

The Secretary of State for Wales

Quick Guide

September 2012

Introduction

The Secretary of State for Wales is a member of the UK cabinet and is supported by Wales Office staff in London and Cardiff. The Secretary of State is **not** a member of the National Assembly of Wales but under the *Government of Wales Act 2006* (“the 2006 Act”) has certain powers and responsibilities in relation to it. The current Secretary of State for Wales is the Rt.Hon. David Jones MP, appointed on 4 September 2012.

The current Secretary of State is supported by Baroness Randerson, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State and Stephen Crabb MP, Lords Commissioner to HM Treasury and Parliamentary Under Secretary of State. The Secretary of State is also assisted by Daniel Kawczynski MP, Parliamentary Private Secretary.

History

The Welsh Office and the post of Secretary of State for Wales were created in 1964 by the Labour Government headed by the Rt.Hon. Harold Wilson MP. There have been 16 Secretaries of State for Wales:

- Rt. Hon. James Griffiths MP Labour
- Rt. Hon Cledwyn Hughes MP Labour
- Rt. Hon George Thomas MP Labour
- Rt. Hon Peter Thomas MP Conservative
- Rt. Hon John Morris MP Labour
- Rt. Hon Nicholas Edwards MP Conservative
- Rt. Hon Peter Walker MP Conservative
- Rt. Hon David Hunt MP Conservative
- Rt. Hon John Redwood MP Conservative
- Rt. Hon William Hague MP Conservative
- Rt. Hon Ron Davies MP Labour
- Rt. Hon Alun Michael MP Labour
- Rt. Hon Paul Murphy MP Labour
- Rt. Hon Peter Hain MP Labour

- Rt. Hon. Cheryl Gillan MP Conservative
- Rt. Hon. David Jones MP Conservative

The Wales Office

The Wales Office website states:

the Wales Office supports the Secretary of State for Wales in ensuring the smooth working of the devolution settlement in Wales. It is Wales' voice in Westminster and Westminster's voice in Wales.

As well as being Wales' voice in Westminster and Westminster's voice in Wales, the Wales Office is responsible for ensuring the smooth running of Welsh legislation through Parliament and for financial transactions between the UK Government and the National Assembly for Wales. It also undertakes certain reserved functions for Wales.¹

The Secretary of State has a number of duties with regard to the Assembly which are discussed below but at Westminster he or she is voted the Welsh block grant by Parliament, which is then passed on to the Assembly in the Welsh Consolidated Fund.

The Secretary of State is also responsible for steering through Parliament legislation which concerns only Wales. This has included *the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004*; the *Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2005*; the *Commissioner for Older People (Wales) Act 2006* and the *Government of Wales Act 2006*. Between 2007 and 2011 the Secretary of State was also responsible for taking Legislative Competence Orders through Parliament.

The 2011 Annual Report described the responsibilities of the Secretary of State as:

The Secretary of State has overall Ministerial responsibility for the operation of the Wales Office and represents Welsh interests at Cabinet. She is responsible for maintaining close working relations with Welsh Government Ministers, including preserving Wales' place as part of the Union; representing the coalition Government in relation to a wide variety of interests in Wales; and ensuring Welsh interests are properly understood and represented across Whitehall. The Secretary of State also addresses the National Assembly for Wales on the coalition Government's legislative programme.²

The Wales Office has 60 staff based in London and Cardiff and works primarily within Government and between the UK Government and the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Government. The Wales Office has a number of service level agreements with the Ministry of Justice to support the delivery of its core responsibilities, and the necessary support services.³

The Secretary of State and the National Assembly

The *Government of Wales Act 2006* ("the 2006 Act") retains a section⁴ entitling the Secretary of State for Wales to participate, but not to vote, in proceedings of the Assembly, and to have access to documents relevant to those proceedings

The Act also retains the requirement for the Secretary of State for Wales to consult the Assembly about the UK Government's legislative programme and to participate in a plenary session of the Assembly at least once in the session. The Secretary of State can participate by actually attending the plenary session, or by video link. Where, after the beginning of the session, it is decided that a bill should be introduced into Parliament and that bill has not been included in the Secretary of State's initial consultation with the Assembly, then the Secretary of State must consult the Assembly about it (unless it appears to the Secretary of State to be inappropriate to do so)

The 2006 Act gives the Secretary of State certain powers in relations to Assembly elections. He or she has the power to

¹ [Wales Office website](#). [accessed 5 September 2012]

² Wales Office, Annual Report 2010/11

³ Ibid.

⁴ *Government of Wales Act* (c.32) s.32 (1)

vary the date of a general election or an extraordinary general election and to make provision about Assembly Elections.

Some of the powers and duties of the Secretary of State for Wales in relation to the Assembly under the Act are:

- Power to intervene in certain cases. The Secretary of State may make an Order prohibiting the Clerk from submitting a proposed Assembly Bill for approval by the Monarch in Council. This applies in cases where the proposed Measure:
 - would have an adverse effect on matters which are not within the legislative competence of the Assembly;
 - might have a serious adverse impact on water resources in England, water supply in England or the quality of water in England;
 - would have an adverse effect on the operation of the law as it applies in England; or
 - would be incompatible with any international obligation or the interests of defence or national security.⁵
- Statement of estimated payments. Secretary of State must make a statement each financial year and lay it before the Assembly.
- Intervention in case of functions relating to water etc. The Act allows the Secretary of State to intervene where the exercise of (or failure to exercise) devolved functions by the First Minister, the Welsh Ministers or the Counsel General, or by anyone else upon whom such functions have been conferred by an Assembly Act, might have a serious adverse impact on water resources, supply or quality in England.

Further information

⁵ *Government of Wales Act 2006* (c.32) s114

For further information on the/about the **Secretary of State for Wales**, please contact Alys Thomas (alys.thomas@Wales.gov.uk), Research Service.

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We welcome your comments. These should be sent to: **Research Service, National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff, CF99 1NA** or e-mailed to Research.Service@wales.gov.uk

The Research Service has produced this Quick Guide for the benefit of Assembly Members and their support staff. Authors are available to discuss the contents of these papers with Members and their staff but cannot advise members of the general public.

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