

Labour should hesitate to implement its plans for the Civil Service Internship Scheme

Eager to remedy the social ills of class advantage, Labour has introduced a series of new policies, the latest of which greatly undermines meritocracy.

Eligibility for the Civil Service Summer Internship Programme has been restricted to students from a working-class background, as defined by their parent's occupation at the age of 14. Increasing the number of working-class civil servants is unquestionably valuable. The public benefits greatly from public servants who understand the challenges of growing up poor in today's Britain. This not only builds public trust but also encourages policies that are far more reflective of those on a lower income.

But it is crucial that the public is served by the best and most capable, regardless of their class. Great numbers of talented, civic-minded students from middle- or upper-class backgrounds stand ready to participate in this scheme. Class is no good reason to bar them from doing so.

Yes, the wider Civil Service is open to all. But the Civil Service Summer Internship Scheme is the government's leading undergraduate programme. It serves as the main entry point to the Fast Stream, the future of the Civil Service. Restricting access to this scheme narrows the gateway into senior public service roles.

Meritocracy should not be sacrificed in the name of representation. The government would do well to adopt an approach that expands opportunity without closing doors.