior official; and
- include key points; and
- highlight any difficult or contentious issues.

A stand-alone brief on each major issue. You need to consider what issues might be raised during the visit or meeting. Advise on the line to take should be included if it is needed. This should:

- a. be presented on a single page and in double-line spacing; and
- b. include advice on points to make, and defensive lines to take; and
- c. if possible, provide background material, on a separate sheet of paper, to support each issue.

8.2 The brief might cover the ground in the following order:

Purpose

- State, at the beginning of the briefing, what the purpose of the meeting is
- Specify who asked for the meeting
- Identify the people attending the meeting
- Explain what both the attendees and the Home Office want the meeting to achieve
- State what the key issues are

Timing

- List any particular reason why the meeting is taking place now (e.g. whether it is to coincide with the launch of an organisation's policy document, or it is the first suitable opportunity since the Home Office agreed to the request)
- Remember that outside organisations like something positive out of the meeting, however small. It could just be an undertaking to meet again at a later date

8.3 Remaining detailed background briefing should then follow as normal, but include only necessary material.

8.4 If the briefing pack contains a number of annexes etc, you should list them on the covering submission.

8.5 Distinguish clearly between defensive and other briefing by making the defensive briefing look obviously different, and placing it on a separate page.

8.6 Different subjects in a background note should be placed on separate pages. Background information should be distinguished clearly from the main briefing by:

- placing it on a separate page; and
- heading it "Background note"; and
- not presenting it as bullet points

9. Timeliness

9.1 The brief should be put forward as soon as possible. Leaving it to the last minute will mean that there is no opportunity to address questions the Minister may have before the meeting.

10. Tips for briefing

- Keep the briefing short
- Draft in clear and precise language so as to be readily understood by the listeners
- If it is a lengthy briefing, each subject should be kept on a separate page
- The briefing should be in bullet point form
- The briefing should contain clear headings
- There should be only one subject per page
- The names of people that the Minister will be meeting should be highlighted in bold
- Background information should be kept separate
- Key statistics should be revisited regularly to ensure that they are up to date. It may be helpful to illustrate them by means of a table or chart

11 Briefs for visits

11.1 As with briefings for meetings, all visits should have a clear objective (e.g. to improve working relations between certain organisations and the Home Office).

11.2 There should be a covering sheet defining the objectives and listing the people involved, set out as follows:

Purpose

- State, at the beginning of the briefing, what the purpose of the visit is; and
- Specify who asked for the visit; and
- Identify the people the Minister will meet during the visit; and
- Explain what both they and the Home Office want to achieve; and
- Summarise, in two or three sentences, what the key issues are

Timing

- List any particular reason why the visit is taking place now

11.3 There should be a second page covering:

- any key information which the Minister should convey to those being visited;
and
- any key points to be taken away from the visit

11.4 Remaining detailed background briefing should then follow as normal but only include necessary information.

11.5 If the briefing pack contains a number of annexes, these should be listed on a covering submission.