



CABINET OFFICE

Civil Service Chief Operating Officer & Cabinet Office Permanent Secretary

Catherine Little CB
Civil Service Chief Operating Officer
and Cabinet Office Permanent Secretary
10 January

Simon Hoare MP
Chair, Public Administration and
Constitutional Affairs Committee

Dear Chair,

At the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee hearings on 4 and 10 December, I committed to update you on multiple areas of Cabinet Office business which I have outlined below:

Business Appointment Rules and the role of ACOBA

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster recently outlined the importance of bringing fresh ideas and expertise into government to help drive public sector reform. Key to this is Business Appointment Rules, which exist to perform the vital function of protecting the integrity of government. For civil servants at Director General grade and above, and for equivalent special advisors, the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (ACoBA) provides advice on applications under these rules.

The Rules make clear that it is in the public interest that people with experience of public administration should be able to move into other sectors, but recognise that this can give rise to real or perceived conflicts of interest. Enabling this movement of expertise relies on consistent and transparent processes and the management of any potential, or perceived, conflicts of interest; this is the function of the Business Appointment Rules.

These rules are vital to protect the integrity of government and, for example, against allegations of partiality in the award of contracts. But we do not want them to prevent talented individuals from taking up a post in government by making it harder for them to return to their previous industry. As I mentioned to the Committee, there is certainly more we can do to make these processes clearer to applicants and - where possible - more streamlined. The most effective way of doing this is via early communication, so those moving into government can make this decision in full knowledge of the facts. In circumstances where people are seconded from their parent organisation for a defined time period, a robust assessment of any outside interests and risks must be made to identify any potential, perceived, or conflicts of interest.

The government has committed to reforming the Business Appointment Rules. We will update the Committee of this progress in due course, once formal Ministerial decisions have been made.

Missions

You were able to speak with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster ahead of our joint session, which I hope answered the question around the timing and frequency of the Mission Delivery Board meetings to your satisfaction.

Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination Training:

Training on Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination in the Cabinet Office is not mandatory. However, all staff are strongly encouraged by myself and senior leaders to attend all the available training.

One of these is a 'Fair Treatment for All' workshop, which in the last year has been piloted, rolled out, and has been well received by the business. Progress has been made to ensure that as well as participating, business units also have the opportunity to upskill their own staff to deliver these workshops, supporting them in owning and personalising this work and conversations. Moving forwards into FY25/26, I will be setting a very clear expectation that all business units should be engaging with this learning at both delegated and SCS levels and am asking business units to conduct quarterly reviews on their progress.

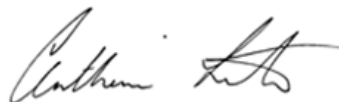
In November 2024, the Cabinet Office moved to include Civil Service Expectations as one of the four required (and mandated) learning packages, which all colleagues are expected to do each year. This aligns the Cabinet Office with most other departments, and this learning package ensures that individuals understand the expected behaviours of a Civil Servant which actively support an inclusive culture, and act in line with the Civil Service Code, our Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, and the 2010 Equality Act. I am currently reviewing all mandatory training within the department and what the best approach is to addressing BHD.

Public Bodies

The Arms Length Bodies (ALB) Landscape publication, published on 17 December, covers the role, headcount and spend of 305 Arms Length Bodies that were active in the 2022/23 financial year. We are collecting data for the 2023/24 financial year and expect to receive data on 309 ALBs that were active during this year. We are aiming to publish the 2023/24 landscape analysis around the end of this financial year.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to give evidence at the two oral evidence sessions last month. I will look forward to further engagement with the Committee on these important topics as well as the wider remit of Cabinet Office business.

Yours sincerely,



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