

A Day in the Life of a Civil Service Fast Streamer

8.00am to 8.30am

Look at my diary, read e-mails and pick up voicemails. Ideally there are not too many of these at this point in the day. I also look at the diaries for our Chief Executive, Chairman and three directors – this lets me know what sort of day it's going to be, as my work fits around theirs. Finish off my correspondence from the day before, and see what needs to be done in the next 5 days.

8.30am to 9.00am

I greet my staff as they come in. Staff can start between 8 and 10am, and work accordingly later, finishing between 4 and 6pm. I'm expected to work longer hours than this if necessary, which I often do – but I get an allowance on top of my salary to cover it. I like to spend a little time with each of my colleagues as they arrive in the morning. It lets me gauge the mood in the office and avert any potential strife before it happens. I liaise with the press office to see if any stories have come up about the department overnight, and skim the relevant sections of newspapers and magazines.

9.00am to 10.30am

This morning I'm training a new member of staff. We spend half an hour talking about the security arrangements for working on government computers, and then we spend an hour on the department's bespoke systems. I leave them with a list of things to practise when I'm interrupted with a query.

10.30am to 11.00am

The post has been opened and sorted by now. I will go through it with my assistant and assess its urgency, and then allocate it to the right part of our department.

11.00am to 11.30am

I spend some time with the Director of Resources, discussing possible outcomes of our upcoming spending review. This is very important for us, as our income from the Treasury will determine what we can do for the next few years. We must put together a list of projects that can be halted if our budget is not increased by at least the rate of inflation, and a wish list in case we get more.

11.30am to 1.30pm

I'm writing a paper to go to the next Board meeting. Since one of my jobs is to ensure that all the papers are done, and chase the late entries, it is politic that I get my own one in on time.

1.30pm to 2.00pm

Time for a spot of lunch. I eat at my desk a lot, but today I take my sandwiches to the nearby public gardens.

2.00pm to 3.00pm

I work with members of my team to put finishing touches on the next open Board meeting. As the meeting is open to the public we have to ensure that there are enough copies of the Board papers to go to the attendees. It is important that no restricted information is discussed in front of a wider audience, so we must carefully consider each document before it goes to the Board. Some papers that are not suitable are dealt with privately instead. We edit the papers as we go, occasionally checking with the legal or policy department when unsure of suitability.

3.00pm to 4.30pm

Several responses to MP letters have been returned today. A large part of my job, is dealing with enquiries from other government departments and from MPs, which come in fits and bursts. I edit the letters, removing technical jargon and overly long prose, and check with our legal team on our position on a certain case. Once I am satisfied with the letters, I take them to the Chief Executive, who does a final check and (hopefully) signs them, or makes suggestions of his own. My assistant has made a list of any correspondence that is in danger of late response, so I contact the people responsible for them to make sure all is well. One letter deals with a case that is currently under review, and I will have to send a holding letter in the mean time.

4.30pm to 5.30pm

Videoconference! I am currently part of a small working group that has been updating and rewriting our department's Race Equality Scheme. We meet by videoconference with team members in three different cities to discuss the current draft. There is some talk about the proposed involvement of the trade union in reviewing the scheme, which the representative agrees is a good step forward, and we discuss our current employment statistics.

5.30pm to 6.00pm

This is my winding-down time today. Most staff have left or are preparing to leave, and the office is quieter. I use the last part of the day to tie up loose ends, and send out a few remaining emails. I check my calendar for the following day (I once did this and realised I had forgotten I was meant to be in Liverpool the following day, nearly leaving my train tickets in the office) and clear my desk, locking away any documents that are confidential. Finally, I log off and go for a drink with my friends.

Career progression

F. graduated from the University of Edinburgh with a General Master of Arts in 2002. She freelanced for a management consultancy for a year then worked for another year with Lloyds TSB before joining the Civil Service in 2004. Assigned to the Charity Commission, her first post was in the communications team dealing with TV, radio and print journalists and devising and running a major internal communications campaign. Her second post was in IT, managing seven projects concurrently, including installing the technology for the Freedom of Information 2005 deadline. She now works in the Secretariat, the private office for the Commission, where she helps to formulate policy.

The University of Edinburgh Careers Service

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