

Assessing Aptitude: A critical analysis of the effectiveness of HRM competency frameworks in Civil Service recruitment, selection, retention and promotion.

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Abstract

Human Resource Management (HRM) competency frameworks have gained substantial traction as tools for assessing, developing, and managing employee performance across various sectors. Within the UK Civil Service, where the recruitment, retention, and promotion of talent are pivotal for effective governance, the implementation of competency frameworks holds particular relevance.

This dissertation aims to critically evaluate the effectiveness of HRM competency frameworks in the context of UK Civil Service operations. Through a comprehensive literature review, analysis of existing frameworks, and empirical research, this study seeks to uncover the impact of competency frameworks on recruitment practices, employee retention strategies, and promotion processes within the UK Civil Service.

As a result of the literature review and action research, a conclusion is drawn, with the findings endeavouring to inform policymakers, HR practitioners, and stakeholders about the strengths, limitations, and potential improvements in the utilisation of competency frameworks within this unique organisational context. A series of recommendations for future researchers and the Civil Service key decision makers concludes this dissertation in an attempt to effect change.

Declaration and Statements

DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

SignedD.S.Emanuel..... (candidate)

Date1st May 2025.....

STATEMENT 1

This work is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

SignedD.S.Emanuel..... (candidate)

Date1st May 2025.....

STATEMENT 2

I hereby give consent for my work, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

SignedD.S.Emanuel..... (candidate)

Date1st May 2025.....

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	- 1 -
DECLARATION AND STATEMENTS.....	- 2 -
LIST OF FIGURES	- 5 -
LIST OF ACRONYMS	- 6 -
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	- 7 -
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	- 8 -
1.1 RESEARCH AIM.....	- 13 -
1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	- 14 -
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	- 15 -
2.1 SEMINAL REPORTS	- 15 -
2.2 CURRENT CIVIL SERVICE POSITION	- 22 -
2.2.1 <i>National Security Constraint</i>	- 27 -
2.2.2 <i>Inquiry Evidence</i>	- 29 -
2.2.3 <i>Legal constraint</i>	- 30 -
2.2.4 <i>Current Civil Service recruitment process</i>	- 30 -
2.2.5 <i>Selection - Civil Service Success Profiles</i>	- 33 -
2.3 RETENTION AND PROMOTION.....	- 38 -
CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	- 41 -
3.1 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES	- 41 -
3.2 RESEARCH RATIONALE.....	- 41 -
3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN	- 42 -
3.3.1 <i>Surveys</i>	- 44 -

3.3.2	<i>Interviews</i>	- 46 -
3.4	RESEARCH PARADIGM.....	- 47 -
3.5	DATA COLLECTION.....	- 50 -
3.6	POPULATION AND SAMPLING.....	- 52 -
3.6.1	<i>Pilot Study</i>	- 54 -
3.7	DATA AND ANALYSIS	- 55 -
3.8	RELIABILITY AND VIABILITY.....	- 56 -
3.8.1	<i>Limitations of the Research</i>	- 57 -
3.9	RESEARCH ETHICS	- 58 -
CHAPTER 4.	FINDINGS.....	- 61 -
4.1	PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA.....	- 61 -
4.1.1	<i>Introduction</i>	- 61 -
4.1.2	<i>Questionnaire</i>	- 61 -
4.1.3	<i>Interviews</i>	- 68 -
CHAPTER 5.	CONCLUSION.....	- 77 -
5.1	RECOMMENDATIONS	- 83 -
CHAPTER 6.	REFERENCE LIST.....	- 85 -
CHAPTER 7.	BIBLIOGRAPHY	- 100 -
CHAPTER 8.	APPENDICES	- 115 -
8.1	APPENDIX 1 - CIVIL SERVICE HR SHARED SERVICES STRATEGY	- 116 -
8.2	APPENDIX 2 – QUESTIONNAIRE QUESTION SET	- 117 -
8.3	APPENDIX 3 – INTERVIEW QUESTION SET	- 124 -
8.4	APPENDIX 4 – ETHICS FORM.....	- 126 -

List of Figures

Figure 1: Civil Service Headcount 2009-2023. Source : (Institute for Government, 2023).....	- 8 -
Figure 2: 5 Pillars of Civil Service Success Profiles framework. Source : (HM Government, 2019).....	- 12 -
Figure 3: Mean annual earnings in Public and Private Sectors, 2001-2024. Source : (Cribb & O'Brien, 2024).....	- 23 -
Figure 4: Civil Service People Survey 2023 summary. Source : (Cabinet Office , 2024)	- 24 -
Figure 5 : David Ulrich Model of HR. Source : (Ulrich, 1997)	- 26 -
Figure 6: Civil Service recruitment policy breaches. Source : (Civil Service Commision , 2023).....	- 36 -
Figure 7: Civil Service entrants vs leavers data. Source : (Office for National Statistics, 2023).....	- 40 -
Figure 8: Convergent Parallel Design of data analysis for mixed methods. Source: (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2022)	- 56 -
Figure 9: Action research cycle. Source: (Clark, Porath, Thiele, & Jobe, 2020)...	- 57 -
Figure 10: Current shared services model. Source: (Government Shared Services, 2021).....	- 116 -

List of Acronyms

AI – Artificial Intelligence

CCS – Crown Commercial Services

CIPD - Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

CoC – Chain of Command

CoE – Centre of Excellence

CV – Curriculum Vitae

DV – Developed Vetting

HR – Human Resources Department

HRM – Human Resource Management

PSR – Public Sector Resourcing

RPO – Recruitment Process Outsourcing

SC – Security Check

SME – Subject Matter Experts

UK – United Kingdom

UKSV – United Kingdom Security Vetting (Department)

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Chapter 1. Introduction

The current United Kingdom (UK) Civil Service comprises a diverse and intricate network of Government Departments, Agencies, and Organisations¹ responsible for the delivery of public services and plays an indispensable role in the daily life of the British population. As of June 2023, the Cabinet Office (2023) reports that the Civil Service employs approximately 520,000 Civil Servants. The definition for the term Civil Servant is a politically impartial, appointed official of the United Kingdom Home Civil Service, that are responsible for supporting the Government's central departments, including those of the devolved governments in Scotland and Wales (Institute for Government, 2023)

In October 2023, the sitting Chancellor of the Exchequer, The Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP (Institute for Government, 2023) announced an 'immediate cap on Civil Servant headcount' to reduce staffing numbers to pre-pandemic (Covid-19) levels (figure 1). This constituted to a reduction of 66,000 people with a focus on a 'more effective workforce' (HM Treasury, 2023).

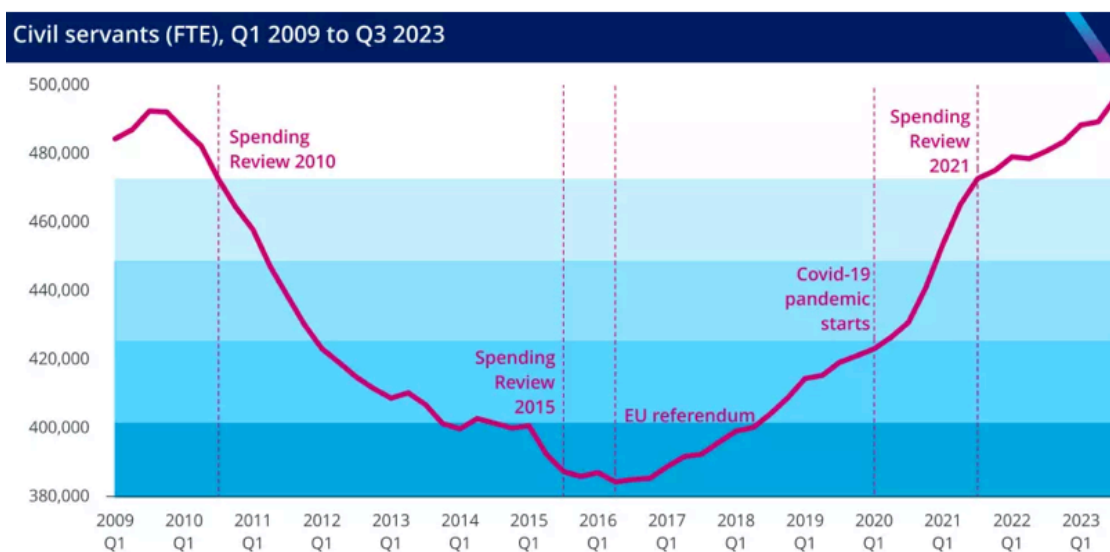


Figure 1: Civil Service Headcount 2009-2023. Source : (Institute for Government, 2023)

¹ Government departments are core Civil Service whilst Agencies and Organisations are arm's length bodies. Source : (Cabinet Office , 2022)

The immediate headcount cap excluded the Civil Service Fast Stream, which is the Civil Service Graduate scheme aimed at less senior, recent graduates in ‘recognition of the importance of the talent pipeline’ (HM Treasury, 2023). Three years prior to Hunt’s announcement, Johnston and Kravariti (2020) implied that the Civil Service Fast Stream is a positive talent management strategy for success planning of an ageing workforce. However, this success planning strategy has been strongly opposed by several seminal reports over the past 167 years including the infamous 1854 Northcote-Trevelyan report where it is stated that attracting a workforce at an ‘early age’ means there has been no ‘trying of their fitness for business’ or ‘forming of their characters and abilities’ (Northcote & Trevelyan, 1854).

Whilst the Northcote and Trevelyan (1854) seminal report is historic, the analysis of Civil Service remains accurate in the modern day, with the ‘Declaration on Government Reform’ (2021) referencing the Northcote and Trevelyan report some 165 years later. A recent House of Commons – Committee of Public Accounts (2024) inquiry into ‘Civil service workforce: Recruitment, pay and performance management’ concurred that there is a requirement to bolster external recruitment and the need to attract experienced external professionals to existing Civil Service roles.

The House of Commons – Committee of Public Accounts (2024) inquiry into ‘Civil service workforce: Recruitment, pay and performance management’ continues that the UK Civil Service has a history of being inefficient at recruitment, selection, retention and promotion of successful candidates for available posts which aligns with Fulton (1968), this results in a high staff turnover, as reported by Institute for Government

(2019), inefficient delivery and a high level of economic expense to public funds (Haddon, 2012).

The plethora of seminal reports dating back 167 years beginning with Northcote and Trevelyan (1854) have identified systemic failings across the Civil Service recruitment policies which resulted in inefficient services being provided to the public (Institute for Government , 2025). The Northcote-Trevelyan Report (1854), The Fulton Report (1968) and The Modernising Government paper (1999) recommended that the highest calibre people should be recruited into posts and the current practice of promoting internal candidates to reward the length of their service “*does not attract the ablest*” people for the role (Northcote & Trevelyan, 1854).

The Institute for Government (2023) reports that staff turnover was at a record high for 2022 at an overall average of 15% with some departments peaking at 30-40% staff turnover per year, which cost the Civil Service £74 million per year according to 2019 statistics reported by the Institute for Government (2019). This was projected to be considerably higher for 2022-23, although it should be noted that the final figures for this period are yet to be released. Greenway (2023) reports that the average employee turnover rate in the UK is 16.8%. However, the author was unable to identify the average statistic when Civil Service data is removed from the calculation, which could be an area for further investigation.

Henderson (2011) stated that 46% of workplaces use performance or competency tests and therefore, an in-depth analysis of the difference between these performance tests against competency test outcomes would be a beneficial area for study.

Henderson (2011) further stated that the costs associated with the recruitment of an employee are £6,125 per person when labour turnover costs are considered, which equates to a significant economic impact on businesses. There appears to be a misconception in the benefit package award according to Cribb and O'Brien (2024) which is hindering recruitment and increasing staff turnover, which would be an interesting area for further research, although time and word constraints do not allow for this within this dissertation.

There has been a clear consensus in recent history supporting the recommendation for Civil Service reform and more specifically, the recommendation to implement an amended talent management strategy (Institute for Government , 2025). This consistency over many years produces the question of whether the Civil Service has progressed with its talent management reform, and whether the current strategies support the attainment of a 'leaner' and 'more effective workforce' in line with the Civil Service People Plan 2024-2027 (Government People Group, 2024).

Talent management is defined by Lewis and Heckman (2006) as 'ensuring the right person is in the right job at the right time' and is further defined by Henderson (2015) as 'managing the human resource flow' within an organisation and is routinely referred to as 'War for Talent' after the 1998 article 'The War for Talent' in the Mckinsey Quarterly (Chambers, Foulon, Handfield-Jones, Hankin, & Michaels, 1998). There are four elements to investigate when analysing organisational talent management, these are broadly, recruitment, selection, retention and promotion (Collings & Scullion, 2010). Which, when applied to Civil Service, leads us to an analysis of the Civil

Service's recruitment framework which is used for recruitment and promotion within the Civil Service (HM Government, 2019).

The Civil Service use a specific competency framework model known as 'Success Profiles' for recruitment which is made up of 5 key pillars of competency assessment (figure 2) and was introduced in 2018 as a flexible framework to allow recruiting line managers to move away from a purely competency-based assessment (HM Government, 2019).

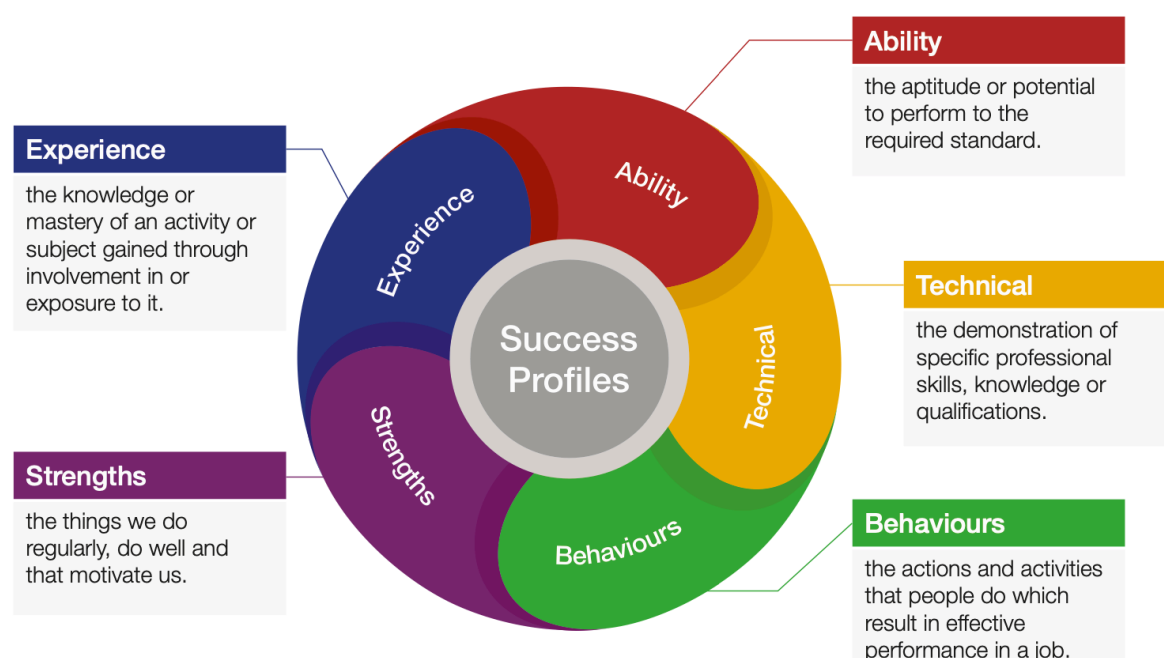


Figure 2: 5 Pillars of Civil Service Success Profiles framework. Source : (HM Government, 2019)

These five key pillars of assessment are standardised profiles to allow fair and open assessment of all professions across all Civil Service departments (HM Government , 2019). Each of the five key pillars is accompanied by a prescriptive and publicly accessible guidance document outlining the requirements for satisfying each of the key pillars. HM Government (2024) states that 'Not all of the elements are relevant to

every role, and will vary depending on the profession, level and type of role' and the recruiting line manager will decide on which of the five pillars are used.

