

# Preparing a Briefing

The content, length and format of the briefing will depend on the nature of the meeting.

It will also need to be tailored to the specific requirements of the Minister attending. However, the following general standards should be observed when preparing briefing:

- briefing should be as clear and succinct as possible. For external meetings, a bullet point, stand-alone, speaking note should be provided. This should include
  - key messages
  - points to make
  - defensive lines to take on concerns that may be raised by other attendees

Remember, the speaking note is likely to be the only paper on which the Minister will rely during the meeting - so make it as brief and to the point as possible

- if the Minister is chairing the meeting, the speaking note should set out the format of the meeting. For example, introductory lines, the reason for the meeting, who will take the lead on each agenda item and a brief overview of the points to be discussed
- Officials attending the meeting should have all relevant papers to hand, but the Minister's briefing should only have essential documents that will be referred to (for example, papers circulated for discussion at Cabinet committee, a letter sent to or from one of the attendees on the points under discussion)
- all briefing should include a covering submission which clearly and concisely sets out
  - the reason for the meeting
  - when and where it will be held
  - an agenda (may not be necessary for internal meetings)
  - the attendees (if external, identify their role, along with details of any previous meetings or relevant background about the visitor/country/organisation)
  - the objective(s) of the meeting. For example, to decide X/to agree Y/persuade others at the meeting to accept Z
  - a short background note which might include
    - further explanation of the points in the speaking note
    - views likely to be expressed by others at the meeting
    - a summary of any relevant previous discussions or decisions taken by Ministers
    - consider including a contents page for larger briefing packs (for example, for overseas visits or if a large number of papers are being discussed at the meeting)
- all attachments should be clearly flagged

## Practical considerations

It is often a good idea to discuss the style, content and arrangements for briefing with the private office beforehand.

- briefings must wherever possible be submitted at least five working days before a meeting; more time should be given if the subject to be discussed is particularly complex or sensitive
- ensure deadlines are met. They are there to help Private Secretaries synchronise other time pressures
- extensions to the deadline must be agreed with the Private Secretary in advance. If the Permanent Secretary or Special Advisors are attending, their offices should also be alerted to any delay
- if the briefing is for the Secretary of State, but the subject matter is the day-to-day responsibility of another Minister, then the briefing should be routed via them for their consideration. In such cases, extra time should be allowed for this
- all attendees at the meeting should have copies of the briefing. Ministers, Special Advisors and the Permanent Secretary should have identical, hard copies of the briefing

## Pre-meeting briefing sessions

For more formal meetings, the Minister may require a 'pre-meeting'. The private office will normally arrange this, but it is worth discussing with the relevant Private Secretary if you think such a meeting would be useful to the Minister.

# Trilateral and Cabinet Committee briefing

## Criminal justice trilateral arrangements

Some briefing for criminal justice-related matters will be provided by Home Office. For example, the criminal justice planning division provides the Justice Secretary with the chair's brief for national criminal justice board meetings. View the organisation structure of departments in the [Home Office](#)

## Briefing for Cabinet Committees

Access the [Cabinet Office website for an explanation of the role of Cabinet committees](#), their membership and terms of reference.

Although most Cabinet committee business is carried out through correspondence, sometimes ministers will be required to attend Cabinet committee meetings.

- the secretariat for the relevant Cabinet committee will circulate an agenda and commission papers for each item from the lead department
- the diary secretary will notify officials of the date of the meeting and commission briefing accordingly
- approved versions of the papers are then circulated by the secretariat via the departmental cabinet documents officer. In the MoJ this is [Jay Amin](#). The papers cannot be photocopied. Papers are often circulated at short notice
- officials, private secretaries and the secretariats need to keep in close contact to ensure that ministers are briefed often at short notice in advance of the meeting

More than one division within the MoJ may be involved in providing briefing for such meetings. However, one official should take the lead on providing a single briefing pack, usually someone from the division that has responsibility for the greatest number of agenda items. Private office will confirm this.

With the increased responsibilities and profile of the Ministry of Justice it is vital that the Secretary of State and the Ministerial team are sighted on all issues that may break over the weekend. This will enable Ministers to give a swift response in full knowledge of the facts, if deemed appropriate. Briefing on 'live issues' across the Ministry therefore needs to be provided every weekend.

A Friday briefing pack will be commissioned on a weekly basis that will be distributed to all Ministers. The pack will be commissioned jointly by Private office and Press office and will only cover high profile live policy or operational issues that are likely to arise over a weekend.

The purpose of the weekend briefing is to provide a clear and concise briefing pack, which explains all the issues Ministers should be aware of for the weekend, lines to take should a response be needed and the names of who should be contacted if required. It should provide enough detail for Ministers to be able to get to grips with the issue quickly and respond immediately.

The template for Live Issues will be the same as that for PMQ requests. [Review the template](#) The MoJ Press office will also be adding a media summary of main Ministerial stories.

The success of the briefing pack will be the capture of live issues and the quality of information it provides on them. The MoJ Press office will take the lead on compiling Live Issues briefs.

## Procedure and timing for Weekend Pack

The first commissioning e-mail for the pack will be sent out on Wednesday afternoons. This will ask key contacts to identify any live issues in their areas that they think could break in the media over the weekend.

Deadline for first briefs will be 4pm on Thursday.

To ensure confidence we ask that all Directors either submit a live issue or a nil return.

Press office will then compile 'Live Issues' briefs and produce a prioritised dossier of these with an MoJ Press summary and grid for Friday noon. Officials should be aware that further requests for briefing may be needed to ensure the pack is kept as up-to-date as possible.