



## Indicators of Potential for Permanent Secretary Roles

### Introduction

This paper describes the characteristics – beyond demonstrating strong performance across the DG Effectiveness benchmark – that predict equally strong performance as a Permanent Secretary. The model is in three parts:

I. **Experience**

The experience that is deemed valuable to underpin success as a Permanent Secretary.

II. **Ambition**

The kind of personal drive and aspiration that is needed to translate effectiveness at DG level into strong performance and comfort at Permanent Secretary level.

III. **X-factor**

The 'X-Factor' is the essence which differentiates the excellent Permanent Secretary from the excellent DG – thereby indicating potential for Permanent Secretary roles.



## I. EXPERIENCE

*The building blocks of experience required to meet the diverse and complex challenges of being a Permanent Secretary*

*NB: This is an indicative list – neither exhaustive, nor does it suggest that without any one building block a Permanent Secretary will be ineffective.*

### LEADING LEADERS

Has experience of effectively driving performance and managing large teams of people. Exposure to manage at a distance, balancing the need to 'deep dive' and for closer management with light touch leadership depending on the demands of the situation.

### BUILDING ORGANISATIONAL CAPABILITY: DRIVING GROWTH AND CHANGE

Has experience of establishing new capability, or developing capability in a new direction, in response to change in policy or external factors. Has developed strategies for bringing learning into an organisation. Has effectively driven strategic change through a department or organisation.

### MANAGING PEOPLE DRIVERS

Has experience of managing HR drivers of organisational performance and development – in a strategic as well as operational manner. Has worked in partnership with (or has been) an effective strategic HRD. Understands therefore how best to leverage people drivers such as Learning and Development, engagement strategies, Reward and Organisational Design and Development.

### MANAGING FINANCIAL DRIVERS

Has experience in managing financial dynamics – managing and forecasting budgets, seeing trends in numbers. Understands the financial drivers of performance at an organisational – and preferably Departmental and Governmental level.

### BREADTH OF EXPERIENCE

Has experience in 3 'career streams', preferably in different Departments. Indicative of breadth of perspective, ability to master a brief, broad rather than narrow patronage within the Civil Service, and ability to be effective across a range of environments. Alternatively, broad experience of leadership in non-CS environments.



## MINISTERIAL SUPPORT: POLITICAL MASTERY

Has adapted to changes in government, political agenda, Secretary of State / Minister. Has worked constructively with Ministers and political advisers, integrating political agendas with governmental and practical reality. Demonstrated credibility with political, customer and Civil Service stakeholders alike. Alternatively, analogous experience dealing with the Board and external stakeholders in non-CS environments.

## BUSINESS DIRECTION

Has preferably developed and implemented a major policy initiative that involved cross-Government collaboration and building alliances across sectors or with other governments – or analogous experience in other sectors. Demonstrated the ability to create a vision and direction, successfully engaging people in the process, and successfully pursuing a mission.

## REAL WORLD DELIVERY

Has turned policy or strategic objectives into reality on the ground. Demonstrated ability to work successfully alongside internal groups other than political and Civil Service elite, and aligning delivery chains. Grounded, real-world experience of executing large-scale initiatives.



## II. AMBITION

### ***Appetite for, understanding of what it takes and drive to fulfil the role of Permanent Secretary***

#### APPETITE...

- Ambition to progress to Permanent Secretary and a self-awareness of why
- Clear and realistic sense of how rewarding the role of Permanent Secretary will be and in what way

#### UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IT TAKES...

- Full appreciation of what a Permanent Secretary role entails, particularly standing alone, and the personal transitions required of DGs progressing to this role
- Especially, grasp of what they may need to sacrifice or un-learn – and keenness to make that transition

#### DRIVE TO...

##### ...Make an Impact

- The individual seeks to use their attributes to their utmost to achieve a sense of self-realisation and achievement through broad impact on the world
- A yearning to leave a legacy rather than simply achieve promotion or deliver others' agendas
- A sense of mission with regards to their Department's role in society