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) (2024) state that competency frameworks are a good method for assessing transferable skills and make the recruitment process 'fairer and more open' although CIPD (2024) also states that competency frameworks are 'unwieldy, not user-friendly and creates clones' as all staff are assessed and expected to behave in line with the same prescriptive framework.

The CIPD (2024) lists the main criticisms of competency frameworks as follows :

- *Focus on the past and can't keep up with rapidly changing environments.*
- *Fail to deliver on anticipated improvements in performance.*
- *Are unwieldy and not user-friendly.*
- *Create clones, as everyone is expected to behave in the same way.*

(CIPD, 2024)

The information outlined above highlights the importance of an effective staff recruitment, selection and promotional strategy to ensure the Civil Service People Plan is being achieved.

1.1 Research Aim

The above context is the catalyst for this report, which its aim is to analyse whether current recruitment frameworks and strategies harmonise with seminal report recommendations and the goals of the current 'Civil Service People Plan 2024-2027'.

1.2 Research Objectives

- To analyse whether the current Civil Service recruitment and selection strategy is fit for purpose and compare it against modern strategic human resource management theories.
- To analyse whether the retention and promotion strategies within Civil Service are fit for purpose.
- To identify the value to Civil Service organisations when using competency frameworks and determine if there are any barriers to developing the frameworks further.

The study aims to analyse the current recruitment environment through consideration of historical and current theory, analysis of relevant data and an analysis of the current environment to improve efficiency and create greater value for government organisations.

Chapter 2. Literature review

Recruitment, selection, retention and promotion are a key part of organisational growth and should be treated as organisational investment (Ashan, 2018). Investing in people improves loyalty which benefits retention but also increases output as people feel valued also known as perceived organisational support (POS), which has been shown to improve employee attitudes, performance and well-being (Eisenberger, Shanock, & Wen, 2020).

Harry, et al (2020) express that the relationship between organisations and their employees is a critical component to achieving organisational goals and the success of any business which aligns with the view of Burrell and Morgan (1979). Having an 'effective government depends on having a skilled and motivated civil service' to 'deliver services to the public and ensure government's priorities are met. However, recruitment across the civil service is too slow, particularly compared with the private sector' (House of Commons - Committee of Public Accounts, 2024).

The Civil Service Careers (2024) states that 'Civil servants are recruited on merit, on the basis of fair and open competition.', however, information presented by The House of Commons – Committee of Public Accounts (2024) inquiry into 'Civil service workforce: Recruitment, pay and performance management' implies that this might not always be the case.

2.1 Seminal Reports

The Northcote-Trevelyan Report (1854) stated that the UK Government department's role in public life is so important that professions should attract the 'ablest and most

ambitious of youth' from around the country and those 'endowed with superior qualifications', 'would rise to distinction and public eminence'. However, Northcote-Trevelyan (1854) found this not to be the case, they found that whilst Civil Service roles are sought after, it only appeared to attract the 'unambitious, the indolent or incapable'. Northcote-Trevelyan (1854) further stated that promotion within single Civil Service organisations results in senior persons being appointed with a narrow view and experience of only a single specialist organisation, which can be prevented by transferring staff across multiple Government organisations.

Northcote-Trevelyan (1854) recommended that the UK Civil Service organisations should independently introduce examinations which will allow for the selection of the highest caliber candidates and a consistent approach across the Civil Service would not be suitable. Northcote-Trevelyan (1854) also states that an independent examiner is required to prevent personal interest or existing relationships from tainting the selection process. However, whilst this is an early version of the modern assessment centre selection strategy, current analysis shows that advancements in technology have paved the way for virtual situational judgement tests to be more effective at predicting overall job performance (Anderson, Born, Kleinmann, & Nikolaou, 2021).

Anderson et al (2021) continue that these virtual testing assessments are more cost-effective and build resilience into the recruitment process in the event of disruptive business continuity events such as Covid-19 which is further supported by Hamouche (2021) in the 'Journal of Management and Organisation' where it is stated that human resource management practitioners 'need to find ingenious solutions to ensure the continuity of their companies' (Hamouche, 2021).

The Northcote-Trevelyan Report (1854) made the following recommendations :

- Central examining board to be conceived with independent examiners (Northcote & Trevelyan, 1854). However, Woodruffe (2000) states that this takes three or four managers out of the business per assessment day increasing pressure on other staff to maintain business output.
- Introduction of the requirement for staff to work across multiple organisations to build experience and ways of working (Northcote & Trevelyan, 1854). This approach is supported by Armstrong (2014) who states that secondment outside the department 'is possibly the most effective approach on the grounds of development'.
- Promotion to be on merit not favouritism (Northcote & Trevelyan, 1854). This is also supported by Henderson (2015) who states that 'managers have a moral and Legal obligation to treat all employees fairly and equally'.
- Managers are to present three names for promotion to their senior chain or command (CoC) for a higher-level decision on merit, not relationships (Northcote & Trevelyan, 1854). Procedural justice is supported by Armstrong (2014) who supports the 'suppression of personal bias towards an employee'.

The Fulton report (1968) was a result of the Fulton inquiry by the committee, chaired by Lord Fulton (Fulton, 1968) who was appointed in 1966 to 'examine the service's structure, recruitment, training and management' (Institute for Government, 2018) and

was critical of the Civil Services 'over-dependence on generalists and over-reliance on detailed controls as opposed to modern management techniques' (ibid).

The Fulton report (1968) references the Northcote-Trevelyan report of 1854 with negative connotations stating that the Civil Service is a result of nineteenth-century philosophy, which suggests that Civil Service needs modern reform to transition away from the aforementioned nineteenth-century philosophy as a result of Northcote-Trevelyan recommendations. However, the Fulton report continues with a series of findings that state that there are 'too few skilled managers' and that 'personnel management and career planning are inadequate' which supports the Northcote-Trevelyan report albeit using different terminology.

The Fulton Report (1968) proposed the following recommendations :

- Targeted recruitment to attract specific skills to suit the role (Fulton, 1968). This approach is supported by Newman and Lyon (2009) as they stated that 'this type of recruiting strategy greatly increases average performance' in their 2009 journal article.
- New central HR department with a remit of pay and management of all Civil Service departments (Fulton, 1968). Although this is opposed by Grobler et al (2012) who states that HRM professionals need to 'fulfil multiple roles' and they are unable to do so if not located within the business that they serve.

- Requirement for managers to have greater involvement with recruitment (Fulton, 1968) which is supported by Wilkinson and Redman (2013) as this approach allows managers the control the rights skills for their departments.
- All staff must have the opportunity for progression and associated training (Fulton, 1968) Which is supported by Price (2015) who advocates that the lack of promotion or development opportunities disincentivises staff.

The Continuity and Change Report (1994) resulted in an enhanced role for the Civil Service Commissioners in recruitment and selection on merit, to remove the relationship element of recruitment. This 1994 report focused on reducing overall staffing numbers whilst increasing efficiency and increasing an emphasis on developing existing staff and introducing a new competence-based system of promotion tailored to the needs of the organisation (Cabinet Office, 1994).

Some five years later, in 1999, the 'Modernising Government' paper was presented to parliament by the then Minister for The Cabinet Office, Dr Jack Cunningham which set out the government's Civil Service strategy for the future. The paper aimed to, once again, overhaul the core staff competency system, increase cross-government secondments and attract more experienced and skilled candidates from the private sector into the Civil Service (Cabinet Office , 1999).

The Modernising Government paper (1999) made the following recommendations :

- Recruit a greater number of experienced people from the private sector (Cabinet Office , 1999) which is supported by Blatter et al (2012) as they state that skilled labour is more productive within a shorter period of time which reduces the requirement for further recruitment which equates to 10-17 weeks of weekly pay per recruitment campaign excluding lost productivity (Blatter, Schenker, & Muehlemann, 2012).
- Increase secondments between Departments (Cabinet Office , 1999) while Drucker (2002) also supports the shift from educating the young to continuing the education of adults (Drucker, 2002).

Modernise the recruitment competency frameworks to align with future goals (Cabinet Office , 1999) which is encouraged by Renshaw and Holland (2013) as they highlight that ‘ The current global economic challenges have led to new patterns of employment, with major downsizing, fewer opportunities for career development and promotions.

- Increase promotional opportunities for existing staff (Cabinet Office , 1999) which Drucker (2002) suggests, helps with retention and combating the rapid shrinkage of young people in a world of rapid globalisation (Drucker, 2002).

Progressing through to 2012, the Civil Service Reform Plan and the recommendations are well known, increase cross-department flexibility for secondment, ensure talented

people have the opportunity for progression on the merit of their competency and attract people with greater experience into the Civil Service (Cabinet Office, 2012).

Reviewing the 2024 future strategy of the 'Civil Service People Plan 2024-2027' (2024) the theme is once again very familiar. Currently, 'Just 1 in 5 new entrants to the Senior Civil Service are external' (Government People Group, 2024) and therefore, there is a continuing commitment to attract more external and experienced candidates to the Civil Service. There is recognition in the Civil Service plan that the current recruitment processes are complex, slow and difficult to navigate, particularly for external candidates, although, the report states a commitment to develop a high-performing HR function (Government People Group, 2024).

Over the past 168 years, a consistent theme has emerged in seminal reports and government papers: the persistent need to reform the Civil Service recruitment strategy to attract externally experienced individuals with a high level of aptitude (Northcote and Trevelyan, 1854). Given the repeated emphasis on this issue, it is pertinent to assess whether any progress has been made to date. Furthermore, would the implementation of a theorist's model accelerate the Civil Service's progress in achieving its objectives? This, in turn, could lead to the provision of a more cost-effective and streamlined version of the current Civil Service for the public. (Government People Group, 2024)

To comprehend the rationale behind the alignment of all seminal reports, it is imperative to ascertain our current resourcing capabilities. This will enable us to identify any impediments to the implementation of previously recommended initiatives.

2.2 Current Civil Service Position

The recent Civil Service People Survey (2024) states that 22% of Civil Service staff intend to leave the Civil Service over the next twelve months with the primary reason being to secure an improved pay and benefits package (Cabinet Office , 2024), which is further supported by Markson (2023) by stating that the appetite for staff to leave the Civil Service is increasing due to increasing bureaucracy and real-terms pay cut due to pay increases not following the increase in inflation (Markson, 2023). The primary reason for staff leaving the Civil Service being pay related is supported by BBC (2020) where they state its ' the only way for Civil Servants to secure meaningful pay rises' which is further supported by Financial Times (FT) (2022) stating that Civil Servants face real terms pay cut for 2023 with pay rises sitting at 1% whilst inflation soars to 9%.

This high turnover combined with a slow recruitment process results in inefficiencies and considerable economic expense of £6,125 per person according to Henderson (2011), which equates to £8,671.65 per person when adjusted for inflation (Bank of England , 2024). This results in an annual turnover cost of nearly a million pounds² a year which does not consider the cost of lost time/productivity, security vetting or induction costs.

Civil Service recruitment processes currently take '99 days on average to hire new staff' and 'an additional 171 days on average' to a total of 270 days on average for

² Calculation

520,000 x 21% = 114,400 people plan on leaving Civil Service in the next 12 months

109,200 people x £8,762.65 = £1,002,447 ² - Source – Bank of England (2024)

high-security vetting requirements as reported by the House of Commons (2024), which will result in 21% of the workforce being unproductive either through low morale awaiting departure or through new staff still navigating the complexities of a new role in the expense of Civil Service.

In terms of recruitment, the Civil Service offers an attractive benefit package overall with a strong pension offering, where the employer contribution is 28.97% (Civil Service Pension Scheme , 2024), which is considerably higher than the average employer pension contribution of 3% (HM Government , 2024). However, according to Cribb and O'Brien (2024) of The Institute of Fiscal Studies, the mean salary for private sector worker is £33,776, whilst for Civil Service, this is a slightly lower salary of £33,099 (figure 3). This is a negligible difference of £677 or 2%, although after considering the higher pension contribution, a 25% difference, we can conclude that Civil Service workers benefit from an above average benefit package.

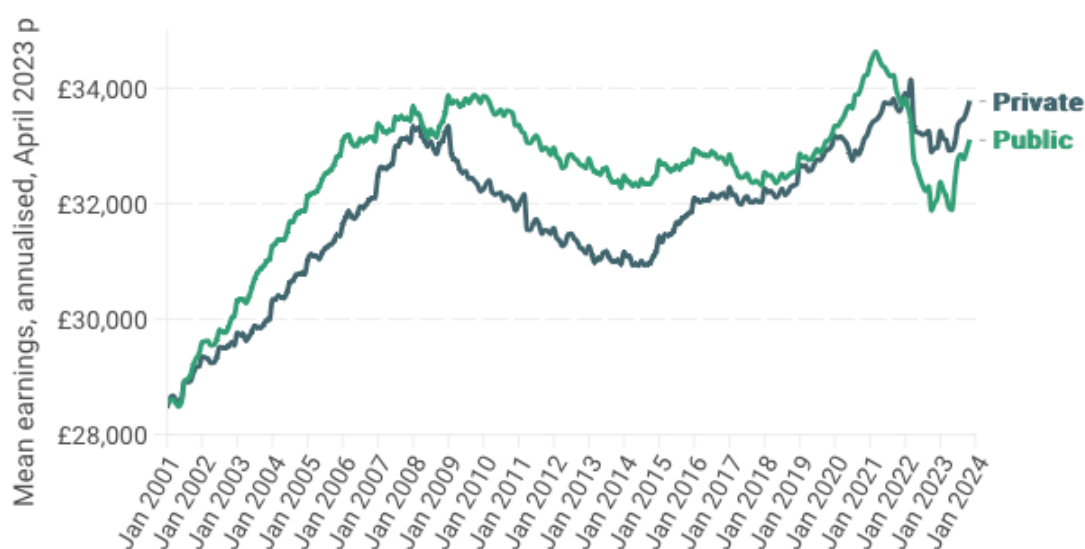


Figure 3: Mean annual earnings in Public and Private Sectors, 2001-2024. Source : (Cribb & O'Brien, 2024)

Whilst the benefit package can be stated as above average in light of the literature available, this is not the perception of Civil Service staff which is supported by the Cabinet Office (2024), as a result of the Civil Service staff survey conducted in 2023 which indicated that only 32% of staff were satisfied with the current benefit package (figure 4).



Figure 4: Civil Service People Survey 2023 summary. Source : (Cabinet Office , 2024)

The other results from the survey indicate that staff generally enjoy their work, their teams and the management (Cabinet Office , 2024). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the Civil Service is a good employer and an enjoyable place to work so if attraction not an issue, why is retention and attraction of external candidates so challenging. Financial Times (2023) suggest that the primary repelling factor is the perceived lack of a comparable salary with the private sector.

The Civil Service (2020) states that roles within the Civil Service are advertised using the specifically developed Civil Service Jobs website which has a returning user base

of 500,000 users and four million visitors in the last twelve months (Government People Group, 2024), whilst 'Indeed' receives approximately 833.61 million returning visitors every month, of which, 65.58 million are based in the United Kingdom (UK) (Semrush, 2024) and therefore, it is reasonable to state that whilst Civil Service appears to be an attractive employer, the advertising reach is poor when compared to mainstream recruitment advertising websites.

The current Civil Service HRM structure is convoluted but akin to Dave Ulrich's HR Model of business partnering (Ulrich, 1997), with departments using a shared services model of HR (Government Shared Services, 2021), which is described by CIPD (2024) as a centralised hub of HR subject matter experts (SME's) and is usually the precursor to out-sourcing (CIPD, 2024) and is also known as the recruitment process outsourcing (RPO) (Wilkinson & Redman, 2013).

Ulrich's Model of HR was conceived by David Ulrich in 1995 and set out a focus on splitting the HR function into four key areas (figure 5) to improve efficiency in large organisations (Ulrich, 1997) similar of that to the Civil Service. Of the four roles, two naturally lend themselves to being out-sourced, Strategic Partner and Change Agents, while Administrative Experts and Employee Champions are primarily internally focused roles (ibid).



Figure 5 : David Ulrich Model of HR. Source : (Ulrich, 1997)

Civil Service utilise both the in-sourced and out-sourced approach to a combination of the shared services model and Ulrich model of HR, (see appendix 1 for current model). Civil Service are aiming to achieve efficiency savings, value for money and standardised processes with common naming convention for all data (Government Shared Services, 2021).

