

## **STAFF NOTICE 1**

### **STAFF INTERCHANGE**

#### **Guide for All Staff of the Forestry Commission**

The Management Board have approved Staff Interchange arrangements which offer staff the opportunity to gain experience by working for other organisations and which allow staff from outside the Commission to join us for specified periods. The attached Guide focuses on external secondment/interchange and explains how the scheme will be implemented throughout the Commission. The Guide is intended to inform and help staff and line managers decide whether interchange will be of benefit and how to go about it. Please take a few moments to look at the Guide, there may be something in it for you.

Jim Anderson (Director Personnel) wrote to managers a few months ago asking for expressions of interest in interchange and discussion with some staff is now underway.

Interchange is not new to the Forestry Commission and some of our staff have already taken up opportunities. Recent examples are:

- Forest Officer employed as Operations Manager with the National Urban Forestry Unit in England. Consequently the FC has been able to influence important urban forestry policies and the receiving employer has had access to expert advice. The officer gained valuable experience in influencing policies in another organisation.
- Forest Officer working for Scottish Enterprise on a timber marketing strategy. This project has long term implications for the industry and there are substantial developmental benefits for the person concerned.
- There have been two cases recently of Forest Officers in this country interchanging with people in Australian forestry. The benefits are mainly personal development but organisationally the Forestry Commission and the Australian Forestry Service gain from new insights and fresh ideas.

We would now like to expand interchange to create more developmental opportunities for employees and hence benefit the Forestry Commission as an organisation.

Val McHale and I from the Change Management team are available should you have any questions on Interchange. We would like to encourage you to think about this and would welcome any enquiries from you.

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This Staff Notice, including the Guide, is available on the Forestry Commission Intranet site by clicking on 'Forestry Commission/Personnel/Staff Notices'.

# STAFF INTERCHANGE

A GUIDE FOR ALL STAFF OF THE  
FORESTRY COMMISSION



## **INTERCHANGE - A BRIEF OVERVIEW**

This guide explains the Commission's interchange policy, the types of interchange opportunities available, and the terms and conditions under which it operates.

This guide is intended for staff at all levels who wish to participate in interchange, and for their line managers and senior managers who may be involved in setting up such an arrangement. It does not cover inward interchange – though many of the principles are the same.

If you have any questions on this guide, or if you would like any further information on interchange, please contact:

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### **What is interchange?**

1. By interchange we mean the exchange of people between the Commission and other public (central and local government and Non-Departmental Public Bodies), private and voluntary organisations. Interchange can take many forms, including secondments, loans, mentoring, work-shadowing, non-executive appointments and joint-training opportunities.

### **The benefits of interchange**

2. For many years, the Commission has promoted interchange. We regard the key benefits of interchange to be:

- for staff:
- an opportunity to acquire new skills in a new environment.
  - increased adaptability and confidence.
  - gaining of a broader outlook.

for the  
Commission:

- ❑ improved quality of operational and people management, leadership, project management, service delivery and specialists' skills through the exchange of ideas and exposure to different ways of working.
- ❑ more outward looking and broadly skilled staff.
- ❑ increased knowledge of, and improved links with receiving organisations.
- ❑ contributing to Investors in People.

for the receiving  
organisation:

- ❑ plugging skills gaps and developing flexibility.
- ❑ networking with other sectors.
- ❑ a new perspective on the operation of the Commission and a better understanding of how we work.

### **Am I eligible?**

3. All Commission staff can apply to participate in interchange provided that they:

- ❑ are a permanent member of staff;
- ❑ have satisfactorily completed their probationary period;
- ❑ have the agreement of their line manager; and
- ❑ have the support of Personnel Division.

4. There are no formal limits on age or grade, and full and part-time staff are eligible. The main thing is that you are able to achieve the objectives of the interchange, and that when you return to the department you can make effective use of the skills and expertise you acquired.

5. Interchange is not an easy option. As well as providing a developmental opportunity for you, host employers will want staff to be able to contribute to the achievement of their goals.

6. For interchange opportunities overseas, the ability to speak another language may be required.

### **What forms of interchange are available?**

7. Interchange can take many forms:

- secondments/loans      a move on a temporary basis, usually for between 3 months and 2 to 3 years (exceptionally up to 5 years), to another organisation.
- exchanges/swaps      providing experience of operating at a similar level in a 'linked' organisation.
- short-term attachments      a placement of up to 3 months working on short-term projects or studies.
- Twinning      regular meetings/contact with someone at a similar level in a different organisation for mutual benefit and support.
- non-executive opportunities      acting as a non-executive director or in an advisory role on subsidiary boards, committees or joint project teams.
- shadowing      accompanying someone during their working day or week.
- Mentoring      regular contact and feedback with someone in another organisation.

