



OFFICE OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON BUSINESS APPOINTMENTS

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BUSINESS APPOINTMENT APPLICATION: Air Chief Marshal Sir Mike Wigston KCB CBE , former Chief of the Air Staff Ministry of Defence. Paid appointment with Faculty AI.

1. Air Chief Marshal (ACM) Sir Mike 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 his proposed role with Faculty AI as a Consultant Strategic Adviser.
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 ACM Sir Mike made during his time in office, alongside the information and influence he may offer Faculty AI. The material information taken into consideration by the Committee is set out in the annex.
3. The Committee considered whether this appointment was unsuitable given ACM Sir Mike's former role as Chief of the Air Staff and Faculty AI's work which overlaps with the defence sector. The Committee must also consider the information provided by his former department about his specific dealings with this employer and the sector.
4. The Committee's advice is not an endorsement of the appointment. The Committee has advised that a number of conditions be imposed to mitigate the potential risks to the government associated with this appointment under the Rules.
5. The Rules¹ set out that Crown servants must abide by the Committee's advice. 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.

The Committee's consideration of the risk presented

¹ 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.

6. Faculty AI is a technology company that provides software, consulting services and artificial intelligence (AI) solutions to customers. It works internationally across several sectors, including defence with one current contract with the MOD.
7. ACM Sir Mike had overall responsibility for the implementation of AI into the air force. However, it is significant that he had no involvement in the MOD's contracts or relationships with Faculty AI; and there is no evidence that he made any decisions specific to the company whilst in office. Therefore, the Committee² considered the risk that he could reasonably be seen to have been offered this role as a reward for decisions made or actions taken whilst in service is limited.
8. Whilst Faculty AI is not a defence company, it operates in the defence sector. As Chief of the Air Staff, ACM Sir Mike will have had access to sensitive information around the UK's defence requirements and capabilities for operations. He will have a detailed understanding of the use of AI in the air force, which could provide an advantage to any company operating in the AI or technology sector. There are a number of mitigating factors that help reduce the risks associated with his access to information and insight that may be seen to offer Faculty AI an unfair advantage:
 - the MOD confirmed that ACM Sir Mike ceased having access to sensitive information from June 2023. This provides a gap of over nine months between his last having access to privileged insight and information and taking up this work;
 - the MOD confirmed ACM Sir Mike had no direct involvement in any of the MOD's relationships with companies and organisations operating in the same area of capability as Faculty AI and therefore had no information on competitors that would offer an unfair advantage;
 - ACM Sir Mike's proposed role with Faculty AI is internally focussed and not specific to the air force or the defence sector
9. Despite the mitigations there remains a risk he has access to information that may offer privileged insight from his time as the Chief of the Air Staff.
10. Faculty AI also works with a range of unknown clients which poses unknown risks. Given ACM Sir Mike's role is focussed on advising the CEO and the company's senior leadership team, this risk is limited as ACM Sir Mike will not be working with clients. The Committee considered the risk is most likely to present itself should ACM Sir Mike be asked to advise on matters or clients associated with UK defence.
11. ACM Sir Mike would also have amassed a wide range of contacts during his time in office, with the UK government and beyond. The MOD noted this

² This application for advice was considered by Andrew Cumpsty; Isabel Doverty; Hedley Finn OBE; The Rt Hon Baroness Jones of Whitchurch; The Rt Hon Lord Eric Pickles; Michael Prescott; and Mike Weir. Sarah de Gay and Dawid Konotey-Ahulu CBE DL were unavailable.

could be seen to offer Faculty AI unfair access, should it look to extend its work with the UK MOD as its AI capability requirements grow and develop. The Committee agrees with the MOD that it would be improper for ACM Sir Mike to use his network of contacts or have direct engagement with the UK government or the MOD.

The Committee's advice

12. The Committee considered that ACM Sir Mike's role within the MOD presents real and perceived risks associated with his access to information within the UK government, particularly in relation to defence matters. Whilst the Committee recognised that Sir Mike's role with Faculty AI is internal and not specific to defence, it has imposed a condition which prevents him from advising on the UK defence sector to mitigate this risk.
13. The Committee noted ACM Sir Mike's role will be focussed on internal strategy and involve no lobbying of government in line with the expectations set out in the Rules. However, there is a risk he could be seen to be offering the company unfair access and influence.
14. The Committee's advice is therefore that ACM Sir Mike should have no direct engagement with the MOD or the UK government on behalf of Faculty AI. This is in addition to the usual lobbying ban, to prevent any suggestion on the basis that any engagement would be more than likely perceived as lobbying.
15. The Committee advises, under the government's Business Appointment Rules, that ACM Sir Mike's role with **Faculty AI** 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, MOD, or their arm's length bodies on behalf of Faculty AI (including parent companies, subsidiaries, partners and clients); nor should he make use, directly or indirectly, of his contacts in the government and/or ministerial contacts to influence policy, secure business/funding or otherwise unfairly advantage Faculty AI (including parent companies, subsidiaries, partners and clients);
 - for two years from his last day in Crown service, he should not become personally involved in lobbying contacts he has developed during his time in office and in other governments and organisations for the purpose of securing business for Faculty AI (including parent companies, subsidiaries and partners);
 - for two years from his last day in Crown service, he should not provide advice to Faculty AI (including parent companies, subsidiaries or partners) on the

terms of, or with regard to the subject matter of, a bid or contract with, or relating directly to the work of the UK government, the MOD and its trading funds, or their arm's length bodies; and