Whilst the shared services model of HRM can provide value for money (CIPD, 2024), according to Cooke (2006) 'the financial and emotional cost of moving to a shared services model outweighs the tangible costs savings predicted' and therefore does not produce the desired outcome. Berman, et al (2021) state that having a centralised team of HR professionals would create a centre of excellence (CoE) environment which would create a better service to all parts of the business. However, CIDP (2024)

state that centralised services are unable to maintain close working relationships with other departments given their scale and remote working element, which is supported by Williamson, et al (2020) that concludes that centralised services are resulting in 'devolution, decoupling of policy and practice resulting in incoherence' which is a direct result of poor relationships between line managers and centralised HRM teams.

2.2.1 National Security Constraint

One of the key constraints to improving the overall recruitment timeframe is the requirement for high levels of security vetting before commencing a role within Civil Service, which has become the bottleneck of Civil Service recruitment (Government People Group, 2024). There are seven levels of security vetting although only the two higher levels will be considered which are 'Security Clearance' (SC) and 'Developed Vetting' (DV), as these make up the requirement of the majority of roles within Civil Service (United Kingdom Security Vetting , 2024).

United Kingdom Security Vetting (UKSV) is an agency within the Cabinet Office responsible for undertaking vetting checks and awarding the relevant clearance to protect the UK.

UKSV has two targets to meet which are as follows :

- SC clearances – 85% to be completed within 25 days.
- DV clearances – 85% to be completed within 95 days.

Source - (United Kingdom Security Vetting , 2024)

A recent survey by the National Audit Office (2023) found that UKSV had not achieved either target since the beginning of 2018 with the average timeframe for DV clearances in 2022 being 177 days and only 25% of SC clearances achieving the twenty-five-day target over the last three years (National Audit Office , 2023). However, whilst UKSV have failed to meet the DV target of 95 days, the Australian Government Security Vetting Agency has a target of 180 business days for their equivalent security level, Positive Vetting (PV) and has an average processing time of 154 days (Australian Government Security Vetting Agency, 2024). The Australian Government Security Vetting Agency (2024) state that 40% of all applications exceed the 180-day target although the average processing time is reduced thanks to a priority processing application (Australian Government Security Vetting Agency, 2024) which is not something offered by UKSV (United Kingdom Security Vetting , 2024).

Security vetting is a requirement for national security and to facilitate the Government in protecting UK Citizens (UKSV, 2024), and is a non-negotiable requirement when appointing candidates for Civil Service roles. The security vetting process does not commence until the successful candidate has been identified which takes place after sifting, assessments and interviewing. The successful candidate is then offered a provisional offer of employment subject to successful security vetting which becomes the bottleneck for the onboarding of candidates (Meyer-Sahling, Mikkelesen, & Schuster, 2018). The House of Commons (2024) recognises that 'Civil Service recruitment times are slow, particularly compared with private sector firms' and further recognises that 'data on recruitment and security vetting times are 'patchy and inconsistent' and therefore, recruitment timescale data in the public domain is inaccurate. House of Commons (2024) proceeds to state that the average 'time to hire'

in 2022 was ninety-nine calendar days with an additional 171 calendar days for high levels of security vetting resulting in an average 'time to hire' of 270 days.

Whilst Civil Service jobs allow for a full e-recruitment process, the current Civil Service system permissions do not allow for a fully digital end-to-end process due to the inconsistencies in departmental naming conventions (Government Shared Services, 2021). This results in recruiting managers keeping paper records of the sifting and interviewing exercises creating duplication in data entry (Government Shared Services, 2021), these records are required to be held for a minimum of two years for audit purposes (HM Government , 2024).

2.2.2 Inquiry Evidence

As part of the House of Commons inquiry into 'Civil service workforce: Recruitment, pay and performance management', a piece of evidence was submitted by Mr Blake (2024), a current senior manager within the Civil Service who states that 'The division of labour between recruiting managers and centralised HR teams is bureaucratic and erratic' causing unnecessary time delays which are compounded by security vetting delays which subsequently contribute to the rate that applicants withdraw from recruitment campaigns or peruse other roles (House of Commons - Committee of Public Accounts, 2024).

Blake (2024) continues to state that 'anti-bias measures have unintended negative consequences' as redacted personal details do not obfuscate applicants known to the hiring manager whether they be internal or external as the line manager will be familiar with the applicant's CV or the applicant will have already communicated with the hiring

manager expressing their interest in the role which results in strong bias and conflict of interest not usually documented (Blake, 2024).

2.2.3 Legal constraint

The Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 was the catalyst for the formation of the Civil Service Commission as the regulator for Civil Service recruitment with sections ten through twelve inclusive, set out the requirement for the Commission to publish a set of principles to which all Civil Service departments must abide by (HM Government , 2024).

The latest iteration of the recruitment principles was published in April 2018 (Civil Service Commission, 2018) in line with the introduction of Success Profiles' and sets out a prescriptive process of recruitment principles. They include the requirement that all candidates are presented with the same information and the same level of access to engage with key people in the department (Civil Service Commission, 2018). However, Blake (2024) states that this bias exists in the current Civil Service as internal applicants will have existing relationships and access to internal information not afforded to external candidates subsequently creating a bias.

2.2.4 Current Civil Service recruitment process

The current Civil Service recruitment process comprises a structured series of events that constitute the entirety of the recruitment process. It commences with the recruiting line manager publishing vacancy advertisements in accordance with standardised job descriptions (Department for Business and Trade, 2022). These advertisements are subsequently forwarded to HR shared services for inclusion on the Civil Service Jobs

website, which adheres to the Ulrich model of centralised HR and follows the same process as any large organisation employing a similar HR model (Ulrich, 1997); (Department for Business and Trade, 2022).

Submitted applications received by the closing date are collated by the shared services HR department and are sent to the Recruiting Line Manager for sifting which also aligns with standard industry practice for large organisations (Government Shared Services, 2021); (Department for Business and Trade , 2022).

The recruiting line manager then undertakes the sift assessment following the success profiles guidance which requires an assessment of the applicants Curriculum Vitae (CV) and personal statement assessed against Success Profiles 5 elements mapped to the person specification (Government People Group, 2024); (HM Government, 2019); (HM Government, 2024).

This sifting element differs from that of private sector organisations where the recruitment policy is less prescriptive allowing recruiting line managers to assess CVs to determine skills, knowledge, experience and training and a personal statement to assess competency (Woods & Zibarras, 2010). However, whilst the Civil Service policy is prescriptive and containing a rigidly structured framework, this appears to reduce policy breaches due to the public sector being more bureaucratic and subject to greater audit and scrutiny (Richardson, 2009).

Once the sifting has been conducted, the recruiting line manager sends the results to HR Shared Services which prompts the HR Shared Services teams to notify

candidates of the outcome and follow-up with invites for intermediary testing or direct for interviews (Department for Business and Trade , 2022); (Government People Group, 2024). If the optional intermediary testing is requested by the recruiting line manager, then selected candidates are invited to virtual Civil Service Judgement tests or Psychometric assessments which provides the line manager with an overview of the candidate's personality traits and allows for cultural fit considerations. Once optional testing has been conducted, the automatically created outcome report is emailed to HR shared services (Government People Group, 2024); (HM Government , 2019); (Campion, Campion, & Campion, 2019).

The next step in the recruiting process is for the recruiting Line Manager to interview candidates in-line with Civil Service success profiles framework, this consists of a series of questions to facilitate the assessment of experience, strengths, behaviours, technical and abilities as per the Success Profiles guidance on the five pillars that constitute to the overall assessment framework (see figure 2.) (Government Analysis Function , 2019); (HM Government , 2019).

However, whilst a minimum of four are required, the options chosen are at the recruiting line managers discretion (HM Government , 2019). This differs from the routinely administrated private sector interview, where interviews can follow a more flexible approach to competency assessment, where more recently, artificial intelligence (AI) is being utilised to assess competencies during virtual interviews which is leading to increased efficiency and quality of successful candidates (Patterson & Lane, 2007); (Upadhyay & Khandelwal, 2018).

Once the interviews have been conducted, the recruiting line manager will collate the results ensuring to identify the successful candidate, which will subsequently be sent to HR shared services for action (HM Government, 2024); (Government People Group, 2024). HR shared services will identify the successful candidate and send a formal provisional offer of employment subject to security vetting and pre-employment checks (Government Shared Services, 2021); (Government Analysis Function , 2019). This process is not required in private sector organisations unless their work is in conjunction with Civil Service departments although, this will be in the minority of occasions (United Kingdom Security Vetting , 2025).

Once the candidate is notified of the outcome, they will be required to submit a series of documents mandated by UKSV and once received, will instigate the commencement of security vetting checks (United Kingdom Security Vetting, 2024). The outcome of the security vetting assessment is delivered to the HR shared services team and if successful, will prompt the HR team to issue a formal offer of employment (Government Analysis Function , 2019) and allow for the negotiation of a commencement date for onboarding (Government Analysis Function , 2019); (United Kingdom Security Vetting , 2025).

2.2.5 Selection - Civil Service Success Profiles

Success profiles were introduced to the Civil Service in 2018 as a flexible framework to replace the purely competency-based assessment framework in service since 2013 and provides a 'variety of selection methods' to assist in finding the right person for the role (HM Government , 2019). Success Profiles were incepted to provide a

consistent approach to recruitment ensuring that all applicants are assessed against the same criteria (Government Chief People Officer, 2018).

CIPD (2024) states that competency frameworks are a good method for assessing transferable skills and makes the recruitment process 'fairer and more open', although CIPD (2024) also states that competency frameworks are 'unwieldy, not user-friendly and creates clones' as all staff are assessed and expected to behave in line with the same framework.

The five elements of success profiles that can be assessed are as follows :

- **Behaviours** – 'the actions and activities that people do which result in effective performance in a job' (HM Government , 2019).
- **Strengths** – 'the things we do regularly, do well and that motivate us' (HM Government , 2019).
- **Ability** – 'the aptitude or potential to perform to the required standard' (HM Government , 2019).
- **Experience** – 'the knowledge or mastery of an activity or subject gained through involvement in or exposure to it' (HM Government , 2019).
- **Technical** – 'the demonstration of specific professional skills, knowledge or qualifications' (HM Government , 2019).

Whilst the Civil Service prides itself on fair and open competition for recruitment, Blake (2024) states that there are several exploitations for unfair bias or advantage that are regularly used in recruitment. This is supported by Civil Service Commission, as the

annual reports for 2020-2024 identified 323 breaches of the recruitment principles which are informed by the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010.

The Civil Service Commission is an independent regulator to assure Civil Servant recruitment and ensure that roles are appointed through fair and open competition (Civil Service Commission , 2024). The Civil Service Commission (2023) report that there were eighty-two breaches of the recruitment principles in the 2022/2023 reporting year, 122 recruitment breaches in 2020/2021 and 119 breaches in 2019/2020 totalling 323 breaches since the success profiles inception.

These breaches resulted in unfair recruitment, incorrect assessment outcomes, failure to maintain accurate audit trails and had the overall effect of favouring internal candidates (Civil Service Commission , 2021). However, Markson (2022) reports that Government officials have stated that they are taking necessary steps to address these issues. Furthermore, it is worth noting that whilst 323 breaches were identified, it is likely that there is a considerably greater number of recruitment campaigns where breaches have occurred unknowingly to the candidates.

An example of breaches of the recruitment principles outlined by Civil Service Commission (2023) can be seen in figure 6 below:

Department	Summary of breach
Department for Work and Pensions	Inconsistent interview processes
Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities	Candidates provided with insufficient remuneration information
Cabinet Office	Error within the numerical assessment

Home Office	Conflict of interest records not kept
Cabinet Office	Incorrect criteria assessed

Figure 6: Civil Service recruitment policy breaches. Source : (Civil Service Commission , 2023)

Whilst Success Profiles is intended to be a flexible framework allowing for differing assessment methods (HM Government , 2019), there appears to be confusion or lack of communication between the HR Shared Services and the recruiting line manager that conducts the sifting and interviewing processes as evidenced by the recruitment principle breaches in figure 6 (Civil Service Commission , 2023).

Recruiting line managers are afforded a great deal of freedom and flexibility in terms of the selection method they use in recruitment and promotional campaigns providing that they stay within the realms of the success profiles framework (Government Analysis Function , 2019). However, Blake (2024) and House of Commons (2024) allude to the unfair bias which is compounded by the fact that success profiles assessment criteria are hosted online within the public domain, although, public sector organisations are subject to greater audit and scrutiny due to the public budget expenditure and therefore, transparency and openness are required (HM Government , 2019); (Richardson, 2009).

Whilst the information is public providing equal opportunity for all candidates as stated by HM Government (2019), it is not clear at this stage whether candidates are given instructions to review the documentation in preparation, as this information is only received by applicants and is not reported in current literature. Therefore, it is a reasonable assumption at this stage to determine that the candidate that spends the

most amount of time researching the criteria will have an advantage over the other candidates. This aligns with direction provided by HM Government (2024) , where it is stated that the public information on success profiles can ‘help you demonstrate specific requirements’ that ‘ match the job description’. However , it cannot be determined whether this is a fair or unfair advantage as all applicants have the same information available.

A plethora of independent business were identified including Interview skills clinic (2024), Civil Service Success (2024) and How 2 Become (2024) that support applicants. These businesses offer Civil Service Success profiles training and insights to prepare candidates for the recruitment and selection process supporting the narrative from Blake (2024) where it was stated that candidates can seek unfair advantages.

Furthermore, it is reasonable to suspect that internal candidates with previous experience and access to recruiting line managers, may have an unfair advantage as stated by Blake (2024) and House of Commons (2024). There is limited literature available from reliable sources investigating the effectiveness of success profiles in Civil Service recruitment and therefore, this would be an area for further research.

Candidate responses during the recruitment activity should be assessed against 2 key criteria, the job description and the success profiles framework (Government People Group, 2024). However, job descriptions and person specifications are being standardised in line with the government professions guidance (Cabinet Office , 2024). Furthermore, European Commission (2022) state that standardised job descriptions in larger organisations tend to downplay the remit of the role as the vagueness

captures a wider remit, this makes the role less appealing whilst smaller organisations tend to over complicate their job descriptions to make the role appear more senior and therefore, desirable (European Commission, 2022).

There exists a route to filling vacant positions exempt from the Civil Service recruitment framework. This route involves sourcing contingent labour, which is managed by Public Sector Resourcing (PSR), a division of Crown Commercial Service (CCS). PSR serves as a single framework that connects suppliers with over 120 public sector organisations. It oversees the entire recruitment process and employs approximately 20,000 individuals in various roles at any given time. (Civil Service Careers, 2024)

2.3 Retention and Promotion.

The same success profiles competency assessment is used for promotional recruitment campaigns (HM Government , 2019), although Picardi (2020) states that effective collaboration is needed between HRM professionals and hiring managers to ensure suitable candidates are presented for competency assessment. Picardi (2020) continues that currently there is a disconnect between accurate job descriptions and suitable candidates being presented for assessment with the lack of collaboration, due to centralised services, resulting in the exclusion of qualified applicants due to a lack of understanding of the application and the role itself.

Bolden, et al (2003) state that the competency method of selection focuses on the inputs (competencies) and the outputs (standards) and very little consideration of the process in between which then becomes an assessment of the relational notion of

valuable experience. Competency frameworks focus on unsubstantiated past behaviour examples from the candidate, which does not provide a rounded image of a candidate nor does the process consider cultural fit, cognitive or inter-personal qualities of an individual (Bolden, Gosling, Marturano, & Dennison, 2003). Blake (2024) implies that the success profiles competency model is being used as a 'matching attributes' model which is described by Henderson (2015) as the process of predicting job success by assuming certain attributes of a role and matching candidates to the attribute.

When used correctly, Henderson (2015) alludes to this being an unbiased selection method which has a pass or fail criteria and is described by Keenan (2015) as the 'selection paradigm'. However, Wilton (2022) states that the model is unrefined and has its failings as attributes do not evidence that a person is competent in the attributes they possess.

