**Career Planning and Advice**

Discussions in the career task force confirmed what had already been expressed in the staff surveys and other debates: **EEAS staff both want and need a coherent career planning**.

**A. What kind of a concept?**

While aware that a career can’t be fully pre-determined or guaranteed, staff expects clear guiding principles for career planning and development that make careers predictable, ensure equality of treatment and fair distribution of chances while upholding the principle that career progression should be merit-based.

**"Continuous career progression should be at the centre of career planning"**

From entry into service to retirement, every EEAS member of staff should be able to progress continuously – as long as justified by his or her performance, qualifications and merit, and according to the principles of equal opportunities, merit and ability. Career progression needs to be understood in terms of responsibility and substance of the job – not necessarily in terms of grade progression or formal management positions. The possibility to access management positions should be the same for all, even if it is understood that not all EEAS senior staff will be managers. These principles – together with transparency and respect for legitimate interest – should lie at the centre of human resources management.

At the same time, it is understood that a career development concept does not only serve the purpose of ensuring that individual wishes are satisfied (such as promotion, favourite posting etc.), but that the needs of the service, the immediate concerns of line management and justified expectations of spouses and families are also crucial parameters to be taken into account.

Some of the **general principles of a career policy should include:**

* **Clear and transparent guidelines** for career planning and development;
* HR to provide individuals with **clear career path possibilities** at the end of the probation period;
* **Merit-based career progression** – including recognition of efforts beyond formal job description;
* Continuous **progression in terms of job responsibility and substance;**
* **Consistency in application of career policy when making decisions on appointments and promotions**, but allowing for **flexibility** in justified cases both for the institution and for the individual (e.g. family or other personal circumstances);
* Allow individuals to **fulfil their potential** and their professional objectives;
* **Career guidelines or paths** must be developed **for all categories of staff**, from local agents (even if not included in this exercise) to EEAS officials;
* Career development **should** **reflect the interests of both staff and the service** (from the perspective of line management and from an overall BA-HR point of view)
* **Transition period** to be envisaged for some concrete measures to allow people to adapt;
* Without wishing to foreclose the work of the other TF, there needs to be some form of **positive action for women**, whether as integral part of the career development concepts or as complementing measures.
* Further align promotion exercises and seniority of grades with responsibility of functions and posts *(to be discussed: At this point, annual appraisal exercises are not much linked with future appointments, and appointments to higher level of responsibility are not linked to a certain grade, with the exception of the AD 9 minimum grade for management positions).*

**B. The existing AD career path paper is a starting point, but …**

In the discussions, there was in principle broad support for the AD career path paper presented by BA.HR in 2015. It was, however, stressed that it had to be better implemented and communicated – including active career advice (1), that it needed to be adapted to various staff categories (2a), that some elements needed to be improved or updated (2b), that that and that the framework required for coherent career planning needed to be improved (3). In detail, this entails:

**1) Better Implementation, Communication and Career Advice**

There is a widespread sentiment that the existing career planning concept as set out in the AD career path was currently not fully and consistently implemented. While it was acknowledged that this couldn't be done over night, the following was considered necessary:

* more coherence in its application
* exceptions and flexibility where justified: exceptions should in principle be made only in singular cases, the justifications for an exception need to be documented and comprehensible ; exceptions to certain (i.e. certain preconditions cannot be retroactively applied). Flexibility was considered necessary also to avoid falling in the other extreme – from no planning/predictability to a too rigid process, where posts would be allocated solely according to grades or experience (instead of abilities) and following exaggeratedly strict rules of progression.
* Empower BA.HR where needed to 1) apply the principles and to ensure the above-mentioned coherence of application and justification of exceptions and 2) to communicate better **(proposal #75)** and provide advice to staff on career planning. This would also entail that - ultimately - BA.HR should have prime responsibly over appointment decisions, and thus could override priorities of line managers (incl. MDs/ DSGs) to ensure that principles of career policy are applied. *(In practice, this could mean that not necessarily the number one in a selection or panel procedure would be selected, but may be number two or three)*
* Possible suggestions on **career advice (proposal #48)**:
1. Some suggested a „de-centralised“ form of career advice provided by interested staff that received training as career guidance counsellors. Others advocate a more „centralised“ system for career advice, establishing a career guidance team within DG.BA. While both have advantages and disadvantages, it seems useful that those providing career advice know how the procedures work, ensure a consistent application of the principles and can ideally also “deliver” along the lines of the advice.
2. Further to providing advice on demand at any given moment of a career, two „routine appointments“ for career advice could be foreseen for EEAS-officials:
* an „initial career orientation“ shortly after joining the EEAS, in order to provide an outlook on perspectives of career development at the beginning of a career;
* a "mid-career orientation mechanism",

