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Sir Bernard Jenkin MP
Chair of the Liaison Committee
House Of Commons
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Dear Sir Bernard,

Thank you for attending Cabinet Office Oral questions on Thursday 23 November, and also for your response to my letter about the recommendation by the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) in 2018 that a Civil Service Parliamentary Scheme be established. I was pleased to hear at Oral Questions that you had received my department's written evidence to your sub-committee's important "Scrutiny of Strategic Thinking in Government" inquiry, and note the points you raised during your supplementary question on churn and generalism in the Civil Service. As per your request, I am providing you with a supplementary note on these particular points, and I will also respond to your follow-up enquiries regarding the Civil Service Parliamentary Scheme.

Building Capability

Through the Government Campus, we are ensuring the Civil Service invests in the skills needed now and for the future by building a culture of continuous learning and offering targeted training. Our accessible, easy to navigate curriculum supports every civil servant to nurture and hone their skills by taking ownership of their own development, supported by line managers who value and reward commitment to learning.

Development of a cross-government taxonomy of skills and Civil Service skills strategy is underway. This complements the work we are doing to support continued investment in core skills. The Government Campus also works closely with the government professions - including science & engineering, digital & data and policy - to ensure we are investing in strategic capability in specialist skills.

Last year we launched the Leadership College for Government, bringing together teams to better support leaders and managers in the Civil Service (and wider public sector) to have the skills, knowledge and networks they need to tackle complex problems. We have introduced induction for all new Senior Civil Servants and tailored support for those recruited externally to reduce the risk of leaders leaving roles early due to poor induction; we are also refreshing the courses and development schemes available to our most senior leaders.

Assignment Duration

The 2021 Declaration on Government Reform stated an action to “set expected assignment durations on appointment for all SCS roles, taking account of the requirements of the role”. This would address the issue that movement at SCS level is often unplanned and that too many regular moves of SCS colleagues leads to inconsistencies.

There is a default minimum tenure for SCS of:

- three years for SCS1 and SCS2 roles (since July 2022);
- four years for SCS3 roles (since 2021); and,
- a five-year fixed term for permanent secretary appointments since 2014.

The initial impact of the policy will be reviewed by July 2024 with a fuller review in July 2025, following completion of the first 3-year cycle.

Pivotal Role Allowances (PRAs)

Pivotal Role Allowances (PRAs) have been in place since 2013 to help retain SCS delivering critical programmes and those responsible for implementing the Government’s priorities. Over 100 PRAs are currently in payment. PRAs are widely recognised as a helpful tactical solution to address flight risk. We recognise that longer term reform of the SCS pay system remains a priority.

Improving Recruitment

Initiatives announced by my predecessor in July 2023 will build the Civil Service’s reputation as an employer of choice and bring in high calibre people with the skills and experience the Civil Service needs. This includes working and testing approx. 15 discovery pilots across the Civil Service on areas of recruitment, such as attraction, assessments and reserve lists to reduce the time to hire, increase the quality and diversity of candidates and support in filling priority gaps with the right skills and capabilities. There is also work progressing on improving the use of Executive Search; and revamped processes to speed up recruitment and open up as many entry routes as possible.

Secondments

Secondments and interchange are effective routes to introduce new perspectives and challenge conventional thinking in government. They offer existing civil servants the opportunity to develop high priority skills and improve their capability, which can improve employee retention, and enable the Civil Service to bring in skills when and where they are needed.

Our aim is to embed secondments into the resourcing strategies of all departments, functions and professions. So far, all departments have made a commitment to secondments. There are currently 895 secondments taking place across 25 responding departments and engaged stakeholders: 583 into the Civil Service and 312 outward placements. There are elements of innovative practice happening in this space but there is more that can be achieved across government. We are supporting departments, alongside

professions and functions, to ambitiously scope out the role of secondments and interchange as a key element of their resourcing plans.

Industry Digital Secondment Programme

In partnership, the Central Digital and Data Office (CDDO) and the Centre of Secondments Expertise (CoSE), have developed and are currently piloting the Civil Service's first Digital Secondments Programme. This industry secondment programme sees us engage directly with organisations that are specialist and in the forefront of digital and tech developments.

Departments can draw on secondees for technical expertise and priority digital and technology initiatives. This initiative forms a new sourcing route (as an alternative to consultants, contingent labour or managed services) to recruit best-in-class industry expertise into high priority posts, in a manner and for a duration that enables knowledge transfer to government teams.

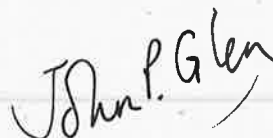
Proposal for a Civil Service Parliamentary Scheme

Thank you, again, for your response to my letter about PACAC's recommendations in 2018 to establish the Civil Service Parliamentary Scheme. As I said, work was undertaken in 2019 to scope a scheme that would give insight into the operational delivery of policy through front line services. This scoping work was paused in 2020 as resource was reprioritised. Initial scoping highlighted some challenges with the proposal, including how to provide a unique experience for MPs that went beyond what they already access through constituency work and identifying an appropriate means by which to fund it.

You are right that the Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme is a valuable experience for those backbench MPs that participate in it. The scheme is run from Parliament rather than the Ministry of Defence (MOD) through a charitable trust, funded by sponsorship, and open to MPs from all parties. If the committee finds that there is evidence of a demand for such a scheme, government departments would be pleased to cooperate with parliamentary bodies in looking at it again.

I hope this information is helpful and thank you, once again, for your interest in the work of the Cabinet Office.

Yours sincerely,



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