Civil Service Commission (2018) states that promotion should be on fair and open recruitment although Blake (2024) implies that internal staff are at an advantage due to personal relationships and Bolden, et al (2003) alludes to existing leadership being underprepared for HR processes and 'not following the Civil Service code of ethics.

Line managers are responsible for talent pipelines and success planning within their teams which also supports team resilience (Government People Group, 2024), although, Church et al (2020) state that talent pipeline success is a direct result of learning and development, and work-integrated learning implying that success planning should be direct from academia (Church, Drewery, & Pretti, 2020).

In terms of retention, it was determined by Cribb and O'Brien (2024) that whilst mean salary was 2% higher in the private sector, the overall benefits package when considering pension contributions is 25% greater in comparison to private sector. However, retention figures are at 91% ³ with a turnover of 9% (figure 7) with a further 22% of Civil Service staff intend to leave the Civil Service over the next twelve months with the main reason for their intention to leave being 'a better pay and benefit package' (Cabinet Office , 2024).

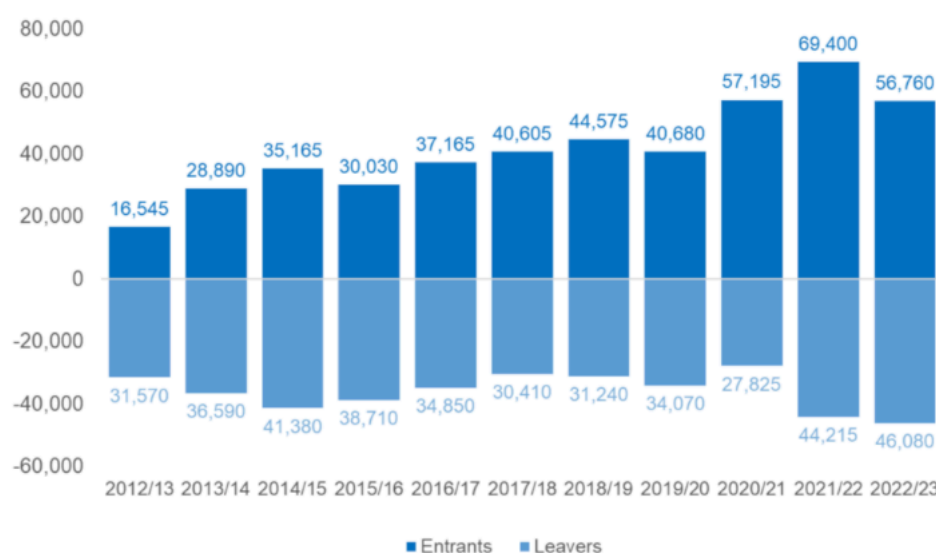


Figure 7: Civil Service entrants vs leavers data. Source : (Office for National Statistics, 2023)

Promotion in the civil service is presenting similar systematic failures with the open recruitment process evidencing poor talent pipeline management (Church, Drewery, & Pretti, 2020). Retention figures presented by Cabinet Office (2024) support the misconception that overall compensation package in private sector outweighs that of Civil Service.

³ Calculation

46,080 / 520,000 * 100 = 8.8% (rounded to 9%) – Source : (Office for National Statistics, 2023)_(Cabinet Office , 2023)

Chapter 3. Research Methodology

3.1 Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives of this research are to:

- To analyse whether the current Civil Service recruitment and selection strategy is fit for purpose and compare against modern strategic human resource management theories.
- To analyse whether the retention and promotion strategies within Civil Service are fit for purpose.
- To identify the value to Civil Service organisations when using competency frameworks and determine if there any barriers to developing the frameworks further.

3.2 Research Rationale

The rationale for this study is supported by existing literature from Northcote and Trevelyan (1854) through the mid-century (Fulton, 1968) and to the present day (Government People Group, 2024) and the findings from primary research, regarding the effectiveness of Civil Service recruitment with particular emphasis on whether Civil Service recruitment does yield the most suitable candidates for the role being recruited.

Various attempts to enhance recruitment, including modernising human resources management (HRM) have been outlined by Cabinet Office (2012), with further efforts resulting in the development of a more sophisticated competency assessment framework as stated by HM Government (2019) which have led to the establishment of the centralised HR model and the current 'Success Profiles' model. Criticism of the current recruitment process has been forthcoming at each juncture from CIPD (2024), current Permanent Secretary to the Cabinet Office Alex Chisholm and current

Government Chief People Officer Fiona Ryland (Prospect, 2024) , although this criticism has been conducted from a strategic and holistic perspective, with minimal feedback from non-HRM hiring managers or applicants themselves. Consequently, further research is necessary to address the objectives and aims of this research.

This research will elucidate the shortcomings of the current Civil Service recruitment practices, which have been identified as minimal in existing literature. By incorporating direct input from applicants, this research will offer an alternative and equally significant perspective on Civil Service recruitment. Surveys and interviews have been conducted by Civil Servants with experience in both the applicant and recruiting manager roles, providing a comprehensive view when combined with published literature.

3.3 Research Design

Research design is an essential consideration in the procurement of reliable and well-rounded data seeking to promote change (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2022), Hair Jr, et al (2019) describes research design as a framework containing a three-phase process, formulation, execution and analytical to assist the researcher in structuring the research. These distinct phases include identifying the problem definition, conducting the research, testing the hypothesis and the analytical decision making.

Bell et al (2022) imply that the quality of a research paper conclusion is a direct result of the quality of the primary research and more specifically, the correct execution of the best methods of primary research. Bell et al, (2022) describe primary data collection as three distinct areas, quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods with

Naoum (2013) describing quantitative as objective, and qualitative as subjective in nature. White (2002) states that irrespective of the research approach, the two most important factors to consider are validity and reliability to ensure that any primary research undertaken addresses the research questions fully and that the research is consistent throughout (White, 2002).

Several research methodologies are mentioned by Biggam (2021) that could be employed, including action research, case studies, ethnographic research, and experimental research, although, grounded theory and historical research are also noted as alternative approaches by Dr. Naoum (2013). However, the author finds that action research is the most suitable research method for this dissertation, as it aims to influence organisational change from its current equilibrium position (Eden & Huxham, 1996).

Burns (2015) defines action research as grounded in practical action (action element) while simultaneously focused on generating and informing theory (research element) with both elements being intrinsically linked through a reciprocal relationship. Walliman (2021) further elaborates that action research is a participatory and democratic process aimed at creating practical and transformative change. Bell, et al (2022) emphasizes that the uniqueness of action research lies in its collaborative nature which requires the researcher to not only work closely with participants but also to focus on real-world issues.

Action research has been chosen as the most appropriate framework for research as the pragmatic focus of action research allows the researcher to identify a real-world

issue within an organisation, empower participants through collaborative research and devise strategies for implementation that will influence change (Burns A. , 2015); (Walliman, 2021). This systematic, rounded and repeatable approach to research is the catalyst for the use of action research form of primary research (Biggam, 2021).

The researcher's strategy was to analyse published literature to identify common themes which would inform the objectives and be the basis for the primary research (Walliman, 2021); (Naoum, 2013). The researcher then formed an assessment criterion to ensure the participants targeted had a genuine and shared interest to bring about change within the organisational (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2022). The participants worked collaboratively with the researcher to validate the secondary research via primary research which was relatable to any Civil Service department due to the single recruitment policy being applied across all Civil Service recruitment (HM Government , 2019); (Walliman, 2021).

3.3.1 Surveys

Kent (2001) defines surveys as a process for collecting administrative facts on some aspect of social, public or commercial life. Hair Jr, et al (2019) describe surveys as a 'structured framework consisting of a set of questions and scales designed to generate primary data' (Hair Jr, Page, & Brunsveld, 2019).

Fellows and Liu (2022) state that the main forms of survey are postal questionnaires, online questionnaires and interviews with the two main forms being questionnaires and unstructured interviewing.

Bell, et al (2022) state that questionnaires are a popular means of primary research data gathering but have not dispersed the traditional approach of postal questionnaires with Dr Naoum (2013) confirming that postal questionnaires are the most widely used data collection method.

Bell, et al (2022) state that one of the main advantages to questionnaires is their speed due to online access and ability for immediate submissions with Patten (2017) listing the nature of anonymous responses encouraging honesty as a key advantage. Dr Naoum (2013) adds that accurate responses are received due to narrow scope of questioning that forms the questionnaire.

However, Dr Naoum (2013) also stated that this narrow question set results in limited flexibility to gather data wider than the question set to seek responses with greater depth as a disadvantage. Bell, et al (2022) lists the requirement for a high level of participant self-motivation as a key factor in the poor response rates generally seen in the application of questionnaires, with Biggam (2021) adding that survey fatigue due to the large number of questionnaires distributed daily as an additional factor of poor response rates (Biggam, 2021).

This dissertation has identified online completion surveys as an appropriate method of primary research given the constraints and intended data being collected. The advantage of self-administered surveys is the removal of any interview bias was a major deciding factor for conducting surveys (White, 2002). This research is primarily to gather the thoughts and opinions of persons with personal experience of civil service

recruitment and branching questions will be used in the proper sequence to add depth to the questioning.

3.3.2 Interviews

Bell et al (2022) describes 'the research interview as a prominent data collection strategy in both quantitative and qualitative research' and promotes standardisation of both asking the questions and recording the answers (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2022). However, Hair, et al (2019) states that interviews are 'much less structured than questionnaires.

White (2002) states that the main advantage of interviewing is the ability to clarify any ambiguity of the questions being posed which improves the reliability, however, Bell, et al (2022) states that interviews can result in 'inter-interview variability' where the interviewer inadvertently asks the questions in a different manner for each participant reducing consistency. White (2002) states that the primary disadvantage of the interview approach is the time investment required to collect a usable sample of data.

Dr Naoum (2013) states that there are three types of interviews, unstructured, semi-structured and structured which vary in formality and in the nature of the questioning, whether that be open or closed questioning. Bell, et al (2022) states that structured interviews are a prominent collection strategy in both quantitative and qualitative data collection and is known as the 'standardised interview' as the structure removes inconsistencies in questioning (White, 2002). The questioning is commonly of closed nature with limited choice of possible answers (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2022).

Bell, et al (2022) describes semi-structured interviews as more general in their nature than structured interviews with Dr Naoum (2013) stating that semi-structured are more formal than unstructured interviews. Bell, et al (2022) continues that semi-structured interviewing provides the interviewer with further latitude to ask further questions in response to the primary questions. Dr Naoum (2013) states that unstructured interviews use open-ended questions and is usually conducted with qualitative research. Bell, et al (2022) states that unstructured interviews are usually informal where phrasing and sequencing between interviews varies.

This research employs the semi-structured interview methodology, which will establish the foundation for reliable and comparable data while ensuring ample opportunities for participants to express their opinions comprehensively.

3.4 Research Paradigm

Research paradigms are described by Fellows and Liu (2022) as a world view that underlies theories and methodology of a particular subject, while Kuhn (1970) states that a paradigm is 'the set of fundamental theories, instruments, values and epistemological assumptions that all members of a scientific community share at a given time' (Kuhn, 1970). Fellows and Liu (2022) continues that a research paradigm is a framework or a set of shared beliefs and practices that guide researchers in their approach to investigating phenomena.

Rehman and Altharthi (2016) describe the research paradigms as the foundations of research and is the researcher's 'way of understanding the reality of the world and

studying it' (Rehman & Altharthl, 2016). Rehman and Altharthl (2016) further describe three main components of philosophy, ontology, epistemology and methodology.

- Ontology - Rehman and Altharthl (2016) define ontology as the assumptions about reality while Nasution (2018) states that ontology speaks of the nature of being, to be, and existence.
- Epistemology - Gall, et al (2003) defines epistemology as 'the branch of philosophy that studies the nature of knowledge and the process by which knowledge is acquired and validated'.
- Methodology - Grix (2010) describes defines methodology as 'the discussion of how a particular piece of research should be undertaken'.

Rehman and Altharthl (2016) continues to describe three frameworks for research, positivism, interpretivism and pragmatic paradigms. The philosophy of positivism is based on the belief that reality is objective and can be measured and observed independently of the researcher (Grix, 2010).The positivism methodology primarily uses quantitative methods, such as experiments and surveys, to test hypotheses and look for causal relationships (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003).The research philosophies aim is to discover general laws or principles that can predict and explain phenomena (Fellows & Liu, 2022).

The philosophy of interpretivism is based on the belief that reality is subjective and socially constructed, meaning that individuals' interpretations and experiences are

central to understanding the world (Grix, 2010). The interpretivism methodology primarily uses qualitative methods such as interviews, case studies, and ethnography to explore the meanings and experiences of participants (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). The research aim is to understand and interpret human behaviour, social phenomena, and the context in which they occur (Fellows & Liu, 2022).

The philosophy of the pragmatic paradigm focuses on more practical and pluralistic approach to research which accommodates the combination or mixed-method research approach. The pragmatic paradigm advocates the use of both, qualitative and quantitative methods combined with a non-singular reality ontology and a value-laden axiology, which, as the name suggests, provides a pragmatic and rational approach to research (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

There is a plethora of other research frameworks but each strategy offers distinct perspectives on what constitutes as valid knowledge and how it should be investigated, making it crucial for researchers to clearly define their paradigm to ensure coherence in their methodology and interpretations although it is important to note that philosophical disagreements are an intrinsic part of business and management research (Saunders, 2009).

This research will adopt the pragmatic paradigm philosophy due to its intrinsic link to the action research methodology which is well informed when mixed-method approach to research is used, as supported by the pragmatic paradigm (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Mixed-method research provides the researchers with a great deal of flexibility to combine action research with other methodology elements as deemed necessary,

providing more rounded and richer research data (Hall, 2013), allowing for varied analysis of data once collected (McKim, 2015).

3.5 Data Collection

The empirical approach to primary research data will be conducted through a mixed-methods approach. This will involve semi-structured interviews combined with questionnaires administered to Civil Servants. The resulting data will provide both qualitative and quantitative insights, ensuring reliability and comprehensiveness.

Due to time constraints, the questioning will be conducted through semi-structured personal interviews which Bell, et al (2022) states that this is time efficient and a suitable method of research. Questionnaires will also be distributed to targeted sampling to gain personal insights into the experiences of Civil Servants who have undergone the Civil Service recruitment process themselves. Additionally, Civil Service managers with experience as recruiting managers will be interviewed to provide valuable input from the employer's perspective.

The research was conducted through fifteen semi-structured interviews and 250 questionnaires distributed to current Civil Servants. All questions are designed to be unambiguous with the question placement being progressive and structured to allow for honest and prompt responses that will appeal to a wide selection of participants. All participants will receive the same questions, which provides consistency and subsequently improves reliability (White, 2002); (Bell, et al., 2022).

Quantitative data was generated through limited focal questions, enabling statistical analysis and optimising respondent time. Open focal questions facilitated qualitative, in-depth, and unrestricted narratives, valuable for eliciting opinions and recommendations (Bradley et al., 2008).

In terms of question types, both questionnaires and interviews employed a diverse range of questioning techniques. Bifurcated questions were utilised, comprising a quantitative multiple-choice response followed by a qualitative opportunity for expansion and additional context to the provided answer. Multiple-choice questions and Likert scale questions were also employed to facilitate structured but multi-answer responses. The latter, in particular, offered greater flexibility in response choices while maintaining a structured format for statistical analysis (Bradley et al., 2008; Farrell et al., 2017).

Virtual questionnaires facilitated the distribution of surveys to a broader demographic, eliminating the necessity for geographical considerations. They served as a substantial data source for statistical analysis while ensuring participant anonymity, thereby encouraging candid responses without the risk of compromising line managers' reputations or potential legal recourse (Bell et al., 2022). Nevertheless, questionnaires lacked the capability to incorporate dynamic follow-up questions, which can elicit profound and insightful responses, thereby enriching the research's depth (Biggam, 2021).

To address this deficiency, interviews were conducted with willing volunteers employing a semi-structured approach, enabling substantial discussions to develop

through dynamic follow-up questioning. This approach provided significant depth and additional context to the responses. While the researcher was not geographically constrained by virtual communication platforms, this process proved to be time-consuming to conduct and time-inefficient to interpret and analyse the data. (Farrell et al., 2017); (Biggam, 2021); (Bell et al., 2022).

