
Ministerial and Civil Service Working Relationships Training Course: Roles, Advice and Delivery

11 – 15 October 2027
Amsterdam





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Programme Summary

Ministerial and civil service working relationships are the subject of this one-week training course for permanent secretaries, directors general, ministerial advisers and senior officials, ending in a joint delivery agreement for one government priority. Elected direction and administrative capacity must pull together, yet roles, advice and expectations are often settled informally and tested only when a decision goes wrong. The programme clarifies each role, then applies the tools to a priority from the participant's own organisation. Mars Training Centre UK delivers this programme on ministerial and civil service working relationships to mixed-organisation cohorts.

The Business Case

Where ministers and senior officials hold different expectations of who decides, who advises and who delivers, priorities stall, advice is withheld or ignored, and accountability becomes disputed. Structured working relationships bring those expectations into the open early, so that decisions are taken with full advice and delivery is planned alongside policy.

- Decision Clarity: Improves as decision rights and advice routes are agreed before pressure builds.
- Delivery Pace: Increases as priorities are turned into joint plans with named owners.
- Accountability: Strengthens as roles and records show who advised, who decided and who delivered.

Principles and Evidence Base

- OECD work on the delineation of responsibilities between ministers and senior civil servants: It treats the minister-official relationship as a question of roles, appointments and accountability, and it frames Sessions 1 and 2.
- World Bank research on political-administrative relations: It links outcomes to role boundaries, trust and shared planning, and it informs Sessions 3 and 4.

Intended Participants

- Senior officials who advise ministers and answer for how decisions are put into effect.
- Leaders who run a department and must agree priorities with the political leadership.
- Advisers who sit between a minister's office and the administration.
- Heads of policy and delivery who translate direction into plans and results.

Typical functions include ministries, central agencies, regulatory bodies and public health authorities.



Learning Outcomes

1. Participants will be able to diagnose where roles between elected direction and administration are unclear.
2. Participants will be able to evaluate the boundaries of advice, neutrality and decision for a live situation.
3. Participants will be able to construct an advice protocol that supports frank and timely briefing.
4. Participants will be able to prioritise the expectations that most affect delivery of a government priority.
5. Participants will be able to design a joint delivery agreement with named owners and review points.
6. Participants will be able to justify a working arrangement to ministers and to senior colleagues.

Programme Structure

Day 1: Ministerial and Civil Service Roles in Government

Who decides, who advises and who delivers in the relationship between ministers and senior officials?

- Role Boundary Map
- OECD Responsibilities Reading Guide
- Decision Rights Chart
- Accountability Line Statement
- Working Relationship Profile

Day 2: Diagnosing Expectations and Friction Points

Where do expectations between political leadership and the administration diverge, and what does that cost?

- Expectations Gap Survey
- Friction Point Register
- Appointment and Mandate Review
- Trust Signals Checklist
- Past Decision Case File

Day 3: Advice, Neutrality and Decision Support

How is advice given frankly, recorded and used when politics and evidence point in different directions?

- Advice Protocol Template
- Options Paper Structure
- Neutrality Boundary Test
- Briefing Quality Rubric
- Difficult Conversation Script



Day 4: Joint Planning for Delivery

How are political priorities turned into delivery plans that both sides own?

- Priority Translation Canvas
- Joint Delivery Agreement Template
- Delivery Risk Conversation Guide
- Review Point Calendar
- World Bank Relations Reading Guide

Day 5: Building the Joint Delivery Agreement

Do roles, advice routes and delivery plans hold together in one agreement?

- Applying the Session 1 Role Map to One Priority
- Using the Session 2 Register on a Live Relationship
- Testing the Session 3 Protocol Against a Real Decision
- Checking the Session 4 Agreement With Peers
- Completing the Joint Delivery Agreement

Methodology

The programme uses case analysis built on anonymised decision records, briefing papers and role statements from ministries and public agencies. Participants work in peer groups on a priority of their own, rehearse hard conversations and receive facilitator feedback on every protocol, register and agreement.

- Suggested activity: Mapping who decided, who advised and who delivered in a past decision and noting the gaps.
- Suggested activity: Rewriting a briefing so that the advice is clear and the neutral boundary is respected.
- Suggested activity: Rehearsing a conversation on a delayed priority and reviewing it with peers.

Capstone Output

Each participant completes a joint delivery agreement for one government priority. It holds a role map, an expectations register, an advice protocol, a delivery plan and a review calendar. The agreement is used at work to open a conversation with a minister or senior colleague and to guide the first review of the priority.



Frequently Asked Questions

Is training in ministerial and civil service working relationships suitable for officials who are new to a minister's office?

Yes. The programme assumes experience of senior public service work and builds ministerial and civil service working relationships from the question of roles upward.

Which sources do ministerial and civil service working relationships rest on in this programme?

They rest on OECD work on the delineation of responsibilities between ministers and senior civil servants, together with World Bank research on political-administrative relations.

How is the joint delivery agreement for ministerial and civil service working relationships used at work?

You use it to open a conversation with a minister or senior colleague and to guide the first review of the priority.

How does learning ministerial and civil service working relationships differ from a programme on government leadership?

It centres on the roles, advice and shared planning between elected direction and administration, while government leadership centres on a leader's influence, team direction and decisions.