The civil service’s new hiring and promotion framework relies on a flawed basis of how people should develop their careers and staff should gain experience, former permanent secretary Sir Richard Mottram has told MPs.

Mottram voiced doubts over the new success profiles system being rolled out across departments at an evidence session for the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee’s inquiry into strategic leadership in the civil service.

The former Department for Work and Pensions, Ministry of Defence, and Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions perm sec was speaking on behalf of the Better Government Initiaitive, which brings together a host of senior former Whitehall officials.

Mottram questioned its fundamental premise of the profiles system, which replaces the former competence framework with five categories of assessment – ability, experience, technical, behaviours and strengths – and which is currently being rolled out.

“What I think is interesting about success profiles is the idea that every civil service job will effectively be put to competition and these success profiles will be used for that purpose,” he said.

“As I don’t believe that every civil service job should be put to competition, my enthusiasm is slightly muted.”

Chief people officer Rupert McNeil has argued that the new system will give managers greater flexibility to hire the right staff, compared with the framework it replaces.

Mottram told this week’s PACAC session that the civil service would benefit from a more line-manager driven model of staff development and experience-building than the current widely-documented reality of churn created by individuals seeking new roles, often in different departments.

“You do want people to have careers that build on – including experientially – what has gone before,” he said.

“If you have a highly competitive ‘chasing new postings’ model, where you can go from X to Y to Z, then that won’t necessarily happen.

“You need to have the capacity to encourage bits of line management to take people who don’t necessarily have experience so that they can learn.

“You have to be able to persuade someone in a delivery function to take someone who’s experience up until now has been policy and give them the experience that will allow them to have the broader vision.

“You can’t take all of your job decisions on the basis of ‘which person best fits the immediate demands of this job’. You need a model that is subtle both ways ‘round, and that requires a philosophy that recognises that, I think.”

Elsewhere in the session, Mottram praised the civil service’s HR function for having “clearly gone to a lot of effort” to set out career pathways for people who are going to be HR professionals in a way that the policy and operational delivery professions did not appear to have done.

He also referred to a notorious remark made to PACAC’s predecessor committee in the early 2000s, when he described the civil service as “a rather stupid dog” to demonstrate its willingness to loyally follow the commands of its political masters.

Mottram had subsequently expressed regret over the remark, saying that the analogy had been intended to portray a degree of training that resulted in an obedient and intelligent pet that followed orders.

“After I compared the civil service to a loyal dog, the context of which I now can’t remember, I was taken to one side by my superiors – and there weren’t many people above me, who said ‘do not make these canine analogies’,” he said at the session this week.

“I don’t quite know why, actually, because A: fundamentally the civil service is called a ‘service’ for a reason and it serves democratic society run by the people in charge of it, who are not civil servants; and B: because civil servants should show a lot of loyalty to the people they work with and for.”

Following Mottram’s comments about success profiles a Cabinet Office spokesperson said the new system would give managers a more rounded view of job candidates’ strengths and potential.

“Success profiles allow recruiters to assess the whole person, from their abilities and experience to their behaviours, increasing fairness within the recruitment process,” they said.

“They allow individuals to target their development and provide a common framework for managers to recruit the right people with the rights skills for their teams.”

*This story was updated at 18:00 on 19 October 2018 to include comments from the Cabinet Office*