3.6 Population and Sampling

The population sample is an essential consideration of the research methodology to ensure that data reliability is as high as possible and to determine the sampling ratio that provides representative responses without targeting the whole population (Biggam, 2021). Fellows and Liu (2022) states that targeting a full population of the desired demographic is impossible, impracticable and undesirable, with Naoum (2013) stating that three interviews are not enough to draw firm conclusions and therefore, a range in between the extremity limits in this instance, can be defined as convenience sampling (Fellows & Liu, 2022) which is the approach taken in this research.

Farrell, et al (2017) states that sourcing data from a single employer or singular demographic does not provide sufficient representation of views from the whole of the population and continues that datasets should include a variety of sources in terms of employers, seniority, sectors and demographics (Farrell, Sherratt, & Richardson, 2017). The sample of Civil Servants chosen was a broad range of differing occupations from multiple departments across several civil service organisations. The total number of employed staff across the organisations chosen is 5100 employed staff, although only 49% (2500) of the staff are contactable within the UK. Of the 2500 accessible staff, a sampling ratio of 1:10 has been applied which equates to a sample size of 250

persons. Whilst a ratio of 1:10 is lower than the desired 1:20 sampling (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2022), the secure nature of government staff means that access to 500 persons is not achievable given the time constraints and word count of the dissertation.

The participation criterion is that all participants are Civil Servants which is built into the question set. The targeted participants will have experience of competency frameworks and associated aptitude assessments, and hiring managers with experience of conducting assessments and recruiting new staff.

The initial target will be fifteen interviews of varying demographic using the following criteria :

- Five recruiting line managers to provide an employer's viewpoint of current processes
- Five successful vacancy applicants to provide a successful candidates viewpoint which may identify trends in successful candidates.
- Five unsuccessful vacancy applicants to provide a rounded data set and identify if there are trends in unsuccessful candidates.

250 questionnaires without demographic targeting

- 250 – Current Civil Servants with experience of Civil Service recruitment
 - 125 recruiting line managers to provide an employer's viewpoint of current processes.
 - 125 Civil Servants that have experience of Civil Service recruitment as a candidate.

No specific demographic within the service will be targeted. However, a suitability criterion will be employed during questioning to ensure that civil servants are selected to provide the highest likelihood of obtaining reliable data. Due to time constraints, while the objective is to target as many individuals as possible, limitations will be imposed. Consequently, it is probable that the sampling of the questionnaire will be significantly greater than that of the personal interviews. The primary focus will be on obtaining high-quality and reliable data rather than high quantity, low-quality data to facilitate an insightful data analysis.

3.6.1 Pilot Study

To ensure the effectiveness of the survey tool and that open questioning was being used, a pilot study was conducted with the support of ten volunteers who were asked to complete the survey and report on any technical issues, ambiguous or loaded questions and their overall experience of completing the questionnaire.

Piloting is an important mechanism to ensure an effective survey is being used before distributing for response with the advantage to using open questions being that respondents can respond in their terms without being bound by the terms foisted upon them (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2022). Farrell et al (2017) further supports pilot studies by stating that all measurement tools should be piloted and that piloting the questionnaire helps to improve its validity (Farrell, Sherratt, & Richardson, 2017).

The question set for both interviews and questionnaires were shared with ten volunteer Civil Servants who provided valuable feedback. This feedback led to the

reorganisation of questioning and the restructuring of questions to eliminate ambiguity and reduce the weight of certain questions.

3.7 Data and Analysis

The primary data collected has been input into an Excel spreadsheet to construct a database of responses, which has facilitated the summarisation and comparison of the data for the identification of trends which is a method suggested by Burns and Bush (2007). The quantitative data has been utilized to generate graphs and charts, providing a clear visual representation that facilitates the comprehension and comparison of the data. Excel was utilised as opposed to a specific statistical software like IBM SPSS due to Excel's user-friendly interface which provides equally detailed analysis (Thomas, 2022).

Triangulation has been utilised in the analysis of primary data to combine accurate and statistical data from quantitative research with descriptive and complex perceptions of qualitative data akin to the convergent parallel design of mixed method data analysis framework (figure 8) (Zamanou & Glaser, 1994); (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2022).

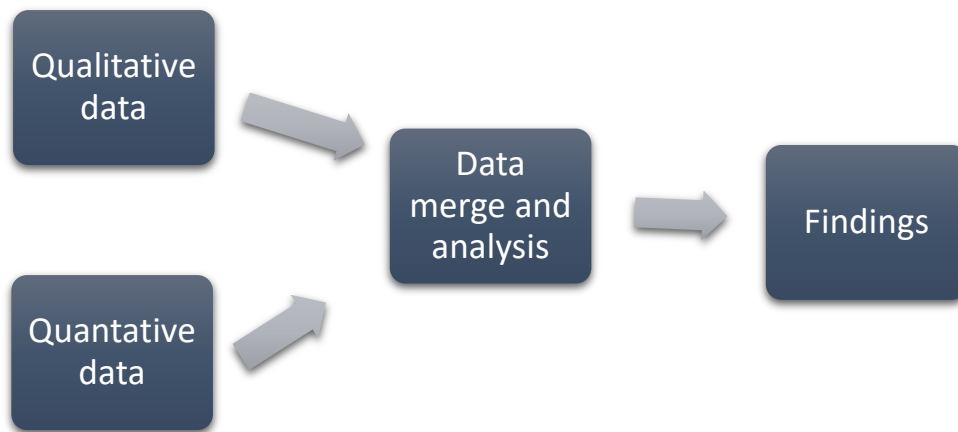


Figure 8: Convergent Parallel Design of data analysis for mixed methods. Source: (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2022)

3.8 Reliability and Viability

The reliability of research data is directly proportional to the appropriateness of the research questions, their ability to address the research objectives, and the quality of the research methodology and how well it has been applied (Bryman and Bell, 2014). The research objectives must be well-defined and free from any bias or influence from secondary research. Furthermore, the research should be aligned with the objectives to ensure that the research data supports the objectives and is not inconsequential (Maslakci & Surucu, 2020).

The ability to consistently replicate or expand upon research that yields the same results is regarded as evidence that a technically sound and comprehensive research study has been conducted (Gast and Ledford, 2018). However, Bell et al. (2022) contend that true replication is unfeasible due to the inherent variation in respondents' demographic characteristics, which can result in differing responses. While research methodology provides structure, it cannot directly influence respondents' characteristics.

Fellows and Lui (2022) state that action research in nature is not static but rather dynamic, capable of generating data over an extended period. Bell, et al (2022) continues that this allows for continuous modifications to the research approach, adapting it to the evolving requirements of the research which can simultaneously identify and solve issues dynamically. This iterative process can lead to an infinite cycle of prolonged research, ultimately resulting in replicable outcomes (figure 9) (Clark, Porath, Thiele, & Jobe, 2020).



Figure 9: Action research cycle. Source: (Clark, Porath, Thiele, & Jobe, 2020)

3.8.1 Limitations of the Research

Research methodologies are subject to limitations, and the researcher has identified several during this study. Action research demonstrated initial strengths in being grounded in practice and possessing the capacity to influence and identify the need for change. However, the research scale was limited in terms of sample size, and

expanding the scope within the same timeframe would have been challenging due to the constraints. (Biggam, 2021).

In relation to the questionnaires, the inclusion of multiple-choice questions was advantageous in terms of maintaining the questionnaire's timeliness for participants. However, due to their ambiguous interpretation, the questionnaire research lacked depth (Biggam, 2021). While the convenience of questionnaires is noted by Biggam (2021), this also resulted in poor completion rates (White, 2002). Furthermore, the sample size was not as substantial as initially anticipated, which has hindered the generalisability of the data for a broader context.

There were further limitations to the semi-structured interview research conducted. Biggam (2021) identifies that interviews are logistically challenging to organize, which is further hindered by the time investment required from the participant and the additional time required for the researcher to interpret the responses. While flexibility is a key advantage of interviews, maintaining consistency to produce reliable data takes considerable effort, further impeded by misinterpretation of questions by the candidate and potentially biased responses (Naoum, 2013); (White, 2002).

3.9 Research Ethics

Research ethics play a pivotal role in the planning and execution of any research project, particularly those involving insider research, which is a cornerstone of action research (Bell et al., 2022). It is imperative to address all ethical and credibility concerns not only procedurally but through a comprehensive and nuanced assessment, as they are fundamental to the integrity and validity of the research

outcomes (Kara, 2018); (Bos, 2020). One of the primary considerations is determining the necessity and advisability of undertaking the study itself, as some research is not ethically advisable, as highlighted by Bell et al. (2022).

Furthermore, action research should strive to contribute meaningfully to theory development and seek to instigate change. Therefore, a carefully considered ethical framework is indispensable to guide researchers in making informed decisions that respect the rights, privacy and dignity of all participants (Walliman, 2021). This ensures that the research not only advances academic theory but also relates to the situations other than the one studied; (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2022).

Undertaking action research necessitates the researcher to assess the consistency and credibility of the data sourced, ensuring its reliability and ethical sourcing (Bell et al., 2022). Furthermore, this approach requires the researcher to ascertain that the data will be useful in diagnosing the issue and serves as a mutually beneficial catalyst for organisational change (Bell et al., 2022).

Before commencing action research, there should be consideration if the research can be undertaken with a genuine opportunity to influence a change and whether the research can be conducted in-line with professional guidance (Bryman & Bell, 2014). In this instance, this consideration is heightened due to the requirement for the adherence of Government security restrictions and Civil Service ethical standards (Civil Service , 2015) which is enforced within the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 (HM Government , 2024).

Action research is a controversial research methodology due to the increased likelihood of unethical procedures being implemented (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2022). It is imperative to consider the participants' livelihoods, employment risks, personal relationships, and obtain appropriate consents (Jones et al., 2022).. The gathered data should be presented in an unbiased manner and not defamatory to any individuals or bring the organisation into dispute (Jones et al., 2022).

Privacy considerations have been incorporated into questionnaire and interview design to ensure that data held and utilised is anonymized. Participants had unrestricted access to their data throughout the research process and have been provided with contact information, allowing them to revoke consent to data usage at any time, as suggested by Thomas (2022). To ensure anonymity, no identifiable information has been retained in this final dissertation as encouraged by Jones, et al (2022).

In this research, no incentives will be provided for participation that aligns with the Civil Service ethics, which prohibit the acceptance of gifts (including monetary) or hospitality in exchange for information (Civil Service, 2015). Consequently, the opinions shared by survey and interview participants will be authentic and uninfluenced by personal gain. All participants will be informed of their right to withdraw at any time and the option to decline any questions they choose not to answer (Cohen et al., 2017).

Chapter 4. Findings

4.1 Presentation and Interpretation of the Data

4.1.1 Introduction

In this chapter of the dissertation, research results from the action research outlined in Chapter 3 are presented, analysed and synthesised with the literature review findings in response to the research objectives. The empirical data was sourced through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, adhering to a suitability criterion to ensure that the participants were Civil Servants with experience in recruitment, either as the recruiting line manager, the applicant, or a recruitment subject matter expert.

All questioning has been unambiguous whilst being wide ranging across all aspects of Civil Service recruitment and has been completed by current Civil Servants that have a shared benefit to bring about change to the current recruitment processes utilised across Civil Service recruitment. All research activity conformed with the Civil Service behaviours and standards (Civil Service , 2015). Clarity was provided within the question where differing interpretations could have resulted in unreliable data.

4.1.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was employed to facilitate the collection of data from a substantial cohort of geographically dispersed Civil Servants in the comfort of their own workspace. This approach allowed for the completion of the questionnaire at the individual's own convenience and without external pressure. Out of the identified large pool of Civil Servants, 256 individuals made up a particular internal email group and

questionnaire invitations were distributed through this group to official governmental email addresses to ensure that only official Civil Servants were invited.

The response rate was 24% with all of the responses submitted from Civil Servants with experience in Civil Service recruitment. 66% of respondents had experience as applicants, while the remaining 33% had additional experience as recruiting line managers.

The respondents were then polled on their perception of the recruitment speed of the Civil Service. Notably, 73% of respondents perceived recruitment as a slow process, while only 3% believed it to be fast which supports the House of Commons Report (2024) which reported an average of 270 days to recruit a new member of staff.

The participants were then questioned on whether their initial recruitment campaign to enter the Civil Service had utilised the success profiles competency framework which was introduced in 2018, 41% of respondents confirming that they had joined the civil service since 2018 and all of these responses also confirmed that they had been subject to success profiles competency assessment framework, which aligns with the Governments initial objective during its inception in 2018 (HM Government , 2019). All respondents confirmed that they did not receive any assistance with their applications from friends nor from the professional services available.

All respondents confirmed that they had experience with the current Success Profiles framework in some capacity. Further questioning on whether the respondents found

the success profiles framework to be effective yielded similar qualitative responses, including :

‘Makes the application process extremely long, for someone new to employment this may put them off applying for Civil Service’

‘Too restricting, doesn't really allow you to dig further into role specific questions to ensure candidate is fit for role’

‘Success profiles are geared more to candidates already in the system, external applicants don't really understand it’

‘No, makes an interview very rigid and inflexible, It also allows someone to prepare textbook answers’

These responses indicated that the framework was perceived not user friendly, lengthy, and biased towards internal applicants which supports CIPD (2024) main criticisms of competency frameworks being ‘not user friendly’ (CIPD, 2024).

The assertion of internal bias was supported when respondents were asked if they perceived any bias in the recruitment process. A significant portion, 48%, indicated that they did not perceive any bias. Conversely, 52% believed in the presence of bias. Notably, fifty of the 52% who believed in bias, attributed it to Success Profiles creating an internal bias which conflicts with the Civil Service People Plan 2024-2027 (2024), which provides clear objectives on attracting external and more experienced candidates into the Civil Service (Government People Group, 2024).

The respondents were then asked for their perception on whether the framework results in the best candidate securing the role, 16% confirmed that the current process resulted in the best candidate for the role securing the position whilst 33% of respondents believe that the best candidate always secures the role, the remaining 51% stated that only infrequently did the best candidate secure the role. However, the questioning did not facilitate respondents in providing reasons for their views on why this is the case.

The next question posed asked about security vetting in civil service recruitment with 67% of respondents believing that the process impedes recruitment and 69% expressing dissatisfaction with the communication provided before and during the process. This primary data supports published literature from the Government People Group (2024) that also identified security vetting as a civil service recruitment bottleneck. Conversely, 79% of respondents indicated that they do not perceive security vetting as excessively burdensome and that it is appropriately tailored to the positions in question.

The next set of questions was on promotional recruitment with the initial question asking respondents whether promotional recruitment processes resulted in the best person securing the promotional role, the responses were varied but followed a similar theme as follows :

‘Often there is bias because a natural successor has emerged, or has been identified during contingency planning’

‘Knowledge of the candidate can influence the result’

‘It seems to be not what you know, but who you know’

The follow-up question provided participants to recommend their own changes to the promotional recruitment process if they felt that it needed any, which yielded varying responses including the following :

‘Reduce the control the hiring manager has over the process, under the old systems when HR managed the process, we got better candidates’

‘All promotional recruitment should have two independent people on the board’

‘It should be on ability to do the job (with a bit of training) rather than success profiles’

The trend in the response to both questions is that promotional recruitment process is bias towards favoured candidates with better relationships as opposed to a greater level of competency, which corresponds with Northcote and Trevelyan (1854) and Armstrong (2014) which both recognise the requirement for ‘suppression of personal bias towards an employee’ (Armstrong, 2014)

The next section of questions was around the topic of staff retention which initially asked for a qualitative assessment of whether the benefits package offered in the Civil Service is comparable to that of the private sector. The prevailing opinion was that the

package is equally attractive as the private sector, despite the overall consensus being that salaries are lower. This primary data supports the outcome of the Civil Service People Survey (2024) where 22% of Civil Servants intend to leave the Civil Service over the next twelve months to secure an improved salary (Cabinet Office , 2024). However, it was acknowledged by 33% of respondents that the pension offering is significantly superior, which compensates for the lower salaries and results in a comparable overall package.

