

## Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

**Petition Number:** [PE01752](#)

**Main Petitioner:** Bill Alexander

**Subject:** Workforce management and time recording systems in the Scottish Government

Calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce suitable workforce management and time recording systems to monitor the work activities of civil servants, to ensure that reasonable standards of efficiency and value for money are being met.

### Background

The most [recent figures show](#) there are 18,200 people employed in the devolved civil service in Scotland, working in the following areas:

- Scottish Government Core Departments – 6,500 employees
- Scottish Government Agencies – 6,400
- Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service – 1,800
- Non-Ministerial Departments – 3,600

Civil servants help the Government develop and implement policies. Civil servants are accountable to ministers, who in turn are accountable to Parliament. Most public services are not delivered by civil servants, but by other public sector workers such as local authority employees, NHS staff, the police and fire services, etc.

Recent figures show there are now 1,800 more devolved civil servants than in 2012, an increase of 11% (source: [Public Sector Employment Statistics](#)).

### Management systems/policies used in the Scottish Government

#### *Performance management*

The Scottish Government's performance management policy is based on annual appraisals and objectives. Objectives are agreed between employees and line managers at the beginning of the reporting year. These should be "SMART", [defined by the Chartered Management Institute](#) as:

- Specific –precisely stating what is required.

- Measurable –enabling employees and managers to monitor progress and to know when objectives have been achieved.
- Achievable –employees and managers should agree the objectives.
- Realistic - focus on outcomes rather than the means of achieving them.
- Time-bound – agree the date by which the outcome must be achieved.

The Scottish Government describe its performance management policy as follows:

“We have a performance management policy in place for all employees to have the support they need to perform at their best and to develop professionally. This includes managers and staff meeting regularly which includes: objective setting which should link to business priorities and with a clear link to the directorate or organisational plan, monthly conversations focussing on performance, priorities, development and wellbeing, in year and end year reviews to appraise performance with a marking being awarded at the end of the performance year. Any performance issues identified should be addressed as soon as they arise and we have a “managing less than effective” performance policy and procedures to deal with any minor concerns or more serious concerns regarding performance.” (Source: internal correspondence with SG’s Human Resources Department)

While the appraisal system monitors performance against key tasks/objectives it does not capture everything civil servants do over the course of a working year.

#### *Time management*

Most Scottish Government employees use a flexible working system which requires them to clock in and out. This is strictly for time recording purposes. There is no system in place to monitor how long it takes for Scottish Government employees to carry out their tasks.

#### *Project management*

According to an [FOI response published in November 2018](#), the Scottish Government also uses a variety of project software which can be used to manage projects. Examples include Microsoft Project Professional 2013, Microsoft Project Standard 2016, Steelray Project Viewer and Mind Genius. The Government also uses project methodologies such as PRINCE 2 and Agile.

### **Task management in the Scottish Government and Audit Scotland**

Scottish Government employees are responsible for managing their time effectively and ensuring tasks are completed by their agreed deadlines. Although having some degree of autonomy over how these are completed, civil servants usually work to deadlines dictated by ministerial priorities, or by

parliamentary timetabling (for example legislation, Parliamentary questions, budget announcements, programme for government, etc).

The petitioner, in the [background information he provided](#), highlights Audit Scotland's management system as a better way of ensuring efficiency. It is true that Audit Scotland employees are required to complete timesheets showing how long they have spent on various tasks; this is for auditors (for billing purposes) *and* non-auditor staff. What happens to this data is unclear; there do not appear to be any documents in the public domain showing how Audit Scotland staff spend their time, nor how efficient they are. There has also been no research conducted looking at the relative efficiency of different public sector workers in Scotland.

### **Problems measuring efficiency in the public sector**

Efficiency measures the relationship between inputs and outputs, and it is much easier to calculate this when an organisation produces one or two types of output and uses one or two types of input. It also helps if the output has a monetary value, i.e. the price customers are willing to pay. For profit-making firms, efficiency is a case of comparing the cost of inputs to the value of outputs, then trying to increase the latter whilst reducing the former.

Looking at what civil servants produce, however, we see it is difficult to assign a monetary value to most outputs. What is the monetary value of a policy strategy, for example, or a ministerial briefing, an answer to a parliamentary question, the chairing of stakeholder meetings, the conducting and summary of public consultations, or replying to FOI requests, etc? Most activities of central government are similar in this sense – i.e. it is very difficult to give outputs a monetary value beyond what it cost to produce them (namely staff costs).

Furthermore, who is to say how long it should take a civil servant to complete a particular task; some tasks are more difficult to achieve and more time-consuming than others. Their completion may also depend on the contribution of various outside organisations and individuals, which the civil servant has little influence over and delays could also be created by a change in ministerial priorities.

In conclusion, it is very difficult to measure the efficiency of an organisation such as the Scottish Government.

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**1 October 2019**

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