

Civil service apprenticeship scheme aims to stop Oxbridge dominance

The change to recruitment aims to diversify Whitehall's intake by offering leadership training and more roles outside London



Pat McFadden, the Cabinet Office minister, will announce the scheme on Wednesday in a speech about civil service reforms and modernisation

JAMES MANNING/PA

A scheme to make the civil service less dominated by Oxbridge graduates will allow apprentices to go from school to the top without having to work in London.

The change to recruitment, ordered by Pat McFadden, the Cabinet Office minister, is designed to rival the civil service fast stream scheme, which is taken up every year by thousands of graduates. Apprentices will for the first time be based regionally and given business management training to help encourage them to apply for a leadership role in the future.

A government source said it was to tackle the issue of the “usual suspects” filling civil service jobs. Roles will be available in Manchester and Birmingham to “strengthen the talent pipeline”.

McFadden will announce the move on Wednesday in a speech about civil service reforms and modernisation.



The scheme will also look to recruit more people from outside London

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Graduate schemes disproportionately lead to the recruitment of middle-class candidates. In the most recent fast stream intake, applicants from higher socio-economic backgrounds had a success rate double that of those from lower ones.

McFadden will pledge to end the dominance of graduates, after warnings from the Social Mobility Commission that senior officials were even more middle-class than in the 1960s.

“McFadden is determined to open up and strengthen the talent pipeline so brilliant young people have greater opportunities to join the civil service whatever their backgrounds,” a government source said.

“To deliver our Plan for Change — which is putting more money in working people’s pockets, rebuilding the NHS and strengthening our borders — we need the best people from all walks of life.”

Applications for the scheme for people aged over 16 to join the civil service will open this summer.

They will not need a university degree, in a move insiders hope will encourage more people to apply for jobs who would otherwise have been put off from working in government.

Ministers have sought to move more officials away from the capital to not only ensure a more diverse workforce, but also to cut down on office costs in prime real estate locations.

A survey in 2021 found that 72 per cent of senior civil servants were from privileged backgrounds, up from 67 per cent in 1967. The Social Mobility - Commission polled 300,000 officials, finding that 59 per cent of senior civil servants went to an independent school — more than three times the rate among the general public.

Whitehall is one of the largest employers of apprentices in the UK, having hired more than 40,000 since 2015. However, ministers have pledged a cost-cutting drive to reduce the number of civil service staff, after numbers grew from 384,000 in 2016 to more than 500,000 now.