

FEDERAL POLITICAL DEPARTMENTThe Division of Administrative Affairs

A short survey of its organisation and tasks by J. Bourgeois, diplomatic collaborator

A. Introduction

It is an obvious fact that any public administration must be organized in accordance with its tasks and provided with adequate means of action.

This, precisely, is the task of the Division of Administrative Affairs with regard to the Federal Political Department. It is there to keep our External Affairs Ministry in good "working condition", by providing it with an adequate structure as well as with appropriate means to perform its numerous functions. In other words, it supplies the Political Department with the required personnel, material and funds, sets the necessary rules to ensure their rational and efficient employment and superintends the application of those rules.

This sounds simple enough in theory, but reality, as one may imagine, tells a different story. Why? There is first of all the fact that one single unit is responsible for all administrative concerns of the entire External Affairs Ministry. This is no minor concern, considering that it administers a total staff of 1'500 officers and employees dispersed all over the world, and a total budget of 122 million francs for 1964.

Secondly, we have to consider that the Administrative Affairs Division shares its responsibilities with other authorities in or outside the Political Department. All matters bearing financial implications must be dealt with in accordance with the Federal Department of Finance and Customs; a number of important matters are to be approved by the Head of the Political Department, the Federal Council, or even by Parliament. Other decisions, those for instance which may bear political implications like the opening or closure of representations abroad, must be handled in cooperation with the authorities concerned, in or outside our Department, in the present example with the Division of Political Affairs as well as with the Division of Commerce of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs.



A third particularity lies in the fact that, as in any other country, the foreign service is the most decentralised of all government services. While other public administrations may spread all over the country, the foreign service is spread all over the world. The organisation, coordination and supervision of a network of 169 diplomatic and consular representations, not to speak of 72 consular agencies, dispersed in nearly a hundred different countries, is, in fact, one of the major problems of the Administrative Affairs Division.

The importance and complexity of these responsibilities explain the importance of the unit which has to assume them. This is why that unit has been given the status of a division acting under the immediate authority of the Head of the Political Department. It is thus placed on the same level as the remaining two divisions, which are the Division of Political Affairs, being - roughly speaking - in charge of matters bearing political implications and in particular of our bilateral relations, and the Division of International Organisations, dealing mainly with multilateral relations.

Thus, the Division of Administrative Affairs forms one of the three main pillars supporting the action of our External Affairs Ministry. Its tasks are carried out by a staff of some 150 officers representing nearly half of the total staff employed in the central services in Berne. They are grouped in 7 sections or services dealing with the following matters :

- personnel affairs
- accounts and inspectorate
- buildings and real estate administration
- mail service
- telecommunications
- chancery service
- general affairs

A synopsis of the services and their organisation is enclosed.

After this general outline of the activities assumed by the Division of Administrative Affairs, we may bring our attention to the particular tasks performed by the various sections or services.

B. Organisation and tasks of the Division of Administrative Affairs

I. Personnel Section

Employing a staff of some 50 officers, the personnel section forms the most important unit of the Administrative Affairs Division. Its size is justified by the importance and complexity of its main task, that of providing the required personnel and of ensuring its adequate employment and working conditions. This involves in particular the following activities :

1. Recruitment of personnel: This includes yearly publication of vacancies, information of applicants, organisation of entrance and final examinations, secretariat of the admission committees, examination of candidates for the secretariat service.

We divide our personnel into four categories or services, each of which opens the way to a separate career:

1. diplomatic and consular service
2. chancery service
3. secretariat service
4. general services

The terms and procedure for admission, which are distinct for each of these services, are ruled by a by-law enacted in 1955. Terms of admission are roughly the following :

1. Diplomatic and consular service:
 - age limit 30 years
 - university degree
 - knowledge of three languages, two of which must be official swiss languages
 - two years practical experience in administration, law or commerce

- 4 -

2. Chancery service: - age between 20 and 28 years
 - commercial or administrative diploma
 - knowledge of two official languages
 - ability for typewriting
 - two years practical experience in administration or commerce
3. Secretariat service: - age between 20 and 30 years
 (women only) - not being married
 - certificate of capacity as commercial or administrative employee
 - two years practical experience as shorthand-typist
 - shorthand and typing ability in two languages, one of which must be an official language.
4. General services: - they comprehend all our specialised personnel which does not follow any of the aforementioned careers. Terms of employment vary according to the particular requirements of the post.