##### ...Exercise Personal Initiative

- Demonstrates a capacity to set and pursue a path in a self-sufficient manner
- Able to establish new goals and new ways of achieving established goals, even in the face of resistance to change

##### ...Assert Personal Authority & Confidence

- Demonstrates a positive orientation to dealing with obstacles and problems
- Has a deep-seated belief in his/her ability to achieve a goal combined with personal humility
- Need to be 'number one'
- Has deep personal assurance that is not manifested in arrogance or a need to prove themselves to others

##### ...Learn and Grow

- Keenness to continue to stretch themselves and grow as a leader
- Seeks ongoing feedback and evolves approach accordingly
- Drives to get a realistic self-evaluation and sense of benchmarks



### III. THE 'X-FACTOR'

#### ***What characteristics will ensure the transition to great performance as a Permanent Secretary?***

##### RESILIENCE

*Mental, emotional and personal toughness – an ability to stand alone, to not take things personally, to see the bigger picture and to cope with ambiguity, change and set-backs*

*Example indicators:*

- Able to live with the starkness of sole personal accountability while having variable levels of control over the 'levers'
- Tolerates high levels of ambiguity and uncertainty and rapid change – and at times irrational political demands
- Deep self-confidence that is maintained when faced with setbacks, including the groundedness to admit vulnerability and difficulties
- Able to stand up for what they believe is right – and to stand alone
- Able to stay on track and keep going when faced with resistance, lack of support and public criticism
- Able to be tough-minded and hard when the situation requires it
- Able to build suitable support systems in order to maintain effectiveness in trying circumstances.

##### ORCHESTRATING OUTCOMES AND ORGANISATIONAL LEADERSHIP

*Coordinating and leading the contribution of Departments, agencies and other organisations, aligning the achievement of targets with the actual realisation of benefits and strategic outcomes for the Government and customers*

*Example indicators:*

- Able to effectively orchestrate a large organisation, knowing where to focus energy and time versus where to lead with a light touch, while coaching DGs on how to orchestrate their individual areas
- Demonstrates excellent ability to build a high performing team of other 'big' leaders, creating a chemistry beyond individual contributions
- Able to inspire commitment to the Department and its mission, personal trust and loyalty through authentic leadership
- Aligns objectives and targets across the delivery chain and ensures they genuinely impact the intended areas
- Able to not only coordinate but also inspire the various elements of the delivery chain that need to dovetail in order to deliver strategic customer benefit
- On achievement of targets engages the team and necessary parties in taking a bigger-picture evaluation to ensure the benefits and outcomes for customers have been achieved.



## STRATEGIC ARBITRATION - MANAGING THE MINISTERIAL/ DEPARTMENT PIVOT POINT

*The ability to manage the complexity of the Ministerial/Departmental interface, effectively acting as a pivot point in balancing the needs and demands of Ministers and high-level stakeholders within Whitehall and externally with stewardship of their Department and its customers.*

*Example indicators:*

- Acts as a 'pivot point' in terms of knowing when to 'serve' the political agenda and manage Ministers' expectations, versus leading their Department with a strong sense of mission. Demonstrates an awareness of how and ability to manage trade-offs and pivot between serving and leading
- Is a counsellor/support to Ministers, intuitively identifying what approach to take in meeting their requirements, building a trusting relationship, but also maintaining dispassionate distance - flexibly balancing the provision of counsel, challenge where necessary and immediate delivery
- Balances Ministers' or high-level stakeholders' immediate needs or priorities with the long-term aims of their Department, being shrewd about what needs to be sacrificed, at what costs and what the implications might be
- Has excellent negotiation and influencing skills. Builds trusting relationships with colleagues and stakeholders, but also able to challenge directly and in an enrolling manner
- Demonstrates authenticity and gravitas; sought as a source of counsel yet able to listen acutely and 'behind the words'.