- for two years from his last day in Crown service, he should not advise Faculty AI (including parent companies, subsidiaries or partners) or its clients on the UK defence market; and he must not directly engage with the MOD/UK government or its arm's length bodies on Faculty AI's behalf (including parent companies, subsidiaries, partners and clients).
16. The advice and the conditions under the government's Business Appointment Rules relate to an applicant's previous role in government only; they are separate from rules administered by other bodies such as the Office of the Registrar of Consultant Lobbyists, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards and the Registrar of Lords' Interests³. It is an applicant's personal responsibility to understand any other rules and regulations they may be subject to in parallel with this Committee's advice.
17. 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.
18. 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*'.
19. You must inform us as soon as ACM Sir Mike takes up employment with this organisation, or if it is announced that he will do so, by emailing the office at the above address. 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.
20. 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

Jess Barrow

³ All Peers and Members of Parliament are prevented from paid lobbying under the House of Commons Code of Conduct and the Code of Conduct for Members of the House of Lords. Advice on obligations under the Code can be sought from the Parliamentary Commissioners for Standards, in the case of MPs, or the Registrar of Lords' Interests, in the case of peers

Committee Secretariat

Annex- material information

The role

1. Faculty AI is a technology company that provides software, consulting, and services related to artificial intelligence. ACM Sir Mike said that it works both as a springboard for placing STEM graduates into careers in computing and data science, and as a provider of AI solutions to customers. Its website says that it works in the UK and internationally across several private and public sectors, including defence. Faculty AI has contracts with several government departments, including the MOD.
2. ACM Sir Mike wishes to take up a paid role as a Consultant Strategic Advisor with Faculty AI. ACM Sir Mike said that his role will be internal facing, to provide strategic advice to the CEO and the leadership team at board and senior management level, as the company grows in the UK and overseas. He said he will be helping craft its business and growth strategy, including: organisational design, international footprint, STEM talent management and data and tech up-skilling.
3. ACM Sir Mike said that the role will not involve any direct commercial bidding or business development. Sir Mike also confirmed his role will not involve lobbying government, the MOD or ministers.

Dealings in office

4. ACM Sir Mike said that although the MOD has a contract with Faculty AI, he did not have any involvement in that commercial relationship. He said he was not responsible for any specific policy or regulatory areas as Chief of the Air Staff. He said that his role was operational, overseeing the delivery of defence policy and priorities to meet the Chief of Defence Staff's objectives.

Departmental assessment

5. The MOD said that Faculty AI has contracts with several government departments and currently has one contract with the MOD, in Strategic Command as a software and AI partner. Faculty AI also sponsors the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL) Defence AI Centre⁴. The Defence AI Centre works collaboratively across the MOD as a federated organisation, and is not specific to the air force, and supported by a core team from:
 - Defence Digital (Digital Foundry)⁵, as part of Strategic Command

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/defence-artificial-intelligence-centre>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/defence-digital>

- Defence Equipment & Support⁶ (Future Capability Group) - which is responsible for procurement
 - Defence Science and Technology Laboratory⁷ (Cyber Information System Division) - which leads on development of science and technology across industry, academia and government to enable capability and delivery
6. The MOD said ACM Sir Mike had no involvement in DSTL's relationship with Faculty AI. Further, it confirmed ACM Sir Mike did not have any commercial involvement with Faculty AI or its competitors in the AI and technology services industry. It therefore considered there is a low risk this appointment could result in unfair advantage to Faculty AI owing to any knowledge or information he holds on commercial matters.
 7. The MOD said that Faculty AI may try to extend its reach within the MOD as AI technology becomes more integrated into capability development, but noted ACM Sir Mike's role is internal, focussing on STEM and education influence within the company. The MOD said that ACM Sir Mike had influence at the highest levels of the UK MOD and he oversaw the adoption of AI into Air Command's capability. Although ACM Sir Mike states he will not have any contact with the MOD in his new role, suitable restrictions will need to be put in place to mitigate the risk of perception that his proposed employer could gain undue advantage through use of such contacts, knowledge and access to information.
 8. The MOD recommended that further to the standard conditions, ACM Sir Mike's role with Faculty AI should be limited so that he is prevented from advising drawing on matters related to his time in office and . He should also be prevented from having any direct engagement with the MOD or UK government.

⁶ <https://des.mod.uk/>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/defence-science-and-technology-laboratory>