The questionnaire proceeds to ask participants what the main factor is in their intention to remain or depart the Civil Service with the leading reason to stay being due to the pension offering (33%), work/life balance (46%) and the purpose of their role (30%) which coheres with Cabinet Office (2024) Civil Service People Survey (see figure 4) where 84% of staff confirmed that they were motivated by the organisational purpose.

The prominent reason to depart the Civil Service was to seek greater perceived salary (48%), lack of promotional opportunities (15%) and seeking an organisation with reduced bureaucracy (8%). This primary data is comparable with the Cabinet Office (2024) survey of staff, where 68% of staff stated that they were not satisfied with the current salary offering.

Final questioning provided an opportunity for respondents to propose their own improvements to civil service recruitment with the overarching response being that Success Profiles framework was ineffective and that the process timeline was too long with poor communication throughout. The benefit offering was comparable to private sector albeit with different weighting for different areas of the benefits package.

Pertinent responses to some of the qualitative questions are as follows :

‘Civil service recruitment is woefully slow with poor communication throughout with respondents reporting 6 months between application submission and role commencement being common place’

‘Salary’s do not align with similar roles in private sector where the salary is higher’

‘Pension provision in the Civil Service is significantly better than private sector although the offering is not as good as it was in the past’

‘Success Profiles is viewed as a biased framework preventing highly skilled external candidates securing roles in Civil Service’

‘Security Vetting is slow albeit at the right level with poor communication throughout’

‘Public image of Civil Servant on a Curriculum Vitae (CV) can discourage potential applicants’

These responses align with seminal report recommendations over the past 167 years.

4.1.3 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were held with the researcher with 15 invites being sent to Civil Servant official email addresses. Ten Civil Servants responded accepting the researchers invite to a research interview which resulted in a response rate of 66% with each interview taking 88 minutes on average across the ten interviews. Of the ten participants, seven were recruiting line managers, two had recently been successful at internal promotion and one had been unsuccessful at internal promotion.

The initial question of the interview was an opportunity for the participants to express their views on the efficiency and effectiveness of civil service recruitment, the responses shared a similar view that the recruitment process was too slow and was biased towards the candidate with most knowledge of the process, instead of the most competent person for the role. This aligns with Wilton (2022) who states that identified attributes through competency assessment does not translate into competency of said attributes.

However, whilst there was a clear trend, some responses alluded to mixed experiences as follows :

‘Blind sift and appropriately constructed interview panels do encourage recruitment without bias - apart from the overarching position that the process favours existing civil servants.’

‘50-50, still feel there is a bit of who you know’

‘It swings and roundabouts and it depends on the role and where in the organisation you fit in’

‘Sometimes yes, however there has been biased examples I have seen where the recruiting line manager favours certain candidates’

When asked about cross-organisational secondment opportunities, all respondents confirmed that there was no opportunity for cross-organisational or cross-departmental secondments. Further follow-up questioning to all participants revealed that that inductions into the civil service are poor with very little orientation to help new starters transition into their new roles. When questioned about recruitment communication, 60% felt that communication throughout the recruitment process was insufficient whilst the remaining 40% felt that communication was suitable although it’s prudent to note that the aforementioned 40% were recruiting Line Managers.

All participants were subsequently questioned regarding the suitability of Success Profiles as a civil service specific competency assessment framework. Responses exhibited variability, although the consistent descriptive terms employed were prescriptive, irrelevant, and a necessary part of the process. Follow-up questioning regarding the suitability of Success Profiles for internal recruitment yielded similar commentary. However, there were additional opinions suggesting that it was more advantageous for internal applicants compared to external candidates, which is supported by Blake (2024) where they state that the existing relationships and access to internal documents creates an unintentional and unconscious bias.

The seven recruiting line manager participants were further asked whether they found success profiles useful for comparing candidate's competency for a role. Varied responses were received all with negative connotations although a pertinent response received was that the assessment framework did not accommodate the consideration of cultural fit or work ethic. Furthermore, technical line managers complained that there was no scope for 'real' technical questions aside from assessment of technical legislation.

The seven recruiting line managers were asked whether internal candidates gave stronger interviews when compared to external candidates, the majority response was 'yes they do' although when a follow-up question was asked of why, the participants give varying answers as shown below :

'They already understand the business and the dynamic between different departments and stakeholders'

'Internal candidates can speak with the line manager to gain a greater understanding of the role and recruiting requirements which is afforded to external candidates but is rarely utilised'

'They know what the key pressures of the role are and how to negate them which allows for excellent responses at interview'

The participants were asked the next question on whether there were additional assessment tools that could be implemented to address the perceived weaknesses in

the Success Profiles competency assessment framework which provided varying responses as follows :

‘Requesting a presentation at interview on a line manager chosen topic could help address the inflexibility’

‘2 stage interviewing would provide an opportunity for greater questioning’

‘Psychometric testing before interview would help assess personality type and cultural fit which success profiles does not cater for’

None of the participants had experienced bias personally although were aware that internal applicants were at an advantage during external campaigns due to existing internal relationships and access to internal guidance documentation not available in the public domain.

All participants were asked whether the current advertising platform attracted enough applicants for roles and all responses confirmed that they believed that the Civil Service Jobs website was sufficient at attracting a high volume of applicants, with Government People Group (2024) reporting 4 million visitors in the last 12 months, although, Semrush (2024) report that 833.61 million people visit the ‘indeed’ website each month which is a stark difference in the potential to attract applicants.

The next question was whether security vetting timescales hindered recruitment with 80% of participants responding that it does not hinder recruitment although 20% believed that it did hinder in some capacity with the following responses :

‘It does not stop people from applying but it does cause people to find employment elsewhere whilst waiting for the vetting clearance which results in the process starting again which takes an age and is frustrating’

‘The timescales are not an issue but people are not told about them until too late in the process. The information required is also not clear until they begin the process’

All participants were content with the current security vetting levels and associated timeframes but implied that they were dissatisfied by communication and information provided to applicants.

The participants were asked whether the current centralised HR model provided sufficient support and guidance for recruitment. The responses were varied as shown in the statements below :

‘No, I have asked by policy guidance and was provided a guidance document relating to a policy of a different government department which is appalling’

‘I receive the assistance I need, although it does take a long time to receive a response if there is a surge of recruitment in other parts of government’

'it's a nightmare to speak to anyone and when I do, it's really impersonal and they have no idea about the jobs I'm recruiting for'

The responses coincide with the opinions of Williamson, et al (2020) where they stated that centralised services are 'decoupling of policy and practice resulting in incoherence'. The responses also alluded to inconsistent processes across the multiple departments which contradicts Government Shared Services (2021) objective of 'achieving efficiency savings and standardised processes.

The participants were asked whether the Civil Service offers a competitive compensation package sufficient enough to retain existing staff. Varied responses are as follows :

'Hybrid working and the work life balance are good and would encourage me to join the CS . However, salaries and bonuses, when compared to the private sector in some cases is poor, especially in some parts of the country'

'Seems good, although have never worked in private sector, so cannot compare'

'I don't think salary is a driver when you compare the CS with Private sector. I think job security is a key factor. Flexible/Smarter working have been a big factor in recruitment.'

‘Yes, the work life balance and security of tenure alongside pension and other benefits are attractive when considered in the round. Whilst salaries are lower, Civil Service does raise salaries annually, so while there aren’t spine points, there is a raise each year’

The participants were asked a follow-up question on how Civil Service can increase retention amongst existing staff with several recommendation received in response with one creative response proposing to reverse engineer the alignment of people and positions where a role is created to suit a person’s strengths as opposed to requiring an individual to adapt to the role where their strengths may not align.

‘The civil service could benefit from aligning job roles to employee assessed strengths...to maximise capability, output and satisfaction. Bespoke training packages. Policy, rules and guidance that were easy to navigate, provided real advice that was easy to follow and not ambiguous. Separate responsibilities to ensure that all staff have access and experience excellent line management support’

This theory is similar to that of Bolden, et al (2003) and Henderson (2015) where they state that the current process ‘predicts job success by assuming certain attributes of a role and matching candidates to the attribute’.

Final questioning provided an opportunity for participants to provide their own suggestions on changes required to the current process, if they felt any were required. There were varied responses with several respondents resisting further changes due

to the continuous amendments to the process, causing confusion as recruitment is not the recruiting line managers main profession.

Several qualitative change proposals posed by the respondents are as follows :

‘A change to the success profiles, it’s too complicated for some, entails a lot of research and work’

‘Better communication throughout the process, from new line manager and HR’

‘Get rid of behaviours they stop a lot of people from applying, retention is all about making someone feel valued and pay what they are worth’

‘More focus on the disciplines that are harder to recruit, e.g. IT specialists, Quantity Surveyors, plus greater engagement in under-represented areas through greater outreach to colleges and universities. Also, greater promotion of the Civil Service as a whole.’

‘Introduce a better software tool so applicants can see the timeline and any movement. Sometimes this can be slow the applicant may choose another job’

Other responses suggested a complete recruitment overhaul, reduced bureaucracy, increased communication to applicants to prevent ‘drop-outs’ and the adoption of a recruitment process akin to private sector, where CVs are submitted and recruiting line managers have the ability to pose their own consistent competency assessments

personalised to the role being recruited. This opposes the Government Chief People Officer (2018) who oversaw the introduction of Success Profiles with a purpose of providing a “consistent approach to recruitment ensuring that all applicants are assessed against the same criteria”.

There were further proposals to break down departmental silos to allow for cross government secondments in similar roles akin to the proposal of the Cabinet Office (1999). Further suggestions to produce role development pathways to attract younger staff and provide a clear pathway for a full career of development and promotion to aid in retention and the initial attraction of younger staff which aligns with Price (2015) and the Fulton report (1968) that recommended that all staff are incentivised through development and progression.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, substantial findings have been identified as a result of this research, which unequivocally demonstrates that primary data aligns with seminal reports, theoretical frameworks, and published literature spanning over 168 years advocating for alterations within Civil Service recruitment practices. However, research suggests that minimal progress has been made in implementing reforms within Civil Service recruitment. This is evidenced by repetitive seminal report recommendations cumulating in the 2024 future strategy of the 'Civil Service People Plan 2024-2027' (2024) recommending a commitment to attract more external and experienced candidates to the Civil Service, which conforms with the recommendations posed by The Modernising Government paper (1999) and Northcote-Trevelyan (1854).

Research conducted by the Government People Group (2024) revealed that the Civil Service jobs website garnered 4 million visitors within the past twelve months. However, a report by Semrush (2024) indicates that the 'Indeed' website attracts approximately 833.61 million monthly visitors, highlighting a significant disparity in the potential to attract potential applicants. This disparity may also impact the conversion rate in terms of successfully attracting actual applicants.

However, the primary objective of this dissertation was to analyse the recruitment process, the reach and attraction of Civil Service recruitment are not within its scope. This is because the dissertation's focus was on the recruitment process itself, rather than methods to increase marketing and conversion rates. However, further research in this area could potentially help to match the mainstream media's reach.

Literature research revealed the existence of several businesses that provide support to customers in the process of applying for Civil Service positions (How 2 Become, 2024). However, primary research failed to identify any Civil Servants who had utilised the services of these businesses. Nevertheless, it is evident that these businesses have a purpose, and it is reasonable to assume that there are applicants who seek to gain unfair advantages by utilising these services (Blake, 2024).

Collective research also corresponded in that internal candidates had an unfair advantage in writing Civil Service applications (Blake, 2024) due to existing personal relationships internally, with questionnaires and respondents stating that they believe that internal bias exists. However, procedural justice is opposed by Armstrong (2014) with Civil Service Commission (2021) recognising internal bias and conflicts of interest in recent recruitment policy breaches (Civil Service Commission, 2023).

Furthermore, both direct research and external research demonstrated that internal candidates had an unfair advantage in writing Civil Service applications (Blake, 2024). This advantage arose from existing internal personal relationships, with responses to questionnaires and interviews acknowledging the presence of internal bias. However, this issue is countered by Armstrong (2014), who contends that procedural fairness is being compromised. In response, the Civil Service Commission (2021) recognised internal bias and conflicts of interest in recent recruitment policy breaches (Civil Service Commission, 2023).

When analysing the current Civil Service HR model, research aligned with the notion that the current model of centralised human resources, which closely resembles David

Ulrich's HR model, was not delivering the desired level of service as evidenced by the participants responses and the literature authored by Williamson et al. (2020) further supported by the weaknesses identified by CIPD (2024).

Currently, a blended recruitment strategy is used with Success Profiles forming the competency assessment framework. The current Success Profiles framework, introduced in 2018, was initially conceived as a competency assessment framework capable of standardisation across all roles and departments within the Civil Service (Government Chief People Officer, 2018). However, subsequent research has demonstrated that assessing all candidates for all roles against a standardised assessment may not be an effective approach.

The assessment method of standardising individuals into the assessment criteria is found to be fair and open competition although, the primary research findings revealed that the Success Profiles framework was not deemed an effective assessment tool for competency. It was inflexible and often resulted in the most informed candidate securing the role rather than the most competent individual. Additionally, the research suggested a lack of collaborative interaction between HRM professionals and recruiting line managers, which was also implied by Picardi (2020).

Recruiting line managers indicated that the success profiles framework lacked options for technical interviewing or the evaluation of cultural fit, which aligns with Bolden, et al. (2003). Bolden, et al. (2003) further asserts that competency assessments transform into assessment tools for a relational understanding of valuable experience that disregards cultural fit, cognitive, or interpersonal qualities of an individual.

Research conducted on the implications of extended security vetting has demonstrated that the current levels of security vetting are adequate and appropriately positioned for the roles being recruited. (United Kingdom Security Vetting, 2024). The UK Security Vetting (UKSV) agency, responsible for security vetting, has consistently failed to meet the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) set by the government. (National Audit Office, 2023). However, a comparison with Australian security vetting agencies suggests that the KPIs are realistic and achievable. (Australian Government Security Vetting Agency, 2024).

Primary research provided the further insight that whilst vetting timescales are accepted, the communication and information around the requirements of the process are inadequate, creating an unsettled environment for external applicants. This area warrants further research that would be beneficial to enhance future researchers understanding of Civil Service complexities.

In terms of internal promotional recruitment, the same success profiles competency assessment framework is utilised which results in the same shortcomings of the model. Research suggests that internal promotional recruitment is heavily biased and based on existing relationships and there are very little talent pipelines or success planning to inform the promotional decisions, although, Church, et al (2020) does recommend success planning direct from academia which is an area for further consideration.

In terms of employee retention, retention statistics and opinions are poor with promotion being thought of as an entitlement as opposed to promotion based on high performance or levels of competency. Research has demonstrated that the recruitment cost is a substantial expense at £8,671.65 per person (Bank of England , 2024), and the retention, development, and success planning of existing staff are crucial considerations to reduce this. Currently, 22% of Civil Servants intend to leave the Civil Service within the next 12 months (Cabinet Office, 2024). While the primary reason for pursuing employment outside the Civil Service is to secure a higher salary, as supported by Markson (2023). However, literature has shown an increase in employee satisfaction with their current salary year-on-year, although the current level of satisfaction is 32% (Cabinet Office, 2024).

It was evident from the primary research that there exists a perception that the benefits package offered by the Civil Service is inferior to that provided by private sector organisations. However, Cribb and O'Brien (2024) have calculated that the salary difference between the two sectors is negligible, amounting to only 2%. Conversely, the pension contributions offered by the Civil Service are 25% higher, resulting in an overall benefit package that is superior to that of private sector organisations. Primary research suggests that this disparity in benefits is not effectively communicated and should be a key consideration moving forward, as the overall benefits package plays a crucial role in staff retention and recruitment efforts.

Several limitations were encountered in this research. The primary research did not yield the anticipated number of responses and it would have been beneficial if a greater timescale and word count was available to research the objectives fully and

allow for additional rounds of questionnaires and interviewing to provide a more comprehensive piece of research. While substantial published literature was available for secondary research, the majority originated from government sources, with the exception of seminal reports which, whilst independently researched and written, were still commissioned by government entities.

A significant portion of the targeted research was also unavailable in the public domain due to security constraints although additional sources of information were available thanks to specific pieces of legislation and inquiry data which would not have been available in relation to private organisations. The researcher also found that some Civil Servants were hesitant to share strong opinions to build a polarising piece of research through concern of data protection and potential breach of the Civil Service Code of Ethics which, in-turn, evidenced the strong morality of the staff in public office.

