

How does the Reservoirs Committee Operate?

Background

The panel system of reservoir engineers was set up in its current form by the Reservoirs Act 1975. That Act required the Secretary of State to set up panels of appropriately qualified civil engineers to inspect and supervise reservoirs, appointed after consultation with the President of the Institution of Civil Engineers, or a committee set up for that purpose

Thus the 'Institution Committee under the Reservoirs Act 1975', more commonly known as the Reservoirs Committee, was created. The functions of the Reservoirs Committee are now to advise all the UK devolved governments under the Act and in particular under Section 4 – Qualification of Engineers.

Committee Composition

The committee is chaired by the President of the Institution of Civil Engineers, or someone appointed by the President. Members include ex-officio representatives of:

- Defra
- Scottish Government
- The Environment Agency (as enforcement Authority for England)
- Scottish Environment Protection Agency
- Welsh Government or Natural Resources Wales
- Department for Infrastructure Northern Ireland

Members also include six All Reservoirs Panel Engineers and four Supervising Engineers, with at least one of the Supervising Engineers representing a reservoir owner. At least one member of the Reservoirs Committee is expected to be a member of the British Dams Society (BDS) Committee. Currently Anthea Peters and Rachel Pether, Supervising Engineers who are members of the BDS Committee, sit on the Reservoirs Committee.

These ten panel engineers are appointed as members of the committee by the Institution Council for a three year term, but can be reappointed after a gap of at least one year. Members must demonstrate knowledge of the legislative differences between national governments by attendance at relevant BDS events or other courses.

Two sub-committees, each comprising four All Reservoirs Panel Engineers, are drawn from these panel engineers, and are responsible for examining all applications for reappointment to Panels and for recommending to the Reservoirs Committee the advice to be given to the Secretary of State in respect of each application.

Each Sub-Committee decides which of the applicants for reappointment are to be interviewed in order that the Reservoirs Committee may be satisfied regarding the applicant's eligibility for reappointment.

Interview Panel

An Interview Panel's role is to interview all applicants for first appointment to a Panel and those applicants for reappointment to a Panel that the Sub-Committees have decided require an interview prior to reappointment. Most interviews are held at the ICE building in One Great George Street, London, but could be held elsewhere.

An Interview Panel comprises a Chair and two other members. If the Interview Panel is to interview an applicant for appointment or reappointment to the All Reservoirs Panel the Interview Panel must contain two members of the All Reservoirs Panel. **It is an overriding requirement that an applicant for appointment or reappointment to the All Reservoirs Panel shall be interviewed by a Panel, the majority of whose members are themselves members of the All Reservoirs Panel.**

The members of the Interview Panel are drawn from the Sub-Committee on rotation, but no member may interview an applicant for appointment or reappointment with whom he or she has had any other contact which might reasonably be considered to compromise impartiality, or with whom any matter likely to cause a conflict of interest might arise.

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If an applicant for appointment or reappointment who has been invited to attend an interview raises an objection, whatever the grounds, to a member or members of the proposed interview panel, this must be referred to the Reservoirs Committee to consider whether the grounds cited give legitimate cause for the composition of the interview panel to be changed in accordance with the applicant's wishes.

The Interview Panel reports its findings to the Reservoirs Committee and makes recommendations to the Reservoirs Committee in respect of the suitability for appointment of the applicants it has interviewed. The Reservoirs Committee makes the decision as to whether an applicant should be appointed or reappointed by a majority vote, based on the findings of the Interview Panel.

How are Committee members chosen?

A new system for appointment of Panel Engineers to the committee was agreed by the committee members at the May 2017 meeting, and has since been implemented. Vacancies are now advertised on the BDS website, and all eligible Panel Engineers are invited to apply. The new system provides that in the event that the number of applicants exceeds the number of vacancies, the current members of the committee will vote in order to make the appointments.

What are the commitments of a Committee Member?

The Reservoirs Committee meets three times a year, and committee members are also expected to spend around three days a year interviewing candidates for the Panels. In addition to this, members are expected to review the applications of all new candidates for the four Panels, and half the applications for reappointment submitted by existing Panel Engineers.

The Procedures of an Application

Applications for first appointment or reappointment to the Panels are sent by applicants to Defra and forwarded on to the Secretary of the Reservoirs Committee. From here they are forwarded on to Reservoir Committee members as required, i.e. to the full committee for new applicants; and to one of the Sub-Committees for re-applicants as described above.

Generally interviews take place around six weeks after applications have been received. Once the interview has taken place, the Interview Panel presents its findings at the next committee meeting, which is generally around a month after the interviews. The applicant is appointed or otherwise based on a majority vote informed by the findings of the Interview Panel.

The Chair of the Interview Panel then provides a summary of the Committee's final decision, which is forwarded by the Secretary of the Reservoirs Committee to Defra and the Scottish Government, who advise the candidate of the Committee's decision regarding appointment in England and Wales, and Scotland respectively.