These orientation talks (30-60min) could be prepared with a questionnaire, including questions such as “what areas of work do you think you are good at (e.g. drafting reports or coordinating, networking and public speaking …)”, "where do you see yourself in 10 and 15 years" and “where would you like to improve (e.g. multilateral diplomacy, people management) / do you have hidden talents (e.g. studied Sinology, Indology, Communication or Astrophysics before joining the foreign service).”

Such orientation talks would on the one hand allow staff member to get a realistic overview of what career development perspectives they have and what they can themselves do to increase their performance and chances to succeed (e.g. with training and smart choices in the rotation). They would on the other hand provide the EEAS with a better knowledge of its staff and what each staff member could contribute to the institution. Colleagues could be oriented towards suitable jobs and training, while the EEAS could in justified cases also call on a person in case of emergency rather than publishing a post.

The results of these orientation talks with every official could be summarised in a written note – including career objectives envisaged, individual requests put forward and an agreed personalised training plan **(proposal #21).**

1. A similar, possibly shorter, orientation talk could be proposed to MS TA colleagues **(proposal #72)** to brief them on the general principles applicable and under what circumstances a change of jobs or a contract-renewal would be possible.

**2) Improving existing career planning concepts**

**a) Adapting it to different staff categories**

Draft career path papers for different staff categories are annexed. Some are new (AST, CA), some have been revised (AD, TA-principles).

Again, the key element is predictability: All staff working for the EEAS should have a clear idea of the "rules of the game" for career planning, including the importance of competitiveness. This also includes honesty: If prospects are difficult for the time being (due to certain imbalances), this should be made transparent and remedies openly discussed. Those who join the EEAS on a temporary basis (TAs, CAs) should know this from the outset and be treated fairly while being an integral part of EEAS staff.

**b) Including new ideas and suggestions:**

New elements are suggested, including i. a. on management culture, on family friendliness, and on Delegation-experience:

Management culture:

* Promote the **competency framework for managers** and ensure its application;
* Introduce **obligatory assessment centres** for managers before appointment;
* Introducing **360 assessments /anonymous annual appraisals** for managers;
* **Publicise good examples of managers** (i.e. inclusive leadership, good feedback and information sharing, inviting staff to participate in higher level meetings);
* **Reward good management for promotion**. Improve the way promotions at higher level are conducted (possibly using ACs, 360 assessments and/or linking promotion to the prior successful application to a post with a higher responsibility).
* **Recognise management experience gained on specific posts (proposal #29 & #56) – i.a. DepHoDiv, which is by definition a management- focused position, as well as certain HPolS and HoS –** which due to the size of the entity and/or scope of responsibilities include a certain amount of management responsibility (coordination, team-leadership).