Applicants for the diplomatic and consular service and applicants for the chancery service, who comply with terms of admission, have to undergo a competitive entrance examination. Those who pass it are appointed candidates for the respective service, for a probation term of two years. During this period, half of which is spent in Berne, the other half in one of our representations abroad, they are introduced into all the essential activities which they are to be entrusted with after completion of the probation term. At the end of that apprenticeship, those who appear to qualify are admitted to a final examination; if they pass it, they are appointed as officers of their respective service. The initial rank in the diplomatic and consular service is that of Third Secretary or Vice-Consul in the foreign service, or Third class

- 5 -

diplomatic collaborator in Berne. Officers of the chancery service begin their career as IIInd class chancery secretary, in Berne as well as abroad.

Applicants for the secretariat service have to undergo an entrance examination and a probation term of 3 months. If they qualify after that period, they are appointed shorthand typist with the status of an employee; after a further service period of two years, they may be appointed as officers with the rank of a IIInd class secretary-shorthand typist.

2. Assignments

Once appointed, officers must be employed in accordance with their abilities. This brings us to the second important task of the personnel section, which is perhaps the most difficult one. Basically, the problem is to assign our officers to a post where they may be expected to give the best of themselves. This implies that before each appointment to a particular post, the following points have to be considered :

- vacancies to be filled in;
- rank, experience and general qualifications of the officer concerned;
- opportunities for completing the officer's professional experience;
- family status;
- health condition of the officer and his family;
- officer's particular preferences.

The opportunity for completing the officer's professional experience is, of course, particularly important with regard to his further advancement. For the highest ranks a complete experience of all particular activities of the respective service is required; if the officer is not given a chance to complete his experience, his career is likely to be delayed or even blocked. We also see to it that each officer spends an adequate part of his career in Berne; as a rule, two successive assignments abroad are therefore followed by an assignment in Berne.

- 6 -

The family status is equally important, for, as you know, a diplomat's wife takes an important part in her husband's activities, perhaps more than in any other profession. Therefore, assignments implying considerable social obligations are entrusted preferably to a married officer; the condition is, of course, that his wife is able to assist him conveniently in the fulfilment of his social obligations. For those who have children, we also have to consider whether appropriate educational facilities are available at the post of assignment; this may be a major problem when children reach the high school degree. In such cases officers are often bound to part with their children and to send them to a boarding school in Switzerland. Parting with one's children is not only an affective sacrifice, but also a financial one, as, indeed, education in boarding schools is usually expensive. We now have a by-law which enables us to reimburse at least part of such expenses, if education is completed in Switzerland. In fact, we want to encourage those whom local conditions place before the necessity to part with their children, to send them to Switzerland, where they have a chance to become familiar with their own country.

The health of the officer and his family must, of course, also be taken into account. Tropical climates are not easy to stand for anyone born in our degrees of latitude. High altitudes also require a strong heart. Those who are to be sent to a high altitude or a tropical climate are always submitted beforehand to a thorough medical visit. But even those who prove to be fit are to be removed from those posts after 4, 3 or even 2 years, according to the degree of hardship of the climate.

3. Qualifications

Each officer's professional and personal qualifications, behaviour, health state, etc. are reported at regular intervals by the officer's superior to the personnel section. The reports must be written and brought to the knowledge of the officer concerned. According to new regulations which will come

- 7 -

into force in the near future, the officer is required to sign the report, certifying thereby that it has been communicated to him; he will also be entitled to add comments of his own.

Those qualification reports are the basis on which the Administrative Affairs Division or the Head of the Political Department decide on the officer's future assignments, and of course, on his promotion.

