



The Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer
HM Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

By email

3 October 2023

Dear Chancellor,

Civil Service staffing numbers

I am writing to protest in the strongest possible terms the announcements made yesterday at the Conservative Party Conference of an immediate cap on Civil Service recruitment and a central target to reduce staffing numbers – as part of the coming spending round – by 66,000, which we calculate to be around 15% of the workforce.

Yet again, the Civil Service is being used to generate cheap media sound bites with no thought as to the impact on staff, the organisations they work for, or the services they deliver for citizens.

The Prime Minister wrote to all civil servants in November 2022 distancing himself from Jacob Rees-Mogg's proposals to reduce headcount stating: "I do not believe that top-down targets for Civil Service headcount reductions are the right way to do that". This message was reinforced by assurances given by the Minister for the Cabinet Office the Rt Hon Jeremy Quin MP, who wrote to Prospect in December 2022 stating: "There are no longer any specific headcount reduction targets for the Civil Service."

Through our dialogue with the MCO we had hoped that efforts were being made to reset the relationship between government ministers and civil servants. We had believed that the new government recognised the damage done by the announcement of arbitrary headcount reductions, unfounded in evidence or logic, particularly when announced in a way clearly intended to gain some kind of political advantage.

The announcements made via the front page of the Daily Mail in May 2022 and at Conservative Party Conference yesterday can only be seen as blatantly political. Yesterday's announcement will have thrown organisations into chaos as they seek to work out what the cap on numbers means in practice and leaves them unable to allay the concerns of staff about potential large scale job losses.

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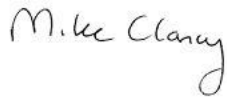
No other "world class" organisation would treat their staff in this way. We know the Civil Service is struggling to recruit and retain the skilled and specialist staff it needs in many areas. Continuing pay austerity and concerns about job security will only exacerbate this issue.

The government needs to stop using the Civil Service as a political punch bag. The assurances given by the PM and MCO now look hollow and civil servants will conclude they are being treated with contempt.

I ask you for an urgent meeting to discuss the concerns of staff and the need for the government to abandon this deeply damaging approach. I have also sent a copy of this letter to the Minister for the Cabinet Office.

Given the importance of this issue, I will be sharing this letter with Prospect members.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mike Clancy".

Mike Clancy
General Secretary