



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

G/7 Ground Floor, 1 Horse Guards Road SW1A 2HQ

Telephone: 020 7271 0839

Email: [acoba@acoba.gov.uk](mailto:acoba@acoba.gov.uk)

Website: <http://www.gov.uk/acoba>

July 2023

**BUSINESS APPOINTMENT APPLICATION: Stephen Philip Oldfield CB, former Chief Commercial Officer at Cabinet Office and Director General of Commercial and Life Sciences at the Department of Health and Social Care. Paid appointment with Portland Limited (Portland).**

1. Mr Oldfield sought advice from the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (the Committee) under the government's Business Appointments Rules for Former Crown Servants (the Rules) on taking up a role with Portland as a senior advisor.
2. The purpose of the Rules is to protect the integrity of the government. The Committee has considered the risks associated with the actions and decisions made during Mr Oldfield's time in office, alongside the information and influence he may offer Portland. The material information taken into consideration by the Committee is set out in the annex.
3. The Committee's advice is not an endorsement of the appointment - it imposes a number of conditions to mitigate the potential risks to the government associated with the appointment under the Rules.
4. The Rules set out that Crown servants must abide by the Committee's advice<sup>1</sup>. It is an applicant's personal responsibility to manage the propriety of any appointment. Former Crown servants are expected to uphold the highest standards of propriety and act in accordance with the 7 Principles of Public Life.

---

<sup>1</sup> Which apply by virtue of the Civil Service Management Code, The Code of Conduct for Special Advisers, The King's Regulations and the Diplomatic Service Code

## The Committee's Consideration of the risks presented

5. Mr Oldfield did not meet with Portland nor made any decisions specific to the company during his time as. Therefore, the Committee<sup>2</sup> considered the risk this appointment could reasonably be perceived as a reward for decisions made or actions taken in office is low.
6. Given Mr Oldfield's role as Chief Commercial Officer at Cabinet Office for DHSC and Director General of Life Sciences he will have had access to sensitive information that may overlap with this role. This risk is limited given the Cabinet Office confirmed Mr Oldfield's role was not one of a policy official and therefore his access to information on policy formation is not of particular concern and it did not consider his access to information posed any risk in relation to this work. Further, 7 months have passed since he had access to any information in the department.
7. There are risks associated with Mr Oldfield's network gained in government service - particularly as Portland does have a lobbying arm. As such there is a risk that his network and influence gained in office might be used to assist the organisation unfairly, which would raise risks under the Rules. This is particularly relevant given the company lobbies the government. It is therefore significant to the Committee's consideration that Portland confirmed Mr Oldfield's role is not aimed at contacting government and confirmed its commitment to acting in accordance with any restrictions imposed by ACOBA.
8. There are also risks related to Portland's unknown clients - if Mr Oldfield was to advise clients he had contact with during government, or advise on matters he had involvement in whilst in government this would raise risks under the Rules.

## The Committee's advice

9. Mr Oldfield and the company have confirmed there will be no lobbying of the government in this role, in line with the expectations set out in the Rules. However, there is a risk he could be seen to be offering Portland unfair access and influence in this role. The Committee's advice is therefore that he should have no direct engagement with the government on behalf of Portland.
10. To address the risk associated with Portland unknown clients, the Committee considered it necessary to impose a further condition. This makes it clear that in working with the company, Mr Oldfield should not advise on work with regard to any policy he had specific material involvement in or responsibility for in his time as Chief Commercial Officer at Cabinet Office for DHSC and Director General of Life Sciences.
11. The Committee considered the conditions below will sufficiently mitigate the risks in this case. These seek to prevent Mr Oldfield from drawing on his

---

<sup>2</sup> This application for advice was considered by Jonathan Baume; Isabel Doverty; The Rt Hon Lord Pickles; Richard Thomas; Mike Weir and Lord Larry Whitty. Andrew Cumpsty and Sarah de Gay were unavailable.

privileged information, contacts and influence gained in Crown service to the unfair advantage of Portland.