Family-friendly policies:

* Ensure that career opportunities are not significantly reduced for staff who have family
* Information about **part-time and teleworking** should be further disseminated.
* Strengthen **double postings** policy (when equal merits), in agreement with the Commission;
* Strengthen possibilities for **job opportunities for spouses** in Delegations, notably through negotiations with third countries ;
* Study on education costs and **adjust allowances** accordingly.
* Several important suggestions were put forward in this respect: **proposal #24** (double postings), **proposals #25** (job opportunities for spouses), **proposal #26** (adjust allowances), **proposal #59** (part-time/teleworking)

Serving in Delegations:

* Following a further discussion on the subject, the idea to introduce the **requirement of having in principle served in a Delegation** (thus contradicting **proposal #6)** for certain positions such as management was considered crucial.
* Everyone agreed that it would be **necessary and justified to make exceptions to this requirement in a transitional phase**, but there was consensus that it was crucial to introduce a standard requirement of having to serve in a Delegation, e.g. at least once in the first 3-4 posts. A career development concept for a foreign service that would fail to even introduce such very general requirements would not be of much value.
* On the long run – that is in a standard EEAS career – and taking the current distribution of AD-posts between HQs (560) and Delegations (388) as a basis, approx. **one of three postings should be spent in Delegations**, preferably including a hard-ship posting. These principles should be applied fully and immediately to newly recruited staff and on the long run to everyone.
* For those already in the service, this should in an interim phase serve as an orientation. Should some of the more experienced colleagues wish to avoid serving in Delegations altogether, one could envisage creating a alternative “carrière interne”. Avoiding serving in Delegations on the long run and beyond a certain transition period could, however, impact on career perspectives.

The career path papers should also include a **better visualisation of typical career paths**, e.g. by summarizing a typical career path in a table or graph.

Last, but not least, an open and frank **expectation management** is also needed: any career path paper should realistically depict what is achievable – and avoid creating false hopes **(proposal #75)**.

* In concrete terms of career prospects, anyone joining the EEAS at entry level should have an approximate idea of what level of responsibility and grade she or he can realistically expect to reach. As an orientation: for ADs: HoS, DepHoDiv at AD11; ideally maybe even HoDiv or HoD/DepHoD at AD12?;). Consequently, it should be clear and transparent that further progression and promotion will be open to only a very few highly talented (for ADs: Director, MD or HoD on posts beyond AD13).
* Regarding the specific group of experienced AD-staff colleagues currently working in the EEAS, we all need to be aware that no career planning policy or tool alone can make sure that all the colleagues that are currently AD12 to AD 14 will have access to management posts for the rest of their career. Many will not be interested either; they should be allowed to continue to progress in their careers without management responsibilities. Reviewing the organisational structure of the EEAS cannot be the solution to address this major imbalance either. The proposed set of measures will only be able to improve the situation a bit, but not solve all issues.

**3) Improve framework conditions – rebalance EEAS human resources**[[1]](#footnote-2)

Coherent career planning is only possible if the numbers are right. It is well known that the current staff body does not correspond to the organisational structure and needs of the service and/or staff in several ways:

**First**, **the age/seniority pyramid is imbalanced**: The fact that 515 or roughly 55% of the 948 AD-staff are very experienced and graded AD12 or above is one of the main factors why coherent career planning for everyone is difficult to implement for the time being. To give but one example: Given that there are currently 261 management positions (48 senior management; 213 middle management) and a few Senior Advisor posts in the EEAS, it is obvious that not all senior staff can be assigned to management positions. Even if all positions were to be filled with AD12-14 colleagues, there would still be a significant number of colleagues who will not get a management post. Even including the 61 DepHoDiv posts and some HoSector-posts would not solve the equation, especially as these posts, which are actually management, are needed for mid-career staff as a first step towards more "traditional" management position. As a result of this imbalance, career perspectives are blocked for both senior staff and for younger colleagues, thus making coherent career development impossible. The imbalance also leads to the fact that there is not sufficient younger staff that could be allocated to assist managers or senior advisers in their daily tasks.

**Second**, there has been an **excessive intake of officials from other institutions**: While staff exchange between the EEAS and the COM or other institutions (Council Secretariat, EP) is in principle beneficial, this clear lack of balance or reciprocity had a particularly negative effect at management level; EEAS officials have to compete for management positions not only with limited numbers (also due to the foreseen "quotas"), but with an additional unforeseen, but very real, quota of officials from other institutions.

