

Chapter 12

Arm's length bodies

Non-Ministerial Departments

A non-ministerial department is:

- A Government department headed by a senior civil servant instead of a minister (it often has a regulatory or inspection function, hence the need to be politically impartial and independent from ministers)
- Not directly accountable to a minister
- Has a sponsoring minister who is accountable to Parliament for its overall performance
- Receives funding from Parliament

Examples: National Crime Agency, Ofsted, Crown Prosecution Service, Charity Commission, HM Revenue and Customs

Executive agencies were set up in 1988 under the Next Steps programme.

- Legally part of a Government department, but provide government services as an independent unit of the department with a clearly separate identity
- Routine operations are managed by civil servants, who are directly accountable to the minister
- Ministers set out the policy framework within which they must operate
- The minister is directly accountable to Parliament for the agency
- Funded by the relevant department

Examples: the DVLA (Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency), HM Prisons Service, Maritime and Coastguard Agency

Non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs)—often known as quangos (quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations)—are the biggest group of ALBs. They are public bodies delivering government functions independently of ministerial control.

- Not Government departments or part of a Government department
- Not headed by a minister; a non-executive board is responsible for delivery
- The sponsoring minister sets a strategic policy framework for their operation (defining what they do) and is accountable to Parliament for the body's overall performance
- The minister appoints the body's board members
- Not staffed by civil servants

NDPBs fall into four categories:

- Executive (carry out various functions including administrative, regulatory and technical, e.g. Environment Agency, Health and Safety Executive, Parole Board, NHS England)

- Advisory (give independent specialist advice to Government e.g. Committee on Standards in Public Life, Law Commission)
- Tribunal (are part of the justice system and have jurisdiction over a specific area of law e.g. Traffic Commissioners, Investigatory Powers Tribunal)
- Independent monitoring boards (oversee prisons and immigration removal centres e.g. HM Inspectorate of Prisons)

Public corporations are market bodies (selling goods or services) that are controlled by central government but have day-to-day operational independence. The corporations themselves are not part of central Government.

Examples: the BBC, Civil Aviation Authority, Historic Royal Palaces