## **ARRANGING AN INTERCHANGE**

### **How do I find a suitable interchange opportunity?**

8. Interchange opportunities occur in a number of ways. Some organisations contact the Commission (centrally or locally) about potential interchange opportunities. Sometimes the Commission can spot opportunities. Sometimes vacancies are available across the Civil Service.

9. Opportunities are normally advertised in Personnel Division notices. As part of the Civil Service Reform programme, the Cabinet Office has created a website ([www.cabinet-office.gsi.gov.uk/civilservice/jobs](http://www.cabinet-office.gsi.gov.uk/civilservice/jobs)) to advertise vacancies across the Civil Service.

10. If you believe that you could undertake an interchange, you should discuss with your line manager (eg at a PMS interview) the type of experience you are seeking and the possible opportunities that might be explored in your area of work. Suitable opportunities may not always be available, and you may need to look wider afield or wait for an opportunity in your next posting. You may be able yourself to identify a suitable opportunity – but be careful not to commit yourself (or the Commission) until you have checked out the possibility with your manager.

### **I've found an interchange opportunity - what do I do now?**

11. You should consider whether the interchange will result in measurable benefits for you, the Commission, and the host employer. Remember all interchange opportunities must serve the business interests of, and bring some direct and measurable benefit to, the Commission. They should also provide developmental experience for you.

12. If this condition is met, then the next steps are as follows.

13. Short-term interchange opportunities will normally be arranged on an informal basis by your unit, which will usually continue to meet your salary costs and will keep your job open for you on return. However some funds may be available centrally to assist with the process. Personnel Division will advise on how to take this forward, and you or your line managers should notify them before any commitment is made.

14. Longer-term interchange and overseas opportunities should always be arranged in consultation with Personnel Division who will

- ensure that there is a sound business case for a secondment or a loan with specific business and development objectives.
- provide a direct channel of communication between the Commission, the employer/host employer and you.
- advise on funding and negotiate terms and conditions.
- identify a post for you to return to if your previous post has not been held open.

### **Terms and Conditions**

15. Terms and conditions including funding arrangements are set out in paragraph 30 of this guidance note.

### **Keeping in Touch**

16. Personnel Division manages a Keeping in Touch scheme which ensures regular contact is maintained with staff during their time away. All staff on secondment/loan receive copies of relevant staff vacancy notices, Slasher etc.

### **Returning**

17. Normally you would start to be considered for suitable posts between 3 and 6 months before your date of return to the department. Personnel Division will contact you around this time to confirm the exact date of your return.

18. They will also:

- ask you to complete an evaluation form outlining the benefits of the interchange together with details of newly acquired, or further developed skills and competencies.
- ensure that managers are aware of who is returning. Personnel Services will consider the availability of posts and will arrange a meeting with you to discuss the possibilities.

19. Although the help described above is provided, we expect you to be pro-active to ensure you find the right kind of job when you return. This can include keeping up with informal contacts throughout your interchange, making contact with managers and colleagues in the Commission and checking for suitable vacancies well in advance of return. It may be possible to end the interchange early if a suitable job becomes available (subject to the agreement of all parties).

### **What Is Personnel Division's Role?**

20. Once interchanges are agreed, Personnel Division is responsible for:
- producing/agreeing your contract setting out the terms and conditions of the secondment/loan;
  - liaising about any changes to pay arrangements;
  - setting up arrangements for distribution of Slasher and other Commission literature;
  - updating the personnel database;
  - overseeing the completion of annual staff reports;
  - giving you advice during the interchange;
  - ensuring you have a suitable post to return to.

## **OVERSEAS INTERCHANGE**

### **What opportunities are there to work overseas?**

21. Opportunities to work overseas may arise under the following schemes.

#### **Foreign and Commonwealth Office loans**

22. Overseas job opportunities, on loan to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, are advertised on the Cabinet Office website.

### **Detached National Expert Scheme**

23. Secondments to the European Commission as Detached National Experts (DNEs) normally last between three months and three years and are designed for member states to provide the services of its expert staff in a particular field. Opportunities are normally for Pay Bands 1-5 staff and often require a sound working knowledge of French. Vacancies are normally advertised in the Cabinet Office website.

#### □ **More permanent opportunities in Community institutions**

24. Vacancies that arise in the institutions of the European Community are notified through the Cabinet Office website. Candidates must normally be able to work in at least one other EU language. These posts are normally permanent, though some Temporary Agent posts arise. You cannot normally take up these posts on secondment, but special arrangements might be made if such a posting is deemed to benefit the Commission.

