

# War on Waste: Civil service newspapers

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## Introduction

It is not surprising that government departments have subscriptions to most national newspapers. These subscriptions are one way in which civil servants are alert to public views and opinions.

However, this does not mean that departments should spend a limitless amount on subscriptions to the same newspaper. With the additional costs of producing a printed copy, it is understandable why paper subscriptions are significantly more expensive than online subscriptions. Where possible, departments should procure digital corporate subscriptions only, providing civil servants the same service at a normally discounted rate.

This research reveals the amount spent by five departments on paper and online subscriptions, as well as the number of subscriptions and types of newspapers purchased from 2016-17 to 2018-19.

## Key findings

- From 2016-17 to 2018-19, the total amount spent by five government departments on newspapers was **£898,063**.
- **24** printed daily copies of *The Times* were delivered to the **Foreign and Commonwealth Office** in 2018-19 an increase of **50 per cent** from 2017-18.
- The **Foreign and Commonwealth Office** spent the most on subscriptions, spending **£725,286** on **292** national newspaper and online newspaper subscriptions since 2016.
- The **Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport** had the largest year on year increase in spending on newspaper subscriptions with a rise of **more than 110 per cent** between 2017-18 and 2018-19.
- The department with the largest number of subscriptions to a single newspaper is the **Department for Exiting the European Union**, who currently have **100** online subscriptions to the *Financial Times*.
- Since 2016, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office bought almost **25 per cent more copies of the *Guardian* than the *Mail***. The Department for Exiting the European Union had **100 times more copies of the *Financial Times* than the *Daily Telegraph***.

**Table 1: overall spend on paper and online newspaper subscriptions, 2016-17 to 2018-19**

| Department                                       | 2016-17 (£) | 2017-18 (£) | 2018-19 (£) | Total (£) | Notes  |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|--|
| Foreign & Commonwealth Office                    | 270,820     | 312,394     | 142,072     | 725,286   | In many cases the total spend is now spread over more than one financial year          |
| Department for Exiting the European Union        | Not given   | Not given   | Not given   | 73,207    | Did not breakdown spending by year   |
| Department for International Development         | 12,000      | 12,500      | 17,000      | 41,500    |  |
| Department for International Trade               | Not given   | Not given   | Not given   | 34,526    | Did not breakdown spending by year. Figures are from the departments creation in 2016. |
| Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport | 711         | 7,299       | 15,533      | 23,543    |  |

**Table 2: number of paper and online newspaper subscriptions, 2016-17 to 2018-19**

| Department                                       | 2016-2017 subscriptions | 2017-2018 subscriptions | 2018-2019 subscriptions | Total     | Notes  |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-----------|--|
| Foreign and Commonwealth Office                  | 93                      | 102                     | 97                      | 292       | Figures provided are the number of daily copies of print national newspapers delivered to the FCO in London under contract |
| Department for Exiting the European Union        | Not given               | Not given               | Not given               | 121       | Did not provide breakdown by year  |
| Department for International Development         | Not held                | Not held                | Not held                | Not held  | Information not centrally held   |
| Department for International Trade               | Not given               | Not given               | Not given               | Not given | Did not provide number of subscriptions  |
| Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport | Not held                | Not held                | Not held                | Not held  | Information not centrally held   |

## Methodology

This research was assembled primarily from parliamentary questions asked to five government departments by Philip Davies MP. The question asked the following:

*How much the Department has spent on purchasing (a) national newspapers and (b) newspaper online subscriptions since 2016; and how many copies of each national newspaper were purchased in that time period.*

All departments asked provided a response. However, the information supplied was often inconsistent. Not every department provided the full range of data requested. Where information was not provided it was often referenced that the information was not centrally held. The identification numbers for the parliamentary questions were 281675, 281,676, 281677, 281674 and 281678.