

Some personal observations on the employment of spouses

To hire a wife or husband in the role of Secretary, Office Manager or Researcher can be misconstrued by those outside Westminster. The public only observe the closeness of the relationship and may assume – wrongly, I contend – that preferential treatment has been given to the new employee.

There is certainly a grey area surrounding the precise mechanics of hiring any member of staff. This is particularly true of spouses. I did not demand or expect Jill to submit to a competitive interview process when I took her on to provide secretarial help. MPs do not have HR managers breathing down their necks. Given my previous company I also employed Jill in the same capacity.

But I doubt if any conventional recruitment selection would have attracted other credible candidates.

For her pains Jill has to work both in Somerset and London. There are no set hours. The telephone rings late at night and at weekends. There are precious few periods of total exemption. She is as much on duty in our village as she is along the corridors of the office where we both work at Westminster.

I rely on Jill to be my eyes, ears and common sense thermometer – twenty four hours a day. For these services – and in spite of the disruptive nature of the role - she is paid on the normal recommended Parliamentary scale.

Those who believe that working for a Member of Parliament is a glamorous undertaking should talk to people like Jill. It is no route to riches.

MPs that employ close relatives in any capacity should always ensure that those individuals have appropriate qualifications. But being married to an MP carries a unique qualification of its own.

They live above, below and inside the shop.

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