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1900 Extn. 368

TGP/30/3
JL/IB

17th July, 1962

Mr. J. Lyons,
Assistant Secretary,
The Institution of Professional Civil Servants,
Northumberland Street,
LONDON, W.C.2.

Dear Mr. Lyons,

I can now comment on the points raised in your letters of 7th May and 5th June; I am sorry this has taken rather a long time.

I think I should start by explaining the special significance to the N.I.R.E.S. of appointments in the field of nuclear physics; this has not been fully brought out in our previous discussions with you, and I think we must get it straight if we are to develop the mutual understanding which we both want. The Institute was set up primarily to provide, for common use by universities and similar bodies, facilities for nuclear research which are beyond the scope of individual universities. To fulfil this purpose we need a small number of experienced senior nuclear physicists on our permanent staff. Their job is to organise the use of the facilities for research and to guide and help the university teams, but to leave the universities to determine their own programmes within the scope of what is possible in the Laboratory. They must continue with active research themselves if they are to be successful in this rather delicate task, and they need small teams of research workers both to help them with their research and to work with the university visitors. It is the Institute's policy that the members of these teams should be on fixed term appointments. Their appointments here will give them good opportunities for research and ultimately for careers elsewhere, especially in the universities. Their total numbers will be relatively small, because it is the essence of our policy that the bulk of the nuclear research will be performed by university people. Appointments will be for periods up to 5 years. Their supporting staff (e.g. Exp.O. Class) will be permanent. You need have no fears that the presence of these fixed term research workers will upset either the career prospects or the scientific interests of the permanent staff.

The position of the nuclear physicists at the Laboratory is therefore exceptional, and my detailed comments on the points which you raised relate to staff in other sections of the Laboratory:

1. Fixed term appointments will normally be for periods up to three years, and a second appointment will be regarded as exceptional. We do not debar a man from applying for an appointment solely because he has held a fixed term post, but he has to compete on merit with other applicants. We do not intend, and it would not be in the interests of the staff, to have people limping along indefinitely through fixed term appointments, but we cannot make a firm undertaking never to exceed a total period of six years. Nevertheless it will be clear to you that we expect a continuation beyond 6 years to be even rarer than a second appointment of 3 years.

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2. Our normal practice in general recruiting publicity is to offer both fixed term and permanent appointments. We may have to discontinue this as the complement fills up, and to advertise for one only or the other according to the special requirements of the particular vacancy or the overall staffing position.
3. We cannot foresee now, in the whole field covered by your Institution, a need to recruit fixed term staff outside the range of work done by the S.O. class.
4. As you know, we attach great importance to continued interchange of staff between the Institute and the universities and other research organisations. We also think it important to retain a degree of flexibility for unforeseeable developments in our research programme. For both these reasons we intend to have a proportion of our staff on fixed term appointments. Our present plan is for not more than 25% of the "S.O." class, but we shall always keep this under review.
5. We cannot undertake to make appointments outside the complement, and but I prefer to answer this constructively by assuring you that the presence of fixed term staff will not interfere with the promotion prospects of the permanent staff. We expect that fixed term staff will rarely be offered permanent posts. It would of course defeat our object in having fixed term posts if transfers to permanent posts became frequent; it is certainly not our intention to use the fixed term posts for probation.
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7. I am afraid that we cannot offer recruits an option on superannuation, because the F.S.S.U. Council will not allow this for any class eligible for their scheme.
8. We cannot yet make a definite statement on order of discharge on redundancy, and leave this for further consideration and discussion.
9. We agree fully with your remarks on secondment or attachment of permanent Institute staff to other places in this country and abroad. Arrangements already exist and are in use. There will be no shortage of opportunities.
10. We shall keep the arrangements under continuous review, and readily agree to discuss them with you at any intervals which do not bear too heavily on your time and ours.

Dr. Willie replied on 30th May to your letter of 21st May and, I hope, cleared up one apparent misunderstanding. You also asked why we had issued an advertisement for fixed term posts at this stage in our discussions. My answer is that these posts are for nuclear physicists with highly specialised experience whom we require urgently, that the advertisement does not detail the conditions which will apply to the appointments, and that any conditions which may be applied to these particular appointments will not commit us for the future.

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There was evidently another misunderstanding; you mention in your letter of 7th May an idea that we might have as many as 50% of S.O. staff on fixed term. When I mentioned this figure during our meeting I was thinking of an outside upper limit which I could never contemplate exceeding or even attaining, at the most distant date in the future and whatever unforeseen circumstances might arise!

I hope you will be reassured by some of my answers and comments. There are still some outstanding matters, notably order of discharge on redundancy, and no doubt you will wish to comment further. My main message to you is that the careers of the permanent staff, scientifically and materially, are not menaced by the fixed term staff. On the contrary, we shall all benefit from the flow of scientific people through the Laboratory.

Yours sincerely,

T. G. Pickavance

c.c. Dr. J. A. V. Willis
Mr. B. Halstead
Mr. A. H. Spurway
Mr. T. R. Walsh