The researcher has successfully achieved the primary objectives of this dissertation. However, the researcher anticipates that this dissertation will serve as a catalyst for further research, recognising the substantial scale of the evidence required to effect change. This is compounded when we recognise that it is in the interest of the whole country to bring about change as we all interact with Public Servants to receive public service as part of our day-to-day lives.

5.1 Recommendations

This research has revealed that there are consistent themes running through 168 years of literature which aligns with current day primary research. There are several misconceptions of Civil Service recruitment that could be quickly addressed within the realms of current Civil Service constraints. In light of this, the researcher proposes the following recommendations :

- It is recommended that greater flexibility is built into the current Civil Service recruitment policy to allow recruiting line managers to assess technical competency and cultural fit in a more meaningful way as opposed to the prescriptive framework currently enforced. This will allow for greater focus on recruiting the most competent as opposed to the most informed.
- Communication throughout the recruitment process requires improvement with greater information available from the outset on security vetting requirements and associated timescales. A technologically advanced applicant tracking portal could map the appropriate stages and allow candidates to have live updates available when required which will help retain candidates that 'drop-out' of the process due to lengthy timescales.
- Improved corporate communication to existing staff surrounding the benefits package currently in place may help influence a cultural change internally to improve the perception that private sector benefits are greater which in-turn will reduce staff turnover. Further corporate implementation of greater talent

pipelines from academia and internal succession planning will further improve retention and internal perception of recruitment.

Furthermore, there are several areas that would benefit from further research with greater sampling to determine other required changes of the Civil Service recruitment strategy.

Chapter 6. Reference list

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Chapter 8. Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Civil Service HR Shared Services Strategy
- Appendix 2 – Questionnaire Question Set
- Appendix 3 – Interview Question Set
- Appendix 4 – Ethics Form

8.1 Appendix 1 - Civil Service HR Shared Services Strategy

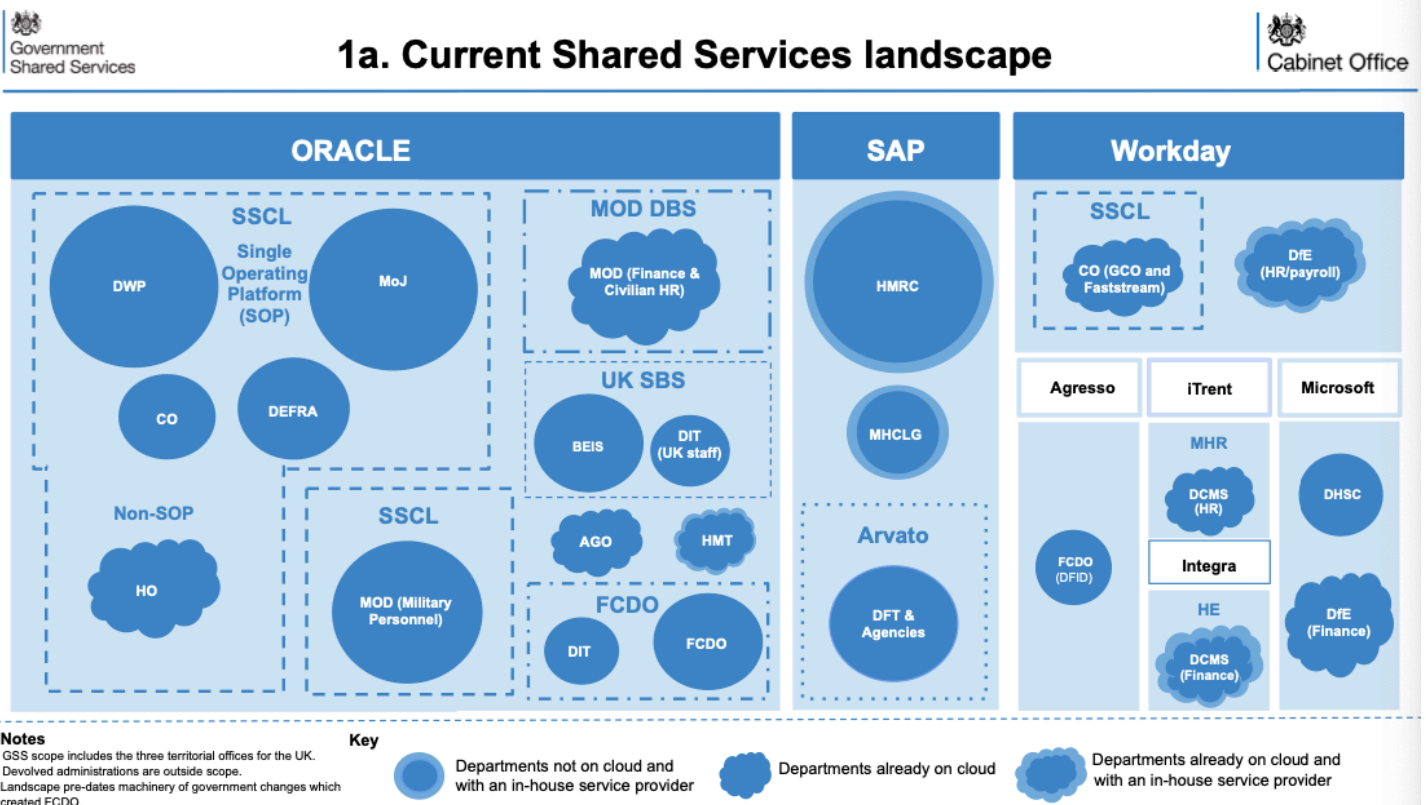


Figure 10: Current shared services model. Source: (Government Shared Services, 2021)

8.2 Appendix 2 – Questionnaire Question Set

Civil Service Recruitment, Retention & Promotion

Hi,

Firstly, thank you for agreeing to participate in this research.

In today's digital age of online digital recruitment tools, it has never been easier to find employment opportunities and to submit your application from the comfort of your own home. However, in such a digital and flexible working era, the Civil Service still has difficulty attracting the best person for the role.

This survey will aim to analyse whether the current Civil Service recruitment strategy is fit for purpose and compare against modern strategic human resource management theories in an attempt to identify improvements to ensure the Civil Service is able to attract the best talent.

You are not obligated to complete all of the questions although all responses are recorded anonymously, so feel free to provide honest feedback. Your responses will help to inform improvement recommendations for Civil Service recruitment.

There are 7 sections covering recruitment, promotion, retention, security vetting and improvement suggestions. This survey is expected to take 7-10 minutes and you are free to withdraw from this survey at any time.

1. How do you feel about current Civil Service recruitment timescales (from advert to commencing the role) ?

- ☐ Fast
- ☐ Average
- ☐ Slow

Your recruitment journey

To be completed by all Civil Servants

2. When were you recruited into the Civil Service ?

- ☐ 0-6 months ago
- ☐ 6-12 months ago
- ☐ 1-3 years ago
- ☐ 3-6 years ago
- ☐ 6-10 years ago
- ☐ 10+ years ago

3. Were you recruited through fair and open competition ?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

4. Did you receive any assistance from the Civil Service recruitment staff when completing your application or in preparation for the interview ?

- ☐ Yes - Assistance with the application
- ☐ Yes - Assistance with interview preparation
- ☐ Yes - Both, assistance with application and interview preparation
- ☐ No - No assistance received from Civil Service recruitment staff

5. Did you seek any support with the competency element of the recruitment process ? if yes, what support did you seek ?

6. How did you find your application process, was the process efficient and informative in terms of understanding the role ?

Civil Service Recruitment

To be completed by Civil Servants that have experience of Civil Service recruitment between 2018 and current day, either as a recruiting line manager or candidate applying for a role.

if you have not been involved in any recruitment between 2018 and current day, please proceed to Section 4 - Promotion.

7. Have you been involved with Civil Service recruitment between 2018 and current day ?

- ☐ Yes - Continue to next question
- ☐ No - Please proceed to section 4

8. What was your involvement ?

- ☐ Recruiting Line Manager
- ☐ Candidate applying for the role

9. Was Success Profiles used as the assessment framework for the recruitment campaign ?

- ☐ Yes - Progress to question 10
- ☐ No - Progress to question 11

10. What were your thoughts on Success Profiles ? Was it effective ?

11. Did you feel that there was an unfair bias during the campaign ? if so, what made you feel this ?

12. Do you agree that current Civil Service recruitment practices result in the best candidate securing the advertised role ?

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

13. Is there anything that could have improved the effectiveness of this recruitment campaign ?

Promotion

This section will explore your views of the current recruitment processes for promotional roles within the civil service.

14. Have you been promoted within the Civil Service or participated in a recruitment campaign for promotional roles ?

☐ Yes - Progress to the next question

☐ No - Progress to section 5

15. Do you feel that promotional opportunities are recruited fairly without bias ?

☐ Yes

☐ No

16. Do you feel that current promotional recruitment results in the best candidate chosen for the role ? and why ?

17. Do you feel that promotional recruitment process could be improved ? if so, how ?

Retention

This section will explore the main factors that make you want to remain as a Civil Servant or factors that are encouraging you to leave the Civil Service.

18. Do you feel that the Civil Service offers a competitive benefit package when compared with the private sector and why ?

Benefit package can include :

Salary
Pension
Discount offerings
Bonus payments
Healthcare cover
Dental cover
Transport/vehicle provisions (company car, cycle to work etc)
Work/life balance
Hybrid working / Flexible working
Job satisfaction

Any other offerings that make an organisation appealing.

19. What are the main factors that prevents you from leaving the Civil Service or the factors that are encouraging you to leave the Civil Service ?

20. What else could the Civil Service offer that would encourage you to remain employed within the Civil Service ?

Security Vetting

Security Vetting is an essential part of Civil Service recruitment, although whilst necessary, this can be a lengthy process. This section will explore your views and experiences of the vetting process.

21. Do you feel that security vetting applications take an excessive amount of time to be processed ?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

22. Do you feel that security vetting hinders Civil Service recruitment ?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

23. Do you feel that recruitment candidates are sufficiently informed of the security vetting requirements and timescales before employing for a role ?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

24. Are there any improvements that can be implemented to reduce the security vetting impacts on recruitment candidates when applying for Civil Service roles ? if so, what improvements ?

25. Do you feel that Civil Service employees are currently vetted to the correct level that matches their position ?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

26. Do you feel that increased or reduced security vetting is required for Civil Service roles in general ?

- ☐ Increased security vetting
- ☐ Reduced security vetting
- ☐ Security vetting is correct at the current levels

Final Thoughts

Thank you for reaching this stage in the survey, your opinion and time commitment is greatly appreciated. One more question will conclude this survey and greatly assist with this research activity. Thank you.

27. What improvements do you feel would improve Civil Service recruitment, promotion and retention and why ?

8.3 Appendix 3 – Interview Question Set

Pre-set interview questions

Hi, Firstly, thank you for agreeing to participate in this research and for affording me time from your busy schedule.

In today's digital age of online digital recruitment tools, it has never been easier to find employment opportunities and to submit your application from the comfort of your own home. However, in such a digital and flexible working era, the Civil Service still has difficulty attracting the best person for the role.

This interview will aim to analyse whether the current Civil Service recruitment strategy is fit for purpose and compare against modern strategic human resource management theories in an attempt to identify improvements to ensure the Civil Service is able to attract the best talent.

The interview will cover recruitment, promotion, retention, security vetting and Improvement proposals. This interview is expected to take 1 hour 30 minutes and you are free to withdraw from this survey at any time. Your responses in this interview will help to inform improvement recommendations for Civil Service recruitment.

You are also free to request my notes from this interview at any time and are also free to withdraw your consent which will prompt me to delete the notes taken and remove your responses from the research. You are not obligated to answer any of the questions although all responses are noted anonymously, so feel free to provide honest feedback.

Suitability criterion assessment

1. Can you please confirm that you are a current Civil Servant ?
2. Can you confirm that you have experience of Civil Service recruitment and Success Profiles competency framework and in what capacity ? A recruiting Line manager, successful applicant for a recent Civil Service role or an unsuccessful applicant for a Civil Service role.

Questions

3. What is your general opinion of the Civil Service recruitment policy and timescales associated with it ?
4. Do you think that the Civil Service offers a beneficial cross-organisational familiarisation opportunity or suitable induction ?
5. Do you think that the success profiles competency framework suitably identifies the right candidate for the role ?
6. Are there additional assessment tools that would assist Civil Service in identifying the best candidate for the role ?
7. Do you feel that recruitment is fair and without bias ?
8. Do you believe that Civil Service Jobs website is a suitable platform for advertising vacant roles and do you believe that it has suitable reach to attract high calibre applicants ?

9. What are your thoughts on whether promotional recruitment results in the best candidate securing the promotional role ?
10. Do you feel that promotional recruitment is fair and without bias ?

Do you need a 10 minute comfort break as I appreciate that ongoing questioning can be mentally tiring ?

11. What are your opinions on UKSV vetting timescales and do you believe that they hinder recruitment ?
12. Do you feel that a centralised HR shared services model provided you with sufficient support ?
13. Civil Service staff survey states that the primary reason for staff departures is to seek an improved salary, do you believe that Civil Service offers a comparable benefit package to that offered in the private sector ?
14. Do you have any suggestions on how Civil Service can increase its retention rate ?
15. Do you have any suggestions on how the Civil Service could improve recruitment, promotion or retention ?

Thank you for your time once again and for your openness and transparent answers, greatly appreciated. |

SECTION B: Approval for Research Activity

1	Has the research activity received approval in principle? (please check the Guidance Notes as to the appropriate approval process for different levels of research by different categories of individual)	YES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO	<input type="checkbox"/>
					Date
2	If Yes, please indicate source of approval (and date where known): Approval in principle must be obtained from the relevant source prior to seeking ethical approval	Research Degrees Committee	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Institute Research Committee		<input type="checkbox"/>			
Other (write in)		<input type="checkbox"/>			

SECTION C: Internal and External Ethical Guidance Materials

Please list the core ethical guidance documents that have been referred to during the completion of this form (including any discipline-specific codes of research ethics, location-specific codes of research ethics, and also any specific ethical guidance relating to the proposed methodology). Please tick to confirm that your research proposal adheres to these codes and guidelines. You may add rows to this table if needed.	
1	UWTSD Research Ethics & Integrity Code of Practice <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2	UWTSD Research Data Management Policy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3	<input type="checkbox"/>

SECTION D: External Collaborative Research Activity

If there are external collaborators then you should gain consent from the contact persons to share their personal data with the university. If there are no external collaborators then leave this section blank and continue to section E.

1	Institution					
2	Contact person name					
3	Contact person e-mail address					
4	Is your research externally funded?	YES	<input type="checkbox"/>	NO	<input type="checkbox"/>	
5	Are you in receipt of a KESS scholarship?	YES	<input type="checkbox"/>	NO	<input type="checkbox"/>	
6	Are you specifically employed to undertake this research in either a paid or voluntary capacity?	Voluntary	YES	<input type="checkbox"/>	NO	<input type="checkbox"/>
7		Employed	YES	<input type="checkbox"/>	NO	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	Is the research being undertaken within an existing UWTSD Athrofa Professional Learning Partnership (APLP)?	If YES then the permission question below does not need to be answered.	YES	<input type="checkbox"/>	NO	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	Has permission to undertake the research has been provided by the partner organisation?	(If YES attach copy) (If NO the application cannot continue)	YES	<input type="checkbox"/>	NO	<input type="checkbox"/>

Where research activity is carried out in collaboration with an external organisation

10	Does this organisation have its own ethics approval system?	YES	<input type="checkbox"/>	NO	<input type="checkbox"/>
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	If Yes, please attach a copy of any final approval (or interim approval) from the organisation (this may be a copy of an email if appropriate).
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SECTION E: Details of Research Activity

1	Indicative title:	Assessing Aptitude :An in-depth analysis of the effectiveness of HRM competency frameworks in Civil Service recruitment, selection and promotion.		
2	Proposed start date:	January 2024	Proposed end date:	May 2024
	Introduction to the Research (maximum 300 words per section) Ensure that you write for a <u>Non-Specialist Audience</u> when outlining your response to the points below: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose of Research Activity • Proposed Research Question • Aims of Research Activity • Objectives of Research Activity <p>Demonstrate, briefly, how Existing Research has informed the proposed activity and explain</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What the research activity will add to the body of knowledge • How it addresses an area of importance. 			
3	Purpose of Research Activity <p>The purpose of the research activity is to identify whether Civil Service employees and recruiting managers with differing lengths of experience feel that the competency frameworks used for recruitment, result in the employment of the most competent candidate for the role.</p> <p>There are seminal reports dating back 170 years recommending change to recruitment, retention and promotional practices and this research will identify if recommending change is still the requirement or whether change has been implemented and services its purpose sufficiently.</p> <p>(this box should expand as you type)</p>			
4	Research Question <p>Is the current Civil Service recruitment competency framework fit for purpose ?</p> <p>(this box should expand as you type)</p>			
5	Aims of Research Activity <p>The aim of the study is to analyse the current recruitment environment through consideration of historical and current theory, analysis of relevant data and an analysis of the current environment with a view to improving efficiency and creating greater value to government organisations.</p> <p>(this box should expand as you type)</p>			
6	Objectives of Research Activity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To analyse whether the current Civil Service recruitment strategy is fit for purpose and compare against modern strategic human resource management theories. • To analyse whether the retention and promotion strategies within Civil Service are fit for purpose. • Assess other prominent recruitment practices in other industries and analyse the differences. • To analyse the impact on applicants and their preparation for aptitude assessment. • To identify the value to Civil Service organisations when using competency frameworks and determine if there any barriers to developing the frameworks further. 			

	<p>Proposed methods (maximum 600 words)</p> <p>Provide a brief summary of all the methods that may be used in the research activity, making it clear what specific techniques may be used. If methods other than those listed in this section are deemed appropriate later, additional ethical approval for those methods will be needed. You do not need to justify the methods here, but should instead describe how you intend to collect the data necessary for you to complete your project.</p>
7	<p>A mixed method approach to data collection will be used through the means of structured, unstructured and semi-structured personal interviewing and self-completed questionnaires which will be collected by targeted sampling to gain the personal insight of experiences from candidates and recruiting managers as well as HRM professionals that facilitate the recruitment processes.</p> <p>No data recordings will be made and all data collected will be anonymous. The author will make anonymised notes from the interviewing to allow for accurate recall of answers provided which will be typed, retained securely until dissertation submission and destroyed once submitted.</p> <p>It is not deemed that GDPR will apply.</p> <p>(this box should expand as you type)</p>
	<p>Location of research activity</p> <p>Identify all locations where research activity will take place.</p>
8	<p>Virtually in the workplace environment within the UK.</p> <p>(this box should expand as you type)</p>
	<p>Research activity outside of the UK</p> <p>If research activity will take place overseas, you are responsible for ensuring that local ethical considerations are complied with and that the relevant permissions are sought. Specify any local guidelines (e.g. from local professional associations/learned societies/universities) that exist and whether these involve any ethical stipulations beyond those usual in the UK (provide details of any licenses or permissions required). Also specify whether there are any specific ethical issues raised by the local context in which the research activity is taking place, for example, particular cultural and/or legal sensitivities or vulnerabilities of participants. If you live in the country where you will do the research then please state this.</p>
9	<p>Not Applicable</p> <p>(this box should expand as you type)</p>

10	Use of documentation not in the public domain: Are any documents NOT publicly available?	NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
		YES	<input type="checkbox"/>
11	(this box should expand as you type)		

	Does your research relate to one or more of the seven aims of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015?	YES	NO
12	A prosperous Wales	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
13	A resilient Wales	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
14	A healthier Wales	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

15	A more equal Wales	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
16	A Wales of cohesive communities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
17	A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
18	A globally responsible Wales	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
19	If YES to any of the above, please give details:		
	<div>(this box should expand as you type)</div>		

SECTION F: Scope of Research Activity

	Will the research activity include:	YES	NO
1	Use of a questionnaire or similar research instrument?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Use of interviews?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Use of focus groups?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4	Use of participant diaries?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5	Use of video or audio recording?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
6	Use of computer-generated log files?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7	Participant observation with their knowledge?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
8	Participant observation without their knowledge?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
9	Access to personal or confidential information without the participants' specific consent?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
10	Administration of any questions, test stimuli, presentation that may be experienced as physically, mentally or emotionally harmful / offensive?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
11	Performance of any acts which may cause embarrassment or affect self-esteem?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
12	Investigation of participants involved in illegal activities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
13	Use of procedures that involve deception?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
14	Administration of any substance, agent or placebo?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
15	Working with live vertebrate animals?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
16	Procedures that may have a negative impact on the environment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
17	Other primary data collection methods. Please indicate the type of data collection method(s) below.		
	Details of any other primary data collection method:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	<div>(this box should expand as you type)</div>		

If NO to every question, then the research activity is (ethically) low risk and **may** be exempt from **some** of the following sections (please refer to Guidance Notes).

If YES to any question, then no research activity should be undertaken until full ethical approval has been obtained.

SECTION G: Intended Participants

If there are no participants then do not complete this section, but go directly to section H.

Who are the intended participants:		YES	NO
1	Students or staff at the University?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2	Adults (over the age of 18 and competent to give consent)?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Vulnerable adults?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4	Children and Young People under the age of 18? (Consent from Parent, Carer or Guardian will be required)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5	Prisoners?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
6	Young offenders?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7	Those who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with the investigator or a gatekeeper?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
8	People engaged in illegal activities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	Others. Please indicate the participants below, and specifically any group who may be unable to give consent.		
	Details of any other participant groups:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
(this box should expand as you type)			

Participant numbers and source	
Provide an estimate of the expected number of participants. How will you identify participants and how will they be recruited?	
10	How many participants are expected? 115 – 175 participants will be targeted for the data collection (this box should expand as you type)
11	Who will the participants be? Civil service recruitment candidates Civil service employees Civil service recruiting managers Civil Service HRM subject matter experts (this box should expand as you type)
12	How will you identify the participants? Networking with Civil Service HRM departments followed by an email introduction and invitation to participate. (this box should expand as you type)

Information for participants:		YES	NO	N/A
13	Will you describe the main research procedures to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15	Will you obtain written consent for participation?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16	Will you explain to participants that refusal to participate in the research will not affect their treatment or education (if relevant)?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

17	If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
18	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19	With questionnaires, will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20	Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21	Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation, in a way appropriate to the type of research undertaken?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22	If NO to any of above questions, please give an explanation			
<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>				

Information for participants:		YES	NO	N/A
24	Will participants be paid?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25	Is specialist electrical or other equipment to be used with participants?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26	Are there any financial or other interests to the investigator or University arising from this study?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27	Will the research activity involve deliberately misleading participants in any way, or the partial or full concealment of the specific study aims?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28	If YES to any question, please provide full details			
<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>				

SECTION H: Anticipated Risks

Outline any anticipated risks that may adversely affect any of the participants, the researchers and/or the University, and the steps that will be taken to address them. If you have completed a full risk assessment (for example as required by a laboratory, or external research collaborator) you may append that to this form.						
1	Full risk assessment completed and appended?	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>No</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
No	<input type="checkbox"/>					
2	Risks to participants For example: sector-specific health & safety, emotional distress, financial disclosure, physical harm, transfer of personal data, sensitive organisational information <table border="1"> <tr> <td> Risk to participants: Risk of employer repercussions for providing insights to recruitment, retention and promotion practices <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i> </td> <td> How you will mitigate the risk to participants: All data gathered will be anonymised and no sensitive information will be sought. Answers to questioning will not be compulsory and participants are able to withdraw their participation or information at any time if desired. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i> </td> </tr> </table>		Risk to participants: Risk of employer repercussions for providing insights to recruitment, retention and promotion practices <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	How you will mitigate the risk to participants: All data gathered will be anonymised and no sensitive information will be sought. Answers to questioning will not be compulsory and participants are able to withdraw their participation or information at any time if desired. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
Risk to participants: Risk of employer repercussions for providing insights to recruitment, retention and promotion practices <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	How you will mitigate the risk to participants: All data gathered will be anonymised and no sensitive information will be sought. Answers to questioning will not be compulsory and participants are able to withdraw their participation or information at any time if desired. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>					
3	If research activity may include sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use) or issues likely to disclose information requiring further action (e.g. criminal activity), give details of the procedures to deal with these issues, including any support/advice (e.g. helpline numbers) to be offered to participants. Note that where applicable, consent procedures should make it clear that if something potentially or actually illegal is discovered in the course of a project, it may need to be disclosed to the proper authorities					

	No sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting information will be discussed or sought from the data gathering exercise. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	
4	Risks to the investigator For example: personal health & safety, physical harm, emotional distress, risk of accusation of harm/impropriety, conflict of interest	
	Risk to the investigator: The investigator is a Civil Service Employee and employment risk is present. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	How you will mitigate the risk to the investigator: The employee will follow all university and employer policies to ensure conformance with data security procedures to ensure sensitive information is shared. All information sought is publicly available in the public domain. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>
5	University/institutional risks For example: adverse publicity, financial loss, data protection	
	Risk to the University: The main risk towards the university is the adverse publicity it might receive. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	How you will mitigate the risk to the University: To ensure the author acts appropriately whilst representing the university. Adhering to the appropriate policies and procedures. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>
6	Environmental risks For example: accidental spillage of pollutants, damage to local ecosystems	
	Risk to the environment: No risk as all activity will be virtual. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	How you will mitigate the risk to environment: No control measure required. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>

Disclosure and Barring Service				
	If the research activity involves children or vulnerable adults, a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate must be obtained before any contact with such participants.	YES	NO	N/A
7	Does your research require you to hold a current DBS Certificate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	If YES, please give the certificate number. If the certificate number is not available please write "Pending"; in this case any ethical approval will be subject to providing the appropriate certificate number.			

SECTION I: Feedback, Consent and Confidentiality

1	Feedback What de-briefing and feedback will be provided to participants, how will this be done and when? De-briefing will take place on the conclusion of the interviewing where candidates will be thanked and informed that all data is anonymised and the researchers contact details will be left for any later requests to withdraw the information provided. There will be no follow-up feedback session as the data gathering exercise does not necessarily result in a conclusion. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>
2	Informed consent

	Describe the arrangements to inform potential participants, before providing consent, of what is involved in participating. Describe the arrangements for participants to provide full consent before data collection begins. If gaining consent in this way is inappropriate, explain how consent will be obtained and recorded in accordance with prevailing data protection legislation.
	An email invitation to potential interviewee's will describe the requirements of their participation where any additional questions are invited by response. Participants to the self-completed questionnaire will initially read a cover page outlining the purpose and requirements of the survey. Participants may decline to participate at any time and any data collected will be void and destroyed. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>
3	Confidentiality / Anonymity Set out how anonymity of participants and confidentiality will be ensured in any outputs. If anonymity is not being offered, explain why this is the case.
	All data collated will be anonymised and any identifying information will be redacted. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>

SECTION J: Data Protection and Storage

	Does the research activity involve personal data (as defined by the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 "GDPR" and the Data Protection Act 2018 "DPA")?	YES	NO
1	"Personal data" means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person ('data subject'). An identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person. Any video or audio recordings of participants is considered to be personal data.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	If YES, provide a description of the data and explain why this data needs to be collected:		
2	<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
	Does it involve special category data (as defined by the GDPR)?	YES	NO
3	"Special category data" means sensitive personal data consisting of information as to the data subjects' – (a) racial or ethnic origin, (b) political opinions, (c) religious beliefs or other beliefs of a similar nature, (d) membership of a trade union (within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992), (e) physical or mental health or condition, (f) sexual life, (g) genetics, (h) biometric data (as used for ID purposes).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	If YES, provide a description of the special category data and explain why this data needs to be collected:		
4	<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
	Will data from the research activity (collected data, drafts of the thesis, or materials for publication) be stored in any of the following ways?	YES	NO
5	Manual files (i.e. in paper form)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
6	University computers?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7	Private company computers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
8	Home or other personal computers?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	Laptop computers/ CDs/ Portable disk-drives/ memory sticks?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
10	"Cloud" storage or websites?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
11	Other – specify:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
12	For all stored data, explain the measures in place to ensure the security of the data collected, data confidentiality, including details of backup procedures, password protection, encryption, anonymisation and pseudonymisation:		
	<p><i>All data will be kept in password protected cloud storage on the University Office 365 system which will not be shared. Audio/visual data will be transcribed and would be shown to participants to check accuracy of reporting. Any USB sticks used to store or transfer data will be password protected. All participants will be given a unique identifier to ensure confidentiality and this list will be kept securely in the password protected folder.</i></p> <p><i>(this box should expand as you type)</i></p>		

Data Protection			
		YES	NO
	Will the research activity involve any of the following activities:		
13	Electronic transfer of data in any form?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
14	Sharing of data with others at the University outside of the immediate research team?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
15	Sharing of data with other organisations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
16	Export of data outside the UK or importing of data from outside the UK?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
17	Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, emails or telephone numbers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
18	Publication of data that might allow identification of individuals?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
19	Use of data management system?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
20	Data archiving?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
21	If YES to any question, please provide full details, explaining how this will be conducted in accordance with the GDPR and Data Protection Act (2018) (and any international equivalents, where appropriate):		
	<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
22	List all who will have access to the data generated by the research activity:		
	The principal researcher only		
	<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
23	List who will have control of, and act as custodian(s) for, data generated by the research activity:		
	The principal researcher only		
	<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
24	Give details of data storage arrangements, including security measures in place to protect the data, where data will be stored, how long for, and in what form. Will data be archived – if so how and if not why not.		

	<p><i>All data will be encrypted and kept in password protected cloud storage on the University Office 365/Sharepoint system which will not be shared. Any USB sticks used to store or transfer data will be password protected, and will be reformatted at the end of the project in order to destroy the data. The data will be stored until the completion of the project and then deleted.</i></p> <p><i>(this box should expand as you type)</i></p>		
25	<p>Please indicate if your data will be stored in the UWTSD Research Data Repository (see https://researchdata.uwtsd.ac.uk/). If so please explain. <i>(Most relevant to academic staff)</i></p> <p><i>(this box should expand as you type)</i></p>		
26	<p>Confirm that you have read the UWTSD guidance on data management (see https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/library/research-data-management/)</p>	YES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
27	<p>Confirm that you are aware that you need to keep all data until after your research has completed or the end of your funding</p>	YES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

SECTION K: Declaration

<p>The information which I have provided is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge. I have attempted to identify any risks and issues related to the research activity and acknowledge my obligations and the rights of the participants.</p> <p>In submitting this application I hereby confirm that I undertake to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice which is published on the website: https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/research/research-ethics/</p>		
1	Signature of applicant:	<p>D.S.Emanuel</p> <p>Date: 21-01-2024</p>

For STUDENT Submissions:

2	Director of Studies/Supervisor:	Date:
3	Signature:	

For STAFF Submissions:

4	Academic Director/ Assistant Dean:	Date:
5	Signature:	

Checklist: Please complete the checklist below to ensure that you have completed the form according to the guidelines and attached any required documentation:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I have read the guidance notes supplied before completing the form.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I have completed ALL RELEVANT sections of the form in full.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I confirm that the research activity has received approval in principle
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I have attached a copy of final/interim approval from external organisation (where appropriate)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I have attached a full risk assessment (where appropriate) ONLY TICK IF YOU HAVE ATTACHED A FULL RISK ASSESSMENT
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I understand that it is my responsibility to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I understand that before commencing data collection all documents aimed at respondents (including information sheets, consent forms, questionnaires, interview schedules etc.) must be confirmed by the DoS/Supervisor, module tutor or Academic Director.

RESEARCH STUDENTS AND STAFF ONLY

All communications relating to this application during its processing must be in writing and emailed to pgresearch@uwtsd.ac.uk, with the title 'Ethical Approval' followed by your name. You will be informed of the outcome of your claim by email; therefore it is important that you check your University and personal email accounts regularly.

STUDENTS ON UNDERGRADUATE OR TAUGHT MASTERS PROGRAMMES should submit this form (and receive the outcome) via systems explained to you by the supervisor/module leader.