3. Promotions

As for promotion, a minimum service period of 3 years is required in each rank, except for Second and First Secretaries and other officers of the same rank, for whom the minimum period is 4 years. With this system, an officer who joins the diplomatic and consular service at the average age of 28 years may become a counsellor at the earliest at the age of 41, which we consider as a minimum age for the high responsibilities implied in this rank. Officers of the chancery service, who join the Political Department at an average age of 23, may reach the top of their service at the age of 34 and, if qualified, be transferred to the diplomatic and consular service with the rank of a vice-consul, at the approximate age of 37.

5. Salaries and allowances

The efficiency of foreign service officers depends not only on their qualifications and adequate assignments, but also, to a large extent, on the means put at their disposal. To ensure that these means are sufficient is another of the responsibilities incurred by the personnel section.

The performance of official duties in a foreign country involves naturally quite a number of additional expenses which a public officer serving in his own country is not confronted with. Residence abroad is in itself a source of extra expenses, and so is the performance of official duties. The officer transferred abroad has first of all to complete his personal equipment in accordance with the requirements of his new obligations; he will thus have to go into considerable expenses, to

complete his and his family's wardrobe, his furniture, travelling equipment etc. Officers of the diplomatic and consular service also need a car, which they can dispense with while serving in Berne. At their post of assignment, they will need larger premises than those they can content themselves with at home. They will have to meet with expenses for social activities, the importance of which varies, of course, according to the officer's rank and responsibilities.

All these additional expenses deriving from the officer's position and activity abroad must, naturally enough, be covered, as we neither want nor expect anyone to invest private means in the fulfilment of official obligations. If this principle meets with universal agreement, its application is, obviously enough, a source of constant difficulties. The same allowances will be considered excessive or insufficient, depending on who is considering them - those who spend them or those who grant them. The problem then is to find the truth, which, as anywhere else, is likely to be found in the golden middle.

Basically, the officer serving abroad is to be granted the same living standard as an officer of equal rank serving in his own country. This means, to begin with, that the salary which he is entitled to when serving in Berne will be adapted to the cost of living prevailing at the post of assignment. In addition to this basic adaptation, we foresee the following main allowances or indemnities, according to new regulations which are likely to be adopted in the course of the present year :

1. Foreign residence allowance: This allowance is to be granted to any officer transferred abroad, what ever his rank and activity may be. It is meant to cover all additional expenses implied by foreign residence in itself. The amount is to depend on the officer's rank, the remoteness and hardship degree of the post of assignment and on local living conditions.

2. Diplomatic and consular allowance: In addition to the foreign residence allowance, officers of the diplomatic and consular service are to be granted a diplomatic and consular allowance, which must enable them to keep a car and to meet with the expenses deriving from their social obligations.
3. Supplement for married officers: Married officers of any rank or service will have their salary and foreign residence allowance increased by 20 %, to compensate additional expenses deriving from their family's official position. This also applies to the diplomatic and consular allowance for those who are entitled to it. Single officers will receive a supplement of 10 % if they belong to the diplomatic and consular service, or if a diplomatic or consular title is conferred upon them, or also if they are in charge of one or more persons living in their household.

These three basic allowances are also adapted to the cost of living at the post of assignment. In addition to them, we grant a number of special allowances or indemnities to meet with certain particular requirements :

1. An annual representation allowance is granted to officers entrusted with the permanent direction of a diplomatic or consular representation. The amount depends on the importance of the mission or post and of representation requirements; its employment is checked by the personnel section. Half of this allowance is granted to those who act temporarily as head of mission or of a post for the duration of their deputyship. Part of the allowance is also granted to the first diplomatic collaborator of the head of mission or post, and to the officer in charge of economic affairs.

