

UNION SYNDICALE - FFPE

March 2021

Negotiating the "new normal" A trust-based new social deal

INTRODUCTION

We face profound changes in our working environment. The pandemic has triggered the start of the **fourth industrial revolution**, affecting us all.

The Council needs to lead the European response to an ever more complex and inter-connected set of challenges, in a context of globalisation and technological change. We need to master the art of cooperation to manage change, connect better with stakeholders and citizens and enhance trust. Technology brings with it increased flexibility and this has an impact on values and expectations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced a rapid change in the way we work. We should learn from and build on this experience. **Union Syndicale** and the **FFPE** intend to be at the forefront in this work.

Such change will make some established rules obsolete, so we will need to negotiate **a new deal: a new social agreement** with **a new set of rules** to protect staff interests. Our administration and staff need to work in a spirit of genuine social dialogue to safeguard our most precious asset: staff commitment and motivation.

The post-COVID GSC will look different. Our working tools and methods, management model and work-life balance are likely to undergo profound changes. Social cohesion may also be a challenge.

The following changes seem necessary and will need to be negotiated:

- more **flexible structures and task/project-based** working should increasingly replace outdated, top-down hierarchical structures;
- staff must enjoy a **healthy work-life balance** supported by a caring management that prioritises health and protects against overwork and burnout;
- there is a need for improved **social cohesion, team-building and communication** to promote collaboration and a real *esprit de corps*;
- management should focus on **staff development, job satisfaction** and the **individual strengths** that people bring to their team;

- staff can deliver **high-quality work** from anywhere, so increased **remote working** should be an option. However the boundaries between professional activities and private life will need to be redefined and management will need to show the same **trust, empowerment and flexibility** as it has during the pandemic;
- our new ways of working can become **greener**, as increased digitalisation can help reduce commuting;
- some new offices will be designed with **collaborative spaces**. This can, however, compromise **privacy and personal space** that may be needed by some colleagues for certain tasks requiring silence and concentration. Such concerns will therefore need to be taken into account: the current set-up in the LEX building seems broadly acceptable, however the JL building will need re-designing to include sufficient **single-user offices** and spaces;
- there are likely to be fewer **missions** (again reducing travel).

GREENER AND MORE DIGITAL WORKPLACE



To become climate-neutral, we will need to continue to change the way we work.

Digital technology can play its part in this regard, in particular by reducing the need for travel and commuting. However such technology is destroying traditional boundaries between professional and private life, and must be kept in check by new arrangements.

Careful consideration of the pros and cons is necessary. This needs to be based on consensus and dialogue.

This is why, as a first, important step, we want the Staff Committee to be represented in the GSC's internal ***Working Group on Digital Transformation***.

Our goals in the digital sphere:

- a focus on **greener** ways of working, such as:
 - ✓ increased use of video conferences
 - ✓ more flexible rules on **voluntary telework**, without the current, outmoded constraints (such as the place of telework) or any discrimination in terms of remuneration, rights and privileges;
- flexible working patterns that meet team needs while ensuring a **healthy work-life balance**;
- better quality, ergonomic IT equipment for all **colleagues working at home**, with laptops, GSMs and repurposed printers for those staff members who need them and a customer service (provided by SMART) to help people set up IT equipment and a workplace at home, taking into account ergonomic considerations;
- protecting staff from digital overload (the **right to disconnect**);
- the development of digital skills through appropriate, focused **training**;
- increased funding for the Council and Staff **libraries** to improve the offer of both traditional + E-books (including fiction) and streamed films to facilitate language-learning; wider free access to specialised websites and online newspapers, magazines and databases;
- the **replacement of SYSPER** by a state-of-the art, integrated and continuously updated user interface that is simple, reliable and user-friendly - **Union Syndicale** and the **FFPE** advised against the GSC's loss of administrative autonomy, with the introduction of SYSPER, the outsourcing of essential administrative functions and the delegation of the Appointing Authority's powers to the Commission. The Council has specific needs, which derive from its special role within the European Union and should recover this administrative autonomy as its needs are not served by the Commission and by SYSPER.

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVENESS



Our staff need to reflect the full diversity of those we serve, in all respects, including sex, colour, ethnic or social origin, age, disability etc. We need to create a more inclusive GSC.

To this end, more internal campaigns and training on inclusion and unconscious bias would be helpful. The anti-harassment policy must cover all forms of unwelcome workplace behaviours and be implemented effectively. Flexible working arrangements must be improved, including increased scope for paternity leave and part-time arrangements, which should be granted on request.

RECRUITMENT AND CAREERS



Our image, working culture, career opportunities and recruitment processes are important. We need to appeal to potential recruits in terms of career opportunities and development, our working environment as well as salaries and social benefits. Staff skills and expertise also need to match evolving tasks and challenges.

Recruitment needs to be transparent, to guarantee fair access to the public service and to provide the GSC with the requisite expertise. We need better targeted campaigns to attract a more diverse range of candidates and ensure the intake of under-represented nationalities. Additional resources for recruitment are needed in this area. Accordingly, EPSO needs more resources and staff to prepare, publicise and run competitions.

NEW WAYS OF WORKING



Time spent working face-to-face with colleagues is important. We need to identify categories of tasks best done in the office and from home. A flexible approach is needed to ensure team cohesion and the integration of new colleagues, and to **avert isolation and burnout**.

