

UNION SYNDICALE - FFPE

March 2021

CAREERS

Staffing - recruitment



Understaffed services need to be clearly identified and a maximum of vacant posts need to be filled in these through the recruitment of permanent officials for every permanent post available. The current drift towards privatisation and externalisation should be stopped, as this is doing lasting damage to the quality and morale of the European civil service. The recruitment of temporary and contract agents should be limited to a strict and rational minimum.

Valuing in-house experience more highly including for senior posts

Clearly, the GSC needs to make full use of the talents and skills already available and this means limiting external recruitment, too. If staff feel that their expertise is valued and used to the full, they will be motivated - and this is in the best interests of the GSC. The same logic should apply to appointments of directors and directors-general. Instead of resorting to the external recruitment of high-ranked officials, priority should be given to recruiting competent internal candidates. Why should external experience count higher than internal experience?

Internal selection/recruitment procedures



While **Union Syndicale** and the **FFPE** are firmly committed to internal recruitment and selection procedures, we believe there is room for improving some of the more rigid aspects of these procedures. We are keen to work with the administration on making the internal mobility policy more flexible and better tailored to needs.

Some aspects of the current system are similar to those used in external recruitment competitions. They seem less appropriate in the context of the internal mobility of colleagues who have worked for the institution for years. For instance, assessment of "attitudes" using evaluation grids and the like, should be replaced by a simpler, reasoned assessment of actual ability, merit and potential, with a focus on matching these skills to the vacant post in question. In addition, relevant qualifications and wider experience - including invaluable and relevant expertise acquired from previous work experience inside and outside the Council - need to be given greater weight. Colleagues with such experience and qualities are sometimes passed over as not having the right attitudes to "tick the boxes". It is demotivating if and when they lose out, as a result, sometimes to younger colleagues, who tend to undergo faster career development and may - in some cases - attain a position of responsibility at a relatively young age. The corollary is that some younger colleagues may then find it harder to sustain motivation and drive in what, in many cases, will be another 20 or 25 years of work at the Council, with little scope for further internal mobility.

More attention should also be paid to the candidate's working language preferences and to ensuring that they are able to express themselves comfortably during the interview. Fluency in English or French should not be a discriminating factor. Many selection procedures are conducted largely in English, which does give certain colleagues an unfair advantage.

Above all, we favour an approach based on a fair assessment of the substance of the person and the professional applying for a post. This is in the long term interests of all colleagues and of the institution as a whole.

The above approach needs to be understood and handled in the context of the need for a rigorous overhaul of the reports and promotion system, which everyone agrees is too open to subjectivity and manipulation.

Internal competitions



Union Syndicale and the **FFPE** call for regular internal competitions, particularly for AST, AD, Head of Office, Head of Sector and Head of Unit posts. Such competitions are needed as they will open up new career opportunities for all, including GSC contract and temporary staff.

We draw attention, in this regard, to the situation facing increasing numbers of colleagues and the difficult circumstances of our colleagues who are contract agents and temporary agents: at present they are offered limited prospects in terms of promotion and professional development in the GSC. The result is that many of them leave the Council to join the Commission which offers more opportunities. This, in turn, undermines the performance of GSC departments, many of which are now suffering from a shortage in staff numbers and a loss of expertise.

Mobility should be valued more and never imposed



For many, lack of mobility is still a major source of frustration and demotivation. Too many posts are published or republished at inter-institutional/EPSO level. The result is that internal mobility continues to be particularly problematic.

Recruitment and mobility should, above all, to be in the interests of the institution. Internal applications need to be valued more highly and prioritised in selection procedures for vacant posts. This would help mobility and career prospects within the GSC and help tackle the problem of people being left in posts for which they are no longer motivated.

Mobility allows staff to acquire new knowledge and broaden their skills. It should therefore be valued more highly and should certainly never slow down anyone's career path.

The current system and rules limit mobility unduly and need to be reviewed (for example, in terms of "specialised" posts). We therefore call for voluntary mobility for all staff, without the imposition of blockages or "silos".