2. Child allowance: In addition to the basic child allowance granted to any officer in the swiss government's service, foreign service officers serving abroad receive an extra allowance to cover additional expenses involved in the child's upkeep in a foreign country.
3. Education indemnity: If education expenses at the post of assignment are not covered by the child allowance, an equitable part of them is to be reimbursed. If no adequate educational facilities are available at the post of assignment, an appropriate part of the cost of education or apprenticeship in Switzerland may be reimbursed for children between the age of 12 and 20. Children of officers entitled to this indemnity may visit their parents once a year at their post of assignment, at government's expense.
4. Accommodation indemnity: Foreign service allowances are calculated so as to enable the officer to spend up to 20 % of his total appointments for rent, if he is married, or up to 15 % of his appointments, if he is single. If local conditions do not permit to secure appropriate accommodation at this rate, the exceeding part of the rent is reimbursed.
5. Indemnities for travel expenses: Travel expenses are, of course, reimbursed only if they are made for official purpose; any official travel must be authorised by the Administrative Affairs Division. It is hardly possible to give you a detailed account of the complex regulations applying to such travel expenses. The basic principle is, of course, to reimburse all unavoidable expenses; accommodation expenses are usually compensated by a daily allowance, which varies according to the officer's rank and the cost of accommodation in the country concerned,

while other expenses are either paid directly by the Political Department or, if paid by the officer, reimbursed on presentation of a detailed account.

Officers transferred to another post are, on principle, entitled to payment or reimbursement of all travel and transport expenses for themselves and their family as well as for their furniture and household effects. Special indemnities are granted to them for a number of accessory expenses. Those who are transferred for the first time to a foreign country, receive an equipment indemnity for wardrobe and other purchases required for their new obligations.

Fixing the salaries, allowances and indemnities in accordance with the cost of living and the exchange rates prevailing in some 100 countries, for a staff of 1'500 officers assuming a wide range of various ranks and activities, and taking into account a vast variety of different situations represents obviously a difficult and complex task which can be dealt with only on the solid grounds of complete and detailed regulations. Even so, new situations raising new problems have to be considered and solved practically every day; therefore, if regulations must be detailed, they also must be supple enough to permit adaptation to new situations and conditions.

6. Absentees supervision

Another problem which requires detailed regulation and supervision is that of absentees. Any officer is liable to be absent from service some time or other for various reasons, each of which must be dealt with on the grounds of particular rules. The most important problem, of course, is that of vacations. The basic principle is that every officer is entitled to a certain amount of annual vacations, the duration of which depends on the officer's rank, age, and post of assignment. The choice of the period is at the officer's discretion provided it is consistent with service requirements. Officers serving in Berne are entitled to the same vacations as any other public officer serving in Switzerland; they

- 12 -

may vary from 2 weeks, for officers between 20 and 24 years of age ranking below the 15th salary class, to 4 weeks for officers older than 44 or ranking above the 5th salary class (there are 25 salary classes, the 25th being the lowest). For officers in the foreign service rules are bound to be more complex. The normal annual allowance is of 4 weeks for officers up to 29 years of age, 5 weeks for those aged 30 or more, and 6 weeks for officers aged 50 or more or ranking higher than in the 5th salary class. This represents, as a rule, two weeks more than the allowance applying in Berne.

A special allowance is granted to officers serving in so-called hardship posts. It amounts to 7 weeks a year for those aged below 40, and to 8 weeks from the age of 40 or above. In addition to this, they are entitled to 2 weeks local leave for each service period. Except for local leaves, foreign service vacation allowances are granted subject to the officer's spending at least half of the vacation in Switzerland. If this condition is not fulfilled, the officer is entitled only to the basic allowance prevailing in Berne.

In oversea posts, yearly vacation allowances may be accumulated over a service period, the duration of which depends on the degree of hardship of each post. It varies from 3 years for posts with a normal climate to 2, 1 1/2 or even 1 year for posts with tropical climates or those located at high altitudes. After each service period, the officer and his family are entitled to a paid home leave. This applies, as I said, only to oversea posts; for posts in Europe, there are no definite service periods and travel expenses for home leave are not reimbursed.

Besides vacations, illness and military service are the most frequent reasons for prolonged absences. In all three cases, the maintenance or diminution of the officer's appointments, allowances and indemnities are settled by detailed regulations.

7. Travels and transport

In any foreign service, a considerable amount of persons and goods have to be transferred all the year through to all

parts of the world. This requires naturally a great deal of organisation, the responsibility of which is assumed by another unit within the personnel section. For each travel or transfer, our travel and transport service is required to fix the travel route, calculate expenses, order tickets, passports and vaccination certificates, make reservations, inform the post of assignment, organise transport of cars and household effects, contract insurances, and so on. The same unit also assists officers returning to Berne in their search for accommodation.