**Third**, there is still an **uneven representation between EEAS-officials and TAs** at different levels, especially in senior management. It should be positively acknowledged that there has been a positive trend in some categories, e.g. as far as HoD are concerned: while 2 years ago, only approximately 1/3 of HoD were permanent officials, as of today 54% of the HoDs are officials. Despite this, TAs are still over-represented at HoD-level by at least 6% and further rebalancing is needed also in other areas, including at management level in DEL and HQ. There needs to be in principle proportionate access to management posts in HQ and Delegations for officials and TAs, having in mind the 1/3rd rule. To ensure this, it might be necessary to introduce – where duly justified – some form of flexibility when it comes to assessing the pre-conditions for applications, such as extensive prior work experience abroad in Delegations.

When assessing the even presence of officials and TAs in management, it should however be noted that this goes in two directions: while officials are very badly under-represented in Senior Management, they are very much over-represented in middle-management in HQ;. Consequently, one should be aware that the rebalancing might – in the overall – not create significantly more openings at management level for officials, nor for TAs.

The above mentioned imbalances stand in the way of a coherent career planning and must be addressed with both short term and medium/long term measures:

In the short to medium run, EEAS career policy would need to aim that this high number of AD 12 and above stay motivated - without a realistic prospect of promotion in grade or appointment to management. Possible avenues could include:

* Be creative with those “left behind”: Create tailor made career paths in fields of interest and competence (not necessarily leading to a formal “senior expert” position but having a real impact on level of responsibilities), recognition through soft elements like titles (“e.g. Senior desk, team leader/ head of sector) or special functions as coordinators or lead officers in particular fields, or increased use in providing mentoring and guidance to more junior colleges. Such positions, while not always management, should in exceptional and justified cases "count" for possible promotion beyond AD12 on the basis of their additional responsibilities, so that officials who do not want necessarily to be managers do not feel obliged to undertake a management position as the only way to avoid being blocked in their grade. Some suggested to further increase the possibilities to reach grades beyond AD12 without being management. Another suggestion was to reverse the decision altogether to have a management-requirement for promotion beyond AD12 (to be discussed).Increase number of management posts available for EEAS-officials by ensuring that there is **no further net „intake“ of high-ranking officials from other institutions or that this is on a basis of strict reciprocity** (COM, EP, Council). On the contrary, there needs to be more possibilities for current senior EEAS staff – whether they have been with the EEAS since the beginning or whether they joined since – to **return or move to the other institutions – including in management positions, on the basis of the intake that has already been granted from those institutions**. This applies in particular to the external relations COM-DGs, which should be open to EEAS staff as management levels until the past "backlog" of unilateral flows has been absorbed.
* In general, avoid other types of “parachutages”, as these further reduce career prospects for those who follow a classical bottom-up careers path as foreseen by BA.HR.
* Open up the possibility for EEAS staff to apply for **Development- or Trade-posts in Delegations, with a right to return to the EEAS afterwards.**
* Examine the possibility of **creating new posts within the EEAS (proposal #27)**, such as: non-resident Ambassadors, mini-Delegations, Chief negotiators (PCAs, SPAs, etc.), Ambassadors at large for public diplomacy, Special Envoys on cross-cutting issues (Ocean Policy, SDG-implementation), Mentors.
* **Widen the scope of possibilities for senior staff to work in other institutions at appropriate senior and/or management level**, either on a permanent or on a temporary basis / on secondment: seconding staff to support G7 or G20 Presidencies; staffing UN-agencies or UN-missions; second staff to work in other international organisations, MS MFAs **(proposal #53)** or MS’ permanent representations in Brussels, placing in think tanks, etc.
* **Distribute career prospects evenly**: Every motivated and able official (“assessement centre”) could be given a management role at least once. If it is clear that not all senior staff can be deployed to management posts at all time, it could be an option to give every senior official the prospect of a management post in HQ or in Delegations at least once or twice for the remainder of their career – provided they pass the obligatory assessment centre, have the necessary qualifications and proved on their current (non-management) posting that they are continuously and constructively contributing to the work of the EEAS. Thus, it could be avoided to have some colleagues becoming HoD or HoDiv several times in a row (“haves”), while others to not get the chance at all (“have-nots”).
* Given that all efforts might not be enough to create career prospects and increase motivation for everyone, it is important to propose a “Plan B” by significantly increasing the offer for **voluntary early retirement (proposal #14, possibly combinded with #15/28)**; examine possibilities of “golden handshakes”.

