

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is a testament to the high quality of the public service in Commonwealth countries that most permanent secretaries have risen eagerly to the challenge. In order to adapt successfully to their new environments and to perform their jobs better, permanent secretaries will require greater support, better feedback mechanisms, and adequate compensation. They will also require more opportunities for development and personal training in areas such as leadership, consultation, negotiation, and communication, and will need to further develop a relationship of trust with their ministers.

**1. *Clarify the roles and responsibilities of key ministers and secretaries***

The relationship between the permanent secretary and the minister is a delicate and crucial one. Each country's head of civil service should ensure that both ministers and permanent secretaries understand their roles – a task that must be renewed as often as the people in those positions change. The Commonwealth Secretariat can assist the process by arranging meetings and providing documents intended to provoke dialogue and increase mutual understanding.

**2. *Re-examine the structure of the permanent secretary's job***

The new demands placed on the permanent secretary put into question the viability of the traditional structure. Is it reasonable to expect that a single person can be a trusted personal adviser, a knowledgeable policy expert, and a leader of people?

In some jurisdictions, the role of the permanent secretary is not carried out by one person alone, but by the "office of the permanent secretary," which might be composed of four or five people including the permanent secretary and one or more assistant secretaries, each with a specific function or functions.

**3. *Provide regular feedback to permanent secretaries.***

Permanent secretaries are given a great deal of autonomy. However, in a period of rapid transition, when they are being asked to work in new ways and use new skills, it is particularly important that they be given advice, guidance, and feedback. As noted above, nearly two-thirds of permanent secretaries who responded to our questionnaire say they receive no regular work evaluation, and that they find this very frustrating. The Commonwealth Secretariat could

provide a useful service by reporting on the best practices used around the Commonwealth to provide feedback to permanent secretaries.

**4. *Ensure adequate opportunities for training and development of permanent secretaries***

As we have outlined in this publication, the job of permanent secretary is in evolution, and every opportunity should be sought to help incumbents expand their horizons and deepen their abilities. Particular attention should be paid to:

- *Leadership development* Permanent secretaries are, by definition, leaders of organisations. Yet most feel that their changing roles demand ever higher levels of leadership skills. Their assessment is that leadership development is the most important training they – and their colleagues – need.
- *Understanding the global economy* Taken as a group, permanent secretaries belong to the best-educated segment of the population in almost every Commonwealth country. Nonetheless, they are increasingly constrained by a network of international conventions, treaties, and reciprocal agreements. They say they are frustrated because they lack the depth of understanding of the global economy they need to be able to protect the best interests of their countries. Each country should ensure that it provides its permanent secretaries with sufficient opportunity to learn about the international dynamics that affect their departments and the government as a whole. The Management Training Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat, through its Commonwealth-wide meetings and seminars, can play an important role in this regard.
- *Understanding the private sector* As the role of government moves from direct provision of services to the creation of a framework for economic and social development, government departments become more reliant on external organisations – including the private sector. Few of the permanent secretaries consulted had had direct or extensive experience with private-sector organisations. All felt that their ability to function as permanent secretaries depended on an enhanced understanding of the private sector. Commonwealth governments should ensure that the development of future permanent secretaries includes exposure to, and even experience in, private-sector organisations. This might take the form of courses, conferences, or exchange programmes.