



Cabinet Office

Partnership Framework

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Introduction

1. Across the Civil Service, trade unions play a vital role in the development of employee policy and the continued advancement of positive employee relations. The Cabinet Office recognises that there are significant benefits to both employers and employees when organisations and trade unions work effectively together.
2. There are currently effective arrangements and formal recognition frameworks in place between trade unions and Civil Service organisations. It is beneficial when trade unions have a voice to help shape guidance and policy across the Civil Service and represent the views of their members on matters which will impact the way they work.
3. To harness the benefits of working more closely with the trade unions, the Cabinet Office and trade unions aim to establish closer working practices where we treat one another as trusted partners, including when developing and considering the implementation of policies and guidance aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Civil Service and its workforce. We believe that working in partnership is the best way to achieve these aims.

Purpose of this document

4. This document aims to set out principles regarding how the Cabinet Office will work with Civil Service trade unions centrally on matters that impact the workforce of the Civil Service. It serves as a commitment to effective and constructive partnership working, which means working together to try to achieve objectives and outcomes focused on the betterment of the Civil Service.
5. This document is separate from, and is not intended to impinge upon, departmental arrangements with trade unions which operate in line with the delegated framework. The document does not give rise to any central collective bargaining on any matter, nor is it intended to create legally enforceable obligations or expectations, or any duty of consultation in relation to any matter. It is, however, intended to act as an example of good practice across the Civil Service of how to work in partnership with recognised trade unions.

Working together

6. Cabinet Office and trade unions share a positive aspiration to raise the overall employment standards of the Civil Service, and a desire to make the Civil Service an 'exemplar employer'.
7. Cabinet Office and trade unions will, as appropriate, endeavour to:



- a. Treat others with respect in all means of communication, both oral and written, including the tone and behaviour used when working with one another.
- b. Work collaboratively to promote well-timed dialogue, including the exchange of information.
- c. Encourage the effective exchange of views and evidence from both the Cabinet Office and trade unions to support high quality informed discussions, using evidence where possible.
- d. Approach Civil Service workforce issues jointly and in partnership, as far as possible, whilst respecting delegation.
- e. Be open with one another in discussions, while respecting any requirements of confidence where these have been set out.
- f. Be mindful that all parties should have an opportunity to participate in discussions, with views taken into consideration.
- g. Work collaboratively on joint communications that celebrate successes achieved through working together.

Cabinet Office

8. The Cabinet Office wishes to work effectively and constructively in partnership with the trade unions on policy matters. This means that where it considers it practicable and appropriate in the circumstances the Cabinet Office will:
 - a. Seek trade union engagement and contributions on the development of people policies or guidance, Civil Service workforce strategy development, and other issues affecting the Civil Service workforce in which the Cabinet Office plays a role.
 - b. Continue to promote the benefits of working together, as exemplified by the approach set out in this Framework, and share best practice approach with Civil Service organisations, with the intended aim of improving the quality of relationships with trade unions across the Civil Service.
9. The Cabinet Office acknowledges and values the fundamental role played by trade unions in representing their members across the Civil Service and recognises that genuine engagement and participation enhance their ability to do so effectively.

Trade unions

10. The trade unions recognise the overall framework in which the Cabinet Office must work, including delegation, and are cognisant of the constraints of Government policy and budgetary limitations. The Cabinet Office will always endeavour to engage with trade unions at the earliest opportunity (for example at the policy proposal idea formation stage) in line with the commitments outlined above.
11. To support this collaborative approach, the trade unions will endeavour to work together in their engagements with the Cabinet Office to present a



common view; however as independent trade unions there may be occasions where distinct positions are taken.

Benefits

12. Effective partnership working ensures a number of benefits to the Cabinet Office, trade unions and civil servants. These can include:
 - a. A more productive Civil Service, higher quality jobs resulting in improved job satisfaction and a better represented workforce.
 - b. A more direct link for feedback between civil servants, particularly those who are members of trade unions, and the Cabinet Office.
 - c. Improved quality of workforce policies and guidance for departments.
 - d. Improved internal Cabinet Office processes for policy and strategy teams, regarding when and how they engage with Civil Service trade unions.
 - e. The development of robust and quality relationships between officials and trade union representatives allowing for more effective engagement.
 - f. The opportunity for trade unions to influence the development of guidance and policy through the contribution of their experience and ideas to the process, with the related opportunity for improved initial outcomes.
 - g. Improved communications about the successes achieved by Cabinet Office and trade unions working together.

Engagement approach to partnership working

13. To ensure the Cabinet Office and trade unions are able to work together successfully, there need to be engagement mechanisms which meet the needs of both parties. There is no “one size fits all” approach for this. The needs of the Government, the Cabinet Office and trade unions are likely to change from time to time, impacted on by variables such as the portfolio of matters upon which engagement needs to take place. This could also include variables such as resourcing constraints although both the Cabinet Office and trade unions will need to ensure they have open and honest discussions about resource implications when considering matters to be engaged on.
14. To facilitate this framework, the Cabinet Office commits to ongoing dialogue on the practicalities of engagement, including opportunities for continuous improvement in the operation of this framework. This ongoing dialogue will also include discussion on the topics both the Cabinet Office and trade unions wish to engage on.



Concerns with working in partnership

15. Should either Cabinet Office or trade unions wish to raise any concerns about the operation of this framework, they should do so as below. Both the Cabinet Office and trade unions should make genuine efforts to resolve disagreements as and when they arise.
16. The trade unions should write to the Director General accountable for industrial relations in the Cabinet Office setting out their concerns and what further action they believe is necessary. The Cabinet Office will aim to respond to these concerns within 4 weeks.
17. The Cabinet Office should write to the General Secretary of the relevant trade union, setting out their concerns and what further action they believe is necessary. The relevant trade union should aim to respond to these concerns within 4 weeks.