In the mid to long term, the **Age and Seniority Pyramid needs to be rebalanced**:

* Ensure regular yearly recruitment of young colleagues at entry level to rebalance the age/seniority pyramid **(proposal #44)**.
* For AD: an average of 16 new AD officials should be recruited at AD05 per year (631 AD staff remaining in the service for nearly 40 years in the average => 631 : 40 = approx. 16).
* To allow for a certain flexibility, a “**recruitment-corridor”** could be introduced, i. e. at AD-level of 16 (+/-4). Consequently, regardless of the exact number of colleagues going into retirement every year, there should be a minimum of 12 and a maximum of 20 new colleagues recruited every year.
* Given the current budgetary constraints, this certainly entails tough negotiations with the budgetary authorities. But if it can be made clear that this initiative is not intended to increase the workforce, but to rebalance the age/seniority pyramid on the long run, this should be possible. One option could be to request temporary new posts at entry level for the coming years, promising to return these posts immediately once retirement figures climb beyond the envisaged average number of recruitments. Given that many colleagues are likely to go into retirement in the next 10-15 years, it should be possible to limit the duration of such temporary additional posts in order to convince the budgetary authorities that this initiative is meaningful, well conceived and on the long run nearly budgetary neutral.
* Examine other ways of making additional funds available to recruit new permanent officials at entry level (AD05; AST??). The existing idea and practice of having a higher average seniority before the next promotion at senior level (e. g. 5-7 years above AD11, sometimes subject to certain conditions – as opposed to 2-5 years below AD 11) could for example contribute to this and allow for the employment of new junior staff. Should this not be possible, examine whether other type of staff could be recruited using funds thus made available.
* Fact is: If we do not stabilize recruitment numbers immediately, the fluctuations/oscillations of recruitment will continue, thus perpetuating the imbalance of the age/seniority period and all the difficulties this entails.
* A regular recruitment of staff at entry level, on the contrary, would also be beneficial in improving integration into the service through targeted trainings and mentoring. This would also mean that more senior staff could work together with a team of junior colleagues, which would be mutually beneficial.

Finally, one could examine and possibly adapt the organisational structure of the EEAS and its Delegations to ensure that the **number and level of posts in HQs and in Delegations** – further to responding to the needs and priorities of the service – also allows for a natural career development progression for most staff to a certain level. When career planning for example foresees obligatory postings in Delegation and running through various levels of seniority (junior policy officer, senior policy officer, HoS, DepHoD) before qualifying for management positions, there need to be sufficient posts available at the various levels both in HQs and in Delegations to allow for the career policy to be implemented in practice. Ultimately, every official should have a fair chance of continuously advancing in their career, if he/she fulfills the criteria and has proven the required capacity, merit and ability. Measures might i. a. imply to introduce a **categorisation of posts in HQ and Delegations (proposal #9)**, both at non-management level (e.g. AD05-AD08 vs. AD 09-AD11) and at management level (e.g. different categories of HoD), as well as **relocating some posts from HQs to Delegations; AD and AST**, including for AST serving as co-Desks in political Sections **(proposal #36).**

**ANNEX: New or revised Career Path Papers for the different staff categories**

1. AD career path paper (revised)
2. AST career path paper (new)
3. Basic principles on the employment of TAs in the EEAS (revised)
4. CA career path paper / Basic principles on the employment of CAs in the EEAS (new)

1. While some of the points under this heading will have been dealt with by other sub-groups, they are addressed here insofar as they are a pre-requisite for a coherent career development. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)