#### □ **European Commission/Council Stagiare Scheme**

25. Stagiare posts are based in Brussels and last up to five and a half months starting in mid-February and mid-September. The scheme is aimed at graduates under 30 with a good command of another community language (usually French). The Commission makes nominations to the Cabinet Office who administers the scheme. There is a separate scheme for statisticians.

#### □ **Bilateral exchanges**

26. Arrangements exist for the exchange of civil servants with the French, German, Irish, Swedish, Finnish and Italian Civil Services. Negotiations on new agreements with other countries are also in hand. Exchanges last for up to six months. The intention is that the exchange visitor will be integrated as fully as possible into the work of the host administration. Participants are usually either involved in the day-to-day work of the host administration or they carry out a specific project as required. The Commission advertises the scheme and submits nominations to the Cabinet Office who conducts a sift of all applicants.

#### □ **Other exchanges**

27. Commission links with departments and agencies overseas can also result in exchange opportunities, the length of which can vary.

#### □ **Other international organisations**

28. The Commission occasionally receives vacancy notices from other international organisations for posts in Europe and elsewhere. Where these vacancies are available on a fixed term basis it may be possible for successful applicants to be released on secondment.

29. Richard Howe, in Policy and Practice Division at HQ, maintains an overseas register which holds details of staff who are willing to spend part of their career working abroad. If you wish to apply to join the register please contact Richard.

### **INTERCHANGE – TERMS AND CONDITIONS**

30. Short-term interchange opportunities have no effect on your pay, terms and conditions or employment status.

31. If you are going on loan or secondment, you will normally remain subject to the terms and conditions of the Commission, though that depends on the details of the secondment.

32. You will normally be seconded/loaned at your substantive pay range but some secondments/loans may provide opportunities for temporary progression. If this is the case, your pay will be adjusted in accordance with the current pay and grading arrangements for the duration of the secondment/loan. On return you will normally revert to the substantive pay band/range. The only exceptions to this are:

- if you secure a post in the higher pay range on return;
- if the terms of the secondment include substantive promotion.

33. If during the period of secondment/loan you accept employment elsewhere this will constitute resignation unless specifically approved.

### **Pay and Pensions**

34. Most people on loan or secondment will continue to receive their full departmental salary from the Commission. However, there may be occasions where the host organisation takes on responsibility for your pay.

35. In most cases, therefore, the Commission will continue to pay your salary reclaiming the costs from the host organisation. The host organisation must reimburse the Commission for the full salary costs, including ERNIC (employer's National Insurance contribution) and superannuation. VAT may also be charged. As secondments with VAT added on are not cheap, the financial arrangements will be made clear to the host organisation at the outset.

36. In some cases, special arrangements may be agreed whereby the Commission meets the costs of the secondment or enters into an arrangement with the host organisation about a split of costs. In some circumstances, the host organisation may wish to assume responsibility for salary issues. An off-payroll secondment means that you will receive your salary direct from your host employer. This can have implications for your pension. Personnel Division will resolve this matter with you before your secondment begins.

37. Before taking up a secondment/loan you will be given a written statement of the terms that will apply during your secondment/loan. This letter, prepared and issued by Personnel Division, will include details about the pay and leave arrangements and whether there are any implications for pension.

### **Status as a Civil Servant**

38. Staff on loan or secondment remain Civil Servants and continue to be subject to Commission rules on conduct, propriety, discipline and security. They continue to owe the Commission a duty of confidentiality and to be bound by the provision of the Official Secrets Act. Subject to these considerations, you should carry out your duties as if you were a member of the host organisation's staff and should observe its rules. The host organisation is responsible for the day-to-day line management and supervision of your work. Any disciplinary matters will be dealt with in consultation with the Commission.

## **Performance appraisal and promotion**

39. While on loan or secondment, you will normally continue to be subject to the Commission's appraisal system, but the reporting officer will be a member of staff of the host organisation. These arrangements are designed to ensure you are not disadvantaged through working in an organisation with a different, or with no, annual reporting system. The reporting officer will be provided with written guidance on the appraisal system, supplemented if possible by a Commission training course or oral briefing by Personnel Division.

40. The reporting officer in the host organisation/department is expected to conduct in-year and end-year reviews in the normal way.

## **Training and development**

41. If there is a major programme of training in the Commission – eg where there are major changes to procedures or the introduction of a new system – staff on secondment/loan will be invited to return to attend the relevant training courses and awareness sessions. We will try to ensure the timing of any events is convenient for you and the host organisation. While on secondment/loan, you continue to have access to in-house training courses.

42. The host organisation or department is responsible for job related training.

## **Union Membership**

43. You retain your rights to union membership, and arrangements for Trade Union representation or not affected.

## **Counselling and Support Services**

44. You retain your existing rights of access to Counselling and Support services.