More attention should be paid to staff's wishes. **Compulsory** internal mobility has, at times, undermined the GSC's credibility in terms of the political support it provides and the advisory role it plays. This is due, in particular, to the resulting loss of existing expertise and know-how in policy DGs. Similar negative effects are being felt in other non-policy-related GSC departments, to which colleagues with little or no previous relevant knowledge or expertise have been moved. It is important, therefore, to give due recognition to internal expertise and to assess the impact that any move will have on former and future colleagues. Such changes should not be made lightly: internal mobility needs to be rational and thought through. This is why we will continue to oppose any form of compulsory mobility.

The AST/SC category



Having opposed the introduction of this new, downgraded category in the 2014 Staff Regulations, **Union Syndicale** and the **FFPE** consider it vital to improve the career development prospects of our AST/SC colleagues. More specifically, we call for:

- the introduction of an additional grade for AST/SC staff at the top of the scale, in order to prevent blockages;
- full application of the guaranteed promotion rates, which also need to be improved;
- regular organisation of internal competitions, allowing AST/SC colleagues to move to other categories;
- the creation of a procedure for AST/SC colleagues equivalent to the existing certification procedure (currently allowing ASTs to become ADs).

Union Syndicale and the **FFPE** object to the pointless assignment of AST staff to AST/SC posts. The value of each person's skills and competences needs to be given due recognition.

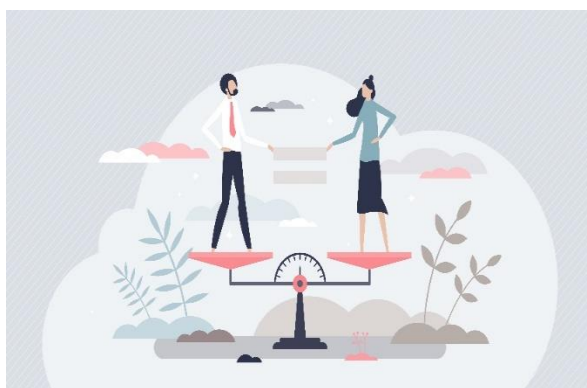
Contract staff in Function Group I

These are our lowest-paid colleagues. **Union Syndicale** and the **FFPE**, as unions committed to social progress, are particularly concerned about the pay and promotion prospects of colleagues in this category.

We therefore propose:

- the addition of an extra grade, in order to avoid career blockages;
- a corresponding increase in promotion rates;
- real opportunities for interinstitutional mobility.

Improving the fe/male balance in key posts across the GSC



Union Syndicale and the **FFPE** recognise the progress made by the GSC in recent years to improve the male-female balance in key posts within the organisation. There are currently more women than men in the GSC¹, however the proportion of women in posts with significant levels of responsibility is relatively low. So we think that more consideration is needed on whether we have the best people in key posts and on identifying strategies designed to ensure additional improvements. At present, the Council does not have a clear enough set of targets or policies to deliver such improvements.

One key tool is to gather more detailed data on the current balance between women and men in Head of Unit and equivalent, as well as *senior official* posts.

It is important to have clearer data on:

- the overall numbers of men and women in such posts within the GSC;
- '*disaggregated*'² data, showing the balance in each individual directorate, Directorate-General and language unit (LING), so that valid and reliable comparisons can be made between the directorates across the GSC. This will help identify both good and not-so-good examples (some of which are explicable through job and skill requirements and the individual merit of the people holding those posts);
- data on selection procedures (gathering data on the respective numbers of *candidates, pre-selected candidates and selected candidates*).

These figures need to be collected annually in order to better identify general trends.

On the basis of the figures collected, it will be possible to "map" the situation. Thereafter, realistic **targets** can be set in order to help correct the most flagrant imbalances, wherever possible.

These targets need to be realistic and achievable. Accordingly, transparent figures and an honest, open discussion of the findings are essential at all stages of the exercise.

¹ <https://domusportal.consilium.eu.int/en/dgsteams/eqopp/Pages/genderequality.aspx>

² i.e. separate figures are needed for each department/service so that comparisons can be made, for example, on the relative balance (e.g. 40% female and 60% male) in LING and SMART management posts.

The appraisal and promotion system



The appraisal and promotion system must become simpler, fairer, more equitable and more transparent. The three trade unions submitted a joint proposal as long ago as 2018. **Union Syndicale** and the **FFPE** call on the Administration to resume negotiations without delay.

Our representatives in the Staff Committee will ensure that appointments to the promotion boards are based on objective criteria alone. Such boards need to comprise colleagues from across the GSC, and not the same colleagues deciding on promotions year after year. The rules also need to be applied in the fairest and transparent manner possible.