12. The Committee's advice, under the Government's Business Appointment Rules, that this appointment with **Portland Limited** should be subject to the following conditions:

- he should not draw on (disclose or use for the benefit of himself or the persons or organisations 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 or any of its Arm's Length Bodies on behalf of Portland Limited (including parent companies, subsidiaries, partners and clients); nor should he make use, directly or indirectly, of his contacts in the government and/or Crown service contacts to influence policy, secure business/funding or otherwise unfairly advantage Portland (including parent companies, subsidiaries, partners and clients);
- for two years from his last day in Crown service, he should not provide advice to Portland Limited (including parent companies, subsidiaries, partners and clients) on the terms of, or with regard to the subject matter of, a bid with, or contract relating directly to the work of the UK government or any of its arm's Length Bodies;
- for two years from his last day in Crown service he should not have any engagement on behalf of Portland Limited (including parent companies, subsidiaries, partners and clients) with the UK government; and
- for two years from his last day in Crown service he should not advise Portland or its subsidiaries on any work with regard to any policy he had specific involvement in or responsibility for as Chief Commercial Officer at Cabinet Office for DHSC and Director General of Life Sciences nor where he had a relationship with the relevant business during his time as Chief Commercial Officer at Cabinet Office for DHSC and Director General of Life Sciences.

13. The advice and the conditions under the government's Business Appointment Rules relate to an applicant's previous roles in government only; they are separate to rules administered by other bodies such as the Office of the Registrar of Consultant Lobbyists or the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. It is an applicant's personal responsibility to understand any other rules and regulations he may be subject to in parallel with this Committee's advice.

14. 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, the Civil Service Code or otherwise.

15. 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.'*
16. Please inform us as soon as Mr Oldfield takes up employment with this organisation.
17. Please also inform 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 the 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,

Isabella Wynn  
**Committee Secretariat**

## Annex - Material information

### The role

1. Mr Oldfield said he wishes to take up a paid, part-time role with Portland as a senior advisor. Mr Oldfield said Portland is a strategic communications agency. It is part of the Omnicom Group which is an American global media, marketing and corporate communications holding company, headquartered in New York City. The website states it combines ‘...*high level strategic counsel with quality execution*’. Stating it ‘...*draws on experience across the political world and global institutions spanning Downing Street and Whitehall to the EU institutions, the French National Assembly and the Bundestag, the UN and the WHO*’. The website states it offers expertise in crisis and reputation management, corporate comms, digital, data, research and polling, employee engagement, media counsel and training and many more.
2. Mr Oldfield said as a senior advisor to Portland he would be expected to provide the following services:
  - Board Challenge: attending some Board meetings and ad hoc meetings with the CEO and/or the COO to advise on particular issues including challenging the Portland Board around:
    - the creation and implementation of Portland’s strategy and
    - the effective operation of the Portland Board
  - Advising on International strategy in priority markets. The initial focus here would be Portland’s Europe offices, including
    - providing critique and guidance on the proposed strategy and capabilities and
    - supporting the business development approach.
  - Wider brand ambassadorial role - This element of the role would arise on an ad hoc basis where Portland requires assistance in driving brand building opportunities (such as contributing to Portland’s thought leadership offerings, giving talks, running round tables etc).
3. He said his appointment would not involve contact with government.
4. Portland provided confirmation that:

*‘Portland fully understands and respects the role of ACOBA in ensuring that there is no abuse (or perception of abuse) of privileged access or information obtained as a result of governmental positions’.*

*‘In relation to the appointment of Steve Oldfield, Portland undertakes that it will not request Steve to undertake any activities which would put him in breach of any requirements imposed by ACOBA. Portland does not envisage that Steve will have direct professional contact with politicians or government officials as a result of his role at Portland. Further, having discussed this matter with Steve, Portland is comfortable that he is aware that he will need to be mindful in respect of any social and personal contact with politicians and government officials to ensure that any such contact remains strictly social. We are also fully aware that Steve should not and cannot use any specific*

*privileged information obtained as a result of his government roles for the benefit of Portland or its clients’.*

*‘We trust that this letter provides clarity and reassurance as to Steve’s proposed role with Portland and to Portland’s commitment to acting in accordance with any restrictions set out by ACOBA’.*

#### Dealings in office

5. Mr Oldfield advised the Committee that he did not meet with Portland whilst in office. Further, he said he did not have any involvement in any policy development or decisions that would have been specific to Portland; had no relevant commercial or contractual responsibilities; nor access to sensitive information.

#### Departmental assessment

6. The Government Commercial Organisation confirmed the details provided by Mr Oldfield. It confirmed it had no relationship with Portland and Mr Oldfield was not involved in this decision or relationship:
7. The department confirmed Mr Oldfield was not a policy official but instead dealt with commercial and procurement matters. It confirmed Mr Oldfield did not have any access to information that could provide Portland with an unfair advantage.
8. The department said it has no concerns and recommended the standard conditions.