Our Ref: MFC/1256

Lord McFall of Alcluith  
Interparliamentary Forum on Brexit  
House of Lords  
London  
SW1A 0PW

16th April 2018

Dear Lord McFall,

UK Government Interchange Week 2018

I am writing to you to provide an overview of the Civil Service Interchange initiative, a core element of the Devolution and You programme to enhance devolution capability across the One Civil Service. The Interchange programme provides a unique opportunity for civil servants from across the UK to improve their understanding of other administrations and to build their networks with counterparts across the UK. I hope this information will be of interest to you and your colleagues in the Interparliamentary Forum on Brexit as you consider the process of EU exit across the different administrations.

Devolution and You was established in 2015 by Philip Rycroft, Head of UK Governance Group and Permanent Secretary at the Department for Exiting the EU (DExEU), following a Civil Service Board commission. The Board recognised the need for greater understanding of devolution among civil servants and for better intergovernmental working across the different administrations in the UK. The programme has the backing of both Sir Jeremy Heywood and John Manzoni and is led by Cabinet Office in partnership with the Scottish and Welsh Governments. It aims to build devolution awareness and civil servant networks across the One Civil Service through shared learning and knowledge exchange throughout the year.

As the UK Government and devolved administrations move towards EU exit, it is more important than ever that civil servants are knowledgeable and confident when engaging on devolution matters or with counterparts in other administrations. The Devolution and You programme will enable civil servants to strengthen these skills and to build open and positive relationships as they engage in complex discussions on implementation and operational readiness.

Interchange supports these objectives by providing a platform in which civil servants can engage directly with their peers working in other UK administrations, through an immersive programme of work-shadowing and educational events over the course of a week. The programme runs three times a year, with the UK, Welsh, and Scottish Governments each hosting an annual event. Since 2017, the Northern Ireland Civil Service has also participated in the programme by providing participants to the events.
The Interchange programme has grown in scope, scale and popularity over the past three years. The most recent iteration of the UK Government Interchange Week ran 5-9 March 2018 and, with a record number of applications, it was the largest Interchange Week to date. In total, 83 Civil Servants from the Scottish (43) and Welsh (18) Governments and the Northern Ireland Executive (22) participated in a series of whole-group sessions and individual work shadowing across nineteen UK Government departments.

The programme also provided participants with the opportunity to learn about the UK Government and Parliament through tours of the Houses of Parliament, workshops with senior leaders in Cabinet Office who shared their perspectives on ways of working across different administrations, and presentations from Cabinet Office’s Economic and Domestic Affairs Secretariat, UK Government’s Future Policy Network, and policy teams in the Home Office, Defra and DExEU.

The Devolution Capability team has received highly positive feedback for both the recent UK Government Interchange Week, and for the wider Interchange programme. The team is running an extended evaluation of the programme to understand how learning objectives are implemented in practice as participants return to their home administrations.

Given the success and popularity of the Interchange programme, the Devolution Capability Team is now exploring options to grow the programme further and to address the needs of diverse Civil Service professions. This will include developing specialist and interdepartmental interchange programmes as well as work to encourage civil servants to organise their own, informal, interchange opportunities.

*Devolution and You* and Interchange programmes are key to improving Civil Service capability and understanding of devolution. As the devolution settlements evolve, it remains critical that civil servants build strong relations through this programme. I hope that you find this information of benefit. I feel the initiative, as well as *Devolution and You* more widely, deserves greater support and awareness. If you would like any further information on this programme, please do not hesitate to contact me.

CHLOE SMITH MP