



The Save British Science Society

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Science and Technology Secondments in the Civil Service

1. In July 1999, the Council for Science and Technology published a *Review of Science & Technology Across Government*. Concerned about the scientific culture within the civil service, one of the Council's recommendations was that:

departments should also consider making more proactive use of inward and outward secondments of scientific and technical staff at all levels, with Research Councils, Universities and the private sector.¹

2. A year later, the Office of Science & Technology responded with an *Implementation Plan*, covering all departments and agencies reported in *Forward Look 1999*. The *Plan* called for:

departments to review present and future need for scientific staff; audit present and future supply arrangements; and make recommendations for action. MSG [the Ministerial Science Group] to consider outcomes in Spring 2001.²

3. In Autumn 2003, SBS assisted Dr Brian Iddon MP in drafting the following parliamentary questions on the numbers of people who had been seconded into the Civil Service in the way that the Council for Science & Technology had recommended.

4. This short document collects those answers together to give an overall picture of the Government's success in following through the Council for Science & Technology's recommendation.

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many people from science and technology backgrounds have been seconded into the Civil Service following the recommendation of the Council for Science and Technology in its review in 1999 of Science and Technology Across Government.

Mr Alexander: This information is not held centrally and could only be collected at disproportionate cost.

Hansard 27 October 2003

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To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what action has been taken to bring more people from science and technology backgrounds into the Civil Service on secondments as recommended by the Council for Science and Technology in its review in 1999 of Science and Technology Across Government.

Mr. Alexander: The Government are committed to developing a modern, flexible and outward focused Civil Service that works in partnership with all sectors of society. A key tool in meeting that commitment is the Interchange initiative, which promotes and encourages the exchange of people and good practice between the Civil Service and other organisations. Most organisations from anywhere in the country can take part and all sectors of the economy are encouraged to do so.

Individual Departments are directly responsible for the staff they bring in to help them deliver their objectives, including secondees. Information on secondments into the Civil Service is recorded separately by Departments. The Cabinet office holds aggregate data, though not specifically on secondees from a science and technology background.

Since financial year 1998–99, there has been, on average, around 4,000 instances of interchange taking place each year of which about half are inward to the Civil Service.

Hansard 6 November 2003

In view of this lack of centrally-held information, SBS subsequently suggested that each of the following Departments be asked:

...how many people from science and technology backgrounds have been seconded into the Civil Service in his/her Department in each of the last five years for which data are available?

In summary the answers were as follows:

- the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has increased recruitment from S&T backgrounds in general, including some secondees;
- the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has recruited an increasing number of secondees, the majority from S&T backgrounds, and is currently working on the issue;
- the Home Office has recruited an increasing number of secondees, but could not determine, from how many were from S&T backgrounds;
- the Department of Trade and Industry does not know how many S&T secondees it has had in the last five years;
- the Department of Culture Media and Sport does not know how many S&T secondees it has had in the last five years

- there have been no S&T secondees into the DfES in the past five years.

Full answers are shown below:

Department of Trade and Industry:

Patricia Hewitt: We do not hold central records on the background of secondees in the form requested. I am personally committed to the exchange of people in and out of the DTI. I recently hosted a reception at Lancaster House for representatives from business and other organizations to promote our interchange initiative. We value the skills and experience of our inward secondees from whatever background.

Hansard 20 November 2003 and letter in the H-o-C Library

Department of Education and Skills:

Mr. Charles Clarke: My Department does encourage secondments from a wide range of sectors. There have, however, been no people with a specific science and technology background seconded to my Department over the years requested.

Hansard 20 November 2003 and letter in the H-o-C Library

Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs:

Alun Michael: Since the creation of Defra in June 2001, the Department has seconded personnel from both the public and private sectors as follows:

15 in the period June 2001 to March 2002

19 in the period April 2002 to March 2003

21 in the period April 2003 to date.

The majority have been seconded from organisations from science and technology sectors. In addition, the Department has provided for opportunity and experience postings from its Laboratory Agencies and the Research Councils, of varying durations, to work on science and technology matters, such as the development of science policy and strategies. Data is not held centrally. Finally, the Department's Chief Scientific Adviser, Professor Howard Dalton, FRS, was appointed on secondment from Warwick university in 2001 and is working on a range of continuing professional development issues, including secondments into and out of the Department.

Defra is committed to playing its part in developing a modern, flexible, outward focused Civil Service that works in partnership with all sectors of society. Interchange is seen as a key tool in meeting this commitment. Defra continues to promote and encourage the interchange of personnel between the Department and a range of organisations to help fulfill its business objectives.

Hansard 20 November 2003

Department of Culture, Media and Sport:

Estelle Morris: This Department does not maintain a central record of the background of secondees: secondees remain employees of their seconding organisation, which holds records on their previous employment or educational background. This information could therefore only be provided at a

disproportionate cost.

Hansard 18 November 2003

Home Office:

Fiona Mactaggart: Secondments are part of the Interchange initiative, which promotes the exchange of people and good practice between the Civil Service and other organisations—public, private and voluntary. Interchange provides opportunities for civil servants to learn new skills, widen their experience and develop ideas, it also brings in skills and experiences from other sectors. 198 staff were seconded into the Home Office during the period 1 April 1998 to 31 March 2003. The Home Office records data on inward secondees according to their originating sector, but it does not specifically collate data on secondees with a science and technology background.

The annual number of inward secondments to the Home Office from outside the Civil Service was:

1998–1999 - 25
1999–2000 - 30
2000–2001 - 21
2001–2002 - 44
2002–2003 - 78

Hansard 19 November 2003

Foreign and Commonwealth Office:

Mr. Rammell: In line with the 2001 Government Cross Cutting Review of Science and Research and the 2000 Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) review of science and technology (S&T) work, the FCO has increased the use of S&T expertise in its work. The FCO has established a new S&T network and recruited a new and diverse generation of high calibre S&T officers, both UK appointed and locally engaged. As well as scientific and technical expertise, many have experience in business, management consultancy and policymaking, as well as skills in diplomacy and international relations. For UK appointees, in each of the last five years the following numbers of people with a science and technology background have been recruited into the S&T network either on Fixed Term contract, loan from Other Government Departments or on secondment from outside the Civil Service:

1999 - 2
2000 - 2
2001 - 7
2002 - 2
2003 - 3

Hansard 19 November 2003

February 2004

¹ *Review of Science & Technology Across Government*, Council for Science & Technology, CST, 1999, paragraph 32.

² *Government implementation plan in response to the Council for Science & Technology Report: Review of Science & Technology Across Government*, OST, 2000, Annex B