Sharing of offices may become more widespread, as we anticipate more colleagues choosing to work remotely. Partial teleworkers may need to share office space increasingly, and might not necessarily always have assigned desks. However - and with the exception of services, such as the press office, where open spaces tend to be the general rule - such arrangements should not be imposed on individual staff members, who should keep a real choice on what they feel are the most suitable working conditions in which to perform their tasks. All members of the staff teams concerned must be **fully consulted and involved** in working out any such arrangements, so that everyone's needs are met.

Individual or shared offices should also have windows that can be opened, letting in fresh air. Any areas that do not fulfil these basic requirements should only be used as shared spaces for occasional small meetings or gatherings.

Breaking the GSC silos through cross-cutting, theme-based or inter-service projects or task forces

"New Ways of Working" should not just be about reshaping our office space. More importantly, this concept should be about the way we work, whether remotely or in the office. This should mean opening up and loosening rigid departmentalised structures and **setting up cross-DG/cross-functional tasks and teams**. Such an approach will make our everyday work more motivating and rewarding, increase scope for mobility, promote staff cohesion and create a better *esprit de corps*. Specifically, this might involve different DGs and teams in the area of policy work and translation and/or lawyer-linguists.

With more flexible working structures, work would become more fluid and varied. With such approaches, the GSC would be better able to tap into and develop the **individual talents and aspirations of staff** as a whole. Currently, a lot of our talent is not used. This would be motivating for our AST and SC colleagues, many of whom have the necessary competence, skills and capacity to do AD level work. Staff working on such cross-DG tasks would gain greater recognition through appraisal and would benefit through better promotion prospects. This is in everyone's interests.

Valuing of in-house experience and knowledge

Another key way to motivate staff is to recognise and appreciate the full value of the experience that they have gained inside the organisation. It is important not to underrate the qualities and experience needed for certain posts, in particular those of head of office (GSC-wide) or of local resources manager or local coordinator (in LING). Such posts are not suitable for beginners and should not be published with inappropriate grades. Where **internal mobility** is an option, it should be used and the best in-house candidates found. Increased recognition and proper valuing of knowledge and experience acquired "on the job" is motivating for those who obtain such posts, and whose efforts over the years are rewarded as a result. Such recognition should not be reserved exclusively for the most senior officials.

A flexible and resilient organisation

In order to address fluctuations in the workload, we need to become better at pooling resources interdepartmentally. This calls for a more flexible and faster approach to setting up task forces and ad hoc-structures. We therefore need to increase the share of posts allocated on a temporary basis to respond more swiftly to emerging priorities. Recourse to temporary staff must be carefully targeted as **internal expertise** that is already available is the better option.

Union Syndicale and the **FFPE** propose the creation of an administrative support unit giving short or longer term project-based support to DGs in such areas as finance, IT, communication and administrative support. This could ensure more flexible support for DGs and enable the GSC to employ permanent officials for such tasks. This would be preferable to recruiting contract staff.

Risks

Some changes risk undermining working conditions and increasing **psycho-social risks** and isolation. The COVID-19 crisis has undoubtedly exacerbated such problems.

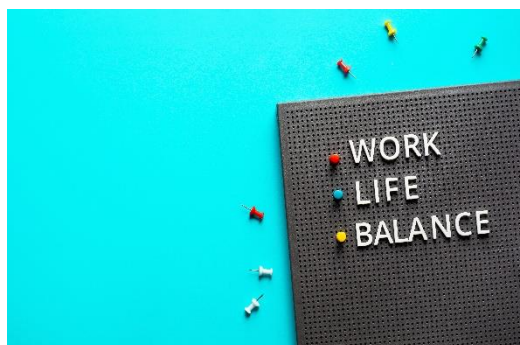
Open-plan offices ("activity-based working") should not be viewed as a "silver bullet". Different services, departments, units and individuals have different needs (with many preferring the quiet of a single office), so a "one-size-fits-all" approach would be counterproductive. That is why all changes to the working environment must be designed to **improve** working conditions and staff well-being, benefiting the institution as a whole.

The "new normal" must not be allowed to undermine interpersonal and social contact.

Accordingly, we need to:

- ✓ monitor on-going modernisation pilot projects and keep staff informed;
- ✓ ensure the pilot project conclusions are objective and well-founded;
- ✓ monitor the impact on health, well-being and the work-life balance;
- ✓ maintain the Staff Committee's budget for social activities;
- ✓ assess the Council's overall attractiveness as an employer (e.g. departures of competent staff).

WELL-BEING AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT



There is a pressing need for more resources to safeguard mental well-being and a healthy work-life balance. And our institution should be more considerate of the specific needs of older staff, the numbers of whom are growing.

The recent GSC modernisation projects have been ambitious. However, they have imposed **considerable and simultaneous change**, without sufficient staff consultation or the requisite training. This has resulted in considerable upheaval and disruption: staff are tired of "mechanical" management styles that implement change without taking the human impact into account. There is a compelling need for a systematic "human impact" assessment of all these new projects and initiatives, in addition to other cost/benefit considerations.

Our administration should adopt a genuinely **inclusive** process from the outset. We need to set clear and realistic goals and ensure that these are negotiated - with the administration and staff representative and unions on an equal footing. Change must never be presented as a *fait accompli*, since constant change implemented without due care and attention has demotivating effects and may end up having an adverse impact on the health of the staff concerned. This is all the more telling in the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Union Syndicale and the **FFPE** are ready to play their part in **negotiating the changes** and helping to forge a **new social deal**.