We will instruct the staff representatives in the promotion boards to take full account of cumulated merit - for instance, 3 years of very good work has, arguably, more merit than 2 years of excellent work.

We are also always available for advice and personal assistance during the annual evaluation exercise.

Promotion rates



The inclusion in the Staff Regulations of promotion rates to be complied with is one of the major gains from the 2004 reform. Instead of calculating annual promotion possibilities on the basis of retirement numbers and the available budget, since 2004 the Staff Regulations have provided a mathematical formula for calculating promotion possibilities. This ensures that staff members' career development generally runs smoothly.

In the first ten years after the reform the GSC mostly applied these provisions scrupulously. However, since 2015 we have noticed some slackening in their application. Whilst certain promotion rates were reduced directly by the new Staff Regulations in 2014 - particularly at the end-of-career stage and for high AST and AD grades - the GSC has gone significantly beyond these imposed reductions.

Our priority is for all available promotion possibilities to be used in all function groups, whether AST/SC, AST or AD. Blockages at all levels are frustrating for the colleagues concerned, who are forced to wait again for the manna to fall from heaven. For those approaching retirement, any salary increase helps and any blockage can reduce their final pension rate, which is based on final salary.

Union Syndicale and the **FFPE** will exert maximum pressure for the Staff Regulations to be applied correctly, fully complying with the promotion rates.

Staff participation in the selection and evaluation of managers



For transparency reasons, all posts need to be published. Article 29(2) of the Staff Regulations - which provides for external recruitment without a competition - should normally not be used for filling managerial or specialist posts. Should this be necessary, it should be used only with the Joint Committee's consent. The Staff Committee needs to be involved in the selection process, too.

The 360° evaluations are not yet a reality. A couple of years ago, the Appointing Authority accepted the idea submitted by Union Syndicale and the FFPE, but implemented it in a very limited manner. In reality, staff members do not have a genuine say in the evaluation of managers. **Union Syndicale** and the **FFPE** will continue to push for a full 360° evaluation. The overall marks given to managers in their appraisal reports should be partly determined by the evaluation given by their staff and colleagues.



Staff Development/Training



Union Syndicale and the **FFPE** want to help people to train better and learn more. To this end, there is a need to increase the professional training budget and to establish a better balance between courses designed exclusively for senior officials and those that are open to all staff members. We wish to see courses that are open to all staff members. Accordingly, we see a particular need to encourage attendance by temporary and contract staff: specific courses can help such colleagues in their efforts to secure permanent posts. We would also like a set "training allowance" for all colleagues, which they may then use to attend any course that interests them, so that they can choose freely what they wish to learn. This minimum training allowance should cover a minimum of 5 days a year. More generally, we would stress the clear benefits of developing the internal competencies of GSC staff. Automatic recourse to external recruitment is detrimental.

We wish to make the GSC a **real learning and trust-based organisation** by:

- increasing the overall professional **training budget**;
- increasing substantially financial support for GSC-sponsored **continuous career learning** (increased amount to be negotiated); SCs, ASTs and contract staff should receive a higher amount for programmes leading to a qualification giving access to a competition for a higher grade;
- increasing substantially the financing of **learning secondments (missions)** in other organisations;
- ensuring that training is **not** automatically subject to a manager's approval: colleagues should be able to choose the training they are interested in, managers' authorisation should be limited to course planning only.

Probationary period



The unions and the Administration are currently negotiating a new Decision on probationary periods. **Union Syndicale** and the **FFPE** intend to defend the interests of all staff in this context so as to ensure that the Decision will contain all the necessary safeguards against unfair dismissal. We also offer advice and support to new colleagues during their probationary period.

Leave in the interests of the service

The relevant provisions are in Article 42c of the Staff Regulations. Its provisions are particularly ambiguous and could be confused with those on early retirement.

Union Syndicale and the **FFPE** are not opposed to the article itself; however, it should be applied only on a voluntary basis. There are enough interested colleagues each year, so there is no good reason to use those few annual possibilities for colleagues who do not wish to retire and are obliged to go to the Court of Justice to oppose such leave where it is imposed. The administrative decisions are often annulled there; however, the harm has been done and the colleagues concerned do not recover from the experience.