

War on Waste: Civil service perks

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Introduction

This research reveals the cost of civil service benefits to the taxpayer, focusing on canteen subsidy, cycling subsidy and rollover holiday which together accrued a total value of **at least £7,610,578 between 2014-2015 and 2018-2019**. Many private sector roles do not offer these perks, yet taxpayers are forced to provide for those in the public sector. That is despite their lower productivity compared to their private sector equivalents.^{1,2}

Key findings

- Since 2014-15 government departments have spent **at least £7,610,578** on canteen subsidy, cycling subsidy and rollover holiday.
- Between 2014-15 and 2018-19, the total value of annual leave days rolled over by at least two government departments was at least **£6,800,269**.
- The **Department for International Trade** had **20,972** days rolled over, worth approximately **£6,631,090**. In 2018-19, **8 days on average** were rolled over by each employee in the department.
- The **Wales Office** had **1,158** days rolled over, worth approximately **£169,179**. In 2018-19, **6 days on average** were rolled over by each employee in the department.
- **£600,759** was spent by two departments between 2014 and 2018 to provide a canteen subsidy to their employees.
- The **Department for Work and Pensions** spent the most on their canteen subsidy spending **£536,503** in 2018-19 at the headquarters site alone.
- Across four departments **£209,552** was spent on cycle to work schemes and installing bicycle racks. Of the four departments who responded to the Parliamentary Question, the **Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy** spent the most on cycle to work schemes, with a total spend of **£110,800** since 2015. Meanwhile, the **Department for Transport** spent the most on installing bicycle racks with costs since 2015 totalling **£48,000**.

¹Office for National Statistics, *Public service productivity: quarterly, UK, April, to June 2019*, 2020.

²Office for National Statistics, *Labour productivity, UK: April to June 2019*, 2020.

Table 1: overall amount of days rolled over, 2014-15 to 2018-19

Department	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	Total	Notes
Department for International Trade	Not held	Not held	3,466	3,599	13,907	20,972	Department created in 2016
Wales Office	288	240	176	230	224	1,158	

Table 2: approximate value of days rolled over, 2014-2015 to 2018-2019

Department	2014-2015 (£)	2015-2016 (£)	2016-2017 (£)	2017-2018 (£)	2018-2019 (£)	Total (£)
Department for International Trade	Not held	Not held	1,296,437	1,975,705	3,358,948	6,631,090
Wales Office	36,903	38,699	25,793	29,941	37,843	169,179

Table 3: total subsidy for staff canteen, 2014-2015 to 2018-2019

Department	2014-2015 (£)	2015-2016 (£)	2016-2017 (£)	2017-2018 (£)	2018-2019 (£)	Total (£)
Department for Work and Pensions	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	536,503	536,503
Department for Health and Social Care	52,623	11,633	0	0	0	64,256

Table 4: overall amount spent on cycle to work schemes and installing bicycle racks since 2015

Department	Cycle to work schemes (£)	Installing bicycle racks (£)	Total (£)
Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy	110,800	16,800	127,600
Department for Transport	0	48,000	48,000
Department for Health and Social Care	0	31,291	31,291
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	0	2,660	2,660

Methodology

This research was fulfilled by issuing two freedom of information (FOI) requests to all government departments regarding rollover holiday and canteen subsidy. The requests asked the following:

For rollover holiday:

Please include the following information for 2014-15, 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19:

- *The total number of annual leave days that were rolled over*
- *The average per employee number of annual leave days rolled over*
- *The approximate value of the annual leave days that were rolled over for all employees*

If leave is calculated on a calendar rather than financial year basis, please include that.

Of the 21 departments contacted, 18 fulfilled the request by providing partial or full responses by 1 December 2019. Of these 18, however, the information supplied was inconsistent. Not every department provided the full range of data required. Section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act was often referenced when information was not provided. This allows a public authority to refuse to deal with a request where it estimated that it would exceed the appropriate limit. Additionally, most departments said that they do not hold any information relevant to this request.

For canteen subsidy:

Please include the following information for 2014-15, 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19:

- *The total subsidy for the staff canteen*
- *The total sales income for the staff canteen*

Subsidy means the direct costs of providing the catering service to the department. Sales income means income generated from those who use the canteen.

Of the 21 departments contacted, 20 fulfilled the request providing partial or full responses by 1 December 2019. Of these 20, however, the information supplied was inconsistent. Not every department provided the full range of data required. Section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act was often referenced when information was not provided. This allows a public authority to refuse to deal with a request where it estimated that it would exceed the appropriate limit. Additionally, it was common for the departments to say that they do not hold any information relevant to this request.

The information regarding the cycling subsidy was fulfilled by reviewing parliamentary questions made by Phillip Davies MP. These questions related to cycle to work schemes, installation of bicycle racks and bonus schemes for bicycle use in four government departments. The identification numbers for the parliamentary questions are 281681, 281682, 281679 and 281680.