



For exclusive holiday offer: [×](#)
take a trip to our website
[i](#) **TIMES**Travel



RED BOX | ED REZA SCHWITZER

Starving the civil service of talent does no one any favours

Ed Reza Schwitzer

Monday May 23 2022, 12.01am, The Times

Share



Save



I first sat down in the Department for Education in 2013, a fresh-faced civil servant on the graduate recruitment programme. The rest of the department was undertaking a bruising “selection exercise” - forcing staff to re-apply for their own jobs. It was a stressful time, so you can imagine colleagues’ feelings on being told that grads, like me, were exempt from these cuts. Despite this reaction, the rationale from ministers and senior officials was made crystal clear - you do not deliberately sabotage your own talent pipeline.

That graduate programme is called the Fast Stream, and I was shocked to read reports this week that government is not only planning to freeze civil service recruitment, but potentially suspend the Fast Stream too.

The Fast Stream has been *The Times’s* graduate employer of the year for the past

three years in a row, and the year I joined was the first year of the new-style scheme where, instead of spending their time in one government department, graduates rotate between different departments over a number of years.

Ironically given the disdain directed at the scheme from the current government, this was part of a flagship drive under Francis Maude, former minister for the Cabinet Office, to improve the civil service by adopting best practice from the private sector. The rotations were based on the successful model from consultancy and accountancy - well established schemes which generate highly competent senior leaders in those sectors.

Fast Streamers are vital to how the civil service functions. After facing a gruelling application process, the country's best and brightest graduates find themselves at the heart of government. While they are on the scheme, they are typically bright, enthusiastic and (crucially) cheap. If you want someone to spend 12 hours a day being a minister's private secretary, to sit in the officials' box in parliament late at night, or challenge the way a team does something and suggest something new, there's a good chance you'll turn to a Fast Streamer.

ADVERTISEMENT

And once they leave the scheme, Fast Streamers develop to become the backbone of the senior civil service. Their whole Fast Stream experience, punctuated with endless feedback and assessment, is designed to give future leaders a full-fat

experience of how government works, how to develop and lead civil service staff, how to best support ministers and how to engage with stakeholders.

That is not to say that all senior civil servants should be ex-Fast Streamers or career civil servants, far from it. Recruitment from the private sector is extremely healthy for the civil service – providing much needed innovation and challenge. But when new senior civil servants come on board, they rely on ex-Fast Streamers (among others) to show them how you get things done in Whitehall.

The reality is that, despite its imperfections, the Fast Stream should be one of the civil service’s proudest achievements. A modern scheme, improved through public sector reform, building on best practice in the private sector, and independently winning accolades for the opportunities it provides graduates.

What Francis Maude wanted was for our civil service to combine the best of the public sector with private innovation, to (in his words) “create a modern service for a modern world.” So it should not be sniffed at that a decade on, instead of joining Deloitte or KPMG, thousands of top graduates every year are choosing an award winning public sector recruitment scheme – deciding they want to work on improving our schools, hospitals, welfare system and armed forces.

SPONSORED



This stunning city has it all: start with the art and artefacts in one of Europe’s most beautiful museums



Relaxed fit: you don’t need a suit to show that you mean business in

We cannot take for granted that top talent will join the civil service without this – and it’s our public services that will suffer if we get it wrong.

Ed Reza Schwitzer is an associate director at Public First and a former civil servant

Education

Red Box

UK politics

PAID PROMOTIONAL LINKS

Promoted by **Dianomi**



Sign up to Crypto Reviewer to get all the latest laws & regulations

Simmons & Simmons



I have £500,000 - Am I On Track To Retire Comfortably?

Fisher Investments UK



Why now may be the best time to invest in emerging markets.

BlueBay Asset Management



The future of crypto: 5 predictions for 2022

eToro



Why investors should care about natural capital

Aviva Investors

Comments

Comments are subject to our community guidelines, which can be viewed [here](#).

Edward Schwitzer





Be the first to comment...

[^ BACK TO TOP](#)

THE TIMES THE SUNDAY TIMES

GET IN TOUCH

[About us](#)

[Help](#)

[The Sunday Times Editorial Complaints](#)

[Classified advertising](#)

[The Times corrections](#)

[Careers](#)

[Contact us](#)

[The Times E](#)

[Place an ann](#)

[Display adve](#)

[The Sunday](#)

MORE FROM THE TIMES AND THE SUNDAY TIMES

[The Times e-paper](#)

[Times Currency Services](#)

[Times Print Gallery](#)

[Times Crossword Club](#)

[Times+](#)

[Times Expert Traveller](#)

[Schools Guide](#)

[Best Places to Live](#)

[Sportswomen of the Year Awards](#)

Podcasts

© Times Newspapers Limited 2022.

Registered in England No. 894646.

Registered office: 1 London Bridge Street, SE1 9GF.

[Privacy & cookie policy](#)

[Licensing](#)

[Cookie settings](#)

[Site map](#)

[Topics](#)

[Commissioning terms](#)

[Terms and conditions](#)