8. Personnel statistics

Last but not least, we may mention the statistical unit which also forms part of the personnel section. Statistical data are needed not only for the Political Department's annual report to Parliament, but practically every day for all sorts of decisions in personnel affairs. To work rationally, we also need up to date synoptical tables of the department's organisation, personnel lists with indications on each officer's rank, service years, age, post of assignment etc.; or special lists, for instance of officer's due for retirement, or officers due for transfer. All these lists and synopses are established by the statistical unit.

II. Accounts section and inspectorate

We may now turn our attention to another important section within the Administrative Affairs Division, that which administrates the credits granted to the Political Department by Parliament. It is that section also which establishes our financial needs in the various fields of activity, in cooperation with the competent services, and accordingly establishes the annual budget of the Political Department.

The funds required by our representations abroad are provided by the accounts section, and our representation's accounts are established in accordance with its instructions. The same section also fixes the exchange rates for emoluments collec-

ted by our representations.

Our missions and posts settle their accounts quarterly; those accounts are checked and analysed by the accounts section, which also cashes outstanding debits due to representations abroad by other government services or private persons.

Calculation and payment of salaries, allowances and indemnities due to our personnel in Berne or abroad are not one of least tasks assumed by the accounts section. Even abroad, our personnel is subject to the compulsory social security system applying in Switzerland, as well as to the invalidity insurance for federal government officers. Their contributions to these security systems, which represent approximately 8 % of the basic salary, are deducted from their appointments and transferred to the respective funds by the accounts section.

Federal government officers may deposit their savings with a special savings-bank created for them by the government, at an interest rate slightly higher than that prevailing in private economy. However, only savings made on the officer's appointment may be deposited with that bank. The officer who wants to make use of this possibility indicates to the accounts section the amount he wants it to deduct regularly from his appointments, and those amounts are transferred directly by the accounts section to the bank.

Foreign service officers who need a car for the fulfilment of their obligations abroad are entitled to borrow the amount required for its purchase from the government at a low rate. The accounts section grants the loan and deducts interests and amortization from the officer's appointments.

Government officers having served for 25 or 40 years are entitled to a special premium representing one month's basic salary. These premiums are also paid by the accounts section.

- 15 -

Expenses involved with travels and transports require close examination. Usually, the accounts section advances the estimated total cost to the officer concerned and cashes or pays the balance due after termination of the officer's travel or transfer, on presentation of detailed accounts.

As you know, the swiss government is often asked to represent foreign interests, particularly when diplomatic relations are severed between two countries. Expenses implied by this mission are at the constituent country's charge; the respective accounts are established by the accounts section.

Finally, we may mention our inspectors who work under the authority of the accounts section. Their task consists in visiting our representations abroad and to check on the spot not only their accounts, but also their organisation and work on the chancery level.

III. Buildings and real estates section

Buildings housing our representations and residencies of heads of missions abroad are usually owned by the swiss government; this equally applies in some cases to the personnel's housing, particularly in places where accommodation is hard to secure.

To own a house, we either have to buy one or to build it; if we build it, we first need an adequate real estate. These tasks are handled by our buildings and real estates section, but they are, of course, not the only ones. In some cases, the swiss government also contracts rents to house its representations or, in exceptional cases, for its personnel. As a rule, our foreign service officers are required to arrange themselves for their accommodation and to contract the rent in their own name.

Whether owned or rented, buildings and real estates must be maintained, often also renovated or transformed. Repre-

sentations as well as residencies of heads of mission or of posts are furnished by the government; exceptionally, when transport of personnel's furniture is not advisable, their residence may also be furnished at government's expense; in those cases, of course, the officer's furniture is stored in Switzerland.

IV. Mail service

Each year, some 145'000 letters reach the Political Department, and some 83'000 are sent out from it to all parts of the world. Whether going in or out, those letters pass without exception through our mail service and thus occupy a staff of not less than 17 officers.

Communications to and from our representations abroad are sent, as a rule, by the diplomatic pouch. In accordance with international law, only strictly official communications are forwarded through this channel: private letters and parcels to or from foreign service officers must therefore be forwarded by post.

