

Ministerial Responsibility - individual and collective

Q1		True or False?
A	It is the accepted convention that all Ministers must, at least publicly, agree with decisions made in cabinet under the principle of collective ministerial responsibility.	
B	The conventions of collective and individual responsibility are included in the written UK constitution.	
C	Under the convention of individual ministerial responsibility, a secretary of state must take responsibility for the running of his/her department.	
D	In 2003 Robin Cook resigned from the Labour cabinet over the Iraq war as he could not follow collective responsibility.	
E	During referendums such as the 2016 Brexit vote the Prime Minister can suspend collective ministerial responsibility.	

Q2	For each Ministerial role listed below, decide whether it relates to individual responsibility or collective responsibility	Type of responsibility
A	Ensuring the smooth and effective running of a government department.	
B	Taking key decisions on broad areas of government policy.	
C	Answering questions about a specific issue in the House of Commons or at a select committee.	
D	Talking in public or to the media about government proposals or decisions.	
E	Resigning as unable to agree with the direction or decision making made by the cabinet.	

Q3	Fill in the missing words
	<p>The principle of _____ responsibility requires that Ministers should be able to express their views frankly in the expectation that they can argue _____ in private while maintaining a _____ front when decisions have been reached. This in turn requires that the privacy of opinions expressed in Cabinet and Ministerial _____, including in correspondence, should be maintained</p> <p>The internal process through which a decision has been made, or the level of Committee by which it was taken should not be _____. Decisions reached by the Cabinet or Ministerial Committees are _____ on all members of the Government. They are, however, normally announced and explained as the decision of the Minister concerned. On occasion, it may be desirable to emphasise the importance of a decision by stating specifically that it is the decision of Her Majesty's Government. This, however, is the exception rather than the rule. Ministers also have an _____ to ensure decisions agreed in Cabinet and Cabinet Committees (and in write-rounds) are implemented.</p> <p>Matters wholly within the _____ of a single Minister and which do not significantly engage collective</p>

responsibility need not be brought to the Cabinet or to a Ministerial Committee unless the Minister wishes to inform his colleagues or to have their _____. No definitive criteria can be given for issues which engage collective responsibility. The Cabinet _____ can advise where departments are unsure, however, the final decision rests with the _____. When there is a difference between departments, it should not be referred to the Cabinet until other means of resolving it have been exhausted.

Before publishing a policy statement (_____ paper) or a consultation paper (_____ paper), departments should consider whether it raises issues which require full collective ministerial consideration through the appropriate Cabinet Committee. The expectation is that most such papers will need collective agreement prior to publication.

Take from the Ministerial Code (Dec 2016 version)

Select from: binding committees white collective Prime Minister green advice
 responsibility disclosed freely obligation united Secretariats

Q4	The Seven Principles of Public Life, known as the Nolan Principles, were defined by the Committee for Standards in Public Life. These form a guide to ministerial conduct. Match the correct term to the principle.	
	Nolan Principle	Correct Term
	Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other benefits for themselves, their family or their friends	
	Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties.	
	In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.	
	Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.	
	Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands it.	
	Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.	
	Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.	
	Select from: Honesty Objectivity Accountability Openness Selflessness Leadership Integrity	

Q5 What are the advantages of collective ministerial responsibility? Select possible answers from the list below.

Select from:

- Gives Government stability
- Provides unity within the Cabinet
- Stifles public debate
- Ensure confidence and public support of the Government is maintained
- Can't be held accountable if ministers can't debate policy in public
- If someone cannot publicly agree with a policy, they are expected to resign as to recreate unity within the Cabinet
- Makes it difficult for media and Parliament to know how a decision is reached
- Brings potentially unstable coalition governments together in the public eye.
- Ministers are responsible for the conduct and performance of their own department.

Case Study: taken from the Coalition Agreement for Stability and Reform (Cabinet Office, 2010)

There is no constitutional difference between a Coalition Government and a single party Government, but working practices need to adapt to reflect the fact that the UK has not had a Coalition in modern times. The Coalition Parties will work together effectively to deliver our programme, on the basis of goodwill, mutual trust and agreed procedures which foster collective decision making and responsibility while respecting each party's identity...Close consultation between the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, other Ministers and members of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Parties in both Houses will be the foundation of the Coalition's success.

The initial allocation of Cabinet, Ministerial, Whip and Special Adviser appointments between the two Parties was agreed between the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister. Future allocation will continue to be based on the principle that the Parliamentary Party with fewer MPs will have a share of Cabinet, Ministerial and Whip appointments agreed between the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister, approximately in proportion to the size of the two Parliamentary parties.

The principle of collective responsibility, save where it is explicitly set aside, continues to apply to all Government Ministers. This requires:

- (a) an appropriate degree of consultation and discussion among Ministers to provide the opportunity for them to express their views frankly as decisions are reached, and to ensure the support of all Ministers;
- (b) the opinions expressed and advice offered within Government to remain private;
- (c) decisions of the Cabinet to be binding on and supported by all Ministers;
- (d) full use being made of the Cabinet Committee system and application of the mechanisms for sharing information and resolving disputes set out in this document.

There are certain standard exceptions to the principle of consultation – the Chancellor's Budget judgements, quasi-judicial decisions and opinions of the Law Officers in particular. Budget judgements will require consultation with the Chief Secretary; when the Prime Minister is consulted the Deputy Prime Minister should also be consulted.

