



**OFFICE OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON BUSINESS APPOINTMENTS**

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**BUSINESS APPOINTMENT APPLICATION: PETER WATKINS CBE**

The Committee has been asked to consider an application from Peter Watkins, former Director General of Strategy within the Security and Policy Operations for the Ministry of Defence (MOD) on becoming a Visiting Professor at King's College London.

Mr Watkins informed the Committee that this role will be to provide seminars and provide advice on conferences. He confirmed this is an unpaid role and is likely to involve a work commitment of 10 days per year.

Mr Watkins confirmed that this appointment may include limited contact with his former department by way of offering opportunities to speak at conferences and/or influence the agenda of those conferences.

Mr Watkins confirmed that within his last four years in office he had occasional contact with academic participants from King's College London at MOD supported seminars or events. King's College London are a provider of training and education to the Defence via the Defence Academy.

Mr Watkins also informed the Committee that during his time as DG at the Defence Academy between 2011 and 2014, King's College London was confirmed as an academic provider at the Joint Service Command & Staff College and the Royal College of Defence Studies. As DG here, he also held responsibility for the courses on which academics from King's College London taught.

Mr Watkins told the Committee that King's College London's contract with academic Joint Services Command & Staff College (a sub contract via Serco) was re-let just before he took up his post and so he had no part in the contract evaluation and award process. He also told the Committee that the contract with the Royal College of Defence Studies was re-let whilst he was in post and he thought King's College London was the only bidder. He confirmed that he had no role in choosing King's College London, but *'As Budget Holder for the Academy, I formally approved the commitment of funds to this activity - but, again, I had no part in the contract evaluation and award process. And would not have expected to - under the Academy's governance regime, such choices were delegated to the heads of the individual colleges, advised by the relevant MOD Contracts Branch'*.

The MOD made the following observations about this appointment:

- It was noted that Mr Watkins was involved in the award of work to King's College London while he was DG at the Defence Academy. However, this was four years ago and his contact with King's College London since then has been restricted to occasional contact at seminars and events relating to subsequent roles in security policy and operations. Further, it noted the appointment is unpaid. It considered the risk this appointment could be perceived as a reward is low.
- PW had no access to commercially sensitive information about competitors of King's College London, so the risk of objection from competitors is low.
- Conditions which prevent the use of privileged information; lobbying; and securing business for King's College London will mitigate the potential for King's College London to be seen to benefit unfairly from employing Mr Watkins.
- The MOD considered this should not preclude him from having contact with UK MOD he envisages; for example, inviting of speakers to academic events.

#### The Committee's consideration

Mr Watkins was formerly a DG at the Defence Academy which has a contract with King's College London, and the Committee<sup>1</sup> has considered whether this appointment could be perceived as a reward for decisions taken in Crown Service.

Whilst it is clear he had some involvement in the award of work with King's College London, this was limited to approving the spend; it occurred some years ago; and did not involve choosing the supplier. This is an unpaid role and his former department have no concerns regarding this appointment. The Committee therefore agrees with the MOD's assessment that the risk this appointment could be seen as a reward for decisions made in office is low.

The Committee has concluded that it is unlikely that Mr Watkins could provide an unfair advantage to King's College London as a result of the information he had access to as the MOD confirmed he has not had recent access to commercially sensitive information about competitors.

However, the Committee noted there is a possible risk of unfair advantage in relation to the contacts Mr Watkins may have gained whilst in post, in particular with reference to renewing contracts for provision of academic services with the MOD. Therefore, the lobbying ban imposed makes clear that it would be inappropriate for him to use his contacts across Government/ Whitehall to the unfair advantage of King's College London. Further, the Committee has imposed a specific ban on providing advice on the terms, or with regard to the subject matter of, a bid or contract relating directly to the work of the MOD.

Mr Watkins said this role may involve some limited contact with officials and the MOD have no concerns with this contact. Given the restriction above, the Committee consider such contact within the confined scope of the role described above would not be inappropriate.

The Committee's advice to the Secretary of State for Defence is that the appointment be subject to the following conditions:

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<sup>1</sup> This application for advice was considered by Sir Alex Allan; Jonathan Baume; Baroness Angela Browning; Lord Michael German; Baroness Helen Liddell; Richard Thomas and John Wood. Dr Susan Liautaud was unavailable. Terence Jagger recused himself from this application in line with ACOBA's published Code of Practice.

- he should not draw on (disclose or use for the benefit of himself or the organisation to which this advice refers) any privileged information available to him from his time in Crown service;
- for two years from his last day in Crown service he should not become personally involved in lobbying the UK Government on behalf of King's College London, its partners or subsidiaries, nor should he make use, directly or indirectly, of his contacts in Government and/or Crown service to influence decisions or policy on behalf of King's College London, its partners or subsidiaries. This does not preclude routine contact on matters relating to his duties as a Visiting Professor at King's College London as described above; and
- for two years from his last day in Crown service, he should not provide advice on the terms, or with regard to the subject matter of, a bid or contract relating directly to the work of the UK Ministry of Defence.

By 'privileged information' we mean official information to which a Minister or Crown servant has had access as a consequence of his or her office or employment and which has not been made publicly available. Applicants are also reminded that they may be subject to other duties of confidentiality, whether under the Official Secrets Act or otherwise.

The Business Appointment Rules explain that the restriction on lobbying means that the former Crown servant/Minister *"should not engage in communication with Government (Ministers, civil servants, including special advisers, and other relevant officials/public office holders) – wherever it takes place - with a view to influencing a Government decision, policy or contract award/grant in relation to their own interests or the interests of the organisation by which they are employed, or to whom they are contracted or with which they hold office."*

I should be grateful if you would ensure that we are informed as soon as Mr Watkins takes up this position, or if it is announced that he will do so (I enclose a form for this purpose). We shall otherwise not be able to deal with any enquiries, since we do not release information about appointments which have not been taken up or announced, and this could lead to a false assumption being made about whether he had complied with the Rules.

I should also be grateful if you would ask that Mr Watkins informs us if he proposes to extend or otherwise change the nature of his role as, depending on the circumstances, it may be necessary for him to make a fresh application.

Once this appointment has been publicly announced or taken up, we will publish this letter on the Committee's website, and where appropriate, refer to it in the relevant annual report.

Yours sincerely

Tiffany Amusu  
Committee Secretariat