Besides this main task, our mail service organises exceptionally the dispatch of food and medicaments to some of our representations abroad when no adequate sources of supply are available in the country of residence.

The mail service also decides on the attribution of service cars in Berne and to representations abroad, and supervises their use.

Finally, the mail service is in charge of all internal dispatches within the various services of the Political Department in Berne.

V. Telecommunications service

The telecommunications service is in charge of all telegraphic communications, to and from our representations abroad, including ciphering and deciphering of confidential communications. Ciphering naturally includes the elaboration of codes and instructions for the use of ciphering devices and machines. This job can be done only by a highly qualified staff, as progress achieved in deciphering requires constant improvement of ciphering methods and more and more complex ciphering devices. We entrust this task to specialists only who are not transferred, as a rule, to any other service.

VI. Chancery section

The efficiency of any Ministry's work depends to a large extent on the rational organisation of its records. If a letter, or any writing for that matter, is ever to be found again, it must be registered on arrival, even before it reaches the officer who is to deal with it. Once it can be disposed of, it must be filed in a way permitting to make it available again at short notice. Ten years old records must be sifted; documents which must be preserved are then transferred to the central archives of the federal government, whereas other documents are destroyed.

Records and circulation of files and documents are the main concern of the three chancery offices, one of which is attributed to each of the three divisions. These chancery offices are subordinated to the central chancery service of the Administrative Affairs Division. My use of the word chancery calls for some explanations. Actually, we use the same word with two very different meanings: in foreign service, the word designates that section which is in charge of consular and administrative

affairs, whereas in Berne a chancery office is practically a record office.

Besides supervising the divisions' chancery offices, the chancery section is responsible for an adequate organisation and coordination of the Department's various services, for rationalisation of its structure and working methods, for an appropriate provision and distribution of offices, furniture and office equipment, for all questions pertaining to working hours and working time of our representations abroad, for daily routine regulations, organisation of picket service, organisation of the Department's internal telephone network.

VII. General Affairs Section

Complaints against our representations abroad or against the behaviour of foreign service officers are fortunately not very frequent, but when they reach the Political Department, they have to be examined with the greatest care. An administrative inquiry is opened in such cases: if the complaint appears to call for disciplinary action, the case is transmitted to the Department's legal service for further inquiry and action.

Other important tasks of the general affairs section are the following :

1. Opening, change of status or closure of diplomatic or consular representations;
2. Delimitation of consular jurisdictions of diplomatic and consular representations abroad;
3. Application of the Swiss Consular Regulation, which rules the procedure and attributions of our representations in consular matters.

- 19 -

4. All questions pertaining to deposits. Swiss nationals abroad may, under certain conditions, deposit valuables or other items with their consulate, provided that such deposits do not infringe on the laws prevailing in the country of residence;
5. Preparation of protective measures in case of war for Swiss nationals living abroad;
6. Preparation of the Political Department's Annual Report to Parliament, in cooperation with all the services concerned.
7. Examination and analysis of annual reports submitted by our representations, in cooperation with the competent services of the Political Department and other federal authorities.
8. Supervision of the Political Department's library.

C. Conclusion

This short survey of so many varied activities, though rudimentary and incomplete may give you an idea of the daily problems an administration like ours has to deal with. Conditions and problems are bound to vary from one country to another, and particularly so from one continent to another. Still, there are a number of basic administrative problems any foreign ministry has to solve, and even if solutions are necessarily different for each country, it may be useful to know how other countries handle them. In this sense, I hope that my explanations may have been of some interest to you.

