



HM Government

Sir Chris Wormald KCB
Cabinet Secretary
Cabinet Office
70 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2AS

Simon Hoare MP

Member of Parliament for Dorset North

Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee

30 October 2025

Dear Simon,

Thank you for your letter of 17 October about the process of the appointment of the former Ambassador to the United States. I will respond to each of your questions in turn.

By way of background, Section 10 (3) a of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 (CRAAG) provides that certain senior diplomatic appointments (Heads of Mission and Governors) can be excepted from the general requirement to be made “on merit on the basis of fair and open competition.” Those appointed in line with this provision of CRAAG 2010 as Heads of Mission are appointed on regular (if normally fixed term) contracts, to the grade of the job they have been appointed to, with standard terms and conditions for the grade, governed by the Diplomatic Service Code and Regulations, and standard line management and performance appraisal arrangements.

Following the former HMA Washington’s withdrawal, the Prime Minister asked for a number of immediate changes to be made to standardise the process of making Direct Ministerial Appointments. This revised guidance has now been published, and I have attached it to this letter. These changes include:

- The introduction of a standard requirement for due diligence to be carried out;
- For high profile roles, or where due diligence has identified potential risks, the requirement for the senior sponsor to undertake a pre-appointment interview. This should discuss any conflicts of interests and how these will be managed, and should assess any other reputational risks to the department or individual; and

- A summary of these steps will be provided for the appointing minister to make a decision.

The scope of this guidance covers all Direct Ministerial Appointments (i.e. appointments made directly by Ministers to specific offices). While Direct Ministerial Appointments to the Diplomatic Service are a separate category of appointment, such appointments will follow the same process and will in addition of course follow the process as set out in CRAG and the Diplomatic Service Code.

The Permanent Undersecretary at the FCDO will write to the chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee separately to set out the changes that will be made for such appointments to the Diplomatic Service in more detail.

Could you outline the purpose of this due diligence process and how it is conducted, and the level of detail the process goes into?

The Cabinet Office can be asked to undertake due diligence as part of the identification and selection of appointees to specific roles. Given the high profile nature of a political appointment to a senior diplomatic role, No 10 commissioned a due diligence exercise in relation to the appointment of the former Ambassador to the United States.

Due diligence largely collates publicly available information and other departments are not routinely engaged in the process. This is because the purpose of the process is to identify any reputational risks or potential conflicts of interests that may need to be considered and which informs a decision as to whether additional information, conversations or advice may be needed if the appointment is to proceed further (for example, a conversation with the candidate about willingness to divest certain financial interests, or with other relevant departments about particular issues or risks). It is not a formal approval stage through which an appointment must progress, and the Civil Service has no 'veto' over the preferred appointee. In the case of a direct appointment, once the Prime Minister has identified and selected an appointee, the usual ambassadorial appointments processes are then undertaken by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

In the case of the former HMA Washington's appointment, the report included:

- A summary of his professional and financial relationships and an initial assessment of what steps may be required in order to resolve any potential conflicts of interest, in order to take up the role;
- A summary of reputational risks, including his previous resignations as a minister, and his prior relationship with Jeffrey Epstein. This section includes direct extracts from media reporting and notes a general reputational risk. The only information which was not already in the public domain at the time is a reference to official records which have since been disclosed by the National Archives, which relate to a Tony Blair meeting with Epstein that was facilitated by the former Ambassador at the time.
- A list of the former Ambassador's previous political and non-political roles; and
- A section on internet searches which summarises news reporting available at the time.

After the appointment was announced, the usual ambassadorial appointments process was followed, including a thorough process to understand and consider the individual's private interests and any mitigations that may be required to prevent a conflict of interest. It also included the National Security Vetting process.

The National Security Vetting process (which covers security clearance up to and including Developed Vetting) is an entirely separate process to the due diligence process. It will usually happen after a job offer and before an individual takes up post. National Security Vetting will apply regardless of how a particular appointment is made and depends on the classification of information to which the postholder requires access.

If concerns are raised, who are they raised with and who makes the decision that the appointment should proceed in spite of concerns?

The due diligence exercise may highlight potential issues or risks which informs what further advice or conversations are required, including with other departments. The decision as to whether to proceed with an appointment is made by the relevant minister, in this case the Prime Minister.

Could you set out the reasons why the FCDO was not asked to contribute to this process on this occasion, and if it is standard practice for a department not to be consulted during due diligence assessments?

Could you also confirm whether the full report from the due diligence process was shared with FCDO and if not, could you set out the reasons why due diligence reports are not shared with relevant departments.

As set out above, the due diligence exercise is an 'in-house' exercise in the initial stages of an appointment process, which highlights potential issues or risks, and which informs a decision as to whether additional information, conversations or advice may be needed if the appointment is to proceed further (including with other relevant departments). It is largely a collation of open source material.

Due diligence is generally carried out by the appointing minister's department (in this case it was carried out by the Cabinet Office on behalf of No 10) so is not usually shared with other departments, and was not in this case. Due diligence is only an initial check carried out during the candidate selection process which forms part of the advice considered by the appointing minister.

The FCDO were responsible for carrying out the usual ambassadorial appointments process following the selection of the appointee.

Following the revelation of Lord Mandelson's relationship with Jeffery Epstein, has there been a review of why this relationship was not flagged by either PET or UKSV. If not, why not?

The former Ambassador's relationship with Jeffrey Epstein was in the public domain at the time of the appointment. As the Prime Minister has said, materially different information subsequently emerged. If that information had been available at the time the appointment would not have proceeded.

You will understand that I am unable to comment on information divulged during the vetting process.

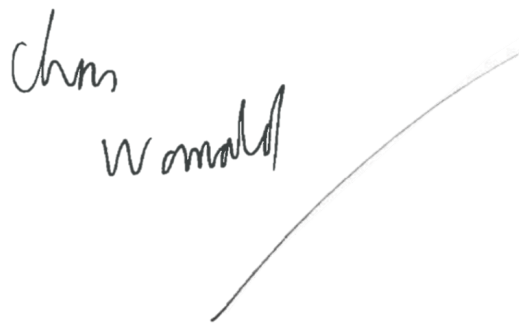
If a review has taken place, have any changes to the processes been implemented? If changes have been implemented, as long as it does not compromise the security of the process, please outline what these changes are?

Security vetting processes are kept under constant review to ensure they are fit for purpose. Due to the nature of the vetting process you will understand that I am unable to go into detail.

As set out above, the Government has also made a number of immediate changes to the process for making Direct Ministerial Appointments, including direct appointments to the Diplomatic Service, and the updated guidance has now been published and I enclose a copy to this letter.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee ahead of an evidence session on Monday 3 November regarding the withdrawal of the former Ambassador to the United States.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the first name 'Chris' and the surname 'Wormald' written in a cursive style. A long, sweeping diagonal line extends from the end of the signature towards the bottom right of the page.

SIR CHRIS WORMALD KCB
Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Civil Service