



The Commissioner for
Public Appointments

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The Rt Hon Francis Maude MP
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Dear Francis,

Publication of the final version of new Recruitment Principles

I was grateful for your letter of 28 March, setting out the Government's formal response to the consultation on the Commission's *Recruitment Principles*, and for the time you took to meet the Commission Board in March. We found the discussion constructive and there were shared views about the need to improve Civil Service recruitment and continue the process of Civil Service reform. The Commission will continue to support those objectives.

You asked – both at our meeting and in your letter – for the Commission's views on whether it was advisable for the Government to restrict future Permanent Secretary appointments to internal candidates, particularly given the difficulty of attracting and appointing external candidates at this level.

The Commission is in favour of opening up senior posts to external recruitment. If the Government wants to change the Civil Service, then there is a continuing need to bring people in at senior levels with different skills, different experience and different perspectives. We see great benefit both in bringing in fresh talent and in ensuring that internal candidates are properly tested against a wide field.

Some of the most successful external recruitment is at Director and Director General level, but it has proved difficult to attract external fields for Heads of Department appointments. There are two main reasons. First, Ministers and the senior Civil Service leadership are often too risk averse in bringing in candidates from outside to the top posts. And, secondly, current recruitment practices (which are Civil Service, not Commission, practices) are not always well suited to credible external recruitment at this level. Time and again the Commission is frustrated to see insufficient effort going in to external recruitment. In the short-term, this makes a good appointment less likely; in the longer term, it reduces the likelihood of attracting serious external candidates, particularly from the private sector, since they will quickly get the impression that the Government is not serious about external recruitment.

Both of these are undesirable – for Government, for the Civil Service and for the country. We want to see Departments stepping up their recruitment practices so that they are more effective at securing strong diverse fields of applicants. This means being more flexible on pay; taking more time over recruitment and, especially, search; nurturing a pipeline of external people and giving them time to understand the role; and, as you and I have discussed, putting less weight on formal panel interviews. Above all, it means being willing to take the risk on candidates who will, by definition, not have Whitehall experience to the degree of an insider, and will be on a longer learning curve. But the gain in terms of senior leadership may sometimes be worth taking that risk.

So our short answer to the question is don't close off the option of external recruitment at the top levels of the Civil Service. By all means, be more selective about which posts are opened up to competition. But, once the decision to recruit externally is taken, put more effort into finding a strong field of candidates, even if that takes time. If you do, you will find the Commission is a strong ally.

There is one small additional point. You suggest in your letter that the Commission makes appointments and that it is only the Commission that makes merit based judgements. That is not the case. The judgement must be taken by the selection panel, which is normally made up of senior officials and non-executives from the recruiting department, plus at least one independent member. The Commission does not seek to impose its judgement in place of the panel's. Given the significance of the panel's role, it is important to create independent authoritative panels, with strong external representatives to balance the participation of senior civil servants. In our experience, the non-executives who have been involved in selection panels have played a particularly valuable role.

Turning to the specific points in your letter:

Head of Department appointments

The Commission Board discussed this issue again in detail this week after receiving your letter and in the light of the variety of views we received during our consultation. We have always sought to ensure that we are proceeding in a way that reflects a cross-party consensus among the main Parliamentary parties. We have, therefore, given particular weight to the opposition of the House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee to further piecemeal change to Head of Department appointments ahead of a more in-depth examination of the future of the Civil Service. In the light of PASC's views we have therefore concluded that we should not move from the current position at this time.

We recognise that the wider debate about the Civil Service is very much alive and moving fast. The Commission intends to contribute actively to it. If and when Parliament reaches a different consensus, we will of course want to look again at this issue.

We have, however, taken on board some of the comments made during the consultation about the way in which 'Option One' was presented, and have sought to

improve it in the revised *Recruitment Principles*, in particular being clearer about the enhanced role of the Prime Minister.

Extended Ministerial Offices

We made it clear in our consultation document that we did not intend to change this guidance ahead of a fuller look at the experience of EMOs at the twelve month point. However, we are willing to clarify the issue of line management, which you raise, in a footnote. This retains the main text as originally published but responds positively to the point you make.

Political impartiality

You will see that we have amended the text on this issue to simplify this requirement and make clear that the approach taken must be proportionate to the level of seniority and the nature of the role. In most cases, it is likely to be sufficient simply to ask applicants to indicate on their application form that they understand this requirement, but the judgement should be taken by the panel (which, in 99% of cases, will be chaired by a Departmental official) rather than prescribed in our rules.

Delegations

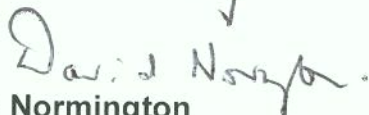
We have thought long and hard about where to set the delegation level, reflecting on the points that you and others have made, but have concluded that we should retain the link to salary set out in the consultation paper.

I should stress that this delegation limit relates only to appointments made by exception to the statutory requirement for appointment on merit, following a fair and open competition. Departments retain the delegation to run competitions for posts below Pay Band 2 irrespective of the salary on offer. It is only where that requirement is being set aside that the new delegation limit applies.

As the number of appointments being made at senior levels to the Civil Service from outside the public sector increases, we have a senior cadre within the Civil Service for whom salary rate rather than the rather old-fashioned concept of 'grade' is more important. We therefore think that it is appropriate that our Recruitment Principles reflect this cultural shift.

We hope that, despite our differences on a few points of detail, we can continue to engage with you on wider issues of Civil Service reform, not least in the context of our forthcoming Triennial Review. Our meeting in March demonstrated, I think, that there are several important areas of shared interest and endeavour.

Yours sincerely



David Normington