Berne, 26th February, 1964

DIVISION OF ADMINISTRATIVE AFFAIRS

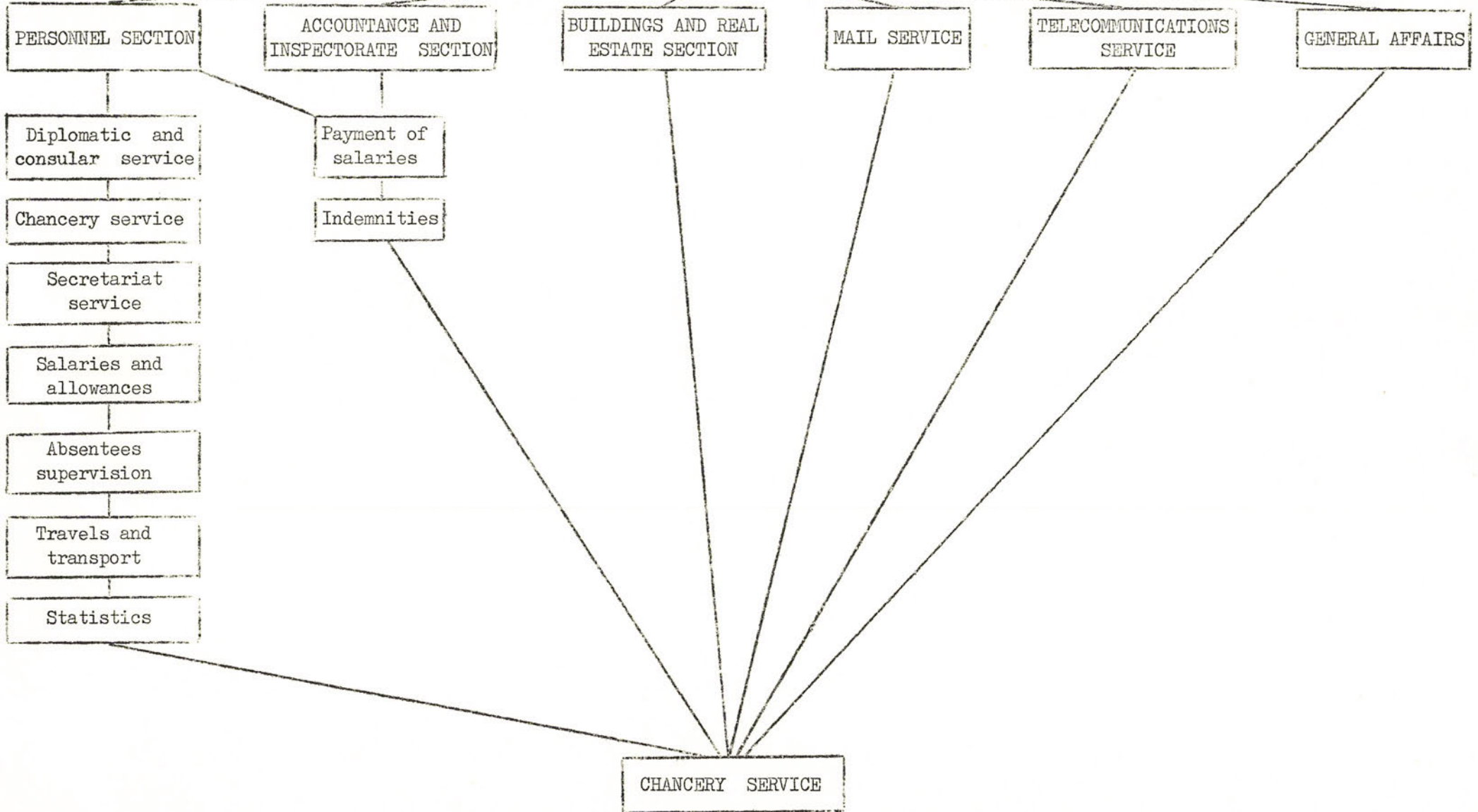


Table of contents

	<u>page</u>
A. Introduction	1
B. Organisation and tasks of the Division of Administrative Affairs	3
I Personnel section	3
1. Recruitment of personnel	3
2. Assignments	5
3. Qualifications	6
4. Promotions	7
5. Salaries and allowances	7
6. Absentees supervision	11
7. Travels and transport	12
8. Personnel statistics	13
II Accounts section and inspectorate	13
III Buildings and real estates section	15
IV Mail service	16
V Telecommunications service	17
VI Chancery section	17
VII General Affairs section	18
C. Conclusion	19
Annex : Synopsis of the sections and services of the Division of Administrative Affairs	