The two Parties will aim to ensure support for Government policy and legislation from their two Parliamentary Parties, except where the Coalition Programme for Government specifically provides otherwise. If on any future occasion any other exceptions are required they must be specifically agreed by the Coalition Committee and Cabinet. Ministers will be responsible for developing and maintaining a constructive dialogue with Members of both Parliamentary Parties. As a general rule, the same whip will be applied by both parties to their members. This includes legislation agreed as part of the Coalition Agreement. Any exceptions will be explicitly agreed by the parties, including exceptions identified in the Agreement of 11 May. In all circumstances, all members of both parties will be expected to support the Government on all matters of confidence.

Source-based question: Using the source as a starting point, explain why collective responsibility is an important aspect of UK government.

Suggested Answers

Q1		True or False?
A	It is the accepted convention that all Ministers must, at least publicly, agree with decisions made in cabinet under the principle of collective ministerial responsibility.	True
B	The conventions of collective and individual responsibility are included in the written UK constitution.	False
C	Under the convention of individual ministerial responsibility, a secretary of state must take responsibility for the running of his/her department.	True
D	In 2003 Robin Cook resigned from the Labour cabinet over the Iraq war as he could not follow collective responsibility.	True
E	During referendums such as the 2016 Brexit vote the Prime Minister can suspend collective ministerial responsibility.	True

Q2	For each Ministerial role listed below, decide whether it relates to individual responsibility or collective responsibility	Type of responsibility
A	Ensuring the smooth and effective running of a government department.	Individual
B	Taking key decisions on broad areas of government policy.	Collective
C	Answering questions about a specific issue in the House of Commons or at a select committee.	Individual
D	Talking in public or to the media about government proposals or decisions.	Collective
E	Resigning as unable to agree with the direction or decision making made by the cabinet.	Collective

Q3	Fill in the missing words
	<p>The principle of collective responsibility requires that Ministers should be able to express their views frankly in the expectation that they can argue freely in private while maintaining a united front when decisions have been reached. This in turn requires that the privacy of opinions expressed in Cabinet and Ministerial Committees, including in correspondence, should be maintained</p> <p>The internal process through which a decision has been made, or the level of Committee by which it was taken should not be disclose. Decisions reached by the Cabinet or Ministerial Committees are binding on all members of the Government. They are, however, normally announced and explained as the decision of the Minister concerned. On occasion, it may be desirable to emphasise the importance of a decision by stating specifically that it is the decision of Her Majesty's Government. This, however, is the exception rather than the rule. Ministers also have an obligation to ensure decisions agreed in Cabinet and Cabinet Committees (and in write-rounds) are implemented.</p> <p>Matters wholly within the responsibility of a single Minister and which do not significantly engage collective</p>

responsibility need not be brought to the Cabinet or to a Ministerial Committee unless the Minister wishes to inform his colleagues or to have their **advice**. No definitive criteria can be given for issues which engage collective responsibility. The Cabinet **Secretariats** can advise where departments are unsure, however, the final decision rests with the **Prime Minister**. When there is a difference between departments, it should not be referred to the Cabinet until other means of resolving it have been exhausted.

Before publishing a policy statement (**white** paper) or a consultation paper (**green** paper), departments should consider whether it raises issues which require full collective ministerial consideration through the appropriate Cabinet Committee. The expectation is that most such papers will need collective agreement prior to publication.

Take from the Ministerial Code (Dec 2016 version)

Q4	The Seven Principles of Public Life, known as the Nolan Principles, were defined by the Committee for Standards in Public Life. These form a guide to ministerial conduct. Match the correct term to the principle.	
Nolan Principle	Correct Term	
Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other benefits for themselves, their family or their friends	Selflessness	
Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties.	Integrity	
In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.	Objectivity	
Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.	Accountability	
Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands it.	Openness	
Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.	Honesty	
Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.	Leadership	

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- Gives Government stability
- Unity within the Cabinet
- Ensure confidence and public support of the Government is maintained
- Brings potentially unstable coalition governments together in the public eye.
- If someone cannot publicly agree with a policy, they are expected to resign as to recreate unity within the Cabinet

Case study suggested answers

Source-based question: Using the source as a starting point, explain why collective responsibility is an important aspect of UK government.

- It allows government to 'deliver their programme'
 - Usually there is a mandate for this, based on winning a majority in a general election, but this is not necessarily the case in Coalition
 - Therefore, collective responsibility in Coalition relies on "goodwill, mutual trust and agreed procedures which foster collective decision making and responsibility while respecting each party's identity"
 - i.e. collective responsibility is vital for allowing decisions to be made
 - Cabinet member will feel as if their input is valuable (although cabinet membership is "approximately in proportion to the size of the two Parliamentary parties")
 - The source says "Close consultation...will be the foundation of the Coalition's success" i.e. collective responsibility leads to more successful government
- Deliberations and discussions inside the cabinet remain private in order to allow the public to perceive 'stronger government' on the outside – this allows disagreements between ministers to be dealt with robustly, and allows disputes to be resolved quickly without getting in the way of important government business. If they feel that they cannot agree with the government line, even in Coalition, then they must resign from their post.
- It can help to provide strength to the PM, and in this case, Deputy PM – Coalition government is unusual in the UK and so it was important that the unusual arrangements stood up to the test