

## Public Sector News

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### What's new in public-sector information?

Keeping track of the structure of government departments and their areas of responsibility is a challenge at the best of times. When all or even some of it changes, we need to be able to find out what has changed, and which functions belong to which departments. So when the Prime Minister announces, as he did at the end of September, a Cabinet reshuffle and creation of a new department, where do you go for authoritative information?

The Direct.gov website ([www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)), described as the 'official government website for citizens' and which aims to give 'easy access to the public services you use and the information you need, delivered by the UK government' is clearly the first stop. The site carried a news story explaining that changes had been made, and a link to a page for the only new department created this time, the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC). The link, at the time, took you to a very basic page, with links to the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR), the departments from which groups were brought together to form the new department.

Directgov then pointed enquirers to the 10 Downing Street site at [www.number10.gov.uk](http://www.number10.gov.uk) which is the 'official site of the Prime Minister's Office.' It would be good to say that all the information could be found there in an instant. This may have been the case on the day of the announcement, or very soon after, because at that time the news story would have been prominent. However, within a week, the news story had inevitably dropped down a couple of pages and a search for 'cabinet reshuffle' turned up 195 entries that did not appear to be in date order. Tracking back to the press release brought up a full list of the changes and new appointments etc., as they had been announced.

When the situation is stabilised, the Directgov site carries a directory of government departments and agencies arranged alphabetically. It is not, though, the most obvious link. It used to be linked from the home page under 'Directories', which was not necessarily where you would expect to find it, but it was at least at a high level in the navigation. Now, it can be found under *Government, Citizens and Right*; look there for the *Guide to Government*. This A-Z list is useful but will not really help if you are unsure which department or agency looks after a particular topic.

Another source for the information about ministers is the Cabinet Office website. This site specifically covers ministerial responsibilities at [www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/ministerial\\_responsibilities.aspx](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/ministerial_responsibilities.aspx), where full details of UK government ministers, their responsibilities and their contact details are given. The site points back to the No 10 site for details of cabinet ministers, and links to the Civil Service Parliamentary Pay and Allowances section of the Leader of the House of Commons web

site (<http://www.commonleader.gov.uk/output/Page1625.asp>) for details of ministerial salaries.

For a more thorough coverage of official publications, see the SCOOP News in the journal of the CILIP Information Services Group, *Refer* published three times a year.

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