



The Commissioner for  
Public Appointments

Sir David Normington GCB  
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Civil  
Service  
Commission

Sir Richard Mottram GCB  
Chair  
Better Government Initiative

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Dear Richard,

As promised when we met towards the end of last year I am writing to give you and your colleagues advance notice that the Civil Service Commission will be launching the public consultation on our *Recruitment Principles* on Monday 13 January. As you know our *Recruitment Principles* contain the Commission's rules and procedures for meeting the legal requirement that selection for appointment to the Civil Service is on merit on the basis of fair and open competition. I enclose an advance copy of our Consultation Document which contains the text of our proposed revision of the *Principles*. You will particularly want to note the sections on Head of Department appointments, on which, I suspect, much of the attention will focus.

The *Recruitment Principles* have not been fully reviewed since 2009. Much of the proposed text involves updating and clarification; in light of experience within departments; and to take account of the recent developments in the Civil Service Reform Programme, including those relating to the appointment of Heads of Department and the creation of Extended Ministerial Offices.

As we discussed, we have re-examined our 2012 guidance on Head of Department (Permanent Secretary) competitions, as we said we would, one year on. The draft revision of the *Recruitment Principles* gives two alternative texts. The first essentially imports into the *Recruitment Principles* the procedure outlined in December 2012, but with greater clarity on the respective roles of the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister.

The second option is a development of the first. It responds to criticism, especially from the Institute for Government, that the 2012 guidance increases procedural complexity, and leaves it unclear just how much Ministerial influence can be exercised at the final stage. In this second option we are clearer about the extent of Ministerial involvement in a situation where a panel assesses candidates to be of equivalent merit. Under this option those candidates' names can be put to the Prime Minister, who will then make the final decision, which must still be made on merit, in consultation with the Secretary of State and Head of the Civil Service. However, the *Principles* remain clear that if the panel assesses one candidate to be clearly better than the others, then only that candidate can be recommended to the Prime Minister for appointment.

The Commission hopes that this consultation and revision of the *Recruitment Principles* may give us the opportunity to shift the public debate away from the narrow issue of Ministerial Choice and onto the more important questions of how to attract the best people needed to meet the current challenges faced by the Civil Service.

We hope the Better Government Initiative will be responding to this consultation and look forward to reading your submission. I would also be very pleased to continue our face-to-face discussions.

Handwritten signature of John Hiney in black ink.Handwritten signature of David